This Some*one*:

On Uniqueness and Self-Writing

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| Abstract |

In this dissertation, staging an encounter between the philosophy of unique selfhood proposed by the Italian sexual difference feminist, Adriana Cavarero, and currently predominant Anglo-American theories of subjectivity, I claim a model of selfhood in which self-writing makes what is general about socially- and discursively-constituted identity unique and material. I ground a critique of Cavarero's development of Hannah Arendt's distinction between the *who* and the *what* of the self through analysis of several self-writings or 'autographies', a term H. Porter Abbott advances in order to accommodate readers' responses to the narrative action that is peculiar to the formal variety of autobiography. Through my discussion of Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being*, Fausta Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger*, Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle*, Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Joan Didion's *Magical Thinking*, Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo*, Brett Shapiro's *L'intruso*, and Timothy Conigrave's *Holding the Man* – I claim the significance of reading the *who-ness* of *what-ness*, the ways in which selves invest themselves in socially determined categories of identity, uniquely.

For Cavarero, 'postmodernism' recuperates the metaphysical universalism it criticises by privileging the general ways in which a decentred subject is constituted by her/his membership of shared identity determinants: by *what* s/he is. Cavarero argues that 'postmodern' preference for, and over-determination of, *what-ness* negates the uniqueness of the self, *who* s/he is, for *who-ness* designates what is unrepeatable about the self, what escapes the generality of *what-ness*. My being Australian, white, gay, middle-class, tertiary-educated, etc. is, for Cavarero, an inventory of things I share with other people, an enumeration of *what* is general about me. None of these identities is reducible to me, however; none of them, because they can describe many people generally, accounts for my uniqueness.

Cavarero's claim to a philosophy that avoids generality of this kind offers an ontology in which the self is necessarily, dependently, related to others by her/his 'appearance' before them, and, importantly, by an altruistic ethic that structures the shared narration of life-stories, the narration of the self by the other. Hers is an invaluable provocation, indebted to the history of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* [sexual difference thought] to think the self beyond socially general categories of identity. It is a philosophy that privileges the particularity of the self's difference, through narration.

I argue over the course of my dissertation, however, that Cavarero ignores the *unique* ways in which selves make particular what she argues is only ever general, irreducible, about them. I claim that Cavarero's deprioritisation of the *what* of the self in favour of the *who* of the self, as well as the autobiographical in favour of the biographical, fails to recognise the significance of ways in which minority identities are invested in their *what-ness* and its representation and reception; for not having to account for oneself, for one's *what-ness*, is a privilege enjoyed only, perhaps, by selves related to what is ideologically of the 'majority'. Through the questions posed by the texts I discuss, questions of sexual difference and motherhood, ethnicity and belonging, trauma and memory, illness, and sexuality, I formulate a model of selfhood that bridges the *who-ness* Cavarero so importantly demands philosophical recognition of, and the *what-ness* she accuses 'postmodern' theories of over-determining. I emphasise the common ground between a philosophy rooted in the philosophical practice of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* and the fragmented identity of 'postmodernism' in order to deepen Cavarero's provocation to think the uniqueness of the self.

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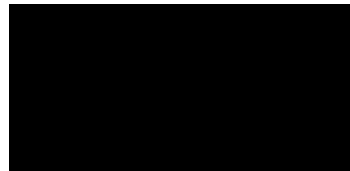
| Introduction: Cavarero's Provocation:
Thinking Uniqueness, Starting from Oneself |

"'Remember Proteus'," Iris Murdoch says to John Bayley in his memoir about their life together. "'Just keep tight hold of me and it will be alright'" (52). Bayley then recalls the myth: "Proteus had the power of changing himself into any shape he wished – lion, serpent, monster, fish – but when Hercules held tightly on to him throughout all these transformations he was compelled in the end to surrender, and to resume his proper shape as the man he was" (52). "'Remember Proteus'," Iris thus replies to Bayley's desperation that he can't understand her, that he can't "capture" who she "really" is. But, he responds gloomily, he is no Hercules, "lacking that hero's resources of musclepower and concentration" (52).

In the early stages of his relationship with her, the source of Bayley's desperation to understand Iris lies in the difference between Iris-as-she-is-amongst-her-friends and Iris-as-she-is-with-Bayley; the difference between, Bayley writes, "the grave being I had seen on the bicycle, or at a party in the public domain" and the "happy child-like girl or woman she […] turned into when she was with me" (51). The desperation produced by that tension is resolved, however, upon Bayley's gradual inclusion within the circle of friends Iris had for a time kept distant from him. It is only by being part of the relations that constitute who she is, only by fitting in with them, that Bayley is able to understand her, to grasp the different realities of her world, her protean identity.

But Bayley's memoir is concerned ultimately with the loss of those relations and the identities that coincide with them; for Iris, philosopher and playwright and author of twenty-six novels, is to be undone by Alzheimer's. Contrasting the literary and articulate life the couple led before Iris' diagnosis, Bayley, himself a novelist and professor of literature, writes, as Iris' disease advances: "[o]ur mode of communication seems like underwater sonar, each bouncing pulsations off the other, and listening for an echo" (57). The "baffling moments" at which Bayley is unable to understand Iris, "moments which can produce tears and anxieties", are sometimes "dispelled by embarking on a joky parody of helplessness, and trying to make it mutual. Both of […them] at a loss for words" (57). To understand Iris is now all the more Herculean, for there is little of the 'real' Iris left to "keep tight hold of".

"'Like being chained to a corpse, isn't it?'," a woman whose husband also suffers from Alzheimer's "cheerfully" remarks to Bayley one day. "'Oh, a much-loved corpse

naturally'," the woman amends, "giving […Bayley] a slightly roguish glance, as if suggesting […he] might be thankful to abandon in her presence the usual proprieties that went with […their] situation" (54). But Bayley is "not at all thankful". Instead, he is "repelled […] by the suggestion that Iris' affliction could have anything in common with that of this jolly woman's husband" (54). "How could our cases be compared," Bayley wonders. "*Iris was Iris*" (54; my emphasis):

> My own situation, I felt, was quite different from hers. It's not an uncommon reaction, as I've come to realise, among Alzheimer partners. One needs very much to feel that the unique individuality of one's spouse has not been lost in the common symptoms of a clinical condition (54).

The tension between the protean things that Iris is and the graspable whole that Bayley's observation "Iris was Iris" articulates, where "Iris" encompasses all that Iris *is* and *has been*, frames the model of selfhood I develop over the course of this study. It is a study indebted to, and which also deepens through sustained critique of, the philosophy of unique selfhood proposed by the Italian political philosopher of sexual difference, Adriana Cavarero. Drawing from Cavarero's model, predominately in *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* (1997) [*Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000)], of a relational ontology sustained by the reciprocal 'appearance' between selves and the exchange of their life-stories, the chapters throughout this dissertation interrogate the significance of Cavarero's provocation to think the uniqueness of the self in response to the over-determination of the protean subject she attributes to postmodern theories of subjectivity. With Cavarero, this study reads against the interminable fragmentation and textuality of the self in postmodernism and reconciles the protean subject with unique and graspable – *narratable* – identity. The argument I advance throughout this study reformulates relations between the general and the particular, the individual and the community by modelling an individuality that is neither enclosed, nor self-sufficient, nor the "soggetto autocentrato e titanico del romanticismo" (*Tu che* 116) ["self-centred and titanic subject of romanticism" (*Relating Narratives* 89)], nor the "private identity" of bourgeois individualism and its ideologies (Jameson 167–169). Instead, the individual that emerges from this study is the absolute difference and distinction (Cavarero *Tu che* 116; *Relating Narratives* 89) of *this* some*one* from any other some*one* with whom s/he is always and necessarily in relation and upon whom s/he always and necessarily depends.

In "Who Engenders Politics?" (2000), in order to outline her disagreement with some crucial aspects of currently-predominant, Anglo-American theories of subjectivity,

Cavarero divides the history of philosophical reflection on the self into "two-camps" (88). "On the one side," she writes, "is the metaphysical subject – strong, self-centred, and present unto itself […] On the other side, instead, is postmodernist subjectivity – multiple, fragmented, and without centre ("Who Engenders Politics? 88). This "two camp" approach is similar to the distinction at the centre of Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994), wherein philosophy of the body is divided along Cartesian and non-Cartesian lines of thought (8-13). Grosz is critical of Cartesian thought and argues that non-Cartesian philosophy – in which she includes the thought of Spinoza, Foucault, and Deleuze, amongst others (13) – offers more suitable approaches for feminist philosophy (13). Cavarero's "two camp" approach is more reductive than that proposed by Grosz, however, and she is conscious of that reduction. She writes that her distinction could more fully detail the associations between Cartesian thought and classical Greek philosophy, in metaphysical approaches to the self ("Who Engenders Politics?" 88), that she might also consider the differences between postmodernism and its psychoanalytically charged "post-structuralist horizon" (88). In her co-authored survey of feminist philosophy with Franco Restaino (2002), moreover, Cavarero writes that

> Il termine 'postmoderno' deve essere inteso soltanto un termine generale che corrisponde a un'area di pensiero assai variegata e complessa, caratterizzata da significativi incroci con la corrente poststruturalista e decostruzionista" (Le Filosofie Femministe 106)

> [The term 'postmodern' should only be understood as a general term that corresponds to an area of very diverse and complex thought, one characterised by significant intersections with current poststructualism and deconstructionism].[1]

In spite of this complexity, it is not Cavarero's intention to offer a more nuanced account of the two camps she distinguishes. Instead she maintains her argument that contemporary feminist theories of the self operate through either metaphysical or postmodern positions, often locating "themselves critically *vis-à-vis* the privileged style of thinking and always assuming both […the] stance and […the] strategic weapons [of that privileged style]" (88). To correct this, Cavarero draws from the work of Hannah Arendt and asserts that if the metaphysicians mistakenly assumed the self to be conceived through the universality of Man, postmodernists recuperate that universality by determining "how many different things constitute the centreless subjectivity that follows

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[1] When available, I have consulted existing English translations of the Italian works I cite throughout this dissertation. Unless otherwise indicated, however, translations between Italian and English are my own.

the collapse of the subject" (91). Extending Arendt, Cavarero argues that in metaphysics and in postmodernism the uniqueness of the self is ignored in preference for a determination of identity based on *what* rather than *who* the self is (91–92).

For Arendt – whose philosophy "discovers the worldliness of the human condition to be its characteristic of plurality, which is unthinkable without action and speech, without what Aristotle called 'praxis'" (Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* xxix), – the *what* of the self refers to her/his "qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings"; they are things s/he "may display or hide" from others (*The Human Condition* 179). The *who* of the self is instead

> implicit in everything somebody says and does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this 'who' in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities. On the contrary, it is more than likely that the 'who,' which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the daimon in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters (179–180).

Specifying Arendt's description of the *what* of the self as "qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings" (179) the self might have, Cavarero locates the *what* of the self in identity categories and demonstrates how this is different from the *who* of the self by describing Virginia Woolf (92). Woolf, when subject to postmodern interpretation, Cavarero argues, was a "Eurocentric, white, lesbian, bourgeois, eccentric, feminist, etc. etc." (92). But a conception of the *who* of Woolf is absent from this perspective: any number of women can meet these criteria; there is no causal relationship between these categories and the evocation, the revelation, of Woolf (92). Postmodernism tenders, for Cavarero, a position that neglects the uniqueness of the self and instead calculates identity through the "comparison, subtraction, and addition" of social qualities (92). The unique self, "*who* always has a face, a name, a story" (99), is neglected by postmodernism in favour of a catalogue of general characteristics and identity determinants. Cavarero, however, is concerned to elaborate a philosophy and a political thought that considers, indeed, permits and insists upon, the specific some*one who* is unique. In this, Cavarero contributes to a visibly French 'attitude' toward selfhood and experience.

The distinction Roland Barthes makes in *Camera Lucida* (1981) between a photograph's *studium* and *punctum* is markedly similar to Cavarero's distinction between the *who* and the *what* of the self. For Barthes, it is "by *studium* that I am interested in so

many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally […] that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the setting, the actions" (26). *Studium*, Barthes writes, "doesn't mean, at least not immediately, 'study,' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment […] but without special acuity" (26). "A photograph's *punctum*," on the other hand, Barthes observes, "will disturb the *studium*", "it is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). Like the generality of social identity to which *what-ness* corresponds for Cavarero, the Barthesian *studium* "is that very field of *unconcerned* desire, of *various* interest, of *inconsequential* taste" (27; my emphasis). *Punctum*, however, is the specific detail of a photograph, the "mark of *something*" that triggers a "tiny shock" in the viewer (49): that which is unique.

Cavarero's contribution to a notably French 'attitude' can also be read in Jean-Luc Nancy (1991, 1993, 1997, 2000), Emmanuel Levinas (2006 [1991], 2008 [1993]), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968 [1964], 1973 [1969], 2008 [1945]), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004 [1980]). An attempt to think the ontological singularity or particularity of the self characterises these works. What emerges from Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the body as "the vehicle of being in the world" (*Phenomenology* 69); from Levinas' proposition that identity resides within the face as itself, "in terms of itself, without a concept" (*Entre Nous* 28-29); from the Deleuzo-guattarian *nom propre* and haecceity, that "entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 289); and Nancy's "knot" (*Sense of the World* 111) – is the possibility to conceive the *who-ness* of the self, her/his unique singularity. But it is not the case that these philosophers lend themselves equally to the elaboration of *who* of the self. There is good reason why this study of uniqueness considers the model of selfhood proposed by Cavarero specifically.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the true proper name is an intimate link "to the becomings, infinitives, and intensities of a multiplied and depersonalised individual" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 42). The proper name "is the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity" (42). But the unique assemblage to which the *nom propre* attests does not "designate an individual" (42) and so falls short, for Cavarero, who instead entirely conceives the self as having "a face, a name, a story" which belongs to *an* individual: to some*one* ("Who Engenders Politics?" 96). The insistent significance of multiplicity in the Deleuzo-guattarian *nom propre*, and, moreover, in haecceity, is less compatible with Cavarero's philosophy because while the self is, for her, many different things, multiple things, "even non-homogenous and contradictory things" (92), s/he is unified in "the

elementary reality of [...her/his] spectacle" (95-96). I will develop this idea more comprehensively in subsequent chapters, but at this point it is important to note that *who* the self is, for Cavarero, is not the *assemblage* of her/his multiple parts (that process of calculation, subtraction, addition), nor the "neutral singularity" that Deleuze develops in *The Logic of Sense* (2004 [1969], 63). For Deleuze, in this argument, singularity is "a-conceptual" (63) and as such resembles Levinas' conception of the face and Cavarero's emphasis on *who-ness* over *what-ness*. But the a-conceptual singularity that constitutes the self is "pre-individual" or "non personal" (63). Cavarero's model of selfhood is also distinct from Nancy's claim that "every one is just as singular as every other one. In a sense, they are indefinitely substitutable, each for all the others, in-different and anonymous" (*Sense of the World* 72). Unlike Nancy, Cavarero is determined to model the *specific* some*one who* is unique, *the* individual in so much as the individual refers to a *who*, to someone who is unrepeatably "thus and not otherwise" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 100): some*one who* is un-substitutable.

This point is reiterated in Cavarero's reference to Nancy's introduction to a series of essays which treat the question "who comes after the subject?". In this introduction, Nancy writes that "[i]t is very likely that no one 'philosophy' [...] is able to grasp this situation [who comes after the subject?], nor to think it through" ("Introduction" 1). Nancy continues, however, and observes that there is something crucial in the form of the question which indicates the perspective through which this 'situation' might be engaged. In asking "*who* comes after the subject", the question, Nancy writes, is one of presence: "Who is *there*? Who is present there?" (7; original emphasis). In response to Nancy, Cavarero writes that what is implicit within his observations is the suggestion that "after the subject, doesn't come something else, something, a thing; instead someone comes" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 99). Who comes after the subject is, for Cavarero, the embodied and specific uniqueness who appears before the reciprocal sight of others in relation (99): some*one* who "always has a face, a name, a story" (99); some*one*, for Cavarero, ignored by postmodernism, however closely it might approximate her own model of selfhood.

In "Contingent Foundations" (1995), Judith Butler discusses the ambiguity of the term 'postmodernism', impeding the force of Cavarero's easy deployment of that term. Butler questions the work "postmodern" performs, who performs it, and the conditions of its coherence – if, indeed, there are any (35). Her essay discerns a politics of

terminology, one in which differing value is given to "postmodern" analyses. But for Butler, the term "postmodernism" cannot account for the multitude of perspectives grouped under its putative consistency. For Butler, the variety of attitudes that "postmodernism" elides frustrates the confidence of its easy deployment (37-38).

Cavarero's preference not to maintain or exemplify a precise target at which to direct her indiscriminate critique of postmodernism renders that critique somewhat disingenuous. Because Cavarero offers no clear definition of postmodernism (other than it being something which is diverse and complex, and as something which neglects uniqueness in the privilege it affords to *what-ness*) a discussion of instances in which it might account for uniqueness is already denied. The term itself announces the apparent homogenous perspective to be discounted: anything postmodern already and always presents a problem. But this is prejudicial and confirms Butler's critique by installing "the term as that which can be only affirmed or negated […forcing] it to occupy one position within a binary" (38). Cavarero's tendency to make a culprit of postmodernism so wholly, so generally, requires further consideration. Indeed, I want to suggest that Cavarero's criticism of 'postmodernism' is in fact more substantially about the "post-structuralist horizon" ("Who Engenders Politics? she overlooks within it.

For Cavarero, "la *molteplicità* e la *mobilità* vengono a caratterizzare la nuova soggettività di cui questa teoria femminista si occupa (*Le filosofie femministe* 106; original emphasis) [*multiplicity* and *mobility* come to characterise the new subjectivity with which this feminist theory is concerned (original emphasis)]. Cavarero's description of the self that follows from the emphasis on multiplicity and mobility in contemporary Anglo-American feminist theory is telling of the theoretical paradigm with which she takes issue. It assists the specification of Cavarero's critique as one more coherently against 'post-structuralism' than 'postmodernism' – even if the distinction between them is often confounded by the "substantial overlap" between them (Agger 112).

From multiplicity and mobility, identity comes to be understood only in terms of its construction; that is, in its impermanence or inessentiality: its socially assembled *insubstantiality*. Cavarero writes:

> Senza alcuna sostanza che lo renda permanente, il sé diventa […] l'effetto temporaneo dell'incrociarsi delle molteplici identità che lo posizionano in un posto, più o meno vantaggioso nel sistema sociale e simbolico (107)

> [Without any substance to render it permanent, the self becomes […] the temporary effect of the intersection of multiple identities which locate that self in a place, more or less to its advantage, in the social and symbolic system].

Within the context of her argument, the above is Cavarero's characterisation of postmodernism. But I suggest it is more indicative of post-structuralism. Postmodernism, in Cavarero, is perhaps better understood as the designation of a cultural and social attitude, a *zeitgeist*, or social-cultural framing of questions and relations. But in appealing to poststructualism as the actual target of Cavarero's critique, the attitude that neglects the uniqueness of the self is contained or specified. Cavarero takes issue with the theoretical perspective that operates through the over-determination of identities produced in and by social and discursive systems. This is not to suggest that poststructualism bears no relation to postmodernism, or that post-structuralism is itself *not* postmodernist. It does mean that postmodernism is not always poststructuralist. I characterise the logic of post-structuralism in the context of this consideration Cavarero, then, as the determination of identity through the instability or fluidity of linguistic and social-cultural structures and their performative effects. The emphasis, then, is on the systematicity and structuration of identity, as well as anti-foundationalist textuality, of the kind contained within Derrida's famous assertion, in *Of Grammatology* (1976), that "there is nothing outside the text" (158). Where postmodernism might generally determine the historical, the social, and the cultural as anti-foundational, fragmented, and non-linear, post-structuralism intensifies these questions and looks to the performative power of predominately linguistics systems and their effects. There is, then, a specification, an intensification in post-structuralism of what might generally be characterised as postmodern concerns. Nevertheless, the significance of distinguishing between postmodernism and post-structuralism affords an important delimitation of Cavarero's critique. It specifies the target of Cavarero's corrective.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler examines phantasmatic identification and the Lacanian signification of the phallus in order to account for the fragility, the instability of the subject's occupation of an identity determinant (102). She observes that identification is "*repeatedly* produced, and in the demand that the identification be *reiterated* persists the possibility, the threat, that it will *fail* to repeat (102; original emphasis). Butler refers, in this example, to the symbolic demarcation of a body as feminine and that body's association with the phallus and, importantly, its figural representation as lack (102). This example is part of a more comprehensive examination that accounts for the fragility of *all* forms of identification. In *Gender Trouble* (2006), moreover, where Butler argues identities are produced *only* in their repetitive performance, an expression of the self's identity cannot be considered inherent to that self because it is rather a particular

performance *of* an identity (*Gender Trouble* 34). Butler here extends Nietzsche to argue that there is no necessary or causal link between a person's gender and her/his selfhood or subjectivity (34). Citing Nietzsche, Butler argues "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything" (Nietzsche qtd. in *Gender Trouble* 34). Feminine, masculine, gay, lesbian (etc.) identity is, in this way, dependent upon its performance. These identities do not, as such, emanate or originate from the person who performs them. Gender, and by inference identities generally (ethnic, sexual, etc.), are constructions that continually obscure their origins (190). Developing this observation, Butler comes to discuss the significance of performing something 'new', something different, as a strategy for illuminating the rigidity of the normative process through which identities emerge (201).

The proliferation of these 'new' identities, of such strategic departures from the norm – and Butler asserts that 'strategy' most appropriately conveys the effort, the pressure, to break from the normative (196) – points, however, to the problem Cavarero discerns within contemporary (poststructuralist) accounts of the self ("Politicizing Theory" 520-521). Cavarero argues that while Butler is critical of the assumed stability of the body, of identity, her project of articulating the *supplément* to the heterosexual matrix (*Gender Trouble* 196) substantiates and partakes in the metaphysical obsession with order and discipline (Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory" 520). Cavarero observes that the effect of stabilisation – that is, normalisation – applies not simply to those identities that have become hegemonic (old, white, heterosexual men) but any identity that comes to assert itself, to normalise itself, through a reiterative process or performance (520). "Each type of identity, as a reiterated and therefore stable response to the question of *what* someone is," Cavarero argues, "arises again as a system of inclusion and exclusion" (520). Those strategic identities that emerge in performative response to hegemonic structures perpetuate the same process they ostensibly subvert. This is the inevitable effect of a socio-political scene that, because it directs its attention toward human beings, necessarily constructs a political ontology appropriate *to* its politics, to its society (513). In order to enact (or perform) politics, there must be the semblance of an identifiable ontological subject.

Indebted to the grammar of *what-ness*, Butler's "ontology of permanent mobility" comes to recuperate, from Cavarero's perspective, the same problematic desire for order and stability that conditioned the traditional philosophy Butler herself critiques. But in its reliance on demonstrating the performative power of social and symbolic structures, this

"ontology of permanent mobility" signals the limits of poststructualism more specifically than it does postmodernism. It is rather that post-structuralism recuperates metaphysical universalism and signals, for Cavarero, the limit of the capacity such accounts have in elucidating *who* the self is without recourse to her/his *what-ness*. An account formed through a delineation of the general qualities and memberships of the self – the social-cultural structuration of her/his identity – actually becomes indifferent to its object of inquiry. The self, *who* is irreducible to her/his identity politics, is neglected in preference for a host of categories incompletely imagined to *be* that self. From here on, I suggest the term postmodernism rather be read as post-structuralism, though I refrain from the probably overly polemic substitution of the latter term for the former at each instance it appears in Cavarero's writing. It is appropriate after this discussion, however, to think of *what-ness* as the socially- and discursively-constituted, performative textuality of identity that is most properly or intensely the concern of post-structuralism, specifically.

More important, certainly more influential, than the similarities that can be drawn between Cavarero's model of uniqueness and the above-mentioned French attention to the particular, to the singular, Cavarero's philosophy is indebted and contributes to the insight of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, Italian sexual difference. Elucidating that association is significant because *il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, specifically, and feminist philosophies of sexual difference, more generally, situates uniqueness within a political logic of difference that insists on the politics of particularity over and beyond equality, same-ness.

In *The Second Sex* (1997 [1949]), Simone de Beauvoir declares that Woman is

> simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other (16).

And this is because "No group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (17). As a result of this, the specificity, the difference of women, of the feminine has, been unthought, or subsumed within the One, the masculine, the universal. For, Adriana Cavarero, moreover, the universalism in which the specific differences of women are lost, has its greatest "mostruosità" [monstrosity] in its doubled assumption of masculinity *and* neutrality ("Per una teoria" 43). That is, the term 'Man', which designates both the masculine and the feminine, is ostensibly neutral (it refers to both sexes and ostensibly has no *specific* sex) but in actual fact disguises its

masculinity and its subsumption of the feminine (43-44). Cavarero exemplifies this claim through a comparison of the pronouncements "woman is mortal" and "man is mortal" ("Toward a Theory" 189; "Per una teoria" 43). In the latter, 'man' refers to a common humanity, to both men and women: human beings are thus mortal. In the former, however, the meaning is specific: woman is mortal, and by inference, man is immortal. 'Woman' distinguishes a difference that is masked by 'man' (44). But at the same time 'man' designates the masculine and the feminine, it also refers to itself, to the masculine. Cavarero argues, then, that in the statements 'I am woman', and 'I am man' sexuation is held (in)differently. In the latter pronouncement, however, in its reference to itself as masculine,

> l'"io' pervenga ad una sua intima completezza, precisando nella sessuazione quel maschile che il suo genere già annunciava, pur mantenendolo come neutralmente disponibile ad ambedue le sessuazioni. Quell'annuncio era allora un avvertimento, un segno del maschile portato dal neutrale e dall'universale (43).

> [the 'I' achieves its intimate completion, specifying in the sexuation the masculinity that its category already announced, all the while keep it as neutrally available to both genders. That announcement was thus already a signal, a sign of the masculine carried by the neutral and by the universal ("Towards a Theory" 189)].

'I am woman' designates an indifferent sexuation because it does not pertain or refer to an 'I' with the same kind of status as 'I am man' does. The authentic subject of discourse, for Cavarero, then, is the masculine neutral-universal ("Per una Teoria" 44). Because 'Man' can at once universalise itself and incorporate both sexes, while also referring to the particularity of the masculine, 'Woman', the feminine, is instead reduced to a negative difference: "l'universale-neutro uomo particolarizzandosi come "uomo" sessuato al maschile si trova di fronte l'uomo sessuato al femminile, e lo dice appunto altro a partire da sé" (44) ["the universal-neutral man particularizing himself as 'man' sexed in the masculine finds himself in front of the man sexed in the feminine and calls it other from himself", ("Towards a Theory" 190)]. In philosophy, then, as in the cultural, social, and political more generally, woman is thought as the negative other of man, without the articulation of a positive and formative difference. But the subsumption of Woman by the universal-neutral Man is not simply an abstract or immaterial indifference to the feminine. The feminine is similarly subsumed in representations of the corporeal.

In *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (1996), Moira Gatens accounts for the way in which the masculine, and the body to which it is assumed to correlate, serves a

metonymical function by standing in for the diversity of bodies represented within the "body politic" (21). The political body, in this sense, is produced, coheres through the image of man's body: "his body […] is taken for the human body; his reason […] is taken for Reason; his morality […] is formalized into a system of ethics" (24). Gatens demonstrates the extent to which the masculine universal makes of its body a site of privileged capacity over that of the feminine (23). "Not any human form", Gatens writes, "by virtue of its humanity, is entitled to consider itself author of or actor in the body politic" (23): the body capable of reason – man's body – serves metonymical purpose in representing the diversity of bodies generally (23). The masculine body, as the image of the body politic, demonstrates the "fantasises about […its own] value and capacities" (25). Its values and capacities become coherent, however, only in reference to those bodies to which these values are denied (25). The figuration of the masculine body is produced precisely in the insistence of an image of an *other*, inadequate body: that of the feminine. The body politic, assisted by the metonymical image of man's body, has its effect only in reference to the "*mere* nature […the] *mere* corporeality" of woman's body (24; original emphasis). The capable body, the male body, acquires significance when it signals what it is *not*, when it marks, implicitly, what it is more capable *than*. The feminine (body) thus serves as the illustrative point of reference upon which processes of definition are dependent.

Similarly, Luce Irigaray, perhaps the most prominent philosopher of sexual difference, writes, in her account of female sexuality, that this female sexuality "has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters" (*This Sex* 23). Like the feminine body within Gatens' study of metonymy, erogenous zones particular to the female sexed body are, Irigaray argues, figured only in reference to those of the masculine. As such, feminine erogeneity is construed as "lack", as "atrophy", incomparable to "the noble phallic organ" (23). Feminine erogeneity and desire becomes, Tina Chanter (1999) writes in her engagement with Irigaray, not her own. It is instead "teleologically oriented towards male desire" (364). In the (teleological) *utility* assigned to female erogeneity, the feminine is estranged from her desire: she experiences herself "only fragmentarily" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 30) precisely because her self-reflexive cognisance of her desire is mediated by the masculine construal of it (31). In consequence of this, Irigaray writes, and forcefully, "pleasure [for women] is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own" (25). The feminine is alien, is other, in her experience of desire, precisely because its conditions are mediated by

masculine definitional parameters. In response to this, and inaugurating the philosophy of sexual difference I am concerned with here, Irigaray proposes a radical reinterpretation of "everything concerning the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic, and the macrocosmic" (8). This radical reworking of thought attempts to adumbrate the feminine on terms unmediated by the masculine. Sexual difference, "one of the major philosophical issues of our age, if not the issue" (7), Irigaray famously asserted, endeavours to subvert that attitude within philosophy, as in the cultural, social, and political more generally, which determines the feminine by way of an othering negativity.

In *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991), Rosi Braidotti considers Italian and French sexual difference philosophy to be a radical "revendication of female specificity in terms of political *and* epistemological subjectivity" (210; my emphasis). What is radical about sexual difference feminism, for Braidotti, is its challenge to epistemological systems that extends across all "the modalities of exclusion of women" (211). That is sexual difference feminism, whose references are predominantly French and Italian, is both a politics and a philosophy: one which considers the activity of thought to be "a specific instance of authority in a chain of effects of power" (211), one which cannot be pure or universal in the ways discussed above. The significance of sexual difference feminist philosophy, then, is its sexualisation of discourse. Michèle Le Dœuff's (1989) consideration of the feminine as the "inner enemy" of philosophy (115) further articulates the importance of the feminine presence in, or engagement with, philosophy.

Indeed, for Le Dœuff, the feminine signals the limits of philosophy by making demonstrable the extent to which its definition rests on the repudiation of that which "cannot be dialectically absorbed" by it (115). The feminine, as that-which-is-excluded, is formative of philosophy, for philosophy "creates itself in what it represses […] and is endlessly engaged in separating, enclosing and insularizing itself" (115). In *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984), moreover, Genevieve Lloyd considers the rationalistic underpinnings of philosophy to express, what is claimed to be, "the real nature of the mind" by appealing to a universal condition in which sexual differentiation plays no determinative part (ix). Reason presumes the transcendence of "contingent historical circumstances which differentiate minds from one another" (ix). The critique of Cartesian dualism undertaken by Lloyd demonstrates, however, the specific and determinative position of sexual differentiation in the attainment of Reason. Indeed, for Descartes, the requisite method of attaining Reason demanded "that the

mind rigorously enact the metaphysical truth of its separateness from the body" (47). Because, for Descartes, the attainment of Reason necessitates the transcendence of the sensuous – "non-intellectual passion, sense or imagination" (46) – which is located in the body, and because women are, following this schema, assigned "the responsibility for that realm of the sensuous" (50), their attainment of reason is, in fact, frustrated by corporeal limitation (50). Conceived in this way, women are expelled from the male realm of pure thought (Cavarero, *Corpo in figure* 10-11) and universalism is revealed to have concealed what is, actually, a tradition in which maleness, the masculine, is privileged (Lloyd x, 38, 50, *passim*). The masculine-as-universal emerges upon consigning the feminine to the role of preserving "the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body" (50): the transcendence of mind, of which the masculine is singularly capable, acquires its valency by excluding the body and its concomitant femininity (50; cf. Le Dœuff 115). Lloyd's study demonstrates the degree to which the feminine, as other to the transcending capacity of masculine Reason, confounds the pretence of philosophical universalism by revealing its implicit maleness. The feminine, in this process, is excluded from philosophy, it slips from its putative universality, and, in its otherness subsequent to that slippage, *destabilises* the same universality (cf. Le Dœuff 115).

In sexualising discourse, then, in exposing the limits of a philosophical tradition that is thought through the masculine-neutral-universal, the task of sexual difference feminism is acutely articulated by Cavarero in her essay "L'elaborazione filosofica della differenza sessuale" (1988):

> Il pensiero della differenza sessuale denuncia e rifiuta la logica di assimilazione ed omologazione insita nell'universalizzarsi del soggetto maschile, e postula la necessità per le donne di produrre come soggetti attivi propri ambiti teorici di autocomprensione (174).

> [*Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* denounces and rejects the logic of assimilation of same-ness inherent in the universalising of the male subject, and postulates the necessity for women as active agents to produce their own theoretical self-understanding].

In the rejection of sameness, then, difference, as the political-theoretical paradigm through which women's self-understanding is engaged, acquires significance not only as a strategy against the assimilative logic of the male-universal, but also against the notion of women's equality, one which, Braidotti argues, maintains women's difference as negative other, rather than affirmative (220).

In *Je, Tu, Nous* (2007), Irigaray articulates the distinction between the positions of difference and equality when she asks: "To whom or to what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a salary? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves?" (4). Irigaray writes that the historical conditions of women's exclusion certainly motivate questions of access to that which women have been denied, but the rhetoric of, and demand for, equality, is utopian as a means of liberation. The fact of women's exclusion and exploitation, Irigaray writes, is based on sexual difference, and the answer to this must similarly be based on sexual difference (4). For Irigaray, moreover, the answer insists upon the establishment of a culture of difference, one underpinned by "a *theory of gender as sexed* and a rewriting of the rights and obligations of each sex, *qua different*, in social rights and obligations" (5; original emphasis). The kind of significance Irigaray gives to the affirmation of sexual difference as a response both to the (continuing) history of the masculine-universal and to the logic of equality is engaged by Italian sexual difference feminism.

Irigaray's influence on the development of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* is significant; her work was met with instant recognition (Braidotti, "Foreword" xiv). The translation of her work, principally by the Libreria delle donne di Milano [The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective], established Irigaray as one of Italian feminism's most prominent references (Bono and Kemp 12). But her popular reception in Italy was contrasted by her belated translation in Anglo-American contexts, where her work was, and still is, often charged of essentialism (13). Indeed, Irigaray's first work, *Speculum of the Other Woman* was first published in France in 1974 but was not translated into English until 1985 (Braidotti, "Foreword" xiv). Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero, moreover, played a leading role in establishing Irigaray's reputation. Bono and Kemp (1991) write that the significance and success of Irigaray in Italy was the result of a particular interpretation which consider her work not simply or merely abstract, but rather "deeply political […,] extremely concrete and attentive to the actual contexts of women's lives" (13). Irigaray's involvement with the Partito Democratico della Sinistra [Democratic Party of the Left] is indicative of the kind of political significance she held in Italy (Braidotti, "Foreword" xv). And Braidotti attributes Irigaray's significance in Italy, moreover, to her insistent attempt to revolutionise socio-symbolic structures (xv).

The establishment of a culture of (sexual) difference is essential to this kind of revolution and it was thought and lived by various groups of Italian women. Of the most notable are: Demau [demystification of authority], which operated in Milan between

1966 and the early 70s; Rivolta Femminile [Female Revolt] formed in 1970 and contributed to most notably by Carla Lonzi; the Libreria delle donne di Milano [Milan Women's Bookstore Collective], which opened in 1975 and collectively authored one of the most important books of Italian sexual difference theory, *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (1987) [*Don't think you have any rights*, translated into English by Teresa de Lauretis and Patricia Cicogna as *Sexual Difference* (1990)] as well as "Più donne che uomini", first published in 1983 and known also as "Sottosopra Verde"; Il Centro Culturale Virginia Woolf di Roma, which was founded in Rome in 1979 and organised courses, seminars and conferences on a number of issues; and Diotima, a philosophical community of women established in Verona in 1983, of which, most notably, Luisa Muraro is part, as was Cavarero. The most significant of Diotima's publications that have shaped this study include: *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (1987), *Oltre l'uguaglianza* (1995), *La sapienza di partire da sé* (1996), *Immaginazione e politica* (2009), and *Potere e politica non sono la stessa cosa* (2009) The imperative to think, to articulate, *to live* sexual difference is manifest in these groups. While their contributions to the philosophy of sexual difference are many and varied, if there is one observation that might serve to summarise them it is Carla Lonzi's and it also underpins the political as well as philosophical imperative of conceiving uniqueness. Lonzi writes:

> L'uguaglianza è un principio giuridico […] La differenza è un principio esistenziale che riguarda i modi dell'essere umano, la peculiarità delle sue esperienze, delle sue finalità, delle sue aperture, del suo senso dell'esistenza in una situazione data e nella situazione che vuole darsi. Quella tra donna e uomo è la differenza di base dell'umanità (*Sputiamo su Hegel* 14).

> [Equality is a juridical principle […] Difference is an existential principle which concerns the modes of being human, the peculiarity of one's experiences, of one's goals, of one's possibilities, and one's sense of existence in a given situation and in the situations one may envision. The difference between women and men is the basic difference of humankind (trans. de Lauretis, "The Practice of Sexual Difference Feminist Thought in Italy" 6)].

An insistence upon the particular, upon "la *peculiarità* delle sue esperienze" ["the particularity of one's experiences"] emerges from the sexualisation of discourse that is the project of sexual difference feminism. The philosophical perspective that underpins sexual difference feminism, its vocabulary, is one that works in service of the articulation of *who*, of the elaboration of the self being "thus and not otherwise". There is, in sexual difference feminism, a politicisation of the question with which this dissertation is concerned. What the insights of sexual difference afford this study is a political lexicon

through which the question of uniqueness can be engaged. Between the practices of *autocoscienza* [consciousness-raising], *affidamento* [entrustment], and, most importantly for the argument I come to make about self-writing and uniqueness, *partire da sé* [starting from oneself] – what is insisted upon by Italian sexual difference feminists is the philosophical-political potential of the singular self in relation with other singular selves. What *matters* very much in and for *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* is the particularity of the self, or, employing Cavarero's terms, the uniqueness of the self. Cavarero's scepticism about postmodernism becomes, in this way, not simply a philosophical-theoretical question, but the inauguration of a political possibility in much the same way that *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* politicised, or made an activity of, French (chiefly, Irigaray's) questions of women's sexuation. Rosi Braidotti's (1988) formulation, moreover, of the task manifest in sexual difference feminism assists further in conceiving the philosophical-practical potential of this feminism for conceiving the uniqueness of self. Defining its project, "un pensiero sessuato femminile" [a female sexed thought], Braidotti writes:

> É un avvenimento, una maniera di far avvenire un potenziale non-detto che le donne si portano appresso come segno di una lunga storia di oppressione e di esclusione dalla produzione del sapere (193; my emphasis)
>
> [Is an event, a way of bringing into being a potential non-said that women carry with them as a sign of a long history of oppression and exclusion from the production of knowledge].

the relation between history, the self, and the present in this conception of sexual difference is significant. Sexual difference, in this formulation, concerns the particular historicity of the self, a historicity that makes the self possible. Simply put, the self articulates an historical situation. Sexual difference, with its insistence on the particular, sexed self brings that particular, sexed self into relation with history. Sexual difference conceives of the self as a living historical situation.

Benefiting from the emphasis on the particular within the philosophy of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, I claim throughout this study that the self engenders the particularity of her/his being, her/his uniqueness, in self-writing. I claim *who-ness* is manifest in self-writing as a material sign of one's investment in *what-ness*, which is thus *made* unique and reducible where Cavarero claims it is only irreducible and general. I further develop this claim below but for now summarise that the affirmation of the *what* of the self on which my study will hinge "is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity,

never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha 64; original emphasis). To this extent, my model of the unique self, building on that of Cavarero's, continues the affirmation in *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* of the self as a living historical situation. The historicity of the particular, sexed, and living self in sexual difference thought is fundamental to Cavarero's conception of the unique self. And the material process of self-creation, which is understated in Cavarero's philosophy but essential to my own, is articulated in Cavarero's concept of *il se narrabile* [the narratable self], where the history and the potential of the self converge.

In *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* (1997) [*Relating Narratives*, 2000], what becomes fundamental (amongst other things) to Cavarero's alternative to postmodern examination of *what-ness*, is the conception of *narrabilità* [narratability] and the correspondent *il sé narrabile* to which it refers. Cavarero extends Hannah Arendt's conception of *who* the self is in her notion of narratability and this extension assists a definition of the narratable self. Cavarero writes:

> l'altro, l'altra ha una storia di vita ed è un'identità narrabile la cui unicità consiste anche e soprattutto in questa storia. Correggendo Hannah Arendt diremo quindi non solo che *chi* ci appare si mostra unico nella forma corporea e nel suono della voce, ma che questo *chi* viene anche già da noi percepito come un sé narrabile con una storia unica (49)

> [The other always has a life-story and is a narratable identity whose uniqueness also consists, above all, in this story. Correcting Hannah Arendt, we will therefore say not only that *who* appears to us is shown to be unique in corporal form and sound of voice, but that this *who* also already comes to us perceptibly as a narratable self with a unique story (*Relating Narratives* 34)].

For Cavarero, the postmodern delineation of the self's *what-ness*, her/his identity determinants, is avoided by a conception of the self as having a particular narratability, as having a singularity to her/his life-story. But Cavarero's conception of a narratable self is not so much a 'correction' of Arendt than it is an emphasis on, or specification of, the story that results from action and speech. Arendt does in fact conceive of the relation between selves as a relation of stories so that if Cavarero's narratable self is a corrective of the Arendtian formulation, what is corrected is not precisely clear. For Arendt speech and action are the means by which uniqueness is manifest. "With word and deed," she writes, "we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance" (*Human Condition* 176). The disclosure of *who* somebody is rests, for

Arendt, and Cavarero, in the affinity between speech and action, but Arendt does propose "that every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end" and that this "is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history" (184).

The significance of Cavarero's extension of Arendt's work lies, perhaps, in the proposition that, *throughout* her/his life, the self *is* narratable such that the *eventuality* of the relation Arendt discerns between the self and the narration of her/his life-story is instead always an *actuality* for Cavarero. The analogy Arendt draws between the expression of *who* the self is – through speech and action – and "the notoriously unreliable manifestations of ancient oracles" (182), exemplifies what Cavarero will come to suggest about narratability and uniqueness: citing Heraclitus, Arendt suggests that *who*, like the manifestation of ancient oracles, "neither reveal[s] nor hide[s] in words, but give[s] manifest signs" (Heraclitus qtd. in Arendt, *Human Condition* 182).

The self consists, for Cavarero, in her/his life-story *as* it unfolds, and this story corresponds or is parallel to the self's 'appearance' before others. In having *this* story and in appearing with *this* face and with *this* name, Cavarero argues, I am "thus and not otherwise" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 100). Uniqueness consists in a life-story that is one's own, which corresponds to or corroborates one's own 'appearance' such that it signals *who* one is, one's thus-and-not-otherwise-ness. Coincident with the narratability of the self, moreover, this "spectacular ontology" – the self's 'appearance' before another, her/his being apparent – signals the self's unity, her/his being existent-without-substitution: unrepeatable (90). Uniqueness and unity denote "un'esistenza la cui storia di vita è diversa da tutte le altre proprio perché con molte altre è costitutivamente intrecciata" (*Tu che* 95) ["an existence whose life-story is different from all others precisely because it is constitutively interwoven with many others" (*Relating Narratives* 71)].

In "The Public and the Private Realm", Arendt writes that the perception of and feeling for reality "depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence" (200). Arendt comments further and writes that "the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it" (201). The private realm is not, however, without its significance or its particular form of politics. The public realm is truly, or properly, political, only because it demands a greater negotiation of the plural 'appearances' of those who populate it, who constitute it (200; Cavarero, *Tu che* 77–78; *Relating Narratives* 57). Political space is, for

Arendt and Cavarero, plural space, the site in which action and speech proliferate unpredictably and without measure, which inevitably insists on a different form of recognition or negotiation than is required by, and within, the private realm (Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory" 514; *Tu che*, 77–78; *Relating Narratives* 57). Private and public spaces are differentiated, then, by the extent to which they are constituted by plurality.

For Arendt, space does not refer necessarily, or immediately, to a place, to a concrete, visible location, but to an interpersonal context, an in-between-ness amongst people, which "relates and separates […them] at the same time" (qtd. in Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory" 516). Arendt is critical of a general tendency in "Western" history toward "depoliticisation" wherein the logic of universalism negates the singular ways in which individuals appear in the world to prioritise instead their *sameness* (Arendt, *Che cos'è la politica?* 7-8; Cavarero, *Tu che* 77–78; *Relating Narratives* 57–58; Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory" 513). In this way, Man, the universal subject, can never be political because politics, in its proper, plural sense is born between unique individuals (Arendt, *Che cos'è la politica?* 7), who appear to each other "in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (Arendt qtd. in Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory" 514).

For Cavarero, following Arendt, the only situation or context that deserves to be called political is the interaction between unique selves in a "spazio relazionale di reciproca esibizione" (*Tu che* 80) ["relational space of reciprocal exhibition" (*Relating Narratives* 60)]. Nancy describes a similar scene when he writes of "the incessant tying up of singularities with each other, over each other, and through each other, without any end other than the enchainment of (k)nots" (*The Sense of the World* 111). It is this *in-between-ness* amongst singular selves, as the necessary interactive condition of politics proper, that is negated, however, by a depoliticised disavowal of plurality in preference for Man's sameness. For Cavarero, narrative exchange between selves is a politicisation of the differences between them. Narrative exchange, and the spectacular ontology which works alongside it, is immediately political by virtue of the *in-between-ness* essential to it. Narrative exchange is a scene in which the self and the other are necessarily and politically related. What mediates, or perhaps initiates, the political relation between selves in 'co-appearance', that "spazio relazionale di reciproca esibizione" ["relational space of reciprocal exhibition"], is the desire to have one's life-story narrated by another.

For Cavarero, autobiography insufficiently satisfies the desire to know oneself, to be familiar to and with oneself; the self instead desires a biography given by another. For

Cavarero, the Delphic injunction, *gnothi se auton*, 'know thy self', "non consiste […] in un esercizio di introspezione, bensì nel sollecitare il racconto esterno della propria storia" (*Tu che* 22) ["does not consist in an exercise of introspection, but rather in soliciting the external tale of […one's] own life-story" (*Relating Narratives* 12)]. Cavarero comes to this conclusion upon interpreting the unfortunate moment in which Oedipus learns the truth of his birth. This moment is fundamentally one in which the narration of one's life-story by another is the determining condition of one's identity. The series of unfortunate circumstances that come to reveal Oedipus as incestuous and parricidal is the result of not knowing *who* he is where *who* is essentially related to one's birth, to natality. This knowledge is, importantly for Cavarero, the result of an external narration by others. Oedipus functions, for Cavarero, as exemplum of the extroversive nature of the injunction *gnothi se auton*.

The story of Oedipus underpins Cavarero's claim that, in the shared space of reciprocal 'co-appearance' "io ti racconto la mia storia affinché tu me la racconti" (85) ["I tell you my story in order to make you tell it to me" (*Relating Narratives* 62)] such that the relation between the self and the other is characterised by a continual disclosure of events, of stories, "affinché l'altra conosca una storia che può a sua volta raccontare […] a chi ne è la protagonista" (85) ["up to the point at which the other […] is familiar enough with the story to be able to tell it […to its protagonist] (63). To this extent, autobiography has its significance, for Cavarero, only in the event of its reversal: when it becomes biography. Autobiography, as singular instance, is, for Cavarero, the celebration of "*il sé come un altro*, proprio perché qui è presupposta l'assenza di un altro che sia veramente *un* altro" (57) ["the *self as other*, precisely because the self here presupposes the absence of another who truly is *an* other" (40)]. The transmission of *who* rests, then, most significantly, for Cavarero, in biography because biography implies and indeed necessitates *relations* between selves. Cavarero discounts the autobiographical because the personal memory on which it depends, the "autonarrazione spontanea" (48) ["spontaneous auto-narration" (33)] that structures it, fallaciously "pretende di aver visto ciò che invece si rivela soltanto allo sguardo dell'altro" (57) ["claims to have seen that which was instead revealed through the gaze of another" (40). For Cavarero, "[n]el suo silente esercizio autobiografico, la memoria personale fa del sé narrabile un Narciso" (57) [[i]n its silent autobiographical exercise, memory turns the narratable self into a Narcissus" (40)]:

> La memoria di ogni essere umano è infatti caratterizzata da questo abbaglio strutturale che la rende infida. Essa si sdoppia nell'occhio dell'altro e pretende di aver visto il daimon, ossia l'identità di chi si mostra senza che l'agente medesimo possa appunto né vedere né conoscere né padroneggiare chi sta esponendo agli occhi altrui. Come avveniva per Edipo – anche se per meno tragici equivoci – la memoria personale continua così a raccontare a ognuno una storia falsa: cioè una storia che, pur avendo il pregio di offrire contenuti mondani al sé narrabile, ne falsifica il posizionamento prospettico (57)

> [The memory of every human being is indeed characterized by this structural mistake, which makes it untrustworthy. It doubles itself in the eye of the other and claims to have seen the daimon, or the identity of the one who is shown, without the same agent being able either to see, or know, or master who is being exposed to the others' eyes. In this way, as happened with Oedipus [– although through less tragic misunderstandings –] personal memory continues to tell us a false story; that is, a story that, although it has the merit of offering worldly contents to the narratable self, also offers a false perspective (40)].

Autobiography, for Cavarero, circumvents the relational structure of identity by claiming to have mastered the external perspectives by which it is constituted, by claiming to have mastered what is exposed to others. Thus Cavarero, and Diana Sartori (1996) with her, draw from Arendt to insist on the significance of biography as the relational scene and practice of narratable identity, for life-stories have no author but are instead generated by and perceived in existence. In other words, Cavarero writes,

> l'identità del sé, cristallizzata nella storia, è totalmente costituita delle relazioni del suo apparire agli altri e nel mondo, perché, anche nello statuto letterario dell'autobiografia, 'la storia racconta attraverso la convenzione della prima persona è sempre una storia che scopre, e allo stesso tempo crea, la relazione del sé con il mondo in cui il sé appare agli altri, potendosi conoscere solo in tale apparizione e esibizione' (*Tu che* 51; internal quotation from Janet Varner Gunn, *Toward a Poetics* 137)

> [the identity of the self, crystallized in the story, is totally constituted by the relations of her appearance to other in the world, because, even in autobiography, 'the story told through the convention of first-person narrative is always a story which both discovers and creates the relation of self with the world in which it can appear to others, knowing itself only in that appearance' (36; ; internal quotation from Janet Varner Gunn, *Toward a Poetics*, 137)].

For Diana Sartori, moreover, "[i]l rivelarsi del «chi si è» sfugge quindi al nostro dominio di noi stessi, alla nostra volontà di controllo e autocontrollo, ed è per questo che lo stare con altri, il parlare e l'agire sono forme di esposizione intrinsecamente rischiose" (34) [the revelation of 'who one is' escapes the domain of ourselves, our desire for control and self-control, which is why being with others, speaking and acting, are intrinsically risky forms of exposure.

In order to counter the self-centredness and solipsism of autobiography within the above formulations, however, I invoke H. Porter Abbot's concept of "self-writing"

to demonstrate the emphatically relational practice that is the self's writing of her/himself. In this way I build on the above observation about the process of self-creation in the affirmation of the self's *what-ness*, that "production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha 64).

"If fictional narrative ends with the last event in the story," Abbott writes, "and historical narrative has no definitive end, autographical narrative (autobiography) ends with the writing of the narrative itself. In effect, an autobiography is its own conclusion" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 598). Abbott's point of departure for the distinction "autography" represents is his claim that

> the end of an autobiography is everywhere present in the writing of it. It is therefore not precisely an event, *but an event in progress*. To translate this into narratological terms, in autobiography the discourse is narrative action. It is this fact, rather than any real or presumed factuality of the events in narrative, that makes for a meaningful difference between autobiography and its textual neighbours, history and the novel (598; my emphasis).

Abbot writes concisely in his *Beckett Writing Beckett* that autography "is the larger field comprehending all self-writing and that autobiography is a subset of autography comprehending narrative self-writing and more specifically that most common narrative, the story of one's life" (2). Nevertheless, though "'autography frees up the term 'autobiography' for a role quite parallel to that of the term 'novel': a loose narrative structure housing a variety of genres (the novel of manners, the *bildungsroman*; the spiritual autobiography, the slave narrative)" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 613) – the term is nevertheless not intended as a rigorous ontological category. Abbott is not immediately concerned with what auto(bio)graphy *is*, but with what it *does*. His intention is thus to account for the significance of autography (with "autobiography" preserved "for the more specifically *narrative* kinds of self-writing", which seem "inevitably to connote – if not denote – a long prose narrative" [612]) as an act, "or better, that autobiography is action" (600). Abbott's intention, then, is to

> refine the meaning of autobiography in three ways: to include in that meaning what can be called the reader's autographical response; to accommodate at the same time the formal variety that usually threatens definition of autobiography; and to establish a clear distinction between the larger set, autography, and other fundamental textual categories (601).

Most important, here, however, in the claim that autography is an act, "a form of personal action" (601), is the involvement of the reader in that personal, narrative action. Abbott's 'autography' offers a theory of the reader's attitude to the content of

auto(bio)graphical texts, an attitude toward reading that is guided by the "analytic awareness of the author in action" (601). Autography is a particular orientation of authors and readers toward content.

"That an author depends upon, and that we seek," Abbott writes, "a final orientation toward a text as fictional, autographical, or […] factual and conceptual is I think undeniable" (612). "To read fictively," Abbot concludes, "is to ask of the text before all else: How is this complete?" (613). The orientation of the reader of fiction is one in which s/he is aligned with the author "in a joint project of rendering the text an artful whole", an alignment that turns away from the author and "considerations of factual or conceptual accuracy" (613). "To read factually or conceptually," on the other hand, "is to ask of the text: How is this true?" (613). The project in which reader and author are aligned in factual and conceptual reading is one that, "unlike the fictive project, does not depend on the text for its completion. When the text is finished, the author's achievement is judged and the search for truth goes on" (613). Finally, then, "[t]o read autographically is to ask of the text: How does this reveal the author? It is to set oneself analytically apart from the author in a project that often succeeds in spite of him. Historical truth or falsity are important only insofar as they express the identity of the author" (613).

When Abbot claims that auto(bio)graphical narrative "begins and ends in the present of its making", that its "writing does not simply convey a life, but is itself, in every line, *an act of self-assertion by the author*" (603; my emphasis), he overturns Cavarero's presumptions about autobiography's static life, solipsistically *narrated*, and conceives of autobiography instead as the representation of *narratable* identity that is guaranteed within the interaction of writer and reader of self-writing. Self-writing is a relational practice: the writer presumes readers; readers follow and constitute the identity of the self who is written. Abbott's formulation of autography in this way permits the conception of self-writing as an instantiation of the practice of *partire da sé*, starting from oneself.

Cavarero's model of unique and narratable selfhood

> non sopporta invece empatie, identificazioni, confusioni. Essa vuole infatti un *tu* che sia veramente un altro, un'altra, nella sua unicità e distinzione. Per quanto tu sia simile e consonante, la tua storia non è mai la mia, dice questa etica. Per quanto siano simili larghi tratti della nostra storia di vita, non mi riconosco *in* te, tanto meno, nella collettività del *noi* (*Tu che* 120).

> [does not support empathy, identification, or confusions. Rather this ethic desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction. Not matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my

story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we* (*Relating Narratives* 92)].

The "invece" ["instead"] of Cavarero's observation above signals the difference of the "altruistic ethics of relation" she formulates in her work from the empathetic subsumption of self into other – the kind of subsumption Cavarero discerns in the feminist practice of *autocoscienza* [self-consciousness], a practice similar to the feminist consciousness-raising groups of women in the United States during the 1960s and 70s. Introduced to Italy by Carla Lonzi in the early 1970s, however, Italian *autocoscienza* – unlike the general meaning of English 'consciousness-raising' – emphasised "the self-determined and self-directed quality of the process of achieving a new consciousness/awareness" (Bono and Kemp 9).

"La pratica dell'autocoscienza […] presupponeva e favoriva una perfetta identificazione reciproca" ["The practice of *autocoscienza* […] presupposed and promoted a perfect reciprocal identification"], write the women of the Libreria delle donne di Milano [Milan Women's Bookstore Collective] in *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (2005 [1987]):

> Io sono te, tu sei me, le parole che una dice sono parole di donna, sue e mie. Questo, s'intende, vale nella misura in cui la donna che parla ha coscienza di sé o l'ha guadagnata politicamente. La presa di coscienza essendo l'atto politico in cui si scopre e afferma la comune identità femminile. Quando la comune identità è riconosciuta, ha il potere di unificare le donne fra loro quanto e meglio di qualsiasi organizzazione (35)

> [I am you, you are me; the words that one of us uses are women's words, hers and mine. Of course, this is valid to the extent that the woman who is speaking has attained self-consciousness, since consciousness is the political act in which one discovers and affirms women's common identity. When that common identity is recognized, it has the power of uniting women among themselves as much as, and better than, any organization could (*Sexual Difference* 42)].

For Cavarero, *autocoscienza*'s promotion of "perfetta identificazione reciproca" ["perfect reciprocal identification"] meant that "l'identità personale consegnata al racconto di un'irripetibile storia di vita […correva] infatti il pericolo di perdere la sua realtà espressiva confluendo e fondendosi nel comune 'esser donne' che […è venuto] qui rappresentato" (81) ["the […] personal identity that is consigned to the tale of an unrepeatable life-story […ran] the risk of losing its expressive reality and founding itself in the common 'being women' that […was] represented here" (*Relating Narratives* 60)]. The women of the Libreria, reflecting on the debate amongst women on the question of abortion, also

consider this problem of a common 'being woman', and write of their coming to terms with the fact that "quando si vuole interpretare i bisogni di tutte le donne, si fa una generalizzazione ideologica che non risponde ai bisogni di nessuna (*Non credere* 73) ["When […] one starts talking about the needs of all women, one makes an ideological generalization which addresses or corresponds to no one woman's needs" (*Sexual Difference* 69)].

A number of experimental practices attempted to address the question of the homogeneity of 'Woman'. 'La pratica dell'inconscio' [the practice of the unconscious] attempted to bring to light "aspetti taciuti o rinnegati della propria vita (*Non credere* 48) ["[u]nspoken or disavowed aspects of women's lives" (*Sexual Difference* 52)]. 'La pratica della disparità fra donne' [the practice of disparity between women] and that of 'affidamento/affidarsi' [entrustment/entrusting oneself] sought to symbolise and affirm the qualitative differences between women in a form of relation where "una donna 'debole' si affida a una donna 'forte' per essere avviata e sostenuta nel suo itinerario di liberazione a affermazione della differenza sessuale" (Cavarero and Restaino 72) [a 'weak' woman entrusts herself to a 'strong' woman in order to be initiated and supported in her journey of liberating and affirming sexual difference]. 'La pratica delle relazioni fra donne' [the practice of relations among women] addressed questions of power and authority through the symbolic significance of the mother amongst women "nella naturale verticalità del loro rapporto" (99; cf. Cigarini, *La politica del desiderio* 152) [in the natural verticality of their relationship]. And 'La pratica di partire da sé' [the practice of starting from oneself] concerned and still concerns itself with "una decostruzione dell'*io* e del *mondo* ed ogni movimento di decostruzione" (Muraro, "Partire da sé e non farsi trovare" 21) [a deconstruction of the *'I'* and the *world* and every movement of deconstruction]. From this history of political and practical experimentation, Cavarero distinguishes 'la pratica delle relazioni fra donne' [the practice of relations among women] and 'la pratica di partire da sé' [the practice of starting from oneself] as the most conducive to the engendering of *who-ness*.

For Chiara Zamboni, the practice of starting from oneself is "una politica che […] sappia fare tesoro dei vissuti e del desiderio" (1) [a politics that knows how to make treasure out of [the self's] experiences and out of desire," out of one's ties [*legami*] to the world and to other people (1). In "Il materialismo dell'anima" Zamboni also writes that

> [p]artendo da sé non si parte da una conoscenza generale e oggettiva per
> arrivare poi ad una conoscenza specifica e particolare della propria situazione.
> Si parte invece dai sentimenti e dalle contraddizioni vissute in prima persona,

perché saperle vedere e interpretare è un modo di restituire la verità del mondo al mondo stesso" (156; my emphasis)

[in starting from oneself, one doesn't start from a general and objective knowledge to then arrive at a specific and particular knowledge of one's own situation. Instead one starts from feelings and lived contradictions in the first person, because to know how to see and to interpret is a means of giving the truth of the world back to the world itself (my emphasis)].

For Cavarero, moreover, alongside the politics of 'relazioni fra donne' [relations among women], 'partire da sé' has its distinction "in un orizzonte che vede incrociarsi politica e narrazione (*Tu che* 80) ["in a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect" (*Relating Narratives* 60)]. It is a "concrete politics tied to the material context where language is generated" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 99), which has its roots in *autocoscienza* (*Tu che* 80; *Relating Narratives* 60) but which distinguishes itself, for Cavarero, from that practice by the radically contextualised significance that uniqueness brings to the scene. In its association with the politics of *relazioni fra donne*, the practice of *partire da sé* assumes a "priority in focus, a privileged orientation in the practice of looking", where *what-ness* might explain the coming-together of particular selves to narrate themselves, but where the exposure of *who-ness* ultimately contextualizes the relational scene (Cavarero, "Who Engenders Politics?" 101). "In other words," Cavarero writes, "the relational setting produces the meaning of the self and prevents […] common identity from becoming a static figure with an exclusive identification" (101). It is the function of relationality that determines whether or not *what-ness* is an irreducible quality or something fundamentally "inscribed in the very expressivity of the embodiments of uniqueness" there exposed (101). The politics of *relazioni fra donne* and the practice of *partire da sé* structure, for Cavarero, the relational scene, the meeting, of embodied and finite selves who narrate their life-stories and engender their uniqueness. This is a very specific example of a context in which the empathetic identification of *autocoscienza* is undermined by the specificities of practices that enable relationality to triumph over static commonality, *what-ness*. "Molti movimenti 'rivoluzionari'," ["many 'revolutionary' movements"], Cavarero thus writes,

(quelli che spaziano […] dalla tradizione comunista al femminismo della sorellanza) sembrano infatti condividere un curioso codice linguistico basato sulla moralità dei pronomi. Il *noi* è sempre positivo, il *voi* è un possibile alleato, il *loro* ha la faccia dell'antagonista, l'*io* è sconveniente e il *tu*, appunto, è superfluo (*Tu che* 118)

[(which range from traditional communism to the feminism of sisterhood) seem to share a curious linguistic code based on the morality of pronouns. The

we is always positive, the *plural you* is a possible ally, the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* is, of course, superfluous (*Relating Narratives* 90–91)].

Cavarero's above-quoted claim that, because it does not support empathy, the altruistic ethics of relationality "vuole infatti un *tu* che sia veramente un altro, un'altra, nella sua unicità e distinzione" (*Tu che* 120) ["desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction" (*Relating Narratives* 92], addresses this "curious linguistic code" of revolutionary movements "based on the morality of pronouns" by asserting the significance, simply, of "Io" [I] and "Tu" [you, singular] (*Tu che* 120). It is in relation with *an* other that *who-ness* is engendered. Collective identity, in *autocoscienza* and in the postmodern determination of the decentred, fragmented subject, is instead a reification of *what-ness*.

In the priority Cavarero affords to a politics of *who* over *what* the self is, identity determinants, social categories, and memberships, are not denied; they are simply things which are not "constitutive, primary, or even exclusive elements of political agency" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 101). *Partire da sé,* starting from oneself, in relation to an other – a politics of face-to-face-ness – offers women (and men) a material situation, a material politics, wherein "every woman puts at stake not one of her many identities (philosopher, communist, lesbian, etc.) but simply herself; or rather, she directly stakes who she is; she exposes her self to others and responds from it" (100). In appearing before others, and in starting from oneself, through narrative, Cavarero's understanding of offering an account of oneself depends upon, and, indeed, demands a close affinity between the self and the narration of her/his life-story. The story that the self tells of her/himself and of others is, in this sense, more than what Meaghan Morris (1996) considers the relation between *mise en abyme* and anecdotes (150). In a similar way to Cavarero, Morris considers the inefficacy of *generality* in matters of cultural criticism and world-history ("On the Beach" 466). In response to the problem of generality, Morris offers the anecdote as a means of localising or particularising politics and critique; anecdotes, in this sense,

> are oriented futuristically towards the construction of a precise, local and social discursive context, of which the anecdote then functions as mise en abyme. That is to say, anecdotes for me are not expressions of personal experience, but allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working. So anecdotes need not be true stories, but they must be functional in a given exchange ("Banality in Cultural Studies" 7).

For Cavarero, however, what is implicit in the narration of life-stories *is* the self who is narrated. In Morris' theorisation of the anecdote, on the other hand, what is of determining significance or priority is the social context in which the anecdote is immersed. For Cavarero, the self consists in and is carried by her/his narrative (without being constituted by it) much more than s/he is in Morris's anecdote. For Cavarero, the life-story narrated to and received by, and from, the other is "the tangible expression of existence" (*Relating Narratives* 67). The worldview expressed within and through it cannot unfold without reference to the embodied uniqueness interwoven throughout and within it. The reciprocal 'appearance' of the self before the other, the exchange of life-stories, is a temporal and spatial orientation of uniqueness in which the self and other are simultaneously related *to*, and separated *from*, each other. Life-stories function less as a *mise en abyme* than as Nancy's configuration of the interlacing singularities: narratives are "singular interlacings" of the self as "a *one* that is *one* only by virtue of concatenation" (Nancy, *Sense of the World* 113). Each story, and the embodied uniqueness to which it refers, exists in relation as a singular (unique) element of a whole. The difference between Morris' anecdote and Cavarero's conception of *who* might be formulated with reference once more to Nancy: if Nancy's response to the question "who comes after the subject?" is another question, "who is present there?" ("Introduction" 1), for Morris, "there" is of determining significance, while for Cavarero emphasis is placed on "who is present?" As much as the narration of life-stories for Cavarero suggests a social scene, a context, of relations, what Cavarero offers in her philosophy of uniqueness is something *more* than the sociality of narrative, its being in and referring to "there"; Cavarero is concerned with something more than *what-ness* (of and in narration).

It is never Cavarero's intention, however, to suggest that the self is *without* her/his *what-ness*. Indeed she comes to emphasise in the conclusion to "Who Engenders Politics?" that *who* is not an original substance to which is added "the multiplicity of the what" (100), that the narration of a life-story is inevitably a narration of *what* as well as *who* the self is. And yet, if the distinction between *who* and *what* is to hold any kind of significance there must be, despite their entanglement, a difference, or priority of one (*who*) over the other (*what*). This is inevitably the case if Cavarero is to claim that the things that indicate *what-ness* are not "constitutive, primary, or even exclusive elements of political agency". Inevitably, then, Cavarero relegates the significance of *what-ness* to a position of *secondary* significance to *who-ness*, despite the fact that each is in imbricated relation to the other.

The effect of the privilege Cavarero attributes to *who-ness* is similar to that described by Judith Butler in her essay "Merely Cultural" (1997), where a questionable perspective (predominantly Marxist) determines to keep issues of political economy distinct from those of culture. She criticises this tendency and accounts for the way cultural identity directly and emphatically asserts, indeed inserts, itself into issues of people's livelihood (273). She refers, persuasively, to "those instances in which lesbians and gays are rigorously excluded from state-sanctioned notions of the family [...] are stopped at the border; are deemed inadmissible to citizenship [...] or are deauthorized by the law to make emergency medical decisions about dying lovers [etc.]" (273) as examples of such an intersection, or insertion. And while the analogy between Cavarero and Butler's criticism of Marxism is insufficient (because Cavarero does permit the importance of *what-ness*, just not as something reducible to the self), Butler's essay provides a forceful retort to analyses which subordinate cultural identity (*what-ness*) to a more important question (*who-ness*). One can accept Cavarero's claim that *who* some*one* is appears materially, singularly – *uniquely* – before and is narrated by another, but one might contend that in the same relation the self also and immediately exhibits *what* s/he is, or, more importantly, her/his unique *investment* in a particular case of *what-ness*, her/his being "fundamentally dependent on those terms for 'our' existence" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 2), and that this impacts upon *who-ness*. This indeed is the conclusion Cavarero comes to when she writes of the entangled relation between *who* and *what*, but it is not one she teases out or wants to explore. In this study, however, I argue that *who-ness* refers to the process by which the generality of *what-ness* is *made* unique. I claim *who-ness* is unique *what-ness*, that self-writing, as an instance of *partire da sé*, gives testimony to the ways in which the general is made particular and unique by virtue of its being lived and invested in *as such*. To this extent, the *what* of the self might approximate Giorgio Agamben's *singolarità qualunque* [whatever singularity]: "Il Qualunque che è qui in questione non prende, infatti, la singolarità nella sua indifferenza rispetto a una proprietà comune (a un concetto, per esempio: l'esser rosso, francese, musulmano), ma solo nel suo essere *tale qual è* (*La comunità che viene* 9) ["The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such as it is*" (*The Coming Community* 1)].

Like Abbott, I am not concerned with what self-writing *is* but with what it *does*. My intention is not to discuss *who-ness* and *what-ness* as ways of rendering or making

possible a subject of autobiography, or a subject of *partire da sé*. I take for granted, or rather assume the significance of, feminist conceptions of the self as the subject of writing, which has been argued by theorists like Sidonie Smith (1987, 1993), Nancy K. Miller (1988, 1994, 2002), and, importantly, the French theorists of *écriture feminine* (particularly Hélène Cixous [1976] and Julia Kristeva [1984]). These theorists demonstrate the (political) weight of permitting the construction of the autobiographical 'I'. The development of this study relies upon observations like Smith's which consider autobiography as "one of those cultural occasions when the history of the body intersects the deployment of subjectivity" (*Subjectivity* 23), but my task is not to consider *how* that is possible, or how these works relate to the all-too-familiar and often cited claims of Roland Barthes' (1984) 'death of the author', Michel Foucault's 'author-function' (2000), Jacques Derrida's 'trace' (1997) or even de Man's position on the 'defacement' of the self by language in autobiography (1979). That is, and perhaps polemically, I assume some kind of correspondence (influenced by preceding feminist insistence on the same) between the self or the "I" and what s/he says or writes about her/himself and her/his world. I am more concerned with *autos* and *bios* than with *graphein* and its attendant complexities. Assuming the confluence between self and autobiography, I am interested in what self-writing offers to a study of the unique self.

This is a question of affect, of attachments, and of orientations. To the extent that self-writings can be read as instances of *partire da sé*, autobiographies elaborate questions of belonging, and thus, necessarily, of relations: to things, to people, to places. In this way, as Cavarero writes, *partire da sé* is not a solipsistic enterprise, but an activity or practice concerned with understanding the 'this-ness' of the self and her/his relations to others and to the world ("Who Engenders Politics?" 96). *Partire da sé* and its self-writing instantiations might be read, then, as phenomenological questions: they are questions about how the self is located or orientated and how s/he locates or orientates her/himself. Autobiography as exemplum or manifestation of *partire da sé* is concerned, then, as much with the unique self as it is with broader questions about where s/he belongs in the world. The personal action that is the narrative of self-writing is, in this way, perhaps the keenest or most important structuration of one's orientation in the world. Narrative is a phenomenological condition or means by which one is located and locates oneself.

In making the question of uniqueness (*who* and *what*) and *partire da sé* a phenomenological concern, I am influenced by Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

(1945), which demonstrates the significance of conceiving the body and the self as constituted by and within a field or series of relations and phenomena. In her introduction to *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed describes Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body with respect to spatial dimensions and observes the "impressions" selves leave on each other in their relation to one another (8-9). In being "here", a relation is established between spatial differences determined from the central perspective that is the body (8). The "here" in which the body is located does not simply refer to that body, but to "where" it is located such that it is shaped, oriented, or made to adjust, to its location (8-9). The body becomes the site onto which surroundings "impress" themselves, and these "impressions" are affective responses, demarcations, of the body's position in space (9). The body surface is reshaped by the impressions made, or left, upon it (9). But it is not only space, however, which can be said to impress upon the self. People, their "comings and goings" also leave impressions (9). In this affective exchange I suggest lies the reciprocity of unique selfhoods fundamental to conceiving the significance of *partire da sé*.

Elspeth Probyn's (1993) account of writing the self as a means of determining (the relation between) epistemological and ontological effects of the social and the culture, underpins the significance of *partire da sé* as a relation between the self, the other, and their worlds. Probyn's *Sexing the Self* inaugurates the political significance of self-articulation. Her project is influenced significantly by Raymond Williams' observations about the structure of feeling which offers an important means of conceiving the agential capacity of the self in her/his starting from oneself as well as the social and cultural influences which impact upon that practice or activity. For Williams, 'structure of feeling refers to the process by which social forms "become social consciousness only when they are lived, actively, in real relationships, and moreover in relationships which are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units" (*Marxism* 130). In this conception, I read the possibility of making the generality of *what-ness* personal so that it speaks much more to *who-ness*. The incorporation of "structure" as that category which refers to the indifferent or general effect of the social and the cultural upon the self, as well as the "most delicate and tangible parts of our activity" (*Politics and Letters* 48) offers a means of making *who* and *what* less a question of hierarchy and priority and more a question of their correspondence.

In the chapters that follow, I read a number of self-writings alongside key concepts in Cavarero's work, demonstrating the merits of a kind of investigation that

Derek Duncan (1998) describes as "[a]n understanding not only of how lives are lived but also of how they are understood, an appreciation of the forces that constrain them and the means by which such constraint is suffered and resisted" (371). For Duncan, this kind of understanding and appreciation "brings bodies back into the text in such a way as to restore as full a sense as possible of their history and of their historical location (371). Throughout my study, self-writing is understood as a means by which the self is located in the historicity of the kind Duncan describes above, one which resonates with Teresa de Lauretis' (1984) formulation of 'experience' as "a *process* by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process *one places oneself or is placed in social reality*, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical" (159; original emphasis on "process"; my own emphasis elsewhere). And I argue that *what-ness* circumscribes that history in ways that demand articulation and recognition, for my choice of self-writings to discuss has been strategic. They are written by men and women who belong to minority groups, men and women who are in some way marginalised by *what* they are. This is because in the priority Cavarero gives to a politics and a philosophy of *who* over *what*, important questions about minority and marginalisation arise. If belonging to a minority is indicative of one's relation to *what-ness*, *what-ness* is a question that matters quite a lot to minority groups, to those who are marginalised. I have thus chosen self-writings whose authors demonstrate the significance of *what-ness* for their personal identity, their *who-ness*, their sense of being "thus-and-not-otherwise" (Cavarero, "Who Engenders Politics?" 100).

But the texts I read are not simply offered as critical responses to Cavarero's prioritisation of *who-ness* over *what-ness*. I also want to substantiate much of her challenge to contemporary attitudes toward the self, exemplifying and deepening her provocation to think uniqueness because it presents theories of selfhood with the task of accounting for *this* some*one* who has far so long been neglected. Given the particularity of the *what-ness* of the philosophy that underpins my study throughout – the *what-ness*, that is, of Italian contributions to philosophies of 'difference' and the self, which are brought into dialogue with philosophies that correspond to the geography and culture of 'Anglo-America' – each of my chapters reads an Italian and an Anglophone text together. The comparative approach implicit in this supports my general intention throughout to affirm the communicable differences of and between types of *what-ness*.

In Chapter 1, Virginia Woolf's "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past" and

Fausta Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger* speak to the philosophical significance of 'birth', 'generation', and 'finitude' and offer a means of modelling the temporality of uniqueness. In their depictions of the mother, Woolf and Cialente relate the uniqueness of selfhood to the significance of natality, the 'being-born-ness' of the self, configuring, at the same time, the finitude of the self's relation to the past and the present. Through Woolf and Cialente, uniqueness acquires greater material significance as a particularity that opposes the abstract and the universal. The thematic of the daughter's sameness to, and difference from, the mother in Woolf and Cialente's texts fortifies the significance of Cavarero's philosophy of uniqueness by countering what I claim are overstated relations of indifference between the self and the discursive (cf. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 33–40 and Michel Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 231–231), relations that neglect the symbolic framework of birth, and the significance of the mother as the some*one who* gives birth to *who-ness*. The relation between mother and daughter in Woolf and Cialente maps a more general model of relationality in which the generative and the finite are given priority over the undifferentiated relation of power between the self and the discursive.

Chapter 2 considers Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*. Through these texts I critique Cavarero's claim to the irreducibility of *what-ness* to the self by considering the immediacy and the significance of skin difference. My discussion of skin difference is informed by Sara Ahmed's theorisation of belonging in *Strange Encounters* and Elspeth Probyn's "surface politics" in *Outside Belongings*. The theoretical premises of Ahmed and Probyn's work, read through Ghermandi and Lorde's texts, enable a deeper political reading of Cavarero's formulation of the Arendtian category of 'appearance'. *Regina* and *Zami* elaborate specific instances in which the body becomes the site or scene of difference, and, more importantly, the means through which processes of *differentiation* between unique selves in relation might be mapped or read. In that chapter, Ghermandi and Lorde offer a means of politicising the 'apparent' and embodied difference of skin.

The third chapter of this study considers the implications of Cavarero's claim to the underlying structure of *assaporarsi* ('tasting oneself', deceptively translated in *Relating Narratives* as "sensing" oneself [35]) in the recognition of uniqueness in oneself and in others. I discuss Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* in terms of the affective dimensions of testimony and recognition and set up what this means for a philosophy and politics of uniqueness. My discussion of Didion and

Levi centres upon the textual accumulation of affect in the narration of one's life-story and the relation this establishes between writer and reader, self and other. In its discussion of Didion and Levi, this chapter outlines a kind of phenomenology of uniqueness, wherein narrative works as means of affective orientation of selves. I consider grief, loss, and the suspension of self in time, horror, shame, and empathetic representation in narrative in order to discuss the ways in which Didion and Levi *affect* their readers and *effect* themselves, their uniqueness.

In Chapter 4, I build upon the affective structure of the kind of phenomenology of uniqueness established in Chapter 3. I discuss the ways in which Conigrave's *Holding the Man* and Brett Shapiro's *L'intruso* articulate the person-ality of gay-ness, through the experience of AIDS and consider this in terms of Cavarero's formulation of the self's ontological vulnerability, a concept that resonates with the "precarity" of life that Judith Butler (2004) theorises, and the "drama of contingency" that Sarah Ahmed describes in *Queer Phenomenology* (124). Conigrave and Shapiro's memoirs attest to the ways in which the general is lived particularly, uniquely such that Cavarero's claim to the irreducibility of these things – the general and the particular – is brought into question by the responsibility of the reader to apprehend, to care for, the uniqueness of *what-ness* there narratable in Shapiro and Conigrave's text, the very real ways in which *what-ness* assumes priority in people's lives.

My final chapter considers what is at work in the very category most fundamental to Cavarero's model of unique selfhood: narrative. The chapter centres on the narratological distinction between 'story' and 'narrative' in order to parallel the plot and content of narrative action – events – with the content of identity, *what-ness*. I account for the ways in which narrative, as the discursive representation of events is always already organised by categories of *what-ness*, by shared terms of existence, which also facilitate their particularity as lived experiences of the unique self. I consider the ways in which narrative *qualia* structure and facilitate the *who-ness* of *what-ness* by facilitating the *meaningfulness* of the communicable content, action, *plot*, of the unique self's writing. In this way, I conclude that the texts I discuss throughout attest to the reducible and lived significance of *what-ness* that is made particular in its being-lived and in the re-presentation of the content and action that is that being-lived by *this* some*one*.

1 | On Birth, Generation, and Finitude:
Mothers and Daughters and the Time of Uniqueness |

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler engages with Cavarero's model of unique and narratable identity and responds to it with some degree of suspicion, drawing from and maintaining Michel Foucault's observations at the end of his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002 [1969]). For Butler, "the account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries this living self" (36) and at the end of his account of discursive formations and functions, Foucault observes the same. People "cannot bear (and one cannot but sympathize)," Foucault writes,

> to hear someone saying: 'Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man [sic] that will live longer than he' (232)

With this caution, against the idea that the self can exist and exert an independent force over discourse, that discourse is contemporaneous with, and operates with respect to, the people it conditions, Foucault articulates the self's position within a system that is beyond and indifferent to her/him. The extent to which the self can ever 'put' her/himself into discourse, her/his discourse, is constrained by a temporality that precedes and will extend beyond, her/him: "its time is not your time". Thus, Foucault writes, any account that I give of myself, or any view that I want to relay, is "governed by rules that are not all given to [...my] consciousness" (232). I am not conscious of all the ways in which the position I speak from is mediated by something prior and anterior to me. In the account I give of myself, I am always, in this way, only partial.

In defence of the potential of partiality, however, this chapter discusses how Virginia Woolf's "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past", from her *Moments of Being* (1975), and Fausta Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze Wieselberger* (1976) stage the generative implications of sexual difference as a corrective to undifferentiated relations (of power) between the self and the historical, social, and cultural systems – the discursive formations – in which s/he is situated. Woolf and Cialente's self-writings offer a means of considering the temporal conditions and structures of uniqueness; they position uniqueness as the self's limit of finitude, her/his partiality, in relation to the historical, the social, and the cultural, the discursive systematicity of which exceeds that finitude and partiality, but is not, I argue, indifferent to it. Woolf and Cialente's self-writings, through

the significance attributed therein to the mother-daughter relation, model an alternative temporality of past-ness and present-ness to Foucauldian and Butlerean discourse, the time of which "is not my own" but in which the "the identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which integrates what 'I' can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of 'me,' interpret my acts and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future" (Benhabib, *Situating the Self* 5). Woolf and Cialente account for the potential of the self's action, and interaction with others, along a stretch of time between birth and death called 'natality', wherein the self's impact upon, and the impact of, historic and symbolic frameworks is measured by finitude and difference. To this extent, Woolf and Cialente's texts, read alongside Cavarero's philosophy, critique the anonymity and indifference of Foucauldian and Butlerean discourse.

The relation between past and present, as it relates to the mother and to sexual difference within Woolf and Cialente, is in part elaborated within this chapter through the category of natality, which Hannah Arendt describes as central to "political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought" (*The Human Condition* 9). For Lisa Guenther (2008), moreover, natality designates the "sheer possibility of existence", the self's being-situated-within possibility, and counterbalances the Being-toward-Death of Heideggerian *Dasein* (107). Natality designates "the gift of birth," a gift that "does not merely give me a range of possibilities; [...but] *gives me*, brings me forth as an existent (107). For Guenther, natality is the lived situation in which the self actively takes up what is inherited or given to her/him such that "I not only receive but actively grasp the possibilities handed down to me, interpreting them in relation to my own projects" (101). To the extent that it refers to the self's immersion in the lived experience of possibility, natality conceives of and affirms the self's *being-born*, her/his 'born-ness'. Natality affirms not only the self's beginning in birth, but also the gift, the possibility of the self's existence throughout the interval between birth and death. As such, natality presumes and insists upon the significance of *generation* and resists teleological claims about the structure of existence. The generative capacity of existence itself is affirmed in the category of natality and implicit within the "sheer possibility of existence".

Arendt articulates the relation between natality and generation when she observes:

> the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only
> because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew,
> that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore

natality, is inherent in all human activities (*The Human Condition* 9; my emphasis).

What Guenther and Arendt offer for a reading of Woolf and Cialente's self-writing, and for the determination of the significance of natality for uniqueness, is the doubled-meaning of 'generation'. Natality, because it refers to the self's being-given to the world and to her/his capacity for beginning something anew, emphasises the significance of 'generation' to designate the historicity of the self, her/his historical lineage – wherein 'being-*given*' necessarily implies being-*born* – as well as the activity of 'generation', within which is carried the implication of inauguration, of creation.

This doubled-implication of 'generation', inherent to the situation of natality into which the self is born, is given, is important for this chapter, because its articulation in Woolf and Cialente reinforces Cavarero's provocation to think the uniqueness of the self. The doubled-implication of 'generation' insists upon the particular because it presumes the significance of the self's finitude. The self who is given to the world, the self who is generated, is always given by some*one*: the mother. And the self who begins something anew, the self who generates, is always *one* her/himself by virtue of being born to and by *one*. The doubled-meaning of 'generation', manifest in the situation of natality, insists upon the uniqueness of the self because it presumes the relation of some*one*-ness manifest in the relation between mother and child. Natality, structured by the generative, finds its significance for the finitude and uniqueness of the self in the figure of the mother.

Woolf and Cialente's texts offer an important means, then, of reading the finitude of the unique self and the significance of natality and 'generation' as categories, as situations, that enable *who-ness*. In their depictions of the mother, Woolf and Cialente relate the uniqueness of selfhood to the significance of the being-born-ness of the self, configuring, at the same time, the finitude of the self's relation to the past and the present. Through Woolf and Cialente, uniqueness acquires greater material or concrete significance as a particularity that opposes the abstract and the universal. The thematic of the daughter's sameness to, and difference from, the mother in Woolf and Cialente's texts fortifies the significance of Cavarero's philosophy of uniqueness by countering claims – prevalent within postmodern and post-structural attitudes toward the self's social and discursive constitution – that overstate relations of indifference between the self and the discursive relations that neglect the symbolic framework of birth, and the significance of the mother as the some*one who* gives birth to *who-ness*. The relation

between mother and daughter in Woolf and Cialente maps a more general model of relationality in which the generative and the finite are given priority over the overstated obscurity and indifference of the discursive constitution of the self.

In *Nonostante Platone*, Cavarero interprets the myth of Demeter in order to give weight to the observation that

> la maternità è *matrice* dell'apparire umano al mondo che si radica nella natura: *physis*. Da *phyein*, nascere: un generare che è manifestarsi, crescere, venire alla presenza […] Così la natura nel suo stesso etimo dice l'apparire al mondo (e l'apparire del mondo) come nascere (67; original emphasis)

> maternity is the matrix of the arrival of humans into the world. Their arrival is rooted in nature, or *physis*. The Greek word *physis*, from *phyein*, to be born, connotes the act of generating as way of manifesting oneself, of growing, and of becoming present […] So the stem of the word "nature" indicates that to arrive into the world (and to encounter the world) is to be born (*In Spite of Plato* 59).

Cavarero keenly indicates here – but which the English translation neglects in its rendering of "apparire" [appearing, appearance] as "arrival" and as "encounter" – her characteristic debt to the philosophy of Arendt. Indeed, alongside Plato, Aristotle (amongst other classic figures) and Luce Irigaray, Cavarero's consideration of Demeter and her consequent philosophy of birth and generation, relies on the above-quoted Arendtian formulation of action and appearance as dependent upon natality. Action, the necessary condition for the newborn's capacity for "beginning something anew" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 9), is dependent upon 'appearance', the coming-into-presence of the self which begins at birth. For Arendt, moreover, 'Being' and 'Appearing' coincide (*The Life of the Mind* 19) such that birth and natality, as the conditions for action, and death, the cessation of action, are "not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart" (*The Human Condition* 96–97). For Arendt, birth, because it is the condition for, the inauguration of, 'appearance', action, and speech, is likewise the condition and the guarantor of uniqueness. If maternity is, for Cavarero, the matrix of 'appearance', it is, then, also the matrix of uniqueness: 'appearance is uniqueness'; by virtue of 'appearing' in the plural space of reciprocal 'appearance', one is unique (Arendt, *Che cos'è la politica?* 7; Cavarero, "Politicising Theory 513-514). Cavarero's account of the myth of Demeter underpins the same kind of political, rather than metaphysical, thought that Arendt claims is enabled by natality. Because natality refers to the condition of being-born it refers to the situation of reciprocal appearances of selves as unique:

uniqueness is born; it appears and is maintained through speech and action. The English rendering of "apparire" in Cavarero's original text, undermines, then, not only the significance of Cavarero's debt to the Arendtian category of appearance (and thus, natality), but Cavarero's specific intervention of such categories. Where Arendt begins to undermine the centrality of the relation between metaphysics and death, Cavarero likewise offers birth, natality, and generation as an alternative means of construing the conditions of the self in the world.

Cavarero's intervention is to specify the general category and phenomenon of birth in Arendt as the birth of some*one* by some*one*: one is born of a mother. In response to the classical and metaphysical disavowal of the mother's role in *physis* – where "la *physis* è semplicemente lo sconfinato modo di essere del mondo (*Nonostante* 67) ["*physis* is simply the world's boundless mode of being" (*In spite* 60)] – Cavarero writes, reducing the universal to the particular, that

> mai nasce, e vive, l'Uomo, bensì sempre, singolarmente, o un uomo o una donna, sessuati nella differenza. Perché ogni nato o nata sempre nasce da donna, la quale è nata da una donna a sua volta nata da un'altra donna, e così via infinitamente all'indietro (ossia in direzione dell'origine), appunto nel continuum materno che disegna la radice femminile di ogni umano. Perché il vivente umano non è che un caso di generazione sessuata all'interno di una natura che genera per sessuazione, e quindi porta in sé inscritta la differenza sessuale come modo e luogo del suo apparire (67)

> universal 'Man' is never born and never lives. Instead, individual persons are born and live their lives gendered in difference as either man or woman. But every human born, male or female, is always born of a woman, who was born of a woman, who, in turn, was born of another woman, and so on, in an endless backward movement toward our origins. This maternal continuum delineates the feminine root of every human being. A living person is merely a single instance of human generation, sexually differentiated within a natural order that generates by gendering (*In spite of Plato* 60).

Here, for Cavarero, the mother is responsible for the generation of singularity, of uniqueness. The significance of the mother – as both symbolic figure, and as corporeal, embodied singularity herself (the continuum of women stresses the importance of "*una donna*" [*a* woman]), recalling, also, Woolf's observation about thinking back through the mother – is read in the making-particular of abstract universals: 'Man' is never born and never lives; men and women are and do. Uniqueness, to the extent that it challenges claims to abstract universals, is the consequence of having been born of a singular woman; uniqueness, in this sense, generates uniqueness. Natality, as the condition of unique selfhood refers always to the birth of some*one* by some*one*.

"Esiste una di sorta gratitudine di fondo per tutto ciò che è così com'è," ["There exists a sort of gratitude for all that is as it is"] Cavarero quotes from Arendt's letter to Gershom Scholem, "per ciò che è stato *dato* e non è stato *fatto*" (Arendt qtd. in *Tu che* 55; original emphasis) [for all that has been *given* and has not been *done*" (Arendt qtd. in *Relating Narratives* 38; original emphasis). For Cavarero, Arendt's observation is formative of an argument for the category of sex, for sexual difference, belonging within the ambit of *who-ness* rather than *what-ness*. Cavarero argues that s/he *who* is born is (if only momentarily) without *what-ness* because s/he is unmarked by the passage of time (*Tu che* 54; *Relating Narratives* 38). But, even without *what-ness*, the newborn 'appears' into the world as a sexed *who*. "La differenza sessuale non *qualifica* infatti l'esistente," ["sexual difference does not qualify the existent"] Cavarero writes, "non specifica il suo *che cosa*, ma ne incarna piuttosto l'unicità sin dalla sua inaugurale apparenza. *Chi nasce non ha ancora qualità, tuttavia ha già un sesso*" (*Tu che* 54-55; my emphasis) ["it does not specify the *what*, but rather embodies the newborn's uniqueness from the moment of this inaugural 'appearance'. *The one who is born does not yet have any qualities; and yet has a sex*" (*Relating Narratives* 38; my emphasis).

Signifcant here, when read alongside Arendt's correspondence with Scholem, is the relation drawn between what is given and what is done: uniqueness, as that which is generated by the mother, is *given*; it is independent, indeed, ignorant, of anything the unique self might *do* or have *done*. This importantly tightens the relation between the meaning of 'generation' as 'creation', or 'inauguration' and its designation of an historical relation between things, between selves. *Who-ness* is generated in the self as a result of she *who* gave it: the mother. The relation between birth, natality, 'appearance', and uniqueness, is unified then in the singular figure of the mother. The singular figure of the mother, and the relations of uniqueness she generates, insists upon the finitude of the self: *one* is born to some*one* within, or is given to, the situation of natality. This generation of some*one*-ness moreover challenges the metaphoricity of (maternal) generation – a process that Luisa Muraro (2006) argues is characteristic of Western culture (19) – because its significance depends upon the uniqueness and embodiment of the mother as well as s/he who is generated by her. It is the significance and the complexity of this model of maternal generation, then, that I examine in my discussion of Woolf and Cialente's texts, wherein relations of finite singularity acquire their valency through the specific relation of mother and daughter. Woolf and Cialente offer a means of

determining the significance of birth and generation for a philosophy of unique selfhood and its finite constitution.

"Your mother was born in 1879," Woolf begins her "Reminiscences", "and as some six years at least must have passed before I knew she was my sister, I can say nothing of that time" (28). This introduction is addressed to Woolf's nephew, Julian, and is thus structured as an address to a coming generation – despite the fact that he "can only be held responsible in a very remote sense" for inspiring "Reminiscences" because it was in fact begun before his birth (Schulkind 25). Nevertheless, the occasion of Julian's birth motivates, at least within the internal, aesthetic function or claim of the text, an account of the women responsible for the care of Virginia and Vanessa: their mother, Julia Stephen (Julian's namesake), and their half-sister, Stella Duckworth (whose father, Herbert Duckworth, was married to Julia before his death). From its beginning, then, 'generation' is the focus of Woolf's "Reminiscences" and Julian is implicated within a series of relations enabled by the feminine. Begun as an account of the life of Julian's mother, Vanessa, "Reminiscences" in fact shifts its focus, shortly after its introductory description of Vanessa's infant character, to ground its attention in the significance of Julia and Stella for the cohesion of the Woolfs' family life. The memoir returns to Vanessa, however, upon her assumption of the maternal role left empty by Julia and Stella's deaths. This narrative structure juxtaposes the innocence, the inexperience, of infancy with the gravity of a position, a family significance, for which Vanessa is awkwardly unprepared.

Woolf initiates this juxtaposition with the recollection of her infancy and the occasion upon which she met her sister "in a gloom happily encircled by the firelight, and peopled with legs and skirts" (29). Woolf conveys the innocence, or tenderness of the relation between Vanessa and her, and their sense of belonging together, in a metaphorical description in which Woolf imagines each "drifted together like ships in an immense ocean" (29). "In future," Woolf, then writes, "I suppose there was some consciousness between us that the other held possibilities" (29). Here infancy and the earliest of Woolf's memories of her sister are figured as possibility, a kind of potential that is simultaneously associated with the expanse of an horizon that opens before them – across which they are to sail – and the reduction of space in the homely scene of firelight, where Virginia tells Vanessa that black cats do not have tails (29). As Vanessa gets older, however, Woolf describes her as one who "took it upon herself to be what

people call 'practical'" (30). And after the deaths of their mother and their half-sister, this practicality comes to assume the character of a maternal significance. But the significance of this must first be read through the significance of Julia Stephen and the consequence of her absence, her death, because what mediates the juxtaposition of Vanessa's infancy and (enforced) maturity is a static image of the mother, of the maternal, which Woolf (perhaps unknowingly) animates through Vanessa, the sister, the daughter. The implication of this will later matter for the comparison I make between the significance of the maternal in "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch", a comparison that ultimately comments on the activity of 'generation' and the historical grounded-ness of uniqueness and its 'appearance'.

> "Written words of a person who is dead or still alive," Woolf writes to Julian,
>
> > tend most unfortunately to drape themselves in smooth folds annulling all evidence of life. You will not find in what I say, or against those sincere but conventional phrases in the life of your grandfather or in the noble lamentations with which he fills the pages of his autobiography, any semblance of a woman whom you can love (36).

What substantiates Woolf's observations here is the way, or the degree to which, Woolf extols the maternal in "Reminiscences". Indeed, in "Reminiscences", the mother, Julia Stephen is made marmoreal: she acquires the mythic status, the character, of a goddess, a mythological significance that hypostasises her and eschews her particularity as well as the sense of activity carried in and by the connotations of 'generation'. This is largely the consequence of the way in which "Reminiscences" is written, a quality of writing that LuAnn McCracken (1990) describes as "Victorian literary treatment", as "impersonal" and "melodramatic" (62), an assessment that corresponds to Gail B. Griffin's (1981) description of "Reminiscences" as "ponderous and stuffy" and composed of "architectonic Victorian sentences" (113).

For Griffin, moreover, the ponderousness and stuffiness of "Reminiscences" is the result of a "judgemental and interpretative" narrative perspective in which the past is subordinated to the predominance of present and enclosed consciousness (113). That is, as I later discuss, where "A Sketch" incorporates the past within the present in order to demonstrate its enduring effects, the past in "Reminiscences" is instead figured as and in retrospection. Its posteriority is inert: Woolf looks back on the past from the present; the present is the ground from which the past is "judged" and "interpreted" and represented in only a measured sense as something lived and living. In this way, "Reminiscences" is structured by a more definitive and distinct relationship between the past and the present

than "A Sketch" is, where the *interrelation* between temporalities is instead formative of the memoir's content and narrative perspective.

The implicit distinction and enclosure of past and present in "Reminiscences" solidifies the mother; it makes Julia Stephen static. Because it is structured by a narrative perspective that enforces and depends upon the past-ness of the past, "Reminiscences" is complicated by a structure of address (to Julian) that elicits an exaggerated historicity in order to account for its significance and representation in the present. The significance of Julia for Woolf acquires a mythological status because of the relation between the immediacy of Woolf's feeling for her mother and the fact of her mother no longer being present. Woolf's feeling in the present has its actual referent or stimulation in the past such that what is represented in "Reminiscences" (for Julian) is not so much the mother, Julia, but the urgency of Woolf's feeling toward her memory. At stake in the representation, then, is not the uniqueness of a woman, of a mother, who no longer lives for a generation soon to come into being, but an account of *Woolf's* emotional attitude toward her. To this extent, those parts of "Reminiscences" that focus on Julia Stephen indicate a hagiographic relation between selfhood and the temporalities of the past and the present, a relation that challenges Cavarero's claim to the capacity of biography to circumvent or limit what she describes as the fallacious structure of autobiographical memory. If, for Cavarero, autobiographical memory is limited by "un gioco che celebra *il sé come un altro*" (*Tu che* 57) ["a game that celebrates the *self as an other*" (*Relating Narratives* 40)], a similar kind of fallacy is at work in Woolf's "Reminiscences" because the urgency of Woolf's address to Julian is one in which the emotional relation to the mother is confused for the mother herself. And this confusion explains the Victorian architectonics of Woolf's representation because the hyperbole that underpins it illustrates Julia Stephen less than it accounts for Woolf's emotional attitude towards her. The biographical is in fact autobiographical.

Woolf describes her mother to Julian as "not only the most beautiful of women […] but also one of the most distinct" (32), an observation which, for Woolf, begins to explain the disaster of her mother's death and its effect upon those that live, one which "is always strange, and often terrible in the havoc it makes with innocent desires" (32). This image of death and destruction is later contrasted by one of generation and activity, an aspect of the mythology of Julia Stephen upon which Woolf insists, and which is indicative of Woolf's general effort to affirm, in "Reminiscences", the authenticity of her

mother. The sense of generation that Woolf's mother represents to Woolf is read in the description of Julia's "view of the world," which

> had come to be very comprehensive; she seemed to watch, like some wise Fate, the birth, growth, flower and death of innumerable lives all round her, with a constant sense of the mystery that encircled them (34).

In this description, Woolf relates her mother to the omnipotent determination of the Fates, a kind of personification that simultaneously, perhaps paradoxically, attributes to the act of generation and care – manifest in the witness of the "birth, growth, flower and death of innumerable lives" – the implication of remoteness and abstract indifference as well as co-involvement and maternal responsibility. The suggestion of maternal responsibility is subsequently made concrete, however, in Woolf's description of her mother as one whom

> took it on herself to despatch difficulties with a high hand, like some commanding Empress. But most often I think her service, when it was not purely practical, lay in simply helping people by the light of her judgment and experience, to see what they really meant or felt (35).

Here, the abstraction of Julia's likeness to the Fates is replaced by the grounded sovereignty of an empress. The cool-ness of her command, however, is contrasted – "But" – by a more ephemeral, though consequential, sensibility or sensitivity toward people, one with practical implication. The mythology of Julia Stephen, then, is one in which abstraction and material implication combine in order to impress upon Julian the significance of a maternal figure no longer present. But the mythology that Woolf establishes is hyperbolic and culminates in one of the most exaggerated passages of "Reminiscences" where Woolf seemingly implores Julian to understand the significance of her mother; Woolf writes:

> If what I have said of her has any meaning you will believe that her death was the greatest disaster that could happen; it was as though on some brilliant day of spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark, and massed themselves; the wind flagged, and all creatures on the earth moaned or wandered seeking aimlessly (40).

This passage confirms the idea that what is really at stake or at issue in "Reminiscences" is less a portrait of Julia Stephen than a testament to Woolf's emotional attitude toward her. Woolf's injunction to her soon-to-be nephew subsumes all possible ways in which "Reminiscences" might be received or engaged (by Julian) within her emotional response

to the death of her mother, "the greatest disaster that could happen". An emotional response different from one in which "racing clouds of a sudden stood still" is figured by Woolf as the product of narrative failure, her narrative failure, for "*if* what I have said of her [Julia] has *any meaning, you will believe* (my emphasis)". This injunction masks the particularity of Woolf's own response to her mother's death in the universalisation of narrative response, of her anticipation, her expectation, of what her mother's death *means*. Woolf's imaginary, in which "all creatures on the earth moaned or wandered seeking aimlessly" upon the death of Julia Stephen, is, unambiguously, an exaggerated and metaphoric *representation* of emotional consequence, but this example of representation substantiates Woolf's tendency in "Reminiscences" to make static, to reify, relations between selves – particularly the relation between narrator (Woolf) and naratee (Julian) – and to hypostatise the figure of the mother in (a universal) mythology of maternal significance.

While "Reminiscences" is *concerned*, largely, with the woman responsible for Woolf's generation, what the representation in that memoir does to generation, as a phenomenon presuming or connoting beginnings and fluidity, in fact counters those very connotations. "Reminiscences" solidifies relations stemming from the mother in the presumably unintended consequence of a personal response to the loss of that mother, the past-ness of whose presence is asserted in order to explain, even justify, the force of present emotion. This reification, the making static, of 'generation' through Woolf's representation of the mother is loosened or freed, however, in Woolf's account of her sister, Vanessa's assumption of the maternal role upon the death of their mother, and the later death of their half-sister, Stella. Through Vanessa, Woolf relates the maternal implications of 'generation' to the activity of care and responsibility, disassociating the maternal, 'generation', and the concept of origin, 'rootedness', from the biological, and instead locating these things within practice.

Upon Stella's death from peritonitis, Woolf, directly addressing Julian, describes a structure of "bewilderment" in which it "generally happens […] that one person becomes immediately the central figure, as it were the solid figure, and on this occasion it was your mother [Vanessa]" (53). The centrality of Vanessa refers, moreover, to her fulfilling the "duties which Stella had but lately fulfilled" (53). Woolf describes this exchange of dutiful centrality as "a tradition", one which, for Woolf and her siblings – in their "morbid state, haunted by ghosts" (53) – Vanessa is "worthy of" because of her likeness to Stella and Julia. For Woolf, moreover, this likeness is insisted upon as the

achievement of "human perfection" (53), an observation that begins to border on the kind of reification manifest in Woolf's representation of her mother. But the coherence, the inflexibility, of that reification is not maintained in Woolf's representation of Vanessa because, where Woolf's mother is hypostatised and situated within metaphors of divinity, Vanessa is instead "exalted, in the most tragic way, to a strange position, full of power and responsibility". But the strangeness of Vanessa's assumption of the role of central figure in the Woolf family distances her from the "exalted" expectations of her siblings, for though such expectations persist, as does the general tendency of "Reminiscences" to exaggerate and reify its subjects, Woolf's representation of Vanessa simultaneously resists this tendency, giving emphasis to, or indeed, permitting the finite. Amongst the descriptions that extol Vanessa is the implicit complexity and difficulty of her centrality within the Woolf family.

The awkward complexity of Vanessa's maternal role, and the relation between what is expected from her by others and her uncertainty about those expectations, is manifest in Woolf's observation that everyone "turned to her [Vanessa], and she moved, like some young Queen, all weighed down with the pomp of her ceremonial robes, perplexed and mournful and uncertain of her way" (53). The comparison drawn by Woolf's simile between Vanessa and the regal ostensibly recuperates the kind of exaggerated hypostasis of Woolf's mother-Empress. The effect of this description, however, is to emphasise the distance between the severity of the regal implication attributed to the maternal (by Woolf) and the simpler, more unassuming, less determined role that is actually lived by Vanessa. Woolf also suggests a degree of pretence or artifice in the role Vanessa has come to assume, and attributes a burdensome gravity to the expectations with which she is met. Woolf later insists upon the awkwardness of Vanessa's assumption of maternal significance, moreover, when she informs Julian that:

> Your mother, as I have said, coming into this inheritance, with all its complications, was bewildered; so many demands were made on her; it was, in a sense, so easy to be what was expected, with such models before her, but also it was hard to be herself […] It came to pass then that she acted at first as though she had her lesson by heart but did not attach much meaning to it (54).

In this passage, Vanessa responds to the "pomp" of expectations about her centrality with strategic performance, acting her mother and Stella's parts without fully comprehending or living those roles authentically – as herself. Again, Vanessa's transition from daughter to the central, maternal figure is conceived in terms of inheritance, implicating Vanessa within the doubled-meaning of 'generation' where she is both

responsible for the care of her siblings and the Woolf household, and a form of relationality that is historical (inherited) and sexed (feminine, maternal). The difficulty, of Vanessa to differentiate herself from her mother and Stella – from her "models" – corresponds to the complexity of relations between finite singularity, *uniqueness*, and the historical universal. Where Woolf's mother is maternity hypostatised, Vanessa individuates, and thus antagonizes, hypostasis and makes unique, complex and *lived* what in Woolf's representation of her mother is fixed (in the past) and absolute. The maternal is revivified in Woolf's representation of Vanessa as something generational – because, in its historical sense, it is passed down, inherited – and generative – because it acquires a different kind of significance or 'character' (Vanessa's) and is extended toward others in the Woolf family by or *from* Vanessa. 'Generation', as such, presumes relations between and selves.

From the difference between Julia and Vanessa in Woolf's mode of representation, a relational concept of selfhood emerges, establishing the significance of relationality for 'generation'. In the movement from (hypo)static representation to that which gives emphasis to flux, partiality, and particularity, Woolf inserts herself within a memoir that is largely the biography of her family. This is the result of her use of the first person plural 'we' for it is almost always as 'we' that Woolf and her siblings are described. Though Alex Zwerdling – commenting on Woolf's use of the first person plural in the biography of her father, Leslie Stephen, which contributes to Frederic Maitland's official biography of the same – describes this preference for 'we' as a "bland sentimental vision" that would take "three decades" to nuance (171), it is of particular consequence in "Reminiscences" because it simultaneously refers to people, to selves, and to time. 'We' is the means by which origin and 'generation' is foregrounded and made relational; 'we' designates rootedness. 'We' – Woolf and her siblings (especially) – gathers together the generation of selves born to Julia and her previous husband, as well as the generation born to Julia and Woolf's father. To the extent that it refers to a communal, relational identity, then, 'we' also refers to the time and origin of that generation, of that form of relationality. 'We' designates a temporal situation of relation.

Significantly in the final pages of "Reminiscences", Woolf addresses Julian directly once more and writes that the term "we" must "in future […] stand for your mother and me" (57). The extent to which "Reminiscences" is about Vanessa is complicated, then, by this 'we' because it presumes and attests to the partiality of perspective: Woolf's. In the same way that Woolf's biography of her mother attests, in

actual fact, to Woolf's own emotional response to her mother's death, so too is Woolf's biography of Vanessa also about Woolf herself. Because of its relational structure, 'we' means that Vanessa's biography is always *Woolf's* experience with and, importantly, *of* Vanessa. Where Woolf is seemingly removed from a biography of her family, 'we' betrays or confirms her presence within relation. In the transition from the static past-ness and reified maternity of Woolf's mother to the bewildered, complex, and individuated maternal responsibility of Vanessa, Woolf privileges her relation *with* Vanessa by way of empathetic and relational representation. This relational model of selfhood is more fully developed in "A Sketch" where it is the subject of the memoir (rather than the consequence of a shift in a mode of representation) and the means by which the nature and scope of autobiography, self-writing, is itself questioned.

Early in "A Sketch", Woolf explains why so many memoirs are for her "failures" because "[t]hey leave out the person to whom things happened"

> The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: 'This is what happened'; but they do not say what the person was like to whom they happened. And the events mean very little unless we know first to whom they happened (65).

From this, the priority of memoir, for Woolf, is the self. It is a priority readily translated into the term of Cavarero's affirmation of *who-ness*. In the same way that Cavarero is concerned, in her model of selfhood, with a political and philosophical project that privileges the particular (*who*) over the general-universal (*what-ness*), so does Woolf assign to memoir the task of accounting for the person, the self, "to whom […things] happened".

Sidonie Smith (1993) describes Woolf's task in "A Sketch" as an attempt "to capture the quality of the 'I' to whom things happened, to capture the self's ineffability" (84). Smith describes this task, moreover, as one that "counters tradition" (84), observing that, unlike Victorian autobiography, Woolf's "A Sketch" "does not structure the narrative around the achievement of career or public recognition, a coherent and chronological template of evolutionary development" because, for Woolf, "too many disparate forces converge on the individual, too many diffusive forces connect the individual to others" (84). Woolf's "A Sketch" counters tradition by way of its often-metafictional elaboration of plurality, which, for Smith, citing Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985), is "the final conveyor of value" (qtd. in Smith 86). But the object of DuPlessis' observation is Woolf's *fiction*, specifically *Between the Acts* and *The Years*, and though it may

be pertinent to insist on the correspondence of the philosophy in Woolf's fiction and self-writing, I suggest that Woolf's memoir actually problematises the straightforwardness of that correspondence. In Woolf's memoir, Julia Stephen does have a certain kind of (at least narrative) priority. What is of central importance in "A Sketch" is the notion of relational selfhood, the plurality it *implies*, and how memoir can capture the diffuse quality of the self and the life s/he lives. But the claim to the non-priority of characters in "A Sketch" can be questioned in a number of ways.

DuPlessis' observation about the central value of plurality in "A Sketch" is for her realised by Woolf through the equalization of character such that "no one stands higher in the plot than any other" (167) – an element of Woolf's text that Smith describes "as a means to undermine the hierarchization of subjects" (85). But although Woolf's mother in "A Sketch" is not – as Jeanne Schulkind describes her in "Reminiscences" – so absolutely an "enigmatic, revered, perhaps slightly resented, certainly distant figure who, dead some dozen years, remains for […Woolf] a powerful, almost obsessive presence" – she does occupy an important position within the memoir. I argue, then, that some degree of hierarchy, different though it is from "Reminiscences", structures "A Sketch": Woolf's mother, even if the central value of the memoir is plurality, coheres the relations between past and present and as such acquires or is imputed with a significance greater than the other characters in the memoir. Indeed, if plurality is the central value of "A Sketch" – which I maintain after DuPlessis and Smith – its meaning in and for the memoir is, to some extent, dependent upon Woolf's representation of her mother as origin. This idea is manifest from the opening of Woolf's memoir, which introduces or frames her first memory: her mother.

"This was of red and purple flowers on a black background – my mother's dress," Woolf begins the narration of her first memory,

> and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St. Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St. Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems my first memory, and in fact it is the most important memory of all my memories (64).

Impressionistic in its metonymical association of colour and the shape of flowers with the mother, where "Reminiscences" is instead burdened by exaggerated simile, Woolf's first memory as it is recounted above is one of infant dependency on the mother. But

before that memory of maternal dependency becomes typical of an oblational mother-daughter relation, Woolf recounts another memory, which confuses the order of both. This confusion is significant because it makes evident the relationship between the remembering-Woolf, the writing-Woolf, and the Woolf-who-is-remembered-in-writing and indicates the priority of Woolf's mother in and for her life and art.

The artistic 'convenience' of the above supposing that Woolf and her mother were going to St. Ives challenges Smith's reading of non-hierarchy in "A Sketch" because that 'convenience' attempts to associate "the most important memory of all […] memories" with the first – with the mother. Woolf's preference for imagining that she and her mother were travelling to St. Ives *rather* than back to London attempts to construct a narrative time in which Woolf's mother, the maternal, is figured as the beginning, the origin, of life as it is remembered and as it is most meaningful. This is distinct from the relation between maternity and birth, the matter-of-fact-ness of the consequence of origin; more than this, Woolf's second memory and her wish for artistic convenience extends the significance of the maternal beyond the scene of origin-in-birth by rooting "the most important memory of all […] memories" in or to the mother *herself*. Woolf's mother is prioritised within "A Sketch" as generator not simply of life (the fact of birth) but also of experience (living). The importance of this can be read in the description of Woolf's "most important memory" where she observes:

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves braking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blond out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive (64-65).

The narrative structure Woolf gives to this passage, and the one before it, is significant because it subordinates the memory she describes as the base that her life stands upon to her earliest memory of her mother. The relationship, then, between narrative and identity that this dissertation develops, following Cavarero, gathers together several claims that make concrete the relation between the mother, 'generation', finitude, and uniqueness. If the narrative construction of "A Sketch" effects the formation of selfhood, and if narrative is the means by which uniqueness is expressed, indeed, affirmed, then Woolf's uniqueness is manifest in a narrative structure that associates life and experience – "a

bowl that one fills and fills and fills" – with the earliest memory of sitting on her mother's lap: life and experience are rooted in, and dependent upon, the priority of the mother.

Woolf's mother is at the beginning once more in the account Woolf gives of relational selfhood. The relation between the first and the most important of Woolf's memories that the narrative structure of "A Sketch" establishes is also important for the relational model of selfhood the memoir proposes. In a moment of metafictional awareness, Woolf writes that "among the innumerable things left out in my sketch I have left out the most important – those instincts, affections, passion, attachments […] which bound me, I suppose from the moment of consciousness to other people" (80). In this observation, Woolf associates relationality – being bound to other people – with consciousness. This is significant because, although I am (theoretically) hesitant to nominate precisely the point at which the self becomes conscious, in the narrative context of "A Sketch" that "point" coincides with Woolf's first memory of her mother. At the very least, that moment of consciousness is the first that Woolf *remembers*. Implicit, further still, however, within Woolf's "from the first moment of consciousness", is the suggestion of origin and beginning, which, alongside the implication of Woolf's first memory as the first moment of consciousness, strengthens the relation between the mother, 'generation', selfhood, and the relational basis of the latter.

Following these observations by Woolf, she describes her mother as "one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life" (80). Woolf describes this kind of relation as "influence", moreover, a term which, for her, refers to "the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that" (80). With this observation, Woolf broadens the way in which I have suggested consciousness relates to origin and the maternal (because of the proximity established between Woolf's first moment of consciousness and her first memory) in order to relate the maternal implications of consciousness and memory to a bounded-ness, to a relationality, which is of social significance; the bounded-ness manifest in the work or the structure of consciousness relates to a social scene in which people "attract" and "repel" others – as Woolf describes. The way in which the self is immersed in social relations, furthermore, has, Woolf writes, "never been analysed in any of those Lives" which she so much enjoys reading. And yet, "it is by such invisible presences that the 'subject of this memoir' is

tugged this way and that every day of his life; it is they that keep him in position" (80). Woolf makes this observation, moreover, as a means of signalling what is lacking in self-writing, a lack which she means to address, for, she writes, "if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir" (80).

In her study of Woolf's "A Sketch", Smith writes of the complex ways in which Woolf represents her relation to her body and the way in which that relation is a/effected by the social, by "invisible presences". The important observations Smith makes in her analysis go beyond the scope of my own study, but a meaningful example from it assists the expansion of the scope of relationality so that it operates not only within the ambit of consciousness – of the psychic – but also within the bodily, the corporeal. That example is of Woolf's description of her physical likeness to, and difference from, her mother; she writes:

> Her voice is still faintly in my ears – decided, quick; an in particular, the little drops with which her laugh ended – three diminishing ahs… 'Ah-ah-ah…' I sometimes end a laugh that way myself. And I see her hands, like Adrian's, with the very individual square-tipped fingers, each with a waist to it, and the nail broadening out. (My own are the same size all the way, so that I can slip a ring over my thumb.) She had three rings; a diamond ring, an emerald ring, and an opal ring. My eyes used to fix themselves upon the light in the opal as it moved across the page of the lesson book when she taught us, and I was glad that she left it to me (I gave it to Leonard) (81-82).

Woolf here brings into correspondence relationality and 'generation', giving to each a material – at times, bodily, at others, simply physical – significance. Woolf demonstrates the extent to which selfhood is the effect of relations with others. In this way, relationality assumes a biological significance (which marks Woolf's difference from her mother); a social significance (where the similarity of ways of laughing is presumably the result of proximity); and it also refers to literal inheritance or the passing-on of objects (Woolf gives her husband, Leonard, her mother's ring). Less physical, though of quite significant and real consequence, is the kind of relation presumed in the education of Woolf and her siblings. In this way, then, and in consequence of the narrative structure of "A Sketch", much of what that memoir recounts situates relationality within the significance and priority of Woolf's mother, substantiating, perhaps, Woolf's observation that her mother was life, "the whole thing" (83), who kept, what Woolf called in her shorthand, "the panoply of life – that which we all lived in common – in being" (83).

The priority that is assigned to Woolf's mother, as the origin and generator of plurality, isn't, however, the same hypostatised and resolutely past figure written about in

"Reminiscences". If Smith's claim to the de-hierarchised representation of character (and DuPlessis' observation about plural value in Woolf's fiction) is applicable, it is manifest in the way Woolf represents selfhood and events through and within a temporality that incorporates the past within the present. Indeed, at work in the passage above is also the *relationality* of differences in time, where what is inherited – what has its basis in history, in the past – endures: the past is active in the present. Woolf summarises the kind of temporal relationality at work in the passage above, as elsewhere in "A Sketch", when she writes that

> [t]he past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, *not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present* (98; my emphasis).

The interrelation of past and present – the life of the past in the present – suggested in this observation offers a useful means of framing and discussing Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze*, where the implications of history are represented not only in the private and particular lives of the autobiographical novel's subjects, but also, analogously and on a larger scale, in the relation between private and public Italian space. The figure of the mother in Cialente's text relates not only the present to the past – time – but also the private to the public: space. The discussion of Cialente's text that follows, then, signals a certain shift in perspective. Where the doubled-implication of 'generation' refers, in the preceding analysis of Woolf, immediately or straightforwardly to time, Cialente instead engages the question of temporality – the question of generation – through the topos of space. The mother in Cialente's text signifies and maps, both literally and metaphorically, relations and passages of time and the difference between History and history. This is understood most significantly, I argue, through the difference of the mother and the daughters relation to public and private space, a difference that refers as much to location as it does to the different ways in which time – history – conditions the significance of where one is located, the space one engages with and by which one is engaged.

     Le quattro ragazze, an autobiographical novel first published in 1976, spans and examines half a century of Italian history, focussing on the lives of three generations and, principally, the women who are part of them. Beginning in fin-de-siècle Trieste, Cialente's text opens with the life of her mother (and to a limited extent that of her grandmother's) and scrutinises the relationship between public and private life. *Le quattro*

ragazze is a portrait of the hypocrisy of Italian bourgeois consciousness (a consciousness from which Cialente worked to distance herself); the vicissitudes of Italian society leading up to and during the First World War; the specific complexities of *irredentismo* (the political movement that advocated the incorporation of Trieste – which for much of the text is part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – into Italy); the Second World War and Fascism; as well as the author's coming-to-writing and the break down of the nuclear family. As Graziella Parati observes, in *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (1996), *Le quattro ragazze* "brings the private story of her family into the public sphere and, in a reverse movement, public history is reflected within the nuclear familial sphere" (73). Through this interrelation of the public and the private in *Le quattro ragazze*, moreover, Cialente "creates her life and her identity-in-effect through an enunciation of her relationship with the women in her family and the search for the 'location' of her cultural subjectivity" (72). In this way, Cialente's autobiography parallels the relational model of selfhood deployed in Woolf's texts and does so with reference to the mother.

But the mother has a more ambiguous dimension in Cialente's text than Julia Stephen does for Woolf. At times in *Le quattro ragazze*, Cialente rejects the model of selfhood that the mother represents; at other times, that selfhood is the object of tender consideration. To this extent, *Le quattro ragazze* is demonstrative of Chiara Zamboni's observation that "lo squilibrio, che esiste nel rapporto con la madre, ritorna nella pratica politica della disparità tra donne" (18) [the disequilibrium that exists in the relation with the mother returns in the political practice of disparity between women] such that Cialente's text is a way of affirming (generational) difference through, and in relation to, feminine knowledge. *Le quattro ragazze* can be read, moreover, as an instance of "la politica della disparità tra donne" through the tensions it establishes and attempts to address between the question of sameness and difference of mother and daughter.

The tension between the sameness and difference of mother and daughter is described by Cristina Faccincani as a structure of "paradossalità" [paradoxicality], which is "insita nella questione cruciale della *identità* e della *differenza*, che, nella relazione madre-figlia, è funzione, in modo particolarmente intenso e talora drammatico, del bisogno d'amore" (5; original emphasis) [inherent in the crucial question of *identity* and of *difference*, that, in the mother-daughter relation, is a function, in a particularly and sometimes dramatic way, of the need for love]. Faccincani writes further that the mother-daughter relation

implica infatti il problema originario della coesistenza fra dimensione speculare identitaria e dimensione asimmetrica, ossia appartenente alla differenza di posizione (chi accudisce e chi viene accudita, chi nutre e viene nutrita, chi contiene e chi viene contenuta, chi cura e chi viene curata, etc.) e la realizzazione del bisogno d'amore segue nella relazione [madre-figlia] il destino delle possibilità, degli spazi lasciati aperti dalle traversie, dalle vicissitudini di questa difficile coesistenza fra *simmetria identitaria* e *asimmetria della differenza* (estesa a qualsiasi differenza d'essere) (5; original emphasis)

[in fact implies the original problem of the coexistence between specular and asymmetric dimensions of identity, that is, belonging to the difference of positions (who cares for and who is cared for, who nourishes and who is nourished, who contains and who is contained, who heals and who is healed, etc.) and the realisation of the need for love, follows, in the [mother-daughter] relation, the destiny of possibilities, of spaces left open by the misfortunes, by the vicissitudes, of this difficult coexistence between *symmetry of identity* and *asymmetry of difference* (extended to any difference of being)].

This relation of symmetry (sameness) and difference is most acute in the latter half of *Le quattro ragazze* but the initial parts of the autobiographical novel set-up this "difficile coesistenza" [difficult coexistence] so that, as whole, the text is testament to the complexities not only of the sexual difference manifest in the lives of the women and men narrated in the text, but also in the generational difference of Cialente and her mother. *Le quattro ragazze* is, in this way, following Parati, a genealogical narrative in which difference is not flattened or subsumed within, nor surrendered to the question of, a common, sexed identity. As Parati writes: "the chronological progression [of narrative in *Le quattro ragazze*] from the grandmother to Elsa [Cialente's mother] and finally to Fausta [Cialente] does not reflect a progressive inheritance of female wisdom. *A mythical woman is not portrayed in this autobiography*: knowledge is acquired by gradually transgressing those rules accepted by the Wieselberger women" (79; my emphasis). The biography that introduces, or indeed, inaugurates Cialente's autobiography formalises Faccincani's observation above about "il destino delle possibilità, degli spazi lasciati aperti dalle traversie, dalle vicissitudini di questa difficile coesistenza fra *simmetria identitaria* e *asimmetria della differenza*" (5) [the destiny of possibilities, of spaces left open by the misfortunes, by the vicissitudes, of this difficult coexistence between *symmetry of identity* and *asymmetry of difference*]. The life-story of Cialente's mother initiates a narrative of the "difficile coesistenza" [difficult coexistence] of mother-daughter specularity and asymmetry, sameness and difference, and this is manifest in generational history and the exchange between biography and autobiography.

Elsa Wieselberger, Cialente's mother, was the youngest of four daughters born to Adolfo Wieselberger, a successful and prominent musical composer. Elsa's father's relationship with music is responsible for her name and as a result of this she stands apart from her other sisters (who are all given names beginning with 'A': Alice, Alba, and Adele), having been named after a character from Wagner's opera, *Lohengrin*. Part of "una giudiziosa, benestante famiglia triestina" (19) [a judicious, well-off Triestine family], Elsa and her sisters grew up "con l'idea che ricche non erano, mentre la carrozza e i cavalli al portone avrebbero potuto lasciarglielo credere" (19) [with the idea that they weren't rich, while the horse and carriage at the door could have made them think they were] and with music as the predominant, certainly the most significant value and form of creativity. The Wieselberger girls are educated in music by their father who, Cialente later writes, would say upon his death that "aveva educato alla musica ben quattro generazioni triestine" (23) ["he had a good four Triestine generations educated in music"].

For Parati, the peaceful atmosphere that characterises the life of Elsa and her siblings – where creativity and performance are part of quotidian family life, and where the father's appreciation of music is continued in his daughters – "is the result of the absolute compliance with the demands of the patriarch" (75). For, indeed, Elsa's mother exerts little influence over the Wieselberger household; instead, Cialente describes, she often "rimaneva […] nella sua placida indifferenza" (25) [used to remain […] in her placid indifference]. Parati exemplifies the household's "absolute compliance with the demands of the patriarch" in her discussion of the text's opening scene where the imperative of (masculine) creativity interrupts the domesticity of (feminine) private space. As Cialente describes, narrating her mother's early life: the (grand)father's position as "presidente perpetuo e direttore" [perpetual president and director] of the "Società Orchestrale" (16) [Orchestral Society] requires that orchestral rehearsals predominate over the domestic sphere:

> Le sere in cui l'orchestra veniva a suonare in casa la famiglia doveva cenare assai più presto del solito perché la signora e le ragazze […] avessero il tempo sufficiente per sbarazzare la tavola della sala da pranzo […], la grande porta a vetri che la separava dell'entrata dovendo rimanere aperta. Bisognava tenere ben chiusi, invece, tutti gli usci verso la cucino e i 'servizi' giacché il padre non voleva sentire durante l'esecuzione […] gli strepiti delle rigovernature e le chiacchere, le *ciàcole*, anzi, delle serve (15)

> [Those evenings when the orchestra came to play in the house, the family had to dine rather earlier than usual so that the lady and girls […] had enough time to clear the table in the dining room […], the large glass door that separated the

> dining room from the house entrance had to remain open. Instead, all the
> doors leading to the kitchen and the 'service' areas had to be kept closed
> because the father did not want to hear, during the performance, the noise of
> the washing up and the chatter, the *ciàcole*, of the women servants (trans. Parati
> 75)].

For Parati, the division between rooms and the necessity of keeping some doors closed and others opened, represents the difference between two realms: the public and the private, the masculine and the feminine (75). Creativity, in this sense, is associated with the masculine outside; femininity with domesticity and the private inside. To this extent, then, the father represents an exteriority to which le ragazze have measured, indirect, or subordinate access. The father, in this way, is estranged from the domestic, feminine worlds of his daughters and their mother. Masculine creativity, its imperative, conditions the boundaries of private space and enforces its distinction from public space. As a result of this distinction, another distinction is also made between the paternal and the maternal: the paternal is distanced from the maternal by the degree to which each is associated with infancy and the responsibility of caring for the infants, le quattro ragazze.

The influence of the patriarch can also be read against the backdrop of the text's nationalist – *irredentist* – concerns, which are interpreted short-sightedly and hypocritically by the father, for whom Trieste is "la mia patria" [my land], which – from the perspective of Cialente's narrative intervention – exemplifies his "trastullandosi con frasi fatte […che hanno] scarso senso storico e una totale ignoranza o intolleranza di questioni sociali" [39] [toying with clichés that have scarce historical sense and a total ignorance or intolerance of social questions]. If, as Parati writes, the "father's law conditions the daughters approach to reality" (77), the hypocrisy and short-sighted-ness that characterises that approach to reality must first be read first in the father's own short-sighted-ness. Cialente intervenes into the narrative once more, then, and writes that

> già s'impinguiva una borghesia rapace e reazionaria ch'egli, ingenuo musicista,
> non era in grado di giudicare e ancor meno di condannare, tanto più da quei
> ranghi eterogenei uscivano le caste che riempivano i teatri, le sale dei concerti e
> l'amatissima Filarmonica (32).

> [already, a greedy and reactionary bourgeoisie was fattening itself up, one that
> he [Adolfo Wieselberger], couldn't judge or, even less, condemn, all the more
> because, from its heterogeneous ranks, came the casts that filled theatres,
> concert halls, and the beloved Philharmonic].

Cialente intervenes at this point to describe the father's ignorance of a city changing in front of him. It is a change that he can't judge or condemn as much because he profits

from it as he is unaware of its scope and significance. The "mia" of "la mia patria" is, in this way, incommensurate to the heterogeneity that it obscures. The racism of the Wieselberger daughters' approach to reality – exemplified in Parati's discussion of the daughters imagined superiority to Trieste's Slovenian population, some of whom, under the employment of the Wieselberger family, are referred to as "s'ciavi" (48), which can, ambiguously, mean 'Slovenians' and 'slaves' (Parati 77) – can be read, then, not simply, or only as subordination to the law of the father, but as a more general limitation manifest in nationalism, in the influence of the publicity of that discourse over the private. The relationship between the public and the private, moreover, and its relation to femininity and masculinity – previously exemplified in the discussion of the father's predominance over space and creativity – is temporarily subverted by Elsa through her career as an opera singer.

Cialente's account of Elsa's relocation to Bologna "a studiar canto" (55) [to study singing] juxtaposes the marriage of her elder sister, Alice, a contrast which establishes the significance of Elsa's position in public space, but which also foreshadows her return to the private. Cialente writes that

> Gli avvenimenti che suscitarono le prime memorabili emozioni nella famiglia all'infuori della permanente ossessione irredentista […] furono le nozze della primogenita Alice e qualche anno dopo la partenza per L'Italia della giovane Elsa che si recava a Bologna a studiar canto con quel celebre professore dell'epoca. Alice si maritò nel 1886 a poco più di vent'anni (55).

> [The events which stirred the first memorable emotions in the family, besides the permanent *irredentist* obsession […] were the wedding of the eldest daughter Alice and the departure of young Elsa for Italy a few years later to study music in Bologna, with the famous instructor of the time. Alice was married in 1886, little more than twenty years old].

Elsa's departure for Italy is, temporarily, a departure from the private space that is generally represented in *Le quattro ragazze* as confinement or subordination to the demands of patriarchal creativity. To this extent, Elsa's study in Bologna confronts feminine convention and expectation; it is a confrontation manifest in her participation in a public sphere independent of, because distant from, the father's law. Its significance, however, is related, and thus equated, to the maintenance of feminine expectation that is read in Alice's marriage – even though that marriage introduces "l'elemento ebraico nella famiglia" (55) [the Jewish element into the family], which the girls' father attests to a "Trieste lastricata sull'inferno" (55) [Trieste paved on top of hell]. Though Cialente's contrast between public and private space seemingly avoids prioritising Elsa's public

identity over Alice's private identity (because each is conceived as one of two events to have stirred "le prime memorabili emozioni nella famiglia" [the first memorable emotions in the family]) – it does foreshadow the life that Elsa will come to live and from which Cialente will disassociate herself. To this extent, it is only from the perspective of Wieselberger family history that Elsa's involvement in public space is equal to Alice's wedding. From the (privileged) distance of Cialente's narrative perspective, however, the contrast does prioritise Elsa's publicity over Alice's privacy because the public is later something that is denied Elsa in her marriage. The narrative foregrounding manifest in Cialente's contrast, anticipates an autobiography that responds to her mother's biography. Cialente's contrast represents the co-involvement of her and her mother's life story. The reverberations of Elsa's life-story are felt in Cialente's, substantiating Parati's observation that the autobiographical biography of *Le quattro ragazze* is "not a contradiction in terms but rather an attempt to write one's own life starting from another woman's life story" (73).

That Elsa's departure for Italy is, for the Wieselberger family, equal in consequence to Alice's marriage indicates the significance of marriage itself for the Wieselbergers. But marriage is ultimately what confines Elsa to private space upon her return to Trieste. Before her marriage, however, Elsa performed in several operas and was praised "per la qualità del suo canto e la sua perfetta scuola" (65) [for the quality of her singing and her perfect schooling]. Her name appeared "in grandi lettere" [in big letters] as "[la] distinta artista" [the distinct artist], "Elsa Wieselberger" (65). Cialente writes, furthermore, that Elsa's "riconoscimento definitivo" [definitive recognition) resulted "da una rappresentazione a Napoli […] quando [ha] canta[to] la parte di Margherita nel *Faust* di Gounod" [from a portrayal in Napoli, when she sang the part of Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*" – a portrayal which meant, for a friend of Elsa's father, that "[la] vittoria della signorina Elsa è completa" (64) [the victory of the young Elsa is complete].

The significance of Elsa's time in Bologna, the implication of her participation in public space independent of her father's law in Trieste, is read further, moreover, in Cialente's account of Elsa's immersion in the plurality and flux of public space itself. In Bologna, Elsa

> visitava chiese e musei e faceva le gite primaverili sui colli circostanti. Le passeggiate a San Luca le ricordò sempre come un vago sogno; e alla fine aveva imparato qualcosa del dialetto bolognese e un po' della famosa cucina regionale. Ma quel che più le rimase impresso fu l'ambiente che l'accoglieva,

l'affetto delle persone, la loro castigatezza, la loro pulizia morale, ch'era forse dei tempi, ma fu anche per una sorte a lei benevola ciò che le impedì di soffrire la separazione dalla famiglia triestina; così che attraverso la dotta, l'ospitale, la grassa Bologna amò anche di più la vagheggiata Italia (63).

used to visit churches and museums and went on spring trip to the surrounding hills. The walks to San Luca always seemed a vague dream to her; and at the end of her time in Bologna, she had learned something of the Bolognese dialect and a bit of the famous regional cooking. But what stuck with her the most was the welcoming environment, the affection of the people, their chastity, their moral purity, which was perhaps indicative of the times, but which was also, to her, a sort of kindness which prevented her from suffering her separation from her family in Trieste; so that, her time in the scholarly, the hospitable, the fat Bologna meant she loved the longed-for Italy even more.

This passage attests to the activity and plurality manifest in public space, to what Cavarero describes, after Arendt, as "uno spazio plurale e interattivo di esibizione che è il solo a meritare il nome di politica" (*Tu che* 77) ["a plural and interactive space of exhibition that is the only space that deserves the name of politics" (*Relating Narratives* 57)]. The plurality of this public space, moreover, contrasts, for Cavarero, the obscure privacy of the private space in which women have historically been consigned and which is mediated predominantly by *what-ness*: in private space, women experience "la pervasività di un ordine simbolico dove è il soggetto androcentrico a definire in vario moda *cosa* esse sono: madri, mogli, corpi fruibili, eterne infermiere… e chi più ne ha ne metta" (*Tu che* 78) [the pervasiveness of a symbolic order where the […androcentric] subject is what defines *what* they are: mothers, wives, care-givers, bodies to be enjoyed… the list goes on" (*Relating Narratives* 58). Public space, however, because it is structured by plurality, affords greater interaction. And Cialente's description of Elsa's time in Bologna gives emphasis to the kind of interactivity afforded by, and manifest in, public space. Where, for the Wieselberger family, Elsa's time spent in Bologna has its most probable significance as demonstration of the father's educating four generations of Wieselbergers in music (certainly it represents the perpetuation of his investment in the musical arts), for Cialente, as narrator of her mother's life-story, Elsa's time in Bologna is instead significant because of the interaction and plurality with which she was engaged. The activity manifest, furthermore, in Bologna – which is related, moreover, in such a way as to substantiate or reflect the irredentist conception of "la vagheggiata Italia" [the longed for Italy] – prevents Elsa suffering form the distance between her and her family. To this extent, the interaction and activity that characterises Elsa's time in Bologna represents an independence contingent upon distance and immersion in the public.

The privileged distance of Cialente's role as narrator of her mother's life is manifest in the significance which is attributed to Elsa's momentary independence in Bologna, because that independence – which is later denied Elsa in her marriage – is figured, in the latter half of *Le quattro ragazze,* as formative of Cialente's feminine and generational *difference* from her mother. Through the topos of marriage, however, Cialente represents the dimension of *sameness* in the mother-daughter relation. The kind of independence effected by the "plural and interactive space of exhibition" has privileged significance in *Le quattro ragazze*, then, because through the narration of auto/biographical experiences of it, of public space, Cialente engages a politics of disparity which, because it is concerned with difference, is also, and necessarily, concerned with sameness. A politics of disparity, in this sense, collates the two dimensions that Faccincani discerns in the mother-daughter relation, it refers to that "difficile coesistenza fra *simmetria identitaria* e *asimmetria della differenza*" (5) [difficult coexistence between *similarity of identity* and *asymmetry of difference*].

For Parati, Elsa's marriage is the narrative means by which Cialente represents her own marriage to and life with Enrico Terni; for when *Le quattro ragazze* shifts from biography to autobiography, and relates the later years of Cialente's life, the text is considerably silent on this aspect. For Parati, this silence is a "narrative void" that can be "filled" by the parallel reading of Cialente and her mother's marriages 74) in which instances of narrative (and experiential) correspondence play an "important role in the construction of matrilinearism" (74). Elsa's failed marriage suggestively represents the failure of Cialente's own marriage. Parati is cautious to note, however, that correspondence of this kind does not mean Cialente's selfhood "is already hiding in the character of her mother" (74). The narrative correspondence between Cialente and her mother's lives instead represents a matrilineal relationality, something that designates and politicises the mother-daughter relation itself. To this extent, the narrative void in Cialente's account of her marriage instantiates the politics of disparity because through it – even though the intelligibility of that void is dependent upon correspondence, upon difference and similarity – the difference between Cialente and her mother is itself asserted. The sameness of Cialente and her mother's marriage is the condition of possibility for the signifying function of the narrative void in *Le quattro ragazze*, but from, or through that sameness, (Cialente's) difference is claimed.

Following her success as an opera signer in Italy, the engagement and wedding of Cialente's mother, suddenly decided upon and carried out, seemed

aver cancellato dalla […] memoria [di Elsa] e da quella dei familiari gli avvenimenti e le speranze di quei pochi anni di studio e di carriera, che presto, incredibilmente presto annegano e scompaiono nella misteriosa nebbia d'una strana indifferenza – e accettazione (63).

to have wiped, from Elsa's memory and that of her family's, the events and hopes of those few years of study and career that would soon, incredibly soon, drown and disappear into the mysterious fog of a strange indifference – and acceptance.

Her elder sister, Alba, was "[l]a sola a deplorare" [the only one to deplore] the marriage because "ha veduto nella carriera della giovane sorella l'unica possibilità d'uscire anche lei […] dall'ambiente triestina dove non si senta favorita" (63) [she had seen in her younger sister's career the only possibility of getting out of the Triestine milieu herself, a Trieste where she didn't feel encouraged]. With "amarezza" [bitterness] Alba "vede cadere la speranza di accompagnarla [Elsa] e proteggerla nel pericoloso ambiente ch'è da sempre quello del teatro, drammatico o lirico che sia" (63) ["saw her hope fall for accompanying and protecting her [Elsa] in the dangerous environment that the theatre, dramatic or lyrical, has always been]. Alba's bitterness about her sister's marriage is demonstrative of the sense of possibility felt to be manifest in public space. In the bitterness that Alba feels, she indicates reflexive awareness of the limits of her and her sisters' position within private space. This kind of awareness, however present, is seemingly inert in Alba (who never married, but remained confined for much of adult life as her father's nurse) and wiped from Elsa's memory, replaced instead, by the "misteriosa nebbia d'una strana indifferenza – e accettazione" [the mysterious fog of a strange indifference – and acceptance].

The acceptance of a life confined to the private is ultimately what differentiates Cialente from her mother. Cialente's childhood is represented as the beginning of her politicisation of difference, a politicisation which at once affirms and questions Muraro's observation, in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (2006), that

la simbolicità […] della madre non aspettava di essere scoperta da me per avere luogo; essa infatti ha già luogo, e un luogo fortissimo, una fortezza, nella nostra infanzia. Nell'infanzia abbiamo adorato la madre e tutto ciò che la riguardava (20)

[the symbolising of the mother has not been waiting to be discovered by me in order to take place; in fact it already takes place, a very strong place, a fortress, in our childhood. In childhood we adored the mother and everything that related to her].

This observation is perhaps truer of Woolf's account of her childhood relation to her mother in "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch" than it is for Cialente in *Le quattro ragazze*. In Cialente's text, the narrator's childhood relation to her mother is more ambiguous, certainly more complex than that which is extolled in "Reminiscences" and looked to as a kind of comfort in "A Sketch". Cialente writes early on in the properly autobiographical turn of *Le quattro ragazze* that while a vague, familiar feeling faintly bound her and her brother to their father, "molti di più ci sentivamo legati a nostra madre" (82) [we more often felt tied to our mother].

This description follows Cialente's account of her travels with her father and her return to Trieste, to her mother. On this, Cialente writes that it was "con gioia [che] ritornavamo l'estate alla villa di Trieste. Ci sembrava che quello fosse il solo pezzo di terra che avesse una specie di solidità e continuità sotto i nostri piedi (82) [it was with joy that we returned in summer to the villa in Trieste. It seemed to be the only piece of land that had a kind of solidity and continuity to it]. In this description, the mother is related to the familiar solidarity and continuity of Trieste, a description that substantiates the "luogo fortissimo" [very strong 'place'] of infant relations with the maternal. The presumed predominance, or significance, of the mother's influence on childhood in this description is later made explicit, moreover, when Cialente writes "[l]a vita che conducevamo era evidentemente quella d'una famiglia borghese con abitudini che, in casa soprattutto, venivano imposte da nostra madre" (85) [the life we led was evidently that of a bourgeois family, with habits that, at home especially, were imposed by our mother]. This description complicates Muraro's affirmation of the maternal in infancy; it begins to establish the asymmetry of difference between Cialente and her mother. This is because, in the association of mother, land, and class, Cialente's anti-nationalist politics comes to underpin and also explain her politics of feminine difference. It is through the rejection of nationalism, then, that the narrative void in Cialente's text comes to claim and affirm feminine difference. Cialente's rejection of nationalism, which is also a rejection of attitudes toward space and location, motivates her self-imposed exile in Alexandria, an event that – because of the association between mother, land, and class – represents the asymmetry of difference between Cialente and her mother. Spatial difference, in the final section of *Le quattro ragazze*, metaphorically represents generational and sexed difference. The kind of difference that can be read in the metaphoricity of distance is best understood as the beginning of or the condition for "estraneità" [extraneousness] (7), a term which signifies, for Faccincani,

> ciò che all'interno del legame affettivo costituisce un *punto irriducibile di alterità*, in rapporto al quale prendono forma le vicissitudini di una *identificazione non speculare* e di una *differenza non conflittuale*, una differenza che non implichi necessariamente una contrapposizione (7)

> [what, within emotional bonds, is an irreducible point of otherness, in relation to which, the vicissitudes of a *non-specular identification* and a *non-conflictual difference*, a difference that does not necessarily imply an opposition, take shape].

Cialente's anti-nationalism is provoked by the disjuncture between the (rhetorical) glory of war and its actual, its particular tragedies. This disjuncture is felt most strongly by Cialente upon the death of her cousin, Fabio (who died in the Battle of Caporetto in 1917), and the account of this event by an army official who visited Cialente's family. Cialente recounts:

> Il [suo] racconto era iniziato con la descrizione del luogo di dove era partito l'attacco, e quando n'ebbe abbondantemente parlato, più del necessario e s'un tono di vanagloria, l'ufficiale fu sorpreso e anche messo a disagio dalla maligna insistenza che dovette cogliere nelle domande di mio padre (204)

> [[His] story began with a description of the place where the attack started, and when he had spoken about it abundantly, more than was necessary, and with a tone of conceit, the officer was surprised and put off by the malignant insistence that he answer my father's questions].

Important here, is the suggestion of the officer's ignorance of the severity of the occasion on which he has come to speak to Cialente's family. Seemingly oblivious to the kind of humility required by his visit, the officer gives far too much information about Fabio's death and does so with conceit. In this, the particular death of one man is lost to the mechanisms of an institution largely indifferent to him. The performance of respect, manifest in the presence of the officer itself, surrenders to the reality of the situation, however, and it is this that discomforts the officer: his surprise at the reaction of Cialente's father indicates his detachment from the gravity, and the personalised significance of Fabio's death. Cialente focuses her account on the performativity of the officer's narration, moreover, and describes an important emotional response to it. She writes, upon the officer's repetition of the story of Fabio's death at the request of her father, that

> [f]u ancora una descrizione del luogo – una tenda, mi sembrò di capire – in cui aveva riunito quelli che dovevano ricevere gli ordini per l'attacco 'domani all'alba' […] Si dilungò a riferire quegli ordini, quasi potessero interessarci a tale distanza di tempo e a fatti compiuti, ma forse erano state le interrogazioni di mio padre a spingerlo, e, ascoltandolo, sentivo con rabbia e sconforto che se fossi stata in Fabio non avrei avuto nessuna fiducia nella tracotanza

dell'individuo che anche in quel momento recitava la sua parte davanti a noi: una retorica della peggior specie (204–205)

[[i]t was still a description of the place – a tent, I seemed to understand – where he met those who were to receive orders for the attack 'tomorrow at dawn' […] He dwelled on reporting those orders, those *fait accompli*, as if they interested us after so much time had passed, but perhaps he had been pressed by my father's interrogations, and, listening to him [the officer], I felt with anger and despair that if I had been Fabio, I wouldn't have had any faith in the hubris of the individual who, even in that moment, was performing his part in front of us: it was rhetoric of the worst kind].

Cialente here describes the level of narrativity of the officer's account, attributing to its inessential, its superfluous detail an artifice she describes as hubristic. The hubris of the officer's superfluous narrative detail is perhaps indicative of strategic abnegation of responsibility on his part: "ordini" [orders] refer metonymically to the institution of which he is part. For Cialente, however, the narrative detail is formative of a performance of nationalist sentiment that confuses the content of her and her family's grief for that of nationalist interest. Toward the end of the passage, Cialente considers this performance with incredulity: "*anche* in *quel* momento […] davanti a noi" [*even* in *that* moment […] in front of us (my emphasis)]. For this reason, she concludes the offer's visit to be "una retorica della peggior specie" [rhetoric of the worst kind], one which provokes an anger that scrutinises the officer's sincerity and trustworthiness.

The rhetoricity of nationalism, exemplified in the officer's treatment of Fabio's death, is subsequently responsible for the radicalisation of Cialente's politics. She writes that this particularised experience of a specious and rhetorical nationalism – Fabio's death – stirred in her

un odio che sentivo inguaribile: l'odio contro qualsiasi forma di nazionalismo e razzismo […,] contro ogni sopraffazione, quindi; in più avevo già imparato […] che i primi a pagare e ad essere travolti sono i poveri, le guerre sembrano inventate per loro, giacche è la miseria che meglio insegna a resistere e a durare (208).

[a hatred that I felt was incurable: the hatred of any form of nationalism e racism, of all oppression, then; more than this, I had learned (and the years to come would confirm it) that the first to pay and to be overcome are the poor: wars seem to be invented for them, for it is misery that best teaches resistance and endurance].

The disjuncture between the performativity of nationalism and the very real and grave effect it has on those who experience it – which is also the disjuncture between the general and the particular – stirs a hatred of all forms of oppression in Cialente. This hatred is the basis, moreover, of a politics directed at, and engaged with, public space. It

is the basis of a politics that takes the form of resistance and endurance. This politics contextualises the autobiographical shift of perspective in *Le quattro ragazze* and becomes formative of Cialente's difference from her mother. Cialente's difference from her mother is manifest in her attitude toward nationalist sentiment which structures the significance of public space, a public space with which her mother has, in her adult life, only engaged with, or only been permitted to engage with, inertly. Thus Parati writes that when "the narrator's 'I' becomes the subject of the autobiography, Elsa's oppression is voiced through Cialente's analysis of all oppressions with which Elsa and her sisters came in contact but never attempted to understand" (79).

The difference between the biography of oppression and the autobiography of resistance and education is acutely manifest in Cialente's voluntary exile in Alexandria. In 1921, after Mussolini acquired more land at the end of the First World War, land which included Trieste (*Public History, Private Stories* 92), Cialente leaves for Egypt. For her, the behaviour of Italians had acquired a character that was intolerable and from which she had to distance herself (Cialente 246). Cialente's politics against oppression is realised in her exile, a voluntary movement that enables "cultural difference and transgression" (Parati, 92). Cialente's transgression, and the instantiation of a politics of resistance and endurance, is manifest in her radiobroadcast, from Egypt, of anti-fascist critique directed toward Italy. Cialente's hatred of oppression is activated, then, from the public space of Cairo and directed toward that of Italy. As an exemplification of politicised engagement of and within the public, Cialente's exile in Alexandria, and her radio program in particular, signal her difference from her mother. The difference is manifest precisely in Cialente's attitude toward public space, an attitude that is radical where her mother's is acquiescent and inert. More than an attitude toward public space, however, or, rather, more than a reaction against a public space that consigns the feminine to the private, Cialente's politicised resistance is a form of answering back to her mother directly. That is, Cialente's radicalisation is as much a statement against Italian nationalism as it is a form of addressing, critiquing, her mother's complicity within the privacy of her situation. One of the final descriptions that Cialente's narrative intervention offers in the conclusion of her mother's biography considers the gap, the disjuncture, between the (public) emotion of *irredentismo* and the staid acceptance of its consequences for the private, for the feminine. On her mother and her aunts' position in this, Cialente writes that, despite

l'irredentismo appassionato che potrebbe farle credere se non rivoluzionare almeno ribelli, sono due prudenti signore borghesi che accettano l'ordine e i limiti della loro classe e nonostante le tristi esperienze si preparano a educare i figli – le femmine soprattutto – alle rinunce e ai sacrifici (73).

[the passionate irredentism that could make them think they were at least rebels if not revolutionaries, they are two cautious, bourgeois women who accept the rules and limitations of their class and, despite their sad experiences, are ready to educate their children – the little girls in particular – in hardship and sacrifices].

Cialente's engagement with the public, her critique of Fascist Italy from Egypt, especially, is a response to the kind of education and experience for which her mother prepared her. Cialente's public identity is the means by which she distinguishes herself from, and antagonises the public sphere of Italian nationalism, personalising, in so doing, the significance of the public itself – reinterpreting, that is, what the public can mean for her – and 'answering back' (cf. Parati's formulation of 'talking back' in *Migration Italy*) to the model of femininity her mother has lived and by which she has been constrained. Cialente's engagement with, and negotiation of, the public speaks, then, to the tension between the symmetry of identity and asymmetry of difference in the mother daughter relation. The extent to which this difference depends upon Cialente's relation to the public is read further still, perhaps even more keenly, in the indifference she feels for it in later years after her daughter's birth and the birth of her grandchildren. Indeed, the final section of *Le quattro ragazze* is marked by, if not a reversal of her criticism of the public sphere, a circular movement back towards the private, a space which, in the final section of the autobiography, is associated with the intimacy of relations between selves – her daughter and her grandchildren – against which Cialente has, for much of the autobiography until this point, constructed her identity. Faccincani's earlier formulation of *estraneità* offers a means of understanding this shift in attitude.

In addition to its conceptualisation as "una *identificazione non speculare* e […] una *differenza non conflittuale*, una differenza che non implichi necessariamente una contrapposizione" (7) [a *non-specular identification* and a *non-conflictual difference*, a difference that does not necessarily imply an opposition], Faccincani describes *estraneità* as the "legame affettivo che è molto difficile da raggiungere perché implica una traversia emotiva che comporta la rinuncia a vedere e volere la *madre come qualcuno che nasce con me* in una sorta di con-generazione, a cui appartengo e che mi appartiene" (7; original emphasis) [the emotional bond that is very difficult to achieve because it involves an emotional ordeal in which is renounced wanting and seeing the *mother as someone who is*

born with me in a sort of co-generation, to which I belong and which belongs to me]. *Estraneità* is thus the recognition of the mother as other; it names a difficult relation of non-conflictual difference between mothers and daughters.

This relation is read in *Le quattro* towards its end, when Cialente returns to Italy from Egypt upon her brother's death and her mother's illness. With these two events, the public identity that Cialente establishes in response to the private begins to change. I described Cialente's relocation to Egypt above as the beginning of, or condition for, the *estraneità* between her and her mother. This is because, with the death of her brother and mother, the public is no longer associated with an effort to break from the mother but with an emptiness that provokes re-evaluation. To the extent that Cialente's engagement with, and negotiation of, public space is a form of 'answering back' to Italian nationalism *and* to her mother's inertia within it, Cialente's relocation to Egypt speaks to the kind of identification of sameness with the mother that Faccincani describes as the content of renunciation in *estraneità*. Though an attempt to break from the mother, Cialente's relocation to Egypt, her engagement with the public space there, is only the *beginning* of the relation of *estraneità* and not its fulfilment because the distance within that relocation is not commensurate with the non-conflictual difference of *estraneità*. As a form of 'answering back' to her mother, as a form of critique of, and a kind of antagonism toward, her mother's bourgeois cautiousness, Cialente's relation to the public speaks to the confusion of sameness that *estraneità* breaks. Cialente's immersion in the public as a means of distancing herself from her mother and the life she has lived indicates the extent to which the mother-daughter relation is still bound up for her in questions of identification and projection, rather than non-conflictual difference. For Cialente, relocation is a means of asserting herself. But this self-assertion still depends upon a sameness that fails to consider the context and conditions of possibility in her mother's relation to space. It fails to appreciate, without conflict and antagonistic repudiation, the actual difference between Cialente and her mother.

When Cialente returns to Italy, however, she is required to care for her mother and in the reversal of mother-daughter roles that implies, the difference described by *estraneità* is established. Despite the extent of her mother's pain and discomfort, "non aveva lasciato cadere nessuna delle sue vecchie e civili abitudini triestine" (247) [she hadn't lost any of her old and civil Triestine habits]. In her illness, and despite the fact she is cared for, rather than carer, Cialente's mother remains identifiably *her*self. The dignity of this underpins the content of a relation of *estraneità* wherein Cialente registers

difference as something other than antagonistic asymmetry. Witness to her mother's vulnerability, Cialente accepts or recognises the non-conflictual difference that constitutes her and her mother's uniqueness. This manifests in a re-evaluation of private space, which can be read in Cialente's longing to be in relation with her daughter and her grandchildren.

Upon her mother's death, Cialente feels a kind of emptiness which she longs to fill and which is achieved in the reduction, and privacy, of space, which the proximity to, and intimacy of relation with, her daughter and grandchildren assumes. Cialente writes that

> [a] me non restava adesso che tendere le braccia verso un orribile vuoto. Della mia famiglia, intendo quella della mia infanzia, non rimaneva più nessuno, alle mie spalle stava solamente la massa frusciante dei ricordi (248).

> [Now all I could do was stretch my arms out into a horrible emptiness. No one from my family, I mean the family of my childhood, was left: behind me was only the rustling mass of memories].

Moving to Kuwait to live with her daughter, Cialente fills this "orribile vuoto" [horrible emptiness] with the tenderness she feels for her grandchildren, a tenderness that is marked by the recognition of *estraneità*. Indeed, Parati notes, at the end of *Le quattro ragazze*, Cialente "expresses the possibility of creating a never ending discourse on women's subjectivity that cannot be enclosed within the text of her autobiography" (*Public History, Private Stories* 96). Parati comes to this conclusion, moreover, through Cialente's reflection, while watching her grandchildren on the beach, that

> [q]ueste care figure che mi cammino davanti sono proprio mie […] erano un me stessa sdoppiato che sembrava promettermi […] Ch'esse rappresentassero per me la continuità della vita poteva essere solo un severo richiamo alla realtà, una sensazione che dovevo responsabilmente accettare, dopo averla riconosciuta (262).

> [[t]hese dear figures, walking in front of me, are really mine […] they were doubles of me […] That they represented the continuity of life to me could only be a severe recall to reality, a feeling that I had responsibly to accept, after having recognised it].

Where public space was once that against which Cialente measured and constructed her identity, now, in the proximity of her daughter and her grandchildren (in the reduction of space to the interstices within relations between selves), she activates the non-conflictual difference described by *estraneità* and the significance of 'generation': "erano una me stessa sdoppiato […] rappresentassero per me la continuità della vita" [they were doubles

of me […] they represented the continuity of life]. In this lies the significance of birth and 'generation' for uniqueness: from uniqueness comes uniqueness.

Through Woolf's "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch" and Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze*, birth and 'generation' have determinative influence as conditions and structures of possibility, of uniqueness. Key to the discussions above is the concept of finitude that is guaranteed by and insisted upon within the relation between mother and daughter. The relation between mother and daughter is a relation of finite singularity, in which the some*one*-ness of the self that Cavarero insists upon, the significance of being born by some*one* as some*one*, is given precedence. Natality, as the stretch of time in which the self is given to the world, establishes the temporality of uniqueness as the finitude of the life of *one*. The relations of sameness and difference, asymmetry and symmetry, between the mother and daughter, between Woolf and Julia, Cialente and Elsa, offer a model of temporality in which generational difference between selves is analogous to the kind of temporality of the self's relation to historical, social, and cultural systems. That difference, and the possibility of its being engaged and activated by the self, frustrates claims to the undifferentiated relation of power, of determination, between the self and the larger systems of which s/he is part by locating the effects of the cultural, social, and historical in relations between selves. In the next chapter, then, the some*one*-ness guaranteed by birth and generation is taken up in a discussion of texts that articulate a 'surface politics' of belonging and which in this way offer a means of critiquing Cavarero's claim to the incommensurability of the self's relation to her/his identity categories.

2 | Appearance and Surface:
Uniqueness and the Ex-pression of *What-ness* |

"Perhaps we need a moratorium on saying 'the body'," Adrienne Rich declares,

> [f]or it's [...] possible to abstract 'the body'. I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity [...] To say 'the body' lifts me from what has given me a primary perspective. To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions [...] This body. White, female; or, female, white. The first obvious, lifelong facts (10–11).

Rich's declaration offers a point of departure for this chapter's discussion of Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007) and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* (1982). In her call for "a moratorium on saying 'the body'" and in the alternative emphasis placed on "my body" as "primary perspective", Rich relates what is visible on the surface of the self to the particularity of that self's "lived experience". Rich celebrates the self and her/his body as a relation of exteriority. Significantly, Rich's declaration formulates an association between the self and the *content* of her/his exteriority: "This body. White, female; or female, White". That is, for Rich the content of what is offered to the "primary perspective" of "my body", what is visible about and for "my body", is reducible to me, to my selfhood. The importance of this association – between the content of the self's exteriority and her/his selfhood – is not only articulated within Ghermandi's *Regina* and Lorde's *Zami* but is also the structure of an affirmative politics of experience within those texts: *what-ness* (the content of the self's identity) is lived as embodied difference reducible to the self. *Regina* and *Zami* elaborate specific instances in which "my body" becomes the site or scene of difference and, more importantly, the means through which processes of *differentiation* between unique selves in relation might be mapped or read. My discussion of Ghermandi and Lorde articulates a theory of the body in which "evidence of experience" is prevented from becoming "evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott 777).

The content of 'my body', that which marks, which registers, the difference between *this* and another body is politicised in the narratives of *Regina* and *Zami* and this matters because affirmative politicisation of this kind destabilises the coherence of Adriana Cavarero's distinction between *who* and *what* the self is. It offers a means of determining and insisting upon the significance of the ways in which *what-ness* is *made* and

lived *as* unique. *Regina* and *Zami* reclaim the significance of content, of *what-ness*, for the expression of uniqueness. In the relation of commensurability between the self and her/his *what-ness* that *Regina* and *Zami* establish, Ghermandi and Lorde offer a means of reading the processes through which the general acquires significance as the particular. Much of this chapter considers, then, the political significance of relations of exteriority, of 'appearance'. This chapter is concerned with the implications for uniqueness of the body's "surface" (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 19), a term which accounts for "the processes by which things become visible and […] produced as the outside", where "the lines of force that compose the social [are configured], lines of force that are by their very nature *deeply* material and historical" (12; original emphasis). The 'surface' of *this* some*one*'s body offers a means of deepening Cavarero's formulation of the 'appearance' between selves and demonstrates how the *what-ness* that constitutes both the 'surface' of, and relations between, selves is made reducible to an affirmative politics of difference.

First published in 2007, Ghermandi's *Regina* is a post-colonial narrative centred upon the history and the ramifications of the 1935–1941 Italian colonisation of Ethiopia. Specifically, and importantly, *Regina* narrates Ethiopia's anti-colonial and anti-fascist *resistance* to Italian occupation from the first phase of the Ethiopian counteroffensive in December 1935. Resistance to this occupation extends beyond the comparatively brief period of Italy's actual colonial presence in Ethiopia, however, and revises colonial history, some generations later, through *Regina*'s protagonist, Mahlet. This revision depends upon Mahlet's collection and narration of colonial experiences, the significant responsibility of which is foreshadowed at the beginning of the text: "[q]uando ero piccola," Mahlet recounts, "me lo dicevano sempre i tre venerabili anziani di casa: «Sarai la nostra cantora»" (5) [when I was little, the three venerable elders at home always used to tell me: 'You will be our singer']. Circular in its structure and often metafictional, *Regina* politicises the relation between narrative and identity and the dynamics of the 'appearance' and surfaces of bodies which impact upon such a relation. *Regina* offers an account of the ways in which body surfaces mediate and establish relations between selves and structure or condition a politics in which selves are differentiated from each other. *Regina* accounts for the ways in which body surfaces make shared identities coherent and inform the designation of *what* does not belong to them. The tension between shared identity and identity which-does-not-belong – the tension between competing or different generalities, *what-nesses* – is represented, however, through the singular, the particular figure of *Regina's* protagonist, Mahlet. And the function of the

singular, of Mahlet, is to disrupt, to facture, the ostensible cohesion of general or common identity in order to comment on the mechanics, on the processes, of social differentiation itself and the means by which 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' come to make sense.

Despite a number of similarities between *Regina's* protagonist and its author, *Regina* is not an autobiographical work. It is a novel based upon interviews and archival research conducted at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa (Ghermandi 253). In the afterword to the novel, Cristina Lombardi-Diop describes *Regina* as "un romanzo corale" [a choral novel], which has its analytic significance in its invocation or designation of plural, relational identity in narrative, in story-telling. The responsibility of Mahlet to collect and to narrate stories that account for Ethiopia's Italian occupation mirrors, moreover, the kind of archival research and biographical project manifest in Ghermandi's production of the novel itself. Lombardi-Diop observes, furthermore, that the choral perspective of *Regina* is the means through which Mahlet "fa riaffiorare i ricordi della sua collettività" (259) [causes the memories of her community to re-emerge]. To the extent that Mahlet honours her promise to narrate the stories that she encounters and collects, however, the reaffirmation of her collective, choral identity depends upon her function, her position, as biographer.

In this way, *Regina's* is less a 'choral' perspective than it is a fragmented or refracted biography: where 'choral' presumes a collective or multiple authorship, 'refracted biography' instead accounts for the significance and the function of *collection*, *re-*telling, and *re*-emergence. 'Refracted biography' refers, then, to the process through which multiple stories are gathered and narrated, through which they are embedded within the larger narrative of that gathering, collection, narration. 'Refracted biography' is better suited to describe the significance of Ghermandi's archival and interview work throughout the production of her novel: the narratives, the biographies, of *Regina* find their expression in a form of authorship that privileges and thematises difference through the figure of singularity. And the difference that re-emerges, that is affirmed, as a result of Mahlet's (and Ghermandi's) narration is functionalised, politicised, in order to stimulate an Italian cultural awareness of Ethiopia's unknown resistance to its colonisation (Portelli; Lombardi-Diop 258-260; Clò 35; Giommi 194). Mahlet's collection of stories, and Ghermandi's *Regina* itself, is thus a form of "talking back", which Graziella Parati (2005) distinguishes from resistance itself, defining its activity instead as that which constitutes "the unassembled skeleton of resistance and the

groundwork that points toward the possibility of constructing resistance" (31). 'Talking back' to a culture that "has traditionally reserved very little for a discussion of […its] colonialism" (33), *Regina* demonstrates the ways in which the general is made particular, the singular way in which the general is lived by the unique self. Nevertheless, bodies, surfaces, and 'appearances' mediate, condition, and often frustrate the uniqueness of the ways in which Mahlet lives her *what-ness* and narrates her shared identity through others' stories.

The functional or political imperative of the narration of difference is also manifest in Lorde's *Zami*. Published first in 1982, *Zami* politicises the differences of ethnicity, sex, and sexuality and relates these differences to space or place, to the nation: the United States. Lorde's account of these differences displaces the conventions of the autobiographical and the biographical, moreover, and establishes a distinct kind of life writing in 'biomythography'. In a way similar to the refraction of narrative perspectives in *Regina*, *Zami* establishes the significance of a relational model of selfhood that informs its whole structure. Such a model is the means through which Lorde addresses the question with which she begins her text: "*To whom do I owe the power behind my voice, what strength I have become, yeasting up like sudden blood from the bruised skin's blister?*" (3; original emphasis). Biomythography designates, in this way, a narrative structuration of the interaction of selves in relation with one another. It enables the representation of *bios* without prioritising individuality or *autos*. Indeed, *Zami* substantiates what Cavarero describes as the fiction of "the subject, the individual, the person" ("Politicizing Theory" 520) by accounting for the relational character of *bios*. In the same way, however, that 'refracted biography' better accounts for the position and function of the narrator-biographer in *Regina*, I suggest the interaction of lives and stories in *Zami* effects the unique selfhood of Lorde such that the biography, *bios*, has its significance *in* the representation of *autos*, in autobiography. With this observation, I do not mean to subordinate the biographical to the autobiographical, nor to correct or to impose a normal interpretation on 'biomythography'. For as Karen Weekes (2006) rightly observes in her account of the biomythographical in *Zami*, the "biographical aspects of others […] shape the autobiographical insights of the narrator and an exploration of myths, traditions, and legends that influence the life presented as both *Künstlerroman* and *Bildungsroman*" (330). Nevertheless, I maintain the simple fact that the biographical is written *from* the perspective, the vantage point, of the autobiographical. What is biographical in *Zami* enables the autobiographical – "*To whom do I* owe *the power behind* my *voice […?]*" – but the

representation of the biographical depends upon *autos* in order to cohere, in writing, the significance of relationality that is more spontaneous and less contained in living.

As *Künstlerroman* and *Bildungsroman*, *Zami* represents, and accounts for, the relationship between Lorde's childhood experience of 'appearing' different, her adolescent lesbian sexuality, the differences between the women she interacts with, lives with, and loves, and the influence of these things on her artistic development, her writing, her poetry. Through *Zami*, however, Lorde also destabilises the normative trajectory of self that is implied in the thematic concerns of *Künstlerroman* and *Bildungsroman*. The narrative structure of *Zami*, though predominantly organised by chronological development, is nevertheless non-linear because of its circularity. More precisely described, *Zami* does begin with Lorde's childhood and progresses to her adulthood, but the passages of the text that deal with these aspects of selfhood are internally (by which I mean *within* the organisation of the narrative) circuitous. Lorde weaves non-linearly through various childhood memories towards various recollections of adult experience. *Zami* destabilises more than its narrative structure, however, subverting commonplace assumption of sameness by representing relations of difference: the differences between blackness and whiteness, between straight and lesbian, between citizen and non-citizen. This insistence upon difference politicises and resists the assumption of sameness that Rich gestures toward in her call for a moratorium on saying 'the body'; it thematises and elaborates the affirmation of difference on the level of the bodies that populate Lorde's text.

Within *Regina* and *Zami*, selfhood is elaborated in terms of belonging to a difference that presents itself, that 'appears' itself, as visible, and in relation to other forms of difference within the social scene of plural exhibition. Ghermandi and Lorde affirm difference in the very means by which their narratives are structured, that is, by the relation each develops between the autobiographical and the biographical, a relationship between genres that mirrors and depends upon the relationship between self and other. Through the narrative politicisation of ethnicity, of differences that relate to cultural otherness that is embodied, *Regina* and *Zami* account for the significance of such kinds of *what-ness* in the development of selfhood; through their texts, Ghermandi and Lorde determine the *who-ness* of 'appearing' (ethnically) different and the investment the selves within their texts have of belonging to the identity they 'appear'. The relation between *who-ness* and belonging (or not belonging), moreover, permits a revision of Cavarero's formulation of *who-ness* itself. Through the politics of (post-)colonial resistance

in *Regina*, the affirmation of black, lesbian, and feminine identity in *Zami*, and the significance of these things *in* and *for* the formation and development of selfhood, *who-ness* becomes less the unqualified self to which *what-ness* is irreducible, than an account or instantiation of the personality of *what-ness*, the personal significance the self invests in a particular case of *what-ness*. This might be described as an expansion of *who-ness*.

The expansion of *who-ness* does not, however, simply mean *including* in *who-ness* the *what-ness* that Cavarero excludes from the former privileged category. It rather means considering the ways in which people live and experience *what-ness* uniquely. This is an important departure from, or revision of, Cavarero's vocabulary, but it is one that maintains Cavarero's distinction between *who* and *what* in order to innovate the distinction itself. In the expansion of *who-ness*, then, what is actually permitted in a philosophy of uniqueness, in a model of unique selfhood, is the very personal significance of *what-ness*. In what I term the expansion of *who-ness*, then, I insist upon the possibility of the self's unique relationship with *what-ness*, with the content of the self's identity. This possibility still depends upon the notion of *who-ness* as the site of particularity, as distinct from the general, but it permits the possibility that the general *can be* particular, or, rather, can be *made* particular. The relations of difference and belonging that *Regina* and *Zami* elaborate indicate the extent to which Cavarero's *who-ness* (understood as that to which the sociality of identity is irreducible and secondary to an unqualified self, a self without identity *qualities*) forecloses the possibility of ways in which the *general* is made *particular*. The elaboration of this process depends in part upon *Zami* and *Regina*'s representation of what Cavarero describes as a "totalmente esibitivo" ["entirely exhibitive"] identity (*Tu che* 36; *Relating Narratives* 23), something she formulates, after Hannah Arendt, in her insistence upon "il costitutivo coincidere di *essere* e *apparire*" (*Tu che* 36; original emphasis) ["the constitutive coinciding of *being* and *appearing* [*Relating Narratives* 23; original emphasis].

Cavarero's emphasis on the reciprocal *expression* of uniqueness by selves who 'exhibit' themselves is the condition, as I outlined in my Introduction, of a politics of plurality (Cavarero, *Tu che* 124; cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition* 176,). It is a politics, moreover, that resonates, in several ways, with the relation Rich draws between the visibility of 'my body' and the particularity of that body's "primary perspective" (10) in lived experience and interaction. Cavarero and Rich's formulations resonate with each other to the extent that each prioritises the external and the expressive, the visible or the exhibitive. But they diverge from each other in their determination of what counts as

properly expressive of the self's particularity. Rich exemplifies the expression of particularity, what Cavarero calls uniqueness, in her description of 'white-ness' and 'female-ness' as the self's "first obvious, lifelong facts" (11). For Cavarero, however, skin difference of this kind and its concomitant *ethnos* do not hold the same kind of significance that they do for Rich. For Cavarero, as I discussed in my previous chapter, it is only sexual difference that acquires a significance belonging properly to *who-ness*. For Cavarero, sexual difference is reducible to the unique identity of the self.

In "Politicizing Theory" (2002), Cavarero determines *what-ness* not only in the "fictitious entities – Man, the subject, the individual, the person", but also in the "problem of identity" which asks: "What does it mean to be an African American, a Muslim, a lesbian, and so forth?" (520). For Cavarero, the "problem of identity" is closely related to the postmodern and poststructuralist insistence on the performativity of language and its bearing on socially constructed identity categories – *what-nesses* – "that stabilize and naturalize, in accordance with a hierarchical order, the meaning of being man, woman, heterosexual, homosexual, white, black, and so on" (529). But where postmodernism and post-structuralism, as Cavarero understands them, relate gender and sex to other forms of difference within a general economy of the socio-cultural, Cavarero instead prioritises *sexual* difference as an original difference. And the logic of this manoeuvre is in keeping with the broad symbolic project of sexual difference feminism, the undertaking of which begins with, or from, the claim that, sexual difference, the difference between women and men, is, as Carla Lonzi writes, "la differenza di base dell'umanità (14) [the difference at the base of humanity].

"Sulla scena natale," Cavarero writes, then, "l'unità del nuovo nato è materialmente visibile e incontestabile nella sua *plateale apparizione*" (*Tu che* 54; my emphasis) ["Within the scene of birth, the unity of the newborn is materially visible and incontrovertible through its *glaring* [*plateale*] *appearance*" (*Relating Narratives* 38; my emphasis)]. For Cavarero this glaring 'appearance' confirms the incarnate status of sexual difference in *who-ness*. "La differenza sessuale," she writes, "non qualifica infatti l'esistente, non specifica il suo *che cosa*, ma ne incarna piuttosto l'unicità sin dalla sua inaugurale apparenza. Chi nasce non ha ancora qualità, tuttavia ha già un sesso" (*Tu che* 54-55) ["sexual difference does not qualify the existent, it does not specify the *what*, but rather embodies the newborn's uniqueness from the moment of this inaugural 'appearance'. The one who is born does not yet have any qualities; and yet has a sex" (*Relating Narratives* 38)]. The *who-ness* of sexual difference is, for Cavarero, determined by,

or contingent upon, the glaring obviousness of the newborn's sex. Indeed, the Italian 'plateale' carries the implication of 'ostentation' such that the sexed 'appearance' of the newborn is blatantly *apparent*, ostentatiously visible and determinate. To this extent, then, Cavarero delimits *who-ness* by attributing it to the naked visibility of difference – to its 'appearance'. The "*mere* bodily existence" against which Arendt (*The Human Condition* 176) develops her formulation of 'appearance' (the phenomenon of the self's reflexive 'appearing' *into* reciprocal, interactive, and exhibitive relations) acquires greater significance for Cavarero because that 'mere-ness' (of bodily existence) is the very disclosure of uniqueness itself. The naked visibility of the newborn, sexed from the start, is, for Cavarero, the beginning of the self's 'appearing' unique. The 'appearance' of *who-ness*, of uniqueness, is the inevitable consequence of what is offered 'merely' to sight. With *this* body, as it 'appears', then, the self is "thus and not otherwise", s/he is unrepeatable ("Who Engenders Politics?" 100). But the logic of Cavarero's claim to the significance and facticity, the "incarnate" status, of sexed *who-ness*, is also the occasion for the expansion of *who-ness* and affirmation of *what-ness* precisely because it depends upon the essential phenomenon of 'appearance'.

With the expansion of *who-ness* and affirmation of *what-ness*, however, it is not my intention to bring into question Cavarero's position on the status of sexual difference for the unique self. The "affirmation of *what-ness*" is not intended as a corrective of the logic of sexual difference, itself, nor of claims within sexual difference feminism (Grosz 2011; Irigaray 1985 & 2004) and, specifically, *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Diotima 1991; Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987; Lonzi 2010) about the original and foundational difference that sexual difference represents. The expansion of *who-ness* and affirmation of *what-ness* rather follows Cavarero's formulation of 'appearance' toward conclusions she is seemingly reluctant to make in her preservation of the priority and special status of sexual difference. The affirmation of *what-ness* developed in this chapter does not destabilise the foundational status of sexual difference, of sexed *who-ness*; it instead points to the important and politically necessary ways in which 'appearance' permits the affirmation of other categories or types of *what-ness* as things that are lived with the reducibility of *who-ness*.

To this extent, rather than denying the significance of sexual difference, the affirmation of *what-ness* aligns itself with the kind of logic manifest in Luce Irigaray's suggestion that the "most important aim is to make visible the exploitation common to all women and to discover the struggles which every woman should engage in, wherever

she is: i.e., depending on her country, her occupation, her class, and her sexual estate – i.e., the most immediately unbearable of her modes of oppression" ("Women's Exile" 69). In the same way that Irigaray permits the significance of other kinds of difference to which the self belongs while also affirming the category of sexual difference and its concomitant "exploitation common to all women", the category of 'appearance' works in this chapter as the underpinning logic of an affirmation of other kinds of difference than that of the sexual. Indeed, on the question of writing (and) sexual difference, Ghermandi remarks, in an interview with Alessia di Griglio, that "Io non mi soffermo molto sulla differenza femminile. Non ho avuto bisogno di segnare la mia differenza di genere […] Nessuno mi hai mai detto che non avevo accesso alla scrittura" (qtd. in. di Griglio 34) [I don't dwell very much on feminine difference. I haven't needed to mark my gender difference. No one has ever told me I don't have access to writing]. And much of Lorde's *Zami* addresses the complexities of a kind of feminism often oblivious and sometimes hostile to the difference of coloured identity.

To the extent that *who-ness* depends upon the incarnate ways in which the self is visibly marked as different, then, the category of 'appearance', the 'appearance' of marked difference, makes possible the affirmation of various other kinds of differences, *what-nesses*, that Cavarero excludes from the status of *who-ness* and reducible significance.

The importance, the relevance of Ghermandi and Lorde's texts, lies in their illustration of a politics of belonging in which the body confirms the process, and becomes the scene of, the social and cultural differentiation of selves as they 'appear' before others. *Regina* and *Zami* facilitate the redress of Cavarero's reluctance to consider the reducibility of 'black-ness' and 'white-ness' (as examples of skin difference that come to bear on questions of ethnicity) to the self and the investment that this confirms in the self's relation to *what-ness*. Within and extending beyond the context of Cavarero's hesitation to consider the *who-ness* (the reducibility) of the self's ethnicity, moreover, *Regina* and *Zami* speak to, and offer a means of critiquing, a tendency within feminist theory to think 'difference' from the perspective of "a universalism; a speaking from the place of (for example) the white subject, who reincorporates difference as a sign of its own fractured and multiple coming-into-being" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 42). As a kind of response to this tendency within feminist theory, one which develops alongside and is often symptomatic of the abstraction of "the body" that Rich signals, Ghermandi and Lorde's life writings acquire further significance in their affirmation of the uniqueness that the self *makes* in and of her/his skin difference or ethnic difference more

generally. Attention to the specific kind of difference manifest in that of the skin, however, follows Sara Ahmed's (2000) important proposal to analyse the ways in which (unique) selves come to live themselves, their bodies, in differentiation, as differentiated.

Ahmed's proposal emerges in reaction to what she describes as the "privileged focus of attention" toward bodies within feminist theory (41). For Ahmed, this "privileged focus of attention" is one in which "the body has become somewhat of an abstraction […] a way of signalling a certain kind of feminist rhetoric as much as the means through which feminist critique of traditional philosophy proceeds" (41). This observation is in part Ahmed's response to Kathryn Bond Stockton's claim that within feminist theory 'the body' has acquired an onto-theological status, which, in its presumption toward the body's already-determined-ness, reflects "an epistemic reliance on the body as in some way prior to, or at least irreducible to, the contingency of linguistic social relations" (41). And while Ahmed distances herself from Bond Stockton's argument because "it clearly misses the point that the concern with the body as already determined constitutes an important aspect of feminist critique of Cartesianism and ideality in general" (41), she notes also that the "appeal to the body as already determined and as differentiated in terms of gender and sexuality, and also race and class, does not always involve in practice an analysis of the particularity of bodies or of subjectivity in general" (41). For Ahmed, though she writes that it is "easy simply to point out that *appeals* to difference do not always involve an *analysis* of difference" (41), the rhetoric of the body-abstracted, what Rich calls 'the body', and its already-determined-ness, is responsible in part for a putative universalism that is reinscribed in feminist formulations of difference. Rich's earlier formulation of and insistence upon the significance of 'my body' as "primary perspective" (11) gestures toward, prefigures even, Ahmed's alternative to 'the body' in much of feminist critique. "To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity," Rich observes (10), such that she is always and only "[t]his body. White, female; or, female, white," (10) which are the "first obvious, lifelong facts" (11) of her selfhood. The emphasis Rich places on the singularity of the body – such that it is always the body of some*one*, always some*body* – also enables a shift in perspective, one that moves from 'the body' and 'difference' to 'my body' and 'differentiation', a manoeuvre that Ahmed prioritises in an attempt to recognise "the violent collision of regimes of difference" such that universalism might be avoided (42). In this way, 'difference' is less that-which-is-already-determined and more that-which-determines. Thus Ahmed asks: "How do 'bodies' become marked by differences? How

do bodies *come to be lived precisely through being differentiated from other bodies*, whereby the difference in other bodies make a difference to such lived embodiment?" (42; my emphasis). Ahmed's question is important, moreover, because in asking how bodies become marked by differences, the significance of *what-ness* as something unavoidable – as something into which one invests oneself and into which the self is implicated by others – is raised. An analysis of the mechanics of difference, of differentiation, in Ghermandi's *Regina* demonstrates the consequence of the self's 'appearing', of being recognised, as different.

The first story *Regina*'s narrator, Mahlet, encounters is that of 'il vecchio Yacob' [old Yacob], one of the elders in Mahlet's family, the brother of her great-grandmother. It is through il vecchio Yacob, moreover, that Mahlet's responsibility to narrate her community's experience of colonisation is established; it is to him that she promises to record his story and to take it "nel paese degli Italiani, per non dare loro la possibilità di scordare" (57) [to the land of the Italians, so they don't have the opportunity of forgetting it]. Il vecchio Yacob's story is offered on the condition, then, that it serve a particular purpose. The narration of il vecchio Yacob's story, to this extent, is premised on the performative function of its revision of colonial history. As a revision of this kind, moreover, the story Yacob narrates is indicative of what Sara Ahmed (2000) describes as the tension between the imaginary and the reality of the nation and nationality (98). Ahmed writes, then, that "the nation involves not only image and myth-making – the telling of 'official' stories of origin – but also the everyday negotiations of what it means 'to be' that nation(ality)" (98). The tension between the imaginary and the real is manifest in the politicisation of Yacob's narrative through its construction of a resistant identity (we/us/Ethiopian) – which is opposed to and by that of the coloniser (they/them/Italian) – that is based on the experience of violence and contempt for its perpetrators. This relation is also described in Clarissa Clò's (2010) analysis of Ghermandi's novel through Stuart Hall's theorisation of identity and diaspora. Il vecchio Yacob's story, the novel's first account of colonial history and one to which many of the subsequent stories refer, exemplifies the post-colonial strategy in Ghermandi's text which "reclaims and rediscovers a shared collective past" (Clò 35) through the excavation of that which "the colonial experience buried and overlaid," (Stuart Hall qtd. in Clò 35). It also exemplifies the production of an identity based on the "political consciousness" (Clò 35; Stuart Hall 24) of that experience of colonisation and its rediscovery. To this extent, il vecchio Yacob's story accounts for more than, or not simply, the justified contempt

toward the Italian colonisers; it also accounts for the investment in the formation of an Ethiopian identity and political consciousness. 'Ethiopia' and 'Ethiopian' acquire their valency within the context of il vecchio Yacob's story through the reclamation of an identity based on resistance to the colonising other.

But Il vecchio Yacob's story also brings into question the coherence of the relationship between resistor and coloniser, Ethiopian and Italian. Alongside the narration of his experience as an *arbegnà* (someone who fought for Ethiopian independence), alongside the narration of militarist and guerrilla strategy, Yacob also tells the story of his sister's love for, and pregnancy to, an Italian soldier. This love story, which also emphasises the cruelty of the Italians during Ethiopia's resistance (for Yacob's sister, Amarech, and her lover, Daniel are murdered by Italian soldiers who tell Yacob "non vogliamo insozzare la nostra razza con la vostra" (48) [we don't want to dirty our race with yours]) destabilises the transparency of both identities and the borders of their associated nations (to the extent that 'the nation' depends upon its identity construction [Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 98]). The challenge to the transparency of coloniser and resistor, and the relation of each to the imaginary and reality of the nation and nationality is read when Amarech informs Yacob of her pregnancy: "«Yacob, io amo il padre di questo figlio. Lui è un militare italiano»" (23) ['Yacob, I love the father of this child. He's an Italian soldier']. Yacob responds to this in two ways: first with a description of his emotional response to the news, second with indignation:

> A quelle parole un fragore mi esplose dentro. Come le bombe del campo di guerra, ma ancora più forte" (23)

> «Un italiano! È incinta di uno sporco militare italiano. Magari dell'aviazione, di quelli che spargevano i gas su di noi, che hanno ammazzato nostro padre» (23)

> [With those words, a roar exploded inside of me. Like the bombs in a war camp, but even stronger]

> ['An Italian! She's got herself pregnant to a filthy Italian soldier. Probably from aviation, one of those who sprayed us with gas, who killed our father'].

Acutely manifest in Yacob's responses to his sister's pregnancy is the relationship between the imaginary and material elements of the nation and the identity that underpins its formation. Yacob's initial response to the information is one in which emotion is related, through simile, to warfare, an association which indicates the extent to which Yacob invests Ethiopian identity (manifest here as the collective identity of the family) in the resistance of warfare against the Italians; it indicates his difficulty in

disassociating Italian-ness from colonialism. Yacob's words of indignation further indicate the extent to which his conception of Ethiopian-ness is related to and invested in the identities of resistor and coloniser. Daniel is subsumed within a history of violence perpetrated by Italians. Italian-ness again becomes coterminous with the violence of colonialism, which is personalised through the death of Yacob's father. The relationship between Amarech and Daniel is, for Yacob, understood through a generality that maintains, but in error, the identities of colonised and coloniser; that is, Yacob's indignation toward his sister's pregnancy indicates the extent to which his sense of self, his Ethiopian-ness, is invested in the distinction and mistaken transparency of identity categories. Yacob's reactions indicate the failure of a general *what-ness* to become particular; they indicate the kind of *what-ness* that Cavarero considers irreducible to the self. In this way, Yacob's reaction to his sister's pregnancy depends upon the stereotypical function of *what-ness*.

Il vecchio Yacob's reaction, and the stereotypical function of *what-ness* that underpins it, follows the logic of Meaghan Morris' (2006) pertinent theorisation of the ways in which caricature works to unify or divide unfamiliar experience within "its mode of address" rather than articulate the heterogeneity and conjuncture of the new (143). For Morris, caricature "is not strong on curiosity ('learning'): one or two salient features do duty for 'the rest'; this is why it is a weapon not only for creating new perceptions of familiar objects […] but for mobilizing familiar ideologies against new objects" (143). Elsewhere, and along similar lines, Morris (2009) describes stereotypes as "*forms of apprehension* rather than bad representations" wherein "familiar knowledge" is mobilised "to explain and absorb unfamiliar experience" (original emphasis). Il vecchio Yacob's reaction to his sister's lover can be read alongside Morris' theorisation of caricature and stereotype to the extent that Yacob's metonymical reduction of Daniel to the violence of the Italian state's colonial project brings into competition familiar – that is, historical – experience with new experience: the possibility of non-violent relations between Ethiopia and Italy. The "apprehension" at work in the stereotypical reaction Yacob has, moreover, combines the implications of "apprehension" to mean both the 'perception' and the 'arrest' of something. Daniel's singularity is apprehended in such a way: the 'Italian-ness' of which, for Yacob, Daniel is representative arrests the possibility of him being otherwise-than-violent-colonialist.

In the conversation between il vecchio Yacob and Amarech that later follows this initial reaction, moreover (a conversation in which Amarech attempts to defend her

lover), the latter's difference is positively figured through metaphoric relations between 'appearance' and land. "«Va bene. Parlarmi di lui facendo finta che sia un *habeshà*[2]»" (30) ['Ok. Tell me about him, making him out to be a *habesha*]", il vecchio Yacob says. But Amarech tells il vecchio Yacob that such a likening is impossible because:

> «Lui è molto diverso da noi. Troppo. Tutti i suoi colori sono diversi dai nostri. Sai, ha un pezzo di cielo negli occhi. Il cielo di fine Meskerem[3], quando tornano le rondini. Sembra che Dio gli abbia dato quegli occhi per farci vedere il cielo da vicino. E i suoi capelli […] anche quelli […] sai come sono? Dorati come il *tief*[4] maturo, che annuncia la festa del raccolto […]Tutti i suoi colori sono i colori della stagione dei frutti e del raccolto» (30)

> ['He's very different from us. Too different. All of his colours are different from ours. Do you know, his eyes seem to be made of a piece of sky. The sky at the end of Meskerem, when the swallows return. It seems like God gave him those eyes so that we could see the sky more near. And his hair […] even it […] do you know what it's like? Golden, like the mature *tief* which signals the harvest festival […] All of his colours are those of the season of fruit and harvest'].

In her defence of Daniel, in the defence of his difference, Amarech describes her lover through an imaginary of colours metaphorically related to, and evocative of, the specificities of Ethiopian land, of location. Amarech's description is characterised, moreover, by a tension between sameness and difference of identity, a tension that results from her effort to account for the impossibility of Daniel's being-*habesha* while also explaining or permitting the reasons why she loves him. All of Daniel's colours, Amarech describes, are different from those of the Ethiopians. "[H]a un pezzo di cielo negli occhi" [His eyes seem to be made of a piece of sky], but the sky at the end of Meskerem, "quando tornano le rondini" [when the swallows return] – an interesting qualification because it relates Daniel's difference to the particularity of Ethiopian configurations of the seasons and to the changes that season announces. The same relation between sameness and difference emerges in the description of Daniel's hair, moreover, so that its foreign gold is associated with the mature *tief*, wheat, and the occasion of the harvest festival. In each case that Daniel's difference is stated, it is also related to a sameness of which it is only metaphorically part. And yet, in that relation of difference and metaphorical sameness, the primacy of the foreign is deprioritised by its configuration, its representation, within the familiar. The difference of Daniel's

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[2] "Termine usato dagli etiopi per indicare se stessi" [Term used by Ethiopians to refer to themselves (original footnote explanation in *Regina* 30)].
[3] A month in the Ethiopian or Ge'ez calendar; September 11 – October 11 in the Gregorian calendar.
[4] "Cereale autoctono" [native wheat (original footnote explanation in *Regina* 30)].

'appearance' is made intelligible within sameness. The intelligibility of Daniel's difference does not, however, eradicate the difference itself. Daniel is not *habesha*, Amarech asserts, because he's "molto diverso" [very different]. The relations she draws between that difference and its intelligibility within sameness are instead a means of affirming the distinction and the possibility of relation between 'Italian' and 'Ethiopian' and the signification of each that results from their exposure. *Regina* attests in this way to the very real significance of *what-ness* for the self. She demonstrates how difference is itself constituted by *what-ness*, by categories of identity.

Il vecchio Yacob interprets the intelligibility of Daniel's difference, however, in such a way that depends upon the relations between colour and land that Amarech establishes but only to work against their affirmative significance. Shortly after Amarech's defence, then, Yacob speaks with his mother and declares

> «Mamma è [Daniel] un diavolo presuntuoso. Solo un diavolo presuntuoso può girare con il colore del cielo di Dio negli occhi. Noi siamo del colore della terra e come essa umili e accoglienti. Tra noi e lui non ci sono punti di incontro» (41)

> ['Mum he [Daniel] is a conceited devil. Only a conceited devil can move with the colour of God's sky in his eyes. We are the colour of the earth and, like it, we are humble and welcoming. There's no meeting point between us and him']

Where for Amarech, the colour of Daniel's eyes metaphorically relates him to the particularity of the changes in Ethiopian seasons, to the specificity of an Ethiopian landscape, for Yacob, the colour of Daniel's eyes is the means by which the distance between 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' is registered and sustained. That distance is commensurate, within the metaphoricity of Daniel that Amarech begins and Yacob extends, to the distance between the land and the sky. In their association with the sky, the colour of Daniel's eyes are also related to God, and for Yacob, this association, though confused, is indicative of a kind of conceit in Daniel for which the Devil is responsible. Between the space of the sky and the earth, the colour of which Yacob relates to being-Ethiopian, there are no "punti di incontro" [meeting points]; the difference between 'Italian' and 'Ethiopian' is, for Yacob, irreducible and irreconcilable.

'Appearance', as it functions within the excerpts above, is the predominant means by which the imaginary sustains conceptions of self and other and the relation of each of these to national identity. In both passages from Ghermandi's text, difference is manifest at the level of surface, at the level of what the self '*appears*' to others. For Amarech, the difference between *habesha* and 'Italian' is positively maintained in the disjuncture between the embodied difference manifest in Daniel's colouring and the

metaphorical relation of his colouring to the particularity of an Ethiopia landscape. Within the terms of Yacob's psychic investment in the incommensurability of difference between 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian', 'us' and 'them', 'appearance' sustains a conception of space in which the familiar and the strange are enforced. Indeed, the differentiation between strange and familiar (whether positive, as in the case of Amarech's defence, or prejudicial and perhaps paranoid, as in the case of Yacob's conception) indicates the extent to which the "proximity of strangers within the nation space – that is, *the proximity of that which cannot be assimilated into a national body* – is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined and exterior other" (Ahmed *Strange Encounters*, 100; original emphasis). 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' depend upon the proximity of each other, the extent to which 'Italian' is involved by and within 'Ethiopian', and vice versa, in the negotiation of what is familiar and strange about each term: 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' are markers of differences that are registered in the 'appearance' of the other, on the level of the other's body surface. Difference is registered in the expression of what is exterior, of an exterior *what-ness*. In the disjuncture between, or, in the *only-metaphorical* relation of, Daniel's blonde hair and the colour of wheat, the significance, the meaning of 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' emerges. In the connotations and spatial dimensions of sky and land evoked by Daniel's eyes, the difference between 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' is enforced.

The potential for a more positive relation between 'Ethiopian' and 'Italian' identity, however, is gestured toward at the end of Yacob's story when, in a moment of catharsis that follows the news of the violent murders of Amarech and Daniel by Italian soldiers, the latter couple's baby is handed to Yacob. He describes

> [u]na bimba, un incanto armonioso che mescolava i colori della terra e del cielo infilò i suoi occhi nei miei. In quell'istante, qualsiasi dubbio o rancore su quell'uomo bianco che era entrato nella nostra famiglia sconvolgendola scomparve (55)

> [a baby girl, a harmonious charm who mixed the colours of the earth and the sky put her eyes on mine. In that instant, whatever doubt or resentment about that white man who had come into our family, upsetting it, disappeared].

For Yacob, Amarech and Daniel's child is the means through which the recognition and affirmation of difference is realised. In that moment of recognition, Yacob's hostility toward Daniel disappears. It is a form of recognition dependent, moreover, upon the mixing of colours, on relations of 'appearance', the expression of a different kind of selfhood manifest in the *what-ness* of the baby girl, her being of "i colori della terra e del

cielo" [of the earth and the sky], Ethiopian and Italian. Yacob's story ends, then, with emphasis on the potentiality of the ways in which bodies, 'appearances', and surfaces signify and sustain particular kinds of relations. They are relations, moreover, in which the general is overcome by the particular, a movement that results from the 'co-appearance' of selves and the expression and affirmation of *what-ness*. Indeed the movement from general to particular is manifest within the majority of Ghermandi's stories; it underpins the importance of the kind of self-knowledge with which much of *Regina* is concerned to establish, to inaugurate. Cavarero's distinction between *who-ness* and *what-ness* is challenged, to this extent, by a process in which the latter acquires the reducible significance of the former.

The association between self-knowledge, narrative, and relations of 'appearances', of expressions of *what-ness*, also underpins the affirmation of Black identity in Lorde's, *Zami*, in which the significance, the meaning, of the self's surface is often imperatively at issue for the narrator. Indeed, in the opening pages of *Zami*, which acknowledge several of the women who made possible Lorde's "intersubjective construction of personal identity and an interactional self-naming process" (Keating, *Women* 146), the narrator describes her life (and thus her biomythography) as one of "coming out blackened and whole" (5). From the text's beginning, then, the narrative construction of Lorde's life is determined by and related to the visible, to 'coming out', to exposure; what is exposed, furthermore, is 'blackness', a difference of the skin, of the surface, of Lorde's body. On this, Elizabeth Alexander (1994) writes that "Lorde restores the visual impact of 'coming out' to suggest her assertion and arrival and also, of course, playing on lesbian 'coming out'" (698). Alexander continues, moreover, and describes Lorde's process in *Zami* is one "of becoming black and lesbian on her own terms as much as it is being named and seen as those things by a larger world. 'Blackened' is a positive state to 'come out' into, but it also implies being burnt and scarred" (698). This process of being burnt and scarred, of being blackened, is also an important part of becoming 'Afrekete', an African goddess "never mentioned in standard books on the subject" (Keating, "Making 'Our Shattered Faces Whole'" 26), who precedes later male versions of her significance, and who is embodied in the character Kitty, one of Lorde's lovers toward the end of *Zami*. The significance of Afrekete has been interpreted, by some, as Lorde's "self-projection" (Chinosole 388) of a return to strong, female-centred African identity such that in "reclaiming her mythological roots […Lorde] reconnects with her matrilineal heritage" (Keating 26). For AnnLouise Keating (1992), Afrekete's significance lies in the revision

she represents of Judeo-Christian myth, a revision that "acknowledges her own cultural heritage" and enables the validation of Black women's power (27). For Keating, further still, Lorde's relationship to Afrekete (and Kitty) is one through which Lorde recognises "the sacredness of her own female power," and "defines herself and all women – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – as divine" (31). Lorde's Afrekete "offers women of all races an image of ancient female wisdom and strength which empowers them to put their differences into words and create networks connecting them to other women" (31). And in "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" within *Sister Outsider* (1996), Lorde questions the absence of affirmative representations of non-white women in Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), and asks that Daly "re-member what is dark and ancient and divine within yourself that aids your speaking" (69). In many ways, then, to "come out blackened and whole" (Alexander 695) refers, in *Zami*, to an investment in a way of being 'rooted' to and in a particular identity. To become 'Afrekete' depends upon an affirmation of *what-ness*: *Zami* functions as an affirmation of its author's Black-ness, as an assertion of difference visible on, and as, the surface of the body.

"Grenadians and Barbadians walk like African peoples," *Zami*'s first chapter begins, "Trinidadians do not" (9); Lorde continues:

> When I visited Grenada I saw the root of my mother's powers walking through the streets. I thought, this is the country of my foremothers, my forebearing mothers, those Black island women who defined themselves by what they did […]. There is a softer edge of African sharpness upon these women, and they swing through the rain-warm streets with an arrogant gentleness that I remember in strength and vulnerability (9).

With this passage, Lorde begins a kind of nostalgic reverence for the roots of her Black identity. It is a kind of reverence, moreover, that convokes past, present, and future in the *what-ness* of 'appearance', in the 'mere-ness' of 'bodily existence' and the relationality implied in the genealogy of mothers, as well as the activity of women swinging "through the rain-warm streets". The Grenada of Lorde's description, a Grenada determined from the position of reflection, is the country of her "foremothers," a country related even further back in time to Africa, moreover. "Africa" is manifest, then, at the level of women's bodies, in the "softer edge of African sharpness" upon them, where "softer" might itself suggest the passing of time, the source, the trace, of a kind of 'rooted-ness'. Structurally, this opening description foreshadows the kind of identity, the kind of genealogical perspective that culminates in Lorde's affirmation of Black identity, in 'becoming Afrekete'. As a beginning that convokes past, present, and future in the *what-*

ness of identity, Lorde's opening description mirrors the model of selfhood developed throughout her narrative; the significance of *becoming* Afrekete lies in the self's relation to the 'rooted-ness' (the past-ness) and presence of *what-ness*.

The affirmative relationship between Blackness and selfhood that the above description establishes also signals the significance of Lorde's mother in the development of the former's conceptions and experiences of surface differences. However, where Lorde's mother is represented above as having a kind of "strength" associated with the particularity of Grenada and its rooted-ness in an African past, for much of Lorde's childhood she is described as the source of an ambiguity, a reticence, about the social significance of, and the "vital pieces of information" (*Zami* 69) about, 'appearing' Black. Ambiguity about 'Black-ness' is the result, predominantly, of what Lorde describes euphemistically as "her mother's special relationship with words (31), or, as Keating writes, "the ambivalent effects of her [mother's] secrecy" (*Women Reading* 147). And this silence is most often in response to the experience of racism.

Lorde writes that from the time her parents had moved to "this country" (69) – an "america" that is never capitalised in order to deprioritise its white-ness in relation to its marginalised 'Black-ness' – they "handled" the "crushing reality" of American racism "as a private woe" (69). "My mother and father believed," Lorde writes, "that they could best protect their children from the realities of race in america and the fact of american racism by never giving them name, much less discussing their nature" (69). For Keating, Lorde's response to this kind of silence by her parents, especially by her mother, plays an important role "in Lorde's construction of a racialized 'blackness'" (*Women Reading* 149). This construction is underpinned by what Keating calls the "'ethnic anxiety'" of many U.S. autobiographies wherein, by "attempting to spare children knowledge of painful past experiences, parents often create an obsessive void in the child that must be explored and filled in" (Fisher qtd. in Keating, *Women Reading* 149).

For Keating, then, *Zami*, and the "construction of a racialized 'blackness'" that develops within it, is the means by which that "obsessive void" is filled in: *Zami* enables the transformation of Lorde's mother's silence into words, an act which is also read in the significance of the figure of Afrekete whose "multivocality and ability to act as translator" (Provost 46) within mythic depictions of her, is an important source of inspiration for Lorde's own undertaking. But while Keating's observations about Lorde's transformation of silence into language are salient, and though it is pertinent to note that that silence "prevented [...Lorde] from understanding how her skin color and ethnicity

positioned her in the racialist structure of twentieth-century U.S. social systems" (149), Lorde does recount some degree of awareness in childhood of the significance of 'appearing' different and the implication of body surfaces. Though there is a disjuncture between the spoken and the non-spoken in Lorde's relationship with her mother, one that ultimately meant Lorde "had no words for racism" (*Zami* 60), difference, the difference of skin, is nevertheless recognised by Lorde in and through her mother so that, even if the reasons behind racism are not understood, the difference that motivates it is. This means that *Zami* is less the "*construction* of a racialized blackness" than it is its *affirmation*, an affirmation of what Frantz Fanon (2008 [1986]) refers to as "the fact of blackness" when he remembers and describes a violent encounter with white people that made him "responsible at the same time for [...his] body, for [...his] race, for [...his] ancestors" (84). The later sections of *Zami* demonstrate the investment Lorde has in 'appearing' Black amongst others in relation. These later section demonstrate the affirmation of an identity that was largely unspoken about in childhood. This is significant because within this perspective, Lorde's mother's "silence" is less the absence of Blackness, or the attempt to make Blackness absent, than an attitude to *what* is *there* in 'appearance'. Thus Lorde writes, "I grew [as] Black as my need for life, for affirmation, for love, for sharing – *copying from my mother what was in her, unfulfilled*" (*Zami* 58; my emphasis).

> "My mother was different from other women," Lorde writes,
>
> and sometimes it gave me a sense of pleasure and specialness that was a positive aspect of feeling set apart. But sometimes it gave me pain and I fancied it the reason for so many of my childhood sorrows. *If my mother were like everybody else's maybe they would like me better*. But most often her difference was like the season or a cold day or a steamy night in June. It just *was*, with no explanation or evocation necessary" (16; original emphasis).

In this passage, Lorde concludes by describing her mother in terms of a difference that "just *was*", a difference that has a kind of ephemeral or non-determined quality. The non-determined-ness of Lorde's mother's difference has its presence, however, in the effect it produces, at least for Lorde, between people: Lorde's mother's 'appearance' is part of "the positive aspect of feeling set apart" as well as the "reason for so many" of Lorde's "childhood sorrows". This passage, which begins a more detailed description of Lorde's mother's difference, gives weight to the 'there-ness' of the self's difference in 'appearance': without explanation or evocation, "it just *was*". The significance of this lies in the non-verbal presence of difference, the inessentiality of its being-put-into-words in

order to be formulated or recognised *as* difference. Lorde's mother's difference is not abstract or supersensible in its 'there-ness', however. It is embodied. It is to the embodied difference that her mother represents, moreover, that Lorde's life is tied. "*If my mother were like everybody else's,*" she writes, "*maybe they would like me better*", a wish that speaks to Lorde's identification with her mother's difference, at least to her co-involvement with it, to the extent that within that subjunctive aspiration – "*If my mother were*", – Lorde's sense of self, her sense of possibility is bound-up in, bound to, her mother's difference, its unavoidable 'it-just-*was*-ness'. In comparison with that difference that "just *was*", moreover, the accuracy of Lorde's deployment of the subjunctive itself attests to the difference between her and her mother by representing a particularly structured, formalised sense of distinction that is a product of education and aspirational cultural shaping.

The consequences of Lorde's mother's difference acquire even greater emotional significance as the biomythography develops. Commenting on the perplexity she felt about her mother's cautions against people of particular skin colour, Lorde later considers her mother's embodied difference more specifically. "We were told we must never trust white people," Lorde writes and then follows on to observe that

> It always seemed like a strange injunction coming from my mother, who looked so much like one of those people we were never supposed to trust. But something always warned me not to ask my mother why she wasn't white, and why Auntie Lillah and Auntie Etta weren't, even though they were all the same problematic color so different from my father and me, even from my sisters, who were somewhere in-between (69).

Here, the logic of 'appearance' as "mere bodily existence" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 176) is brought into conflict with what Arendt designates as the term's proper meaning: the interaction of selves in plural relation. The white-ness that Lorde's mother determines to be untrustworthy is something ambivalent, for Lorde, because her mother looks "so much like one of those people we were never supposed to trust" herself. Where in the previous passage I quoted Lorde's mother's embodied difference was the source of both a feeling of "specialness" and "sorrow" (*Zami*), here her mother's 'surface' is the source of ambiguity and incoherence. Lorde's description of her aunts' skin colour, as well as her sisters', her father's and her own, frustrates the transparency of the surfaces of bodies and shows instead that what coheres as 'Black' is instead the relationships between selves, between the members of her family, those who are trustworthy. The variations in skin colour that 'appear' amongst Lorde's family

destabilises the presumption of an easy movement from the expression of *what-ness* to the recognition of its significance, its meaning. At the same time, however, such destabilisation also points to the inevitable capacity of the surfaces of bodies to signify, to be more than "mere bodily existence" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 176).

The capacity of the surface to signify beyond its 'mere-ness' can also be read in Lorde's confusion as a child about the meaning of "Colored", a meaning she tries to grasp in a conversation with her sisters, an occasion which represented, she writes, "the first and only time my sisters and I discussed race as a reality in my house, or at any rate as it applied to ourselves" (59). Lorde recounts:

> 'What does *Colored* mean?' I asked. To my amazement, neither one of my sisters was quite sure.
> 'Well,' Phyllis said. 'The nuns are white, and the Short-Neck Store-Man is white, and Father Mulvoy is white and we're Colored.'
> 'And what's Mommy? Is she white or Colored?'
> 'I don't know,' answered Phyllis impatiently.
> 'Well,' I said, 'If anybody asks me what I am, I'm going to tell them I'm white same as Mommy.'
> 'Ohhhhhhhhhh, girl, you better not do that,' they both chorused in horror.
> 'Why not?' I asked more confused than ever. But neither of them could tell me why (58–59).

The disjuncture between the private ways in which selves relate to each other and the structural or Symbolic ways in which the 'appearances' of those selves signify beyond their privacy, beyond the context of the local is significant in the above conversation. Neither of Lorde's sisters really understands what "Colored" means, but each knows that it is she who is described or addressed by the term. And it is only in relation to other, "white" selves (the nuns, the Short-Neck-Store-Man, and Father Mulvoy) that "Colored" acquires meaning. Each of Lorde's sisters understands the risk in the former's self-designation as "white", moreover, without being able to explain what the danger in that self-designation is. The inexperience of Lorde and her sisters with and within the greater social and cultural scene of 'appearance' mirrors the often-irreducible relation between the symbolic and the particular, between selves and social-cultural structures. It is ultimately this relationship that Lorde's *Zami*, along with her other political and poetic work, attempts to frustrate through a politics in which difference is affirmed, a politics in which the mechanics of differentiation are scrutinised and redeployed in order for the oppression of particular forms of meaning to change, to be re-symbolised. The force behind that politics is the 'appearance' of selves before others, the negotiation of *what-nesses* that express themselves on the surface.

"The body," Rosi Braidotti writes in *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991), "far from being an essentialist notion, is situated at the intersection of the biological and the symbolic; as such it marks a metaphysical surface of integrated material and symbolic elements that defy separation (282). This is an important formulation of the body, then, because it brings substance (the materiality of the body) into relation with ideation (the abstraction of the substantial). Braidotti's observation captures the kind of relationship between the 'appearance' of selves and the recognition and negotiation of that 'appearance' by others that have been the subject of this chapter so far. The "metaphysical surface" where the biological and symbolic meet *as* the body neatly describes and theorises the kind of relationship at work in Ghermandi's *Regina* between the colour and surface of bodies. It neatly describes and theorises the way in which varieties of skin produce significant effects in Lorde's *Zami*. In many ways, then, Braidotti's formulation echoes Luisa Muraro's (1998) observation that

> [i] corpi, le cose, le esperienze, non più confinati in una cieca letteralità, producono autonomamente un senso del proprio esserci, il cui accostamento al significato che li rappresenta nell'ordine simbolico ha effetti imprevedibili (113–114)
>
> [bodies, things, experiences, no longer confined to a blind literality, autonomously produce a sense of their own being, that, when related to the meaning that represents them in the symbolic order, produces unpredictable effects].

Most importantly, for the discussion in this chapter, however, Braidotti's formulation of the body's "metaphysical surface" introduces Elspeth Probyn's conception of "outside belongings", a term which seeks "to instill some of the movement that the wish to belong carries" (*Outside Belongings* 9) and which enables the consideration of the movement from the expression of *what-ness* in 'appearance' to the investment the self has in a particular case of *what-ness*. For Probyn, moreover, "the outside […] is a more adequate figure for thinking about social relations and the social than either an interior/exterior or a center/marginal model […] [It] supposes that we think in terms of 'relations of proximity', or the surface, 'a network in which each point is distinct […] and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all'" (11; internal quotations from Foucault [1987]). Configured in such a way, the 'outside' resonates with the expansion of *who-ness* that I claim is necessary for a model of unique selfhood in the relation it draws between the general, the common – "a space that simultaneously holds and separates" – and the particular, the unique – that

"distinct point" in a network of relations. For Probyn, what mediates the surface and relations of proximity is desire (13), something which allows her to shift focus from 'identity' to 'belonging' as terms of social analysis.

The configuration of "proximity of belongings" and "the wish to belong" enables a consideration of the ways in which the expression of *what-ness* on the surface of the self's body effects or underpins that self's investment in *what* s/he 'appears'. Belonging accounts, in this way, for the way in which 'appearing' and 'being' "Ethiopian" in Ghermandi's *Regina*, and 'Black' in Lorde's *Zami* matter in ways that are reducible to the selves in each text. The relation between 'appearance' and 'belonging' also enables me then to discuss the significance of narrating difference. The relation between 'appearance' and 'belonging' permits a perspective in which narrative might be considered a way of verbally putting into presence what is exterior and visible about the self.

If the first story in *Regina* (that of il vecchio Yacob) is characterised by the violence that underpins the colonial history through the narration of particular experiences, the latter sections of the novel (which treat the protagonist, Mahlet's own experience with(in) Italy) are characterised by the affirmation of Ethiopian identity and Ethiopia's relationship with Italy. At many times, this relationship is an ambiguous one, where the history of colonialism is still felt despite more peaceful interactions with Italy. Indeed, Italy is often looked to as the source of (economic) opportunity. From, and within, the complexity of emotion manifest in that relation of past and present, the significance of belonging to, and affirming, 'Ethiopian' identity emerges.

When Mekonnen, a school friend of Mahlet's cousin, wins a scholarship to travel to Italy, "per crearsi un sapere da utilizzare un giorno per il bene dell'Etiopia (92)" [to create knowledge that would one day be used for the good of Ethiopia], Mahlet promises to herself

> che anch'io sarei andata in Italia […] vincendo una borsa di studio, come lui [Mekonnen], e poi un giorno sarei tornata […] e avrei fatto parte di quella schiera di eroi che avrebbero usato il sapere acquisito in Europa e in America per ricostruire il nostro paese (92).

> [that I too would win a scholarship to travel to Italy like him [Mekonnen], and then one day I would return […] having been part of that host of heroes that had made use of the knowledge gained in Europe and America to reconstruct our country].

Despite the representation of Italy as the source of opportunity, it is configured as a place from which one returns. Indeed, for Mahlet, that process of return is conceived of as a heroic pursuit. Italy is a place from which one returns with knowledge as a "hero". The significance of what it means to be Ethiopian is in many ways associated with this process of return. In that return, the reconstruction of the country is hoped for and the existence of an Ethiopian hero confirmed at the point of recognition. The extent to which Mekonnen and Mahlet (when she does in fact win a scholarship to travel to Italy) are made to promise to return is indicative also of an insecurity about the maintenance of an Ethiopian identity, what it means for an Ethiopian to travel to the land of its former colonisers. Travel between the countries, then, is experienced as a question of identity and where one belongs. Indeed, Mahlet's father's protest about her travelling to Italy is indicative of this question of identity in which past and present conflict. He objects, forcefully, that "[q]uelli che vanno non tornano più e io non voglio perdere mia figlia proprio nel paese che un tempo ha voluto schiacciarci sotto i suoi piedi" (119) [those who go, don't come back and I don't want to lose my daughter to the very country that once wanted to crush us under its feet"].

The narration of Mahlet's own experience in Italy – where she first lives in Perugia for a year to learn Italian, after which she studies economics and commerce in Bologna – occupies only little space within the novel, a structural means of prioritising the Ethiopian perspective of the novel: *Regina* is not a story about Italy. Focusing predominately on the practicalities and simple facts of her time abroad, the scarcity of detail is broken up by the narration of her experience of nostalgia, which is often exacerbated by the differences between her and the Italians she meets and befriends. Her nostalgia is also compacted by the news she receives of several significant changes to the world she knew in Ethiopia. The solitude in which she is left to deal with such changes is characteristic, for her, of the difference between Ethiopian and Italian conceptions of community and ways of dealing with grief. On this, she recounts: "[v]olevo dirgli [i suoi compagni di università] che per me […] la solitudine avrebbe reso il mio dolore più acuto e insopportabile. Ma loro erano italiani e io etiope. Un crepaccio largo e profondo divideva i nostri modi di vivere" (116) [I wanted to tell them (her university friends) that, for me, loneliness would have made my pain more acute and unbearable. But they were Italian, and I was Ethiopian. A wide and deep chasm separated our ways of living]. The difficulty of communicating what are, for Mahlet, incommensurable differences, reinforces the specificity of what it means to be Italian and what it means to be

Ethiopian. And this experience of incommensurability culminates in the most significant of changes to her Ethiopian world to affect her while abroad: the death of il vecchio Yacob.

Returning home to mourn his death, Mahlet tries to speak to one of the elders about her grief. She describes the inability of being able to find a way of expressing the relation between her and il vecchio Yacob and the significance of that relation as the means of having learnt what it is to be Ethiopian:

> Avrei voluto dirgli qualcosa, ma non sapevo che dire, come spiegare che c'era tanto dentro di me. Tutto un universo. Il vecchio Yacob era morto mentre io mi trovavo in terra straniera, una terra che mi aveva fatto comprendere il valore estremo della sua presenza, della presenza della mia terra, della mia cultura (126).

> [I kept crying and he was silent at my side. I wanted to say something to him, but I didn't know what to say, how to explain that there was so much inside of me. A whole universe. Il vecchio Yacob had died while I was in a foreign land, a land that had made me understand the extreme value of his presence in my land, my culture (126)].

Mahlet's inability to put into words what it means to have lost someone responsible for her relation to a "whole universe", the impossibility of accounting for the significance of her attachment to someone who sustains her way of seeing the world, *her* land, *her* culture, is ultimately contrasted, however, by her responsibility as the collector, the "singer" of other peoples stories about Ethiopian history, about what it means, and has meant, to *live* and belong to 'Ethiopian' identity.

The imperative of these stories is made manifest when a woman named Bekelech narrates her experiences in Italy and the absurdity of some of the ideas the family she worked for as a cook held about Ethiopians. She describes one such moment to Mahlet, saying, believing that, until her employment, "nessuno avesse mai visto un nero se non alla televisione" (205) [no one had ever seen a black person except on TV]. The ignorance that this lack of experience meant for one woman she worked for in particular is manifest in a series of absurd questions about Ethiopian ways of living. "E attaccava," Bekelech recounts, "«Senti…ma…ci sono i cannibali da voi?». «Senti…ma…le avete le case o avete solo le capanne?». «Senti…ma…!»" (205) [And she attacked: 'Listen…but…are there Cannibals amongst you?' 'Listen…but…do you have houses or do you only have huts?'. 'Listen…but…']. Bekelech's narrative represents a challenge, then, not only to the ignorance manifest in this Italian woman's questions, but also to the imperative that she "listen". The significance of resisting ignorant representations of this kind is crystallised in

an observation given to Mahlet by an old man; it establishes the importance of Mahlet's task as "cantora" [singer]:

> Vedi figliola, così è la verità. La non conoscenza non guarisce da nulla, dice il proverbio, e io aggiungo la mancanza di conoscenza di noi stessi può portare alla nostra stessa distruzione» (133)

> "You see my child, such is the truth. Ignorance is not a cure for anything, the proverb says, and to that I add: lacking in knowledge of ourselves can lead to our own destruction" (133).

In this observation, the relation between belonging and identity is demonstratively established. In the narration of Ethiopian experiences with Italians an identity emerges which has its significance not only in Italian reception, but also in its Ethiopian engagement. Mahlet's responsibility as "cantora" [singer] of Ethiopian identity and experience is the means by which the *what-ness* of 'Ethiopian' identity comes to acquire its significance. Mahlet's narrative practice is the means by which 'Ethiopian' is affirmed, as are the lives of those who live it. In the narration of *what* it means to be 'Ethiopian', then, narrative brings together relations between the 'appearance' of *what-ness* and the desire, the "wish" (Probyn 9), to belong to that *what-ness*, a way of being in the world that is itself only made meaningful by the desire of the unique selves who live it.

The coherence that narrative gives to the 'appearance' of, and desire to belong to, *what-ness* is also manifest in Lorde's politicisation of her difference from the women she lives with and loves in the account she gives of herself in *Zami*. Sarah Ahmed's theorisation of skin in *Strange Encounters* (2012) provides a useful way of accounting for such politicisation. For Ahmed, the skin "is not simply invested with meaning as a visual signifier of difference,"

> [i]t is not simply implicated in the (scopophilic) logic of fetishism where the visual object, the object which *can* be seen, becomes the scene of the play of differences. The skin is also a border or boundary, supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside […] But, as a border or a frame, the skin performs that peculiar destabilising logic, calling into question the exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject's becoming (or falling into) the other (44–45).

Following this, Ahmed draws from Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of the skin as an "exposure" (30) to the other in order to describe that exposure as a "passing from one to the other" (45). In many ways, Ahmed's formulation of skin here resonates with that of Cavarero's 'appearance' and Probyn's 'surface' of the 'outside'. Common to these

formulations is the movement of recognition between selves on the basis of an exteriority that is the means by which selfhood is constituted. Ahmed's conception is particularly important for the concluding discussion of Lorde's politicisation of belonging to *what-ness*, of investing oneself in the 'appearance' of difference, however, because the relation it draws between skin and boundary helps to explain the priority Lorde gives to the Blackness of her difference, the *what-ness* of her skin.

The skin as something that contains "the subject within a certain contour" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 44), as something which borders and gives boundary to the self and the other, is manifest in Lorde's affirmation of her Blackness and the anxieties and insecurities that are provoked by that affirmation. Indeed, the "contour" that skin gives to the subject in Ahmed's formulation is readily translated as the sign of the self's emotional investment in belonging to a particular case of *what-ness*. To the extent that Lorde perseveres in her affirmation of, and her belonging to, Black identity, *what-ness* acquires a constitutive significance: *what-ness* 'gives contour to' Lorde's sense of herself. The Blackness of Lorde's skin is the means through which the significance of competing regimes of difference is politicised. Skin as a boundary with a "peculiar destabilising logic" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 45) is the means through which the question of difference is engaged and its particular manifestations affirmed. To the extent that this question refers to a relational practice, skin is the surface on and through which the impressions that are left on the self and the other, by each other (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 8–9; Cataldi 145), are registered, made 'apparent'. The content, the *what-ness* of the surface, of skin difference, is thus registered within relations between selves and experienced reducibly.

Two weeks before her nineteenth birthday, Lorde travels to Mexico and, in many ways, begins to 'discover' herself in the number of new experiences she has there and through a number of relations she has with various women. But in contrast to the familiarity that is established within and by these kinds of relations (especially the love affair she has with a woman named Eudora), Lorde's sense of self in Mexico – in a way that has been much more difficult until this point in the text in the United States – is affirmed by her anonymity and the possibility of being something other than what she is at home. On this, Lorde describes:

> Moving through street after street filled with people with brown faces had a profound and exhilarating effect upon me, unlike any other experience I had known.

> Friendly strangers, passing smiles, admiring and questioning glances, the sense of being somewhere I wanted to be and had chosen. Being noticed, and accepted without being known, gave me a social contour and surety as I moved through the city sightseeing, and I felt bold and adventurous and special (154).

Lorde's sense of self here, one in which she feels herself affirmed – "bold and adventurous and special" – speaks to the contingency of Probyn's "outside" and a context of meaning that e/affects the surface, its 'appearance'. Indeed, shortly after this description, Lorde also writes that "[b]ecause of my coloring and my haircut, I was frequently asked if I was Cuban" (154), gesturing toward the ways in which the surface signifies in varied ways and with consequence. Away from home, Lorde conceives of herself in terms of an exposure, a being-visible that is dependent upon the novelty or difference of context, a place she "had chosen", where she is "noticed, and accepted without being known". The sense of belonging that constitutes this experience of place, moreover, is also the result of the surface familiarity manifest in the 'brown-ness' of people's faces. In Mexico, Lorde's 'appearance' is not immediately one associated with minority. The similarity of skin colour between her and the people she encounters is, in fact, what enables her to be "noticed, and accepted without being known". Combined, moreover, these experiences contribute to one that gives Lorde a "social contour and surety". It is a "social contour" that speaks to the significance of 'appearing' in a particular way, to the reducibility of the exterior, the surface, to the self. But the reciprocity and affirmation is often not reproduced in Lorde's experiences with women in the United States. The boundary that signals, at the same time that it destabilises, the difference between self and other can be extended then to capture the difference in the ways recognition of the surface operates when Lorde is at home and while she is away. The boundary of skin implies, through the difference of Lorde's relation to Mexico and the United States, a larger conception of boundaries: those that separate one country from another and the types of knowledge that e/affect the significance of the surface in each. The frustration that results from often being unrecognised as Black in many of her relations with women in the United States is ultimately, then, what gives rise to Lorde's politics of belonging, to a politics of difference in Blackness and the *what-ness* that that skin colour means for Lorde.

In an interview with Adrienne Rich in *Sister Outsider*, Lorde observes that

> [t]here are different choices facing Black and white women in life, certain specifically different pitfalls surrounding us because of our experiences, our color. Not only are some of the problems that face us dissimilar, but some of the entrapments and the weapons used to neutralize us are not the same (103).

In this observation, Lorde appeals to the 'intersections' of women's experience, to the necessity of being attentive to the varied ways in which women's experiences are made different precisely in the experience of them. Lorde's is an appeal to the competing regimes of difference that manifest themselves in ordinary and political experience. And – in a way that recalls Rich's call for the reconnection of "our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman" (9) – the priority that Lorde gives to the intersection of women's experiences is the result of the presumption of sameness in many of her friends' formulations of women's oppression and the often vulgar insistence on this sameness. Indeed, Lorde recounts that "[e]ven" one of her lovers, Muriel

> seemed to believe that as lesbians, we were all outsiders and all equal in our outsiderhood. 'We're all niggers' she used to say and I hated to hear her say it. It was wishful thinking based on little fact; the ways in which it was true languished in the shadow of those many ways in which it would always be false (203).

In an earlier passage of the biomythography, moreover, Lorde locates her specific difference from the presumed sameness of oppression as lesbians in the *what-ness* of Blackness. That "location" contains both the assertion and affirmation of a difference lived personally and on the surface. Lorde writes:

> I was gay and Black. The latter fact was irrevocable: armor, mantle, and wall. Often, when I had the bad taste to bring that fact up in conversation with other gay-girls who were not Black, I would get the feeling that I had in some way breached some sacred bond of gayness, a bond which I always knew was not sufficient for me.
>   This was not to deny the closeness of our group, nor the mutual aid of those insane, glorious, and contradictory years It is only to say that I was acutely conscious […] that my relationship as a Black woman to our shared lives was different from theirs, and would be, gay or straight (180-181).

This passage reads as an important defence of *what-ness* and the particularity, or personality that underpins and justifies its affirmation. Lorde describes her Blackness as "armor, mantle, and wall", attesting to Ahmed's formulation of the separation between self and other that the skin-as-boundary enacts. Lorde's qualification toward the end of the passage, "this was not to deny the closeness of our group", suggests, moreover, that difference is not antagonistic toward relationality, but precisely what ought to underpin it. The implication from this, then, is that what antagonises relationality is the presumption of sameness of experience that circulates within it. Lorde's *Zami*, then, is

the narrative means by which the 'appearance' of *what-ness*, of difference, is affirmed and made reducible to the self, to Lorde. "I was acutely conscious," she concludes this passage, "that my relationship as Black woman to our shared lives was different from theirs". Lorde's Blackness is a *what-ness* of identity to which she belongs, to which, as a means of asserting the importance of, and her investment in, she affirms her belonging. The surface, skin, is one of the most formative aspects of her sense of self, then, and, as the content and sign of a particular case of *what-ness*, Blackness, and the narration of experience to which it relates, *matters*.

In the relation of exteriority between selves, that relation in which 'appearance' and 'surface' inform the self's investment in a particular case of *what-ness*, the content of the self's identity acquires a significance reducible to selfhood. Ghermandi's narration of what it means to be 'Ethiopian', then, and in relation to a history of Italian colonialism, is one that *makes* particular the experience of what is visible about the self before others. 'Appearance', as "mere bodily existence" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 176) and as the interaction of plural and reciprocally exposed selves in relation, is politicised in a narrative of the varied ways in which the self 'appears' her/himself before others. In Lorde's *Zami*, narrative is the means by which difference is recognised and affirmed in the *what-ness* of Black identity. 'Surface' and 'skin' become signs by which the uniqueness of *what-ness* is recognised, demonstrated, affirmed. Ghermandi and Lorde's self-writings offer a means of expanding Cavarero's category of *who-ness*, then, in the ways in which each author accounts for the reducibility of a *what-ness* that Cavarero determines irreducible and general. Ghermandi and Lorde account for the ways in which *what-ness* is invested into by the self. In the next chapter the significance of investment is taken up in a discussion of the phenomenological and affective means by which narrative carries and expresses the uniqueness of the self.

3 | On Being Penetrable:
The Affective Structure of Uniqueness and Its Recognition |

In this chapter I discuss the unsettling self-writing in Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2006 [2005]) and Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (2005 [1947]). The discussion of these texts is phenomenological in perspective; it takes as its point of departure the claim that narrative and affect insist upon, and are indeed instances of, the self's orientation in time and space by sense-experience (cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [2008]). The question for this chapter, then, a question engaged by Didion and Levi's memoirs, is thus "how is uniqueness experienced, how is it recognised (in narrative)?" I argue that the recognition of uniqueness in narrative, as a phenomenon of sense experience, is chiefly *affective*, a term with which I mean to capture an experience which is not immediately conscious, nor the product of a special psychology; which depends upon and models the interrelation of mind and body; and which attests to "forces of encounter" that insist "beyond emotion" without opposing it (Gregg and Seigworth 2). This latter criterion is especially important because the memoirs this chapter discusses articulate states of grief, loss, and despair, in the case of Didion, and shame, torment, and fear, in the case of Levi. What is "emotional" in, and about, *The Year* and *Se questo*, however, operates more complexly than the common-sense understanding of that word. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's (2010) formulation of affect as the "force or forces of encounter" is significant, then, because it offers a means of emphasising the relational structure of recognition and the *work* of emotional states within it, but beyond the origin or container of emotion, beyond the self.

The affective dimension in the phenomenology of recognising uniqueness offers a means of more fully comprehending two observations that underpin this chapter's study. The first is Didion's explanation, early in *The Year*, that her memoir "is a case in which I need more than words to find the meaning. This is a case in which I need whatever it is I think or believe to be penetrable, if only for myself" (8). The second is from Levi's *Se questo*, where he writes:

> Il bisogno di raccontare agli «altri», di fare gli «altri» partecipi, aveva assunto fra noi, prima della liberazione e dopo, il carattere di un impulso immediato e violento, tanto da rivaleggiare con gli altri bisogni elementari: il libro è stato scritto per soddisfare a questo bisogno; in primo luogo quindi a scopo di liberazione interiore (9)

[Between us, the need to narrate to "others", to make "others" participate, had assumed the character, before the liberation and afterwards, of an immediate and violent impulse, one strong enough to compete with basic needs: the book was written to satisfy this need; in the first place, then, its purpose is one of internal liberation].

Didion's "need", beyond words, in *The Year*'s account of her husband's death and daughter's sickness "to be penetrable", as well as the force of Levi's impulse to have others "participate", through narratable experience, in the violence and horror of his internment in Auschwitz-Monowitz, guides this chapter's formulation of the affective sense-experience that structures the recognition of uniqueness. Before I turn more comprehensively to Didion and Levi's text, however, fuller explanation of the affective dimension in the phenomenology of recognising uniqueness is required and this depends crucially upon Cavarero's formulation of uniqueness and "il sapere irriflesso dell'assaporarmi" (*Tu che* 50) ["the unreflecting knowledge of my 'sense-of-self'" (*Relating Narratives* 35)]. Cavarero's concept of *assaporarsi* is crucial for understanding the phenomenality and affectivity of uniqueness that I claim to be at work in Didion and Levi's memoirs. *Assaporarsi* conceptualises the affective content of relationality and recognition, things that are essential for formulating the phenomenon of recognising uniqueness in the textual selves of self-writing.

In *Tu che mi guardi*, Cavarero claims that the content or textuality of a life-story is inessential to the knowledge the self has of her/himself as a unique and narratable (50). She exemplifies this claim in her description of the experience of an amnesiac (52-53). Having lost her memory, having forgotten who she is, the amnesiac in Cavarero's example knows, despite her loss of memory, that she has a life-story and that she is constituted within it, even without her knowledge of it. The life-story of the amnesiac is not *familiar* to her, and yet, Cavarero writes, "non ha affatto *dimenticato* che lo statuto di narrabilità – il suo gusto irriflesso di ricordar*si* – pertiene all'esistente" (52; original emphasis) ["has not forgotten at all that narratability – the self's unreflective sense […] for recalling itself – belongs to the existent" (*Relating Narratives* 37)]. The textual detail of the amnesiac's life-story is lost and still she knows, because of her relations to others (who, knowing their own stories, possess an identity), that she has a life-story of her own. The narration of her life-story (by others) functions as a reification, however, because it lacks familiarity, a familiarity that cannot simply be restored to her through the detail of her life-story's textuality (*Tu che mi guardi* 53). Thus Cavarero claims:

il *sapore familiare* del sé narrabile non è affatto un risultato del testo medesimo né sta nella costruzione della storia. Sta invece in una pulsione narrante che non è mai in potenza bensì sempre in atto, anche quando si astiene dal 'produrre' ricordi o dal 'riprodurre' accadimenti (50; my emphasis)

[The *familiar sense* of the narratable self is not the result of text itself, and neither does it lie in the construction of the story. It lies rather in a narrating *impulse* that is never in 'potentiality' but rather in 'actuality', even when it refrains from 'producing' memories or 'reproducing' past occurrences (*Relating Narratives* 35; my emphasis)].

In this account of a 'familiar sense', and in the description of the amnesiac, what emerges from the relation Cavarero draws between textuality, the uniqueness of the self by virtue of her/his narratability and 'sense', is a crucial point of departure, or clue, for determining the phenomenality of uniqueness. The clue lies in the deceptive English translation of Cavarero's original "sapore familiare" and its relation to "assaporarsi" (*Tu che* 50), which is rendered as "self-sensing" (*Relating Narratives* 35). More specific, and indeed more evocative, than the translation of these terms suggests, "sapore familiare" rather means 'familiar taste' and "assaporarsi", 'tasting or savouring oneself'. This is an important distinction to make because 'taste' rather than 'sense' and 'tasting oneself' rather than 'self-sensing' suggests a more particular form of recognition that relates uniqueness to a kind of sense-experience equivalent to the texture and complexity of taste-sensation. 'Familiar taste' and 'tasting oneself' imply and involve a concentration of experience that is otherwise missing in the English 'familiar sense' and 'self-sensing'. It is important to note, to qualify, at this point, however, that with this kind of specification of terms, 'familiar taste' should not be reduced only to the sense of taste. What *assaporarsi* offers to a phenomenology of recognising uniqueness is an affective experience that is not immediately conscious, but which is immediately 'bodily' nonetheless. Key to understanding the significance of assaporarsi then is the complexity and texture of sense-experience, its richness.

In Cavarero's account of the relation the amnesiac has with herself, a relation in which the familiarity of the self is coterminous with the relative coherence of the self to the self – indeed, Cavarero describes this relation as the "unità" [unity] of self and life-story [*Tu che* 53]) – 'taste' [*sapore*] has determinative significance. It is the phenomenological means by which the self relates to her/himself without reflection, that is, immediately, spontaneously. But the relationship the self has with her/himself, and its dependant determination by 'taste' is not localised or contained within that self; its function is more general. 'Taste' and the relations it binds, is also the means by which

uniqueness is experienced, understood, *recognised* in others. 'Taste', as the richness and texture of sense-experience, is the phenomenological basis of uniqueness and the underpinning function of narratability.

Cavarero indicates what I describe as the outward movement or extension of 'taste' – from the spontaneous and uncontrollable recognition of oneself as unique to the recognition of uniqueness in others – when she defends the phenomenon of recognising uniqueness from deduction. On the nature of the relation between the self and the other, Cavarero claims this relation is structured or conditioned by an ethics that

> "trova […] un presupposto basilare nel riconoscimento che ogni essere umano, qualsiasi siano le sue qualità giudicabili, ha il suo ingiudicabile splendore in un'identità personale che è irrimediabilmente la sua storia (114)

> ["finds […] a fundamental principle in the recognition that every human being, whatever her qualities, has her unjudgable [sic] splendour in a personal identity that *is* irrefutably her story" (*Relating Narratives* 87)].

But this form or function of recognition is not one

> che appartiene all'ambito classico della teoria morale, né si tratta di un principio da cui l'etica può essere *dedotta*. Si tratta piuttosto di un riconoscimento irriflesso, già operante nella natura esibitiva del sé, che si rende ancor più esplicito nella pratica, attiva e desiderante, del reciproco racconto (*Tu che mi guardi* 114; original emphasis).

> ["that belongs to the classical realm of moral theory, and neither is it a principle whose ethic can be *deduced*. This is rather an irreflexive recognition, already at work in the exhibitive nature of the self, which is rendered even more explicit in the active and desiring practice of reciprocal storytelling" (*Relating Narratives* 88; original emphasis)].

In the relation between the self and the other, in the recognition of each as unique, there is no rational and independent measure or always-conscious and reflective determination of uniqueness. Uniqueness is not the product of deduction; the relational character of its ethics is not "l'oggetto di una possibile valutazione oppure il risultato di una giudiziosa strategia (114) ["is not the object of a possible appraisal or the result of a grandiose strategy" (*Relating Narratives* 88)]. It is instead *ir*reflexively recognised. Were the relational character of this ethic deductive, or the "object of a possible appraisal", the thing(s) deduced would recuperate, for Cavarero, the error she discerns in the determination of the self by her/his *what-ness*. That is, the deductive proof that might substantiate the claim of uniqueness would inevitably require predication through a process of evaluation. But the predication of uniqueness, or the determination, evaluation, of what makes

someone unique, falls back into the logic of *what-ness*: 'This person is unique *because of* or *by virtue of…*' In a statement of this kind, deduction attributes to the self a number of qualities that, for Cavarero, can be applied to a number of people *generally*, but not uniquely. Not only does deduction contradict the logic of uniqueness *by way of* predication, but in predication itself, a kind of universalism is installed in logical consequence: if a person is unique because s/he is middle-class, for example, then middle-class-ness, as the proof of uniqueness, acquires a universality that dissolves the particularity, the singularity of uniqueness. There is, instead, something quite different at work in the ethical relation between unique selves, then, and in the experience, the recognition, of uniqueness.

Despite its significance as the means by which recognition functions in relations of uniqueness, however, the ethics Cavarero elaborates in *Tu che* is, for this chapter at least, secondary in importance to the very thing that is sustained within it: *irreflexive* and familiar 'taste'. But the ethics that supports this irreflexive and familiar sense does shed light on the phenomenality of uniqueness that underpins my engagement with Didion and Levi's memoirs. That is because, in designating deductive logic as that which the relational ethics of uniqueness *contrasts*, rational delineation, categorisation, or specification is excluded from the phenomenological processes of uniqueness and a different mechanism or means of its recognition is instead installed. More concisely: the ethics formulated by Cavarero has its significance here only as a means of signalling that to which it corresponds, that which acquires an ethical character in the first place: the operation of "taste". I have introduced the notion of 'taste' in this way – that is, *through* the relational and ethical character attributed to it – because its pre-ethical structure has an ambiguous or unaccounted-for operation in Cavarero's philosophy, one that runs the risk of contradicting the very opposition she draws between 'taste' and deduction. Indeed, that there is no comprehensive account of the 'thing' to which a relational ethic responds, that there is no comprehensive account of 'tasting' itself represents a significant gap in Cavarero's philosophy. This gap, and its risk of contradicting Cavarero's exclusion of deduction, is, however, though paradoxically, an opening for the substance of a phenomenological interpretation of uniqueness. This is because, as it appears in her work, and when read closely, Cavarero's ambiguous 'taste' necessitates an account that rescues it from a rational transcendentalism that runs counter to her general emphasis on the finitude ('this-ness' or 'thus-and-not-otherwise-ness' in time, natality) of the embodied self and her formulation of recognition as something distinct from

deduction. That is, in designating 'sense' as distinct from deduction, and in formulating that same 'sense' as irreflexive, Cavarero inadvertently ascribes an *a priori* facticity to the recognition of uniqueness which undermines the significance of the function of narrative imperative to her model of selfhood.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's alternative, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2008 [1945]), to empiricist and intellectualist attitudes toward sense experience considers sensation as an experience or attitude of intentionality, one in which sensation is "neither a state or a quality [empiricism], nor the consciousness of a state or of a quality [intellectualism]" (242). Sensation is rather the *situation* in which the self is brought into communion or sympathetic relation with objects without positing them *as* objects (248). Sensation, sense experience, is the situation of the self's being "connatural with the world" (252); it is the means by which the self and her/his world are synchronised. To this extent Merleau-Ponty dissolves the distance, in perception, between subject and object, self and world, in empiricism and intellectualism. This is because sensation is not a state of consciousness reconstituted in the self, or a being-conscious of an already-constituted world, but the means by which the world is continuously *in* constitution. Sensation is thus not a *state* of consciousness in the self, or a simply being conscious of seeing visible things that the world offers. It is instead a co-involvement of the self and the world in which the latter offers something to be seen and to which the former responds by putting into a particular field of perception (whichever of the senses) what is there to be received (251-252). The world affects me and I bring it into effect within a single interaction. This interaction is one in which the senses are not only co-involved with the world, but with each other, being unified by or in one body and its associated universe (262). I need not be conscious of what I am seeing, for example, in order to see, and, in seeing, my experience of perception is not limited to one sense modality, but affected by others: the auditory, the tactile, etc. (262). Perception is an embodied situation in which different fields (252) of sensation orientate my relation to the world.

My body is "the vehicle of being in the world" (93), the means through which my experience and sensation of it unfolds. The relation Merleau-Ponty draws between the senses and the sympathetic co-existence of the self's relation to the world, is significant for the sensing of uniqueness, then, because it delimits the function of conscious reflection and points to the most immediate way in which the self relates to her/his world before that relation is taken up in objective thought. The significance lies in the possibility of now attributing to the irreflexivity of 'tasting' uniqueness a process of

relationality determined by sensation rather than the installation of an *a priority* to the self's recognition of uniqueness in her/himself and others. The emphasis in Merleau-Ponty's account of perception on embodiment and the sensory resonates with Cavarero's general emphasis in her model of selfhood on the finitude of embodied uniqueness in the relation between the self and the other. The 'taste', the 'tasting', of uniqueness can thus be figured as one that partakes in the more general account of the senses in perception that Merleau-Ponty delineates. The irreflexivity of the 'taste' of uniqueness is not an *a priori* fact, but something that is not always immediately or necessarily available to conscious reflection. In 'tasting' uniqueness, in the self's relation to the richness and texture of experience, of recognition, a phenomenology of perception is at work, and this, I argue, is one in which narrative and the accumulation of affect have principal significance.

Implicit within 'tasting' uniqueness and, indeed, in the more conventional or general understanding of sense (the perceptual function of the human senses) is the suggestion of a '*making* sense'. Indeed, this is the kind of operation of sense that Merleau-Ponty foregrounds in his effort to relate the body and the world in their co-existence, their co-naturalness: the senses work to inform perception in a single interaction of the body and the world such that, contemporaneously, the world offers itself to me and, in responding to it, I respond by *putting* into perception what is there to be perceived. Through the senses, I make a particular sense of the world. The perception of uniqueness follows a similar process: uniqueness is a particular grasp on the world, a particular orientation of the senses.

In the narration of life-stories, the self offers to the other a view of the way in which her/his life has been lived. This exchange requires attention not simply to the fact of the 'co-appearance' of embodied selves, but also to the lived-experiences of those selves beyond the context of the relation of 'appearance'. Narrative offers more to perception than the uncomplicated acknowledgment of the fact of difference in embodied 'appearance'. Narrative is more than a testament to the fleshy otherwise-ness of the self and the other; narrative is the structure given to the meaningful difference between self and other, something that 'appearance' announces by the simple and observable fact of embodiment: I am not you; you are not me. But in narrative the identity of the self is of greater and more sedimented complexity. Narrative is, in this way, of greater phenomenological import than the matter-of-fact-ness of 'appearance', because it offers more to perception and insists upon a more complex orientation of the

self to her/himself, to the other, and to the worlds of both. Narrative is the means by which uniqueness is grasped; its phenomenal *content* is what contributes to, indeed, underpins, the sense of the self and other as unique. Where, in 'co-appearance', a relation of superficial or immediate difference is established, that difference acquires a meaningful status as unique in narration because, in their co-involvement, the senses are required to apprehend the singular complexity that is *selfhood*, and not simply the obviousness of the corporeal, of fleshy embodiment. Against Cavarero's claim to the inessentiality of content, of textuality, narrative organises non-deductive, affective responses to content.

In departing from the physicality of uniqueness, the corporeality of embodiment, greater emphasis is placed on Cavarero's formulation of the *narrabilità* [narratability] of the self. But where, for the latter, *narrabilità* is the general or essential characteristic of the self in any context, here, it serves to carry the implication of 'corporeality' to express the 'this-ness' of a thing, its substance, *its situated or sedimented reality*, but makes this meaning more appropriate to the textual worlds offered by Didion and Levi. Where Cavarero is concerned with the embodied *narrabilità* of the self as unique, I am concerned with the 'storied' existence of uniqueness as it is represented in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Se questo è un uomo* as "narrabile" [narratable] (*Tu che* 50; *Relating Narratives* 35). Where, for Cavarero, *narrabilità* [narratability] is corroborated, in a certain way, by the 'appearance' of the embodied corporeality of the self and other in relation, here, *narrabilità* designates the 'storied' presence of the uniquenesses that are authors and the narrators. Narratability parallels in this sense, the "analytic awareness of the author" that H. Porter Abbott discerns in the reader's response to auto(bio)graphy ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 601). Because the corporeality of Didion and Levi, and the actuality of the things they have experienced, can really only ever be *re*presented in self-writing, the sensing of their uniqueness by the reader of their texts is less the result of the spontaneity of lived-experience than it is the result of an intentional *affecting*, an intentional structuring of affect.

Without installing Didion or Levi as the anti-Barthesian origin of meaning, I argue, then, that the uniqueness of Didion and Levi, and of their memoirs, is experienced most significantly, most movingly, though unsettlingly, in an affective response to content that Didion and Levi themselves provoke. In this way, affect is read as the response to sense experience, to "tasting" uniqueness: I 'taste' the uniqueness of the other; I am affected. As such, the affective is formative of the phenomenality of

uniqueness. To this extent Cavarero's "sapore familiare" (*Tu che* 50) [familiar taste] can be read as the affective response to the experience of recognising uniqueness. The sensation of uniqueness now designates an affective quality and the significance of its effect; the study of it asks *how* does affect *e*ffect uniqueness? What is the affect of uniqueness? How, in their memoirs do Didion and Levi affect the reading of uniqueness? This is to engage with narrative content in a way that resits its objectification, its deduction.

In the claim that affect can be structured in service of the presentation – the bringing to presence – of uniqueness and its content, however, I signal a particular attitude toward affect that must first be outlined. Gregg and Seigworth write that affect

> is found in those intensities that pass body to body […] in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations (1; original emphasis).

This definition is useful here because it indicates an attitude toward affect that is common within Cultural Studies, one that gives significant emphasis to affect's non-substantiality. Gregg and Seigworth's definition resonates, in many ways, with the function I give affect in this chapter. But in other important ways their definition is that against which I offset my own deployment of affect as a category through which to read uniqueness. Indeed, what I am (reductively) characterising as the common attitude toward affect within Cultural Studies conceives of affect as an abstraction of unbound, ungrounded, non-representational dynamics or relations of forces or intensities. For Gregg and Seigworth, affect is not a *thing*; it is not substantial; even as 'force' and 'intensity', affect is anthropomorphised. In its capacity to 'pass', 'circulate', 'resonate', and 'stick' to bodies and objects, affect is independent of those bodies and objects; it is independent of the subject, the self.

Sara Ahmed (2004) reinforces this idea in her consideration of hate, wherein such an emotion is understood to be "economic […,] [circulating] between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement" (119). For Ahmed, emotion is implicated in an affective economy (a field of relations of difference and displacement), a concept which, for her, requires that, "[r]ather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to

mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective (119). As a kind of mediation between these things, affect, emotion, does not "positively reside in a subject or figure" (119) but 'binds' them together. Indeed, for Ahmed, "the nonresidence of emotions is what makes them 'binding'" (119).

Anna Gibbs (2001) metaphorically figures the centrality of affect's circulation amongst and between selves, furthermore, as "contagion". Affect, she writes, "leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear – in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion. Gibbs writes that such a conceptualisation of affective contagion contributes to a model of subjectivity that rethinks "the notions of inside and outside", rendering "redundant the concept of boundary". Gibbs determines the significance of this redundancy by aligning its "rendering" with Brian Massumi's (1993) problematisation of cultural critique that conceives the self as "bounded space" (31). An approach that considers the self a "bounded space" is a problem for Massumi because it treats "boundaries as founding", it considers "*limitation* to be constitutive" and neglects to consider their "fluidification and coincidence" (31; original emphasis). For Gibbs, then, affective contagion undermines the constraint of boundaries because of its intersubjective capacity to affect. And yet, the emphasis placed on the ephemerality of affect is significantly counterintuitive to the intersubjectivity and unbounded-ness for which it means to account. I do not mean, however, that affect is instead substantial where it is claimed to be non-substantial, bound where it is described as unbound, or fixed rather than in flux. The intersubjective capacity of affect *to* affect is undermined, however, in the emphasis placed on its dislocation from the self: without the boundaries of self and other, however fluid those boundaries might be, the *inter*subjective loses its significance. The impact of affect is lost in the over-determination of its ephemerality.

In her consideration of the relations between affect, desire, recognition, and pedagogy, Megan Watkins (2010) introduces her observations with the claim that the autonomy and ephemerality of affect neglects to account "for the distinction Spinoza makes between *affectus* and *affectio*, the force of an affecting body and the impact it leaves on the one affected" (269). Indeed, Spinoza, the first to account for the (philosophical) significance of affect, gives an important definition of the latter:

> By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting [*affectus*] is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause

of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise a passion (III, D3, 70; original emphasis).

Alongside the capacity to affect, moreover, the body, for Spinoza, is also something, importantly, which is *affected* such that "[t]he human body can undergo many changes [*affectio*] and nevertheless retain impressions, *or* traces of the objects […] and consequently, the same images of things (III, Post. 2, 70; original emphasis). From Spinoza (and Watkins), then, I take the very real process by which the body affects and is affected and, with the two capacities combined, delimit the nature and function of affect for the analysis of Didion and Levi's memoirs. What follows, then, is an account of the ways in which Didion and Levi, and the "storied", narratable, selves within their memoirs, affect the reader so as to recognise uniqueness. In this way, though I maintain Lawrence Grossberg's (1992) observation that "affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretation" (81), affect does nevertheless contribute to, indeed, underpin the phenomenality of sensing – *recognising* – uniqueness in narrative.

In the opening to *The White Album* (2009), Didion writes that "[w]e live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience" (11). "We tell ourselves stories," she continues, "*in order to live*" (11; my emphasis). The essay in which she attributes this significance to narrative is, however, also one in which the impulse toward narrative loses its force. Instead of the "imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images," Didion rather experiences life, between 1966 and 1971, as "flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no "meaning" beyond their temporary arrangement" (13). This observation is sharply contrasted in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which was published twenty-six years later. *The Year* is testament to a narrative technology in which particular "meaning" is suspended, held on to, a narrative technology in which the significance of "meaning" becomes the mechanism of hope. *The Year* elaborates the experience of loss and grief in order to overcome these very things, "in order to survive". It does this through what Paul Ricoeur (1984) describes as "predicative assimilation" (x), where the plot of a narrative "'grasps together'" and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole" (x). The narration of grief and loss in *The Year* is the means by which these

things come to make 'sense', rather than find resolution or catharsis. *The Year* is, and accounts for, a kind of phenomenology of grief and optimism where the "grasping together" of narrative structure functions as an exercise or practice in which "making sense" is crucial.

On December 30, 2003, Didion's husband, John Gregory Dunne, died of "a sudden massive coronary event" (7). Didion and Dunne, having returned from visiting their daughter in hospital, made plans for dinner. In the midst of what is repeatedly described by Didion as an ordinary event, the preparation of a salad, the pouring of Scotch, and Dunne's musing on the significance of World War One, the latter slumps over the table and in that instant dies. "At first," Didion writes, "I thought he was making a failed joke, an attempt to make the difficulty of the day seem manageable" (10). Realising that he was not, in fact, joking, Didion attempts to Heimlich, unsuccessfully: "I remember the sense of his weight as he fell forward, first against the table, then to the floor," Didion writes. She then calls for an ambulance and later watches as "three, maybe four" paramedics attempt to resuscitate her husband with injections and defibrillating paddles (11). Didion then rides in a second ambulance to New York–Presbyterian hospital and watches as the gurney carrying her husband is taken inside. There, Didion recounts, a "man was waiting in the driveway. Everyone else in sight was wearing scrubs. He was not. "Is this the wife," he said to the driver, then turned to me. "I'm your social worker," he said, and I guess that is when I must have known" (13).

Didion responds to the death of her husband with a year of magical thinking, one in which seemingly rational responses to her husband's death are ambiguously belated, as in the moment recounted above. It is a year in which Didion comes to terms with the loss of her husband, a year in which the comprehension of his death is not completely or consciously registered, but instead, and in a particular sense, postponed. Didion's year of magical thinking is one in which the 'meaning' or the structure of her world prior to Dunne's death is suspended, the moments leading up to it protracted. It is a year in which Didion reorients herself within a difference that is *felt* before it is consciously apprehended or accepted. It is also a year in which she attends to her daughter, Quintana Roo Dunne, who is hospitalised for much of the text with severe pneumonia – a condition that is ultimately responsible for her death shortly before the publication of *The Year*. Didion's year of magical thinking is, thus, a painful one, and the magical thinking that underpins it includes: Didion's sifting through her memories in an attempt to rearrange the sequence of events leading up to Dunne's death; the preservation of his

shoes in the event that he returns; a retrospective attitude that scrutinizes and invests the events leading up to his death with portentous and symbolic meaning; and circuitous driving routes which are part of avoiding situations of overwhelming emotional response to places and situations that recall Dunne.

There are two levels to the analysis of this year of magical thinking and though they coincide, or are inevitably mixed up in each other, the first considers Didion's (affective) reorientation of self as a case of what Lauren Berlant (2006, 2011) terms "cruel optimism" and the second looks to the *narration* of this process as the means by which the phenomenality of uniqueness is demonstrably at work in the representation of affective conditions. That is, the first level is concerned with the significance of what Didion narrates and the second level is concerned with the narrative itself, with the narrative structure of affective content and its implications for the phenomenality of recognising uniqueness.

In the beginning of *The Year*, Didion writes that her memoir "is a case in which I need more than words to find the meaning. This is a case in which I need whatever I think or believe to be penetrable, if only for myself (8). Here, Didion establishes what Philippe Lejeune describes as "the autobiographical pact" (19), explaining and thus justifying or excusing the ostensible narcissism in writing about oneself. The autobiographical pact establishes a relation between the writer and reader, between the self (of self-writing) and the other (who reads that memoir). It is a relation, moreover, mediated by words, by language, and the mediative function of such words is not one of simple communication, but of penetrability. In the establishment of an autobiographical pact, then, Didion needs *The Year* not only to account, represent, or convey an experience but to have it penetrate. *The Year* is given the task of establishing a *force* between its narrative subject and its audience: "need" and "penetrable" indicate an implicit violence or intensity that is affective and intentional. Didion's memoir *intends*, projects, or gives trajectory to, a relation of affect. In its intentionality, its being-directed-toward-ness, the affective acquires a structure that relates the private world of Didion's experience with the publicity of its reception: the public worlds of its readers. Didion's uniqueness, the singularity of her experience, is offered as something to confront and be confronted by the plurality of a public scene of reception, one which – because the intention of its task is to penetrate – installs or reinforces the boundaries or distinctions between private and public worlds themselves.

Yet what is interesting about *The Year* is a narrative structure that threatens to dissolve this same distinction. It is a narrative structure that ostensibly obscures Didion's uniqueness and the singularity of her experience of her husband's death. The year of magical thinking that Didion experiences is given a narrative structure in her memoir that ostensibly gives greater weight to the general, to the universal. This is most predominantly the consequence of the explanatory force or function Didion determines in intertexuality. Lauren Berlant's conception of 'cruel optimism', however, offers an important means of interpreting this intertextuality that rescues uniqueness from an obscure universality. 'Cruel optimism' offers a way of reading Didion's intertextuality as phenomenological process (one based in narrative sense) that is counterintuitive not simply to the remedial function of story-telling that Didion discerns in *The White Album* and hopes for in *The Year* – but also a means of reaffirming the uniqueness of Didion's experience *in its counterintuitive posturing of the general*. That is, 'cruel optimism' offers a way of reading the intertextuality of Didion's memoir as a narrative logic that affectively maintains the private, the unique, *within* the public and without prioritising the significance of privacy or of the public. Through 'cruel optimism', intertextuality is read as a means by which the sense or significance of uniqueness results from a privacy that matters publicly. The relation between the public and the private discerns the phenomenal significance of uniqueness. Or, rather, the relation between the public and the private indicates, indeed, underpins the phenomenality of reading, of recognising, uniqueness.

In his "Reflections on Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*", Roger Luckhurst (2009) locates Didion's memoir within the generic conventions of "pathography" a type of trauma memoir that treats the experience of "disease, dysfunction or death" (91). The term was coined by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (1999) and Luckhurst, drawing from the former's study, attempts to account for the significant success of Didion's contribution to the genre in the midst of its burgeoning popularity. For Luckhurst, moreover, Didion's memoir is "extraordinary because of its very ordinariness: it tells us that we have become so sequestered from death that we need a literature to script our mourning behaviours" (98). *The Year*, for Luckhurst, has its significance in its account of "the brute and boring experience of mourning" (100).

The ordinariness of Didion's experience in *The Year*, furthermore, is, for Luckhurst, an example of Ross Chambers' (2004) conception of "aftermath cultures", the defining character of which is "a strange nexus of denial and acknowledgment"

(Luckhurst 92; cf. Chambers xxi-xxii). Indeed, Chambers writes that the tension between denial and acknowledgement in "aftermath cultures" is the effect of a negotiation of the temporal (Chambers xxii). "If denial functions as a readable symptom of collective pain," Chambers writes:

> acknowledgment of the pain is inevitably conditioned [...] by the atmosphere of denial in which it arises and with which it must negotiate: the pastness of the event, its apparent insignificance relative to the affairs of the present, the obliviousness in which most people seem to manage, without difficulty, to live. Acknowledgment will therefore always seem inadequate in relation to the known magnitude of the event because it is necessarily a matter of counterdenial, involving indirection, deferment, appropriation, makeshift devices of indexicality that function [...] as a symptom of a certain reality, but not the reality 'itself' (xxii).

This is certainly true of Didion's memoir. The difference between 'then' and 'now', the difference of temporalities, is structured by the tensions between rationalised acknowledgment of Dunne's death, its matter-of-fact-ness, and a psychical process in which his death is denied, its matter-of-fact-ness not wholly grasped and instead imagined as something reversible. This tension is not simply evident in Didion's memoir, however; it is its content. Further still, denial and acknowledgement are often coextensive with one another as in the moment Didion justifies keeping Dunne's shoes:

> I stopped at the door to the room.
> I could not give away the rest of his shoes.
> I stood there for a moment, then realized why: he would need shoes if he was
> to return.
> The recognition of this thought by no means eradicated the thought.
> I have still not tried to determine (say, by giving away the shoes) if the thought
> has lost its power (*The Year* 37).

Earlier, and in a similar way, moreover, Didion rationalises her desire to be alone the first night after Dunne's death as something necessary "so that he could come back" (33). Indeed, this moment in which the irrational is rationalised is later realised as the very beginning of her year of magical thinking (33). It is a year, then, in which denial and acknowledgement are never quite complete and rarely experienced at odds with one another: it is the very relation between acknowledgment and denial that characterises Didion's experience of magical thinking. And yet, despite the ways that Didion's memoir 'fits' the generic conventions of pathography and exemplifies 'aftermath culture', the position of these two things within the broader genre of 'trauma narrative' undermines the very ordinariness of grief and mourning that Didion brings to the fore. *The Year* conveys the ordinariness *in* trauma, but its designation as an example of pathography, or

aftermath culture, deprioritises the ordinariness *of* trauma itself. What is interesting in Didion's year of magical thinking is not simply the emotion or severity of her loss, the traumatic significance of Dunne's death and what comes afterwards, but the process by which these things are survived. It is in the very process of Didion's magical thinking that the affective structure of her uniqueness manifests itself as 'sensible' content and its narrative or aesthetic structuration in *The Year* assists the phenomenological process in which that 'sensible' quality of uniqueness is recognised. "This is a matter of different emphasis," to borrow Berlant's phrase, "not of a theoretical negation" (*Cruel Optimism* 8). It is not the case, then, that 'trauma' is not apparent in *The Year* – indeed, 'traumatic', in its general usage does quite aptly describe Didion's experience of her husband's death – nor that theories of 'trauma narrative' *incorrectly* situate or relate the experience of Didion's year of magical thinking. It is rather the case that the priority of 'trauma' displaces the significance of the ordinary processes by which trauma is survived. And the distance that the conception of 'cruel optimism' offers from traumatic and melancholic experience will help clarify this claim.

In the introduction to the analytic parameters of *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant writes

in critical theory and mass society generally, "trauma" has become the primary genre of the last eighty years for describing the historical present as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed just to keep on going and with respect to which people felt solid and confident (10).

For Berlant, trauma theory, because it typically prioritises the "exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe", implicitly and too easily, too neatly suggests the subject's archival of the intensities of a traumatic event (10). Instead of 'trauma' – its implicit presumption of a "slammed-door departure" from the normal or the ordinary – Berlant proposes the notion of "crisis ordinariness" as a better means of describing events "that force people to adapt to an unfolding change" (10). For Berlant, the alternative description or focus on "crisis" is better suited to the unfolding of irruptive events because it is "not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (10). The distinction between 'crisis' and 'trauma' is, for Berlant, one which more appropriately or usefully considers the "*on-going activity* of precariousness in the present" and opens up "the scenes we have delegated to the logic of trauma, with its fundamentally ahistoricizing logic" (10; my emphasis). This is precisely what Didion's year of magical thinking is: an "ongoing activity of precariousness in the present". It is a

year of suspension; its narrative unfolds a particular case of "navigating what's overwhelming" (10). But more than, this, or more precisely still, Didion's year of magical thinking is a case of 'cruel optimism', a specific kind of navigation or (phenomenological) orientation: optimism refers to "a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us" (23); 'cruel' refers to the "compromised conditions of possibility" in these clusters of promises (24). For Berlant, what is 'cruel' about specific kinds of relations or attachments

> and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might well not endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world (24).

Ostensibly, the relation of this definition of 'cruel optimism' to Didion's year of magical thinking is simple: 'cruel optimism' might denote Didion's investment in Dunne, in their relationship, and the "cluster of promises" each represents; the year of magical thinking that follows Dunne's death, then, might thus be the means by which the promises he presented in life are prolonged, maintained. But this is closer to the Freudian conception of mourning and melancholia, where the provocation to abandon a libidinal position "can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis" ensues (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 243). What distinguishes 'cruel optimism' from mourning and melancholia, however, is its temporal situation. At work in melancholia, for Berlant, is the subject's desire "to temporize an experience of the loss of an object/scene with which she has invested her ego continuity" (24). 'Cruel optimism', on the other hand, and particularly in Berlant's earlier (2006) formulation of the concept, is "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss" (20; original emphasis). To this extent, 'cruel optimism' does not (immediately) refer to the loss of Didion's attachment or relation to Dunne, but to the very process by which she deals with that loss: Dunne is not 'the object' of Didion's cruel optimism, but rather the year of magical thinking is. Didion's year of magical thinking is an experience stimulated by Dunne and in which Dunne figures, but the 'cruel optimism' of this year is manifest in Didion's affective investment in that process *itself*. Didion's year of magical thinking *is* "the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 24); or, rather it is the means by which this sense is engaged.

Didion's year of magical thinking is, for her, a technology of suspension, one that not simply maintains her attachment to Dunne, but one that is the very means by which that attachment is reoriented. Didion's attachment to the process of magical thinking is 'cruel', however, because it is marked by the tension, the pull, between denial and acknowledgment, a dynamic which is arresting or regressive as much as it is the means by which Didion 'progresses' or survives the death of her husband. Didion willingly engages her year of magical thinking because it is a means of suspending a necessary situation in which things are made sense of. Indeed, in his analysis of magical thinking, Claude Lévi-Strauss observes that, in contrast to 'normal' thought, which fails to comprehend the dynamics of the universe and its signification, 'magical' or 'pathological' thought – which results from trauma or loss, physical or mental – "overflows with emotional interpretations and overtones, in order to supplement an otherwise deficient reality" (181). This is similar to Freud's work on the (magical) omnipotence of thought in the third chapter of his *Totem and Taboo* (1950), where the subject interprets a relation of causality between her/his thoughts and events, where s/he imagines 'things' to be the result of her/him having thought them into existence. The (magical) omnipotence of thought, for Freud, is an overvaluation of both the world and psychical process, one he associates with neurotics and narcissism (91–94). But Levi-Strauss' formulation offers an affirmative or restorative relation between the self, the world, and meaning that Freud's formulation does not. This is important to the relation I am drawing between Didion's year of magical thinking and Berlant's 'cruel optimism' because the restorative function of magical thinking for Strauss and its association with experiences in which the world's meaning is deficient, helps to explain Didion's investment in that process. The year of magical thinking promises, then, a moment of reprieve, a moment of suspension in which meaning can be restored and life reaffirmed. The year of magical thinking is compromising, however, because of its accompanying distress, its affective overload. Magical thinking, in Didion's case, then, is not necessarily pathological or fantastical, but rather necessary; it is a necessary means of self-suspension and self-orientation. And if the 'cruelty' in 'cruel optimism' is that which prevents the self from flourishing (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 1), in Didion's case, the cruelty of magical thinking lies in the extent to which Didion *is yet to accept or acknowledge* the significance of Dunne's death. As a technology of suspension that permits Didion's necessary re-orientation of self in a world without her husband of forty years, magical thinking is distinct from that which it is responsible for effecting: the *stability* of the quotidian. It is precisely because of its

suspension that Didion invests her "ego continuity" (24) in magical thinking. It is in the positive affect of intertextual relation, moreover, that Didion invests the continuity of her selfhood. The intertextual affords a space of recognition in which the singular – uniqueness – matters only in its encounter with, or proximity to, the general.

I previously described some of Didion's ritualistic practices that indicate the suspension of her year of magical thinking: those symbolic performances in which a certain wishful thinking over-determines, overvalues, the meaning of events and situations. They are irrational, immediate, and uncontrollable responses to Dunne's death. In this sense, then, their belonging to the ambit of 'magical thinking' signifies their departure from what is expected of 'normal' behaviours, attitudes and thoughts. But Didion's magical thinking is also marked by an over-determined rationalism. This rationalism is part of the tension between denial and acknowledgment that characterises the memoir generally, but it is not indicative of a state of acknowledgement and does not function as the antithesis of the irrational. The rational and the irrational are both formative of the tension between denial and acknowledgement. And the rationalism of Didion's memoir is still very much a symbolic or ritualistic response to the crisis brought about by Dunne's death: it still signals the extent of Didion's suspension in magical thinking because, like the preservation of Dunne's shoes (as exemplum of the irrational), it follows a performative logic that is as much 'magical' as the irrational because of its departure from the 'normal'. Didion's observations about the necessity of her husband's autopsy illustrate the 'magic' of her rationalism. In the second chapter of *The Year*, Didion briefly summarises a study of the anxiety of medical interns when faced with having to request permission from patients' families to perform autopsies (21). Following this, Didion writes:

> If whoever it was at New York Hospital who asked me to authorize an autopsy experienced such anxiety I could have spared him or her: I actively wanted an autopsy. I actively wanted an autopsy even though I had seen some, in the course of doing research. I knew exactly what occurs, the chest open like a chicken in a butcher's case, the face peeled down, the scale in which the organs are weighed […] I still wanted one. I needed to know how and why and when it had happened. In fact I wanted to be in the room when they did it (22).

Here – though the rationalism of clinical procedure is brought into relation or mixed-up with the affective, with the human feeling of a clinical practice (the anxiety of) – Didion conceives of autopsy as the means by which the inexplicability of her husband's death might be demystified. More than a desire simply to understand what happened to her husband, Didion's active desire for an autopsy is a desire to control the implications and

consequences of an event that is, for the most part, indifferent to her. The seemingly distant and calculated desire of Didion for her husband's autopsy is the means by which the proliferation of meaning is contained, controlled. It parallels the symbolic gesture of sleeping alone on the first night after her husband's death by making the self the point from which meaning generates. In both situations, Didion is at the mercy of a world that no longer makes sense. And in both situations, this mercy underpins a kind of thinking in which Didion's capacity to effect things is over-determined. This description of the autopsy unfolds within a section of the memoir that deals with the brute facts and formalities of the event that immediately follow Didion's call to paramedics. It is populated by dates and times and the notes made by the apartment manager upon the arrival of the paramedics. The autopsy, combined with these facts indicate that Dunne had died instantly, and that "the thirteen minutes in between" the paramedics arriving and the official pronouncement of death "were just bookkeeping, bureaucracy, making sure the hospital procedures were observed and the paperwork was done" (22). Through these facts, Didion realises she too must have known her husband was dead otherwise she would have felt she could have saved him. But rationalism of this kind, a means of semiotic containment, a kind of optimism, is impotent – *cruel*; it highlights the inertia of an over-determinative, principally cognitive, process. The rationalism of this process is significant, however, in so far as it points toward the conventional, the general, the normal ways in which one is expected to deal with, respond to, crisis. Its "magic", to reiterate, indicates the extent to which this process has departed from the normal. And it is within this kind of a magical rationalism that I situate the significance of intertextuality in Didion's memoir because the intertextual functions in *The Year* as a structuration of difference that (perhaps obsessively) relates experiences of grief and mourning.

In her account of the ways in which intersubjectivity is established in *The Year*, Devika Chawla (2008) writes that Didion's memoir

> confirms the deeply personal nature of life-writing. At the same time, this book
> is intensely public in being a public requiem to a marriage and a husband in
> "writing." It performs tensions between the cultural and personal and between
> the public and private, while showing us a person's urgent narrative quest to
> rescue herself from a sudden tragic circumstance (380).

Apart from the obvious and commercial ways in which the private and the public are related through Didion's memoir, its intertextuality – something Chawla refers to as "'outside' materials" (383) – is crucial in understanding not simply the tension between

the cultural and the personal that Chawla aptly discerns, but the phenomenological process through which the reader recognises, senses, Didion's uniqueness.

Intertextuality operates in two ways within *The Year*: first, it signals Didion's engagement with "outside" considerations of death, grief, loss, and mourning and offers comfort in relations of affect; second, it underpins Didion's commentary on the way the process of grief and mourning is culturally understood – of which Didion is quite critical. In both operations of the intertextual, then, the singularity of Didion's experience, and its bearing on the status of the uniqueness of self, is challenged. Through intertextual reference, Didion's uniqueness is brought into relation with the general such that what can be regarded as properly "belonging" to Didion uniquely is undermined. Indeed, the exactness of Cavarero's claim that uniqueness is manifest in the life-story of the self, that the self is unique because s/he consists in a life-story which is her/his own, is tested. *The Year* questions the extent to which uniqueness of the self can be guaranteed in a life-story that has its significance in the narrative perspective of an exterior or general otherness. *The Year* consists of passages from the work of Melanie Klein, Freud, Shakespeare, W.H. Auden, D.H. Lawrence, C.S. Lewis, E.E. Cummings, T.S. Eliot and Gerard Manley Hopkins – amongst others, including passages from Didion's other novels and memoirs. The explanatory force of the memoir, moreover, resides in, or results from, these authors such that what can be properly described as *Didion's* life-story is ambiguous or indistinct. For Chawla, Didion's "inclusion of all these 'outside' material – even sidestepping these materials to tread into other – allows the reader to enter the story *because she moves us beyond her personal life into the shared life of culture*" (383; my emphasis). To this extent, then, the intertextuality of Didion's memoir is the means by which the worlds of narrator and reader are brought into relation; the intertexual is the means by which Didion's experience becomes accessible. For Chawla, the intertextual is the initiation of the intersubjective.

But the status and significance of uniqueness is undermined in the association of intertextuality and intersubjectivity because it assumes that (the uniqueness of) Didion is accessible only in terms other than her own. Chawla's claim presumes the personal (the singular) is only accessible in its generality, in a system of reference that exceeds the personal. This, however, is precisely the error that Cavarero's philosophy of selfhood attempts to correct for the articulation of the singular, the unique, through the general actually neglects the uniqueness for which it claims to account: the general is *not*, for Cavarero, reducible to the singular, the unique. And while, to some extent, Chawla

addresses this point by drawing from Mark Freeman's (2002) observation that poesis itself is effected through its engagement with the cultural (the intertextuality of authors and their works as the source of poesis), Didion's uniqueness still remains as something to be filtered *through* the general. I maintain, after Chawla, that the intertextuality of Didion's memoir does, indeed, open a space for recognising what is personal (unique) about Didion and her experience. But that uniqueness must also be regarded, *at least to some extent*, as distinct from the general and this might be formulated by returning to the *relational* model of selfhood that Cavarero develops, as an alternative to the 'intersubjective'. This is because 'intersubjectivity', formed, obviously, by the prefix 'inter', implies a point of overlap, a common-place, a point at which things meet, are 'in', or are 'inter' (to) one another – the instance at which subjectivities are *amongst* each other. 'Relational', however, maintains a distance or distinction between things that are 'related' or 'relatable': a relation is a together-ness, but not an overlapping.

In *Tu Che*, Cavarero draws from Janet Varner Gunn's *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience* (1982) to observe that

> l'identità del sé, cristallizzata nella storia, è totalmente costituita dalle relazioni del suo apparire agli altri e nel mondo, perché, anche nello statuto letterario dell'autobiografia, 'la storia raccontata attraverso la convenzione della prima persona è sempre una storia che scopre, e allo stesso tempo crea, la relazione del sé con il mondo in cui il sé appare agli altri, potendosi conoscere solo in tale apparizione o esibizione' (51; internal quotation from Janet Varner Gunn, *Toward a Poetics* 137)

> [the identity of the self, crystallized in the story, is totally constituted by the relations of her appearance to others in the world, because, even in autobiography, 'the story told through the convention of first-person narrative is always a story which both discovers and creates the relation of self with the world in which it can appear to others knowing itself only in that appearance or display' (*Relating Narratives* 36; internal quotation from Janet Varner Gunn, *Toward a Poetics* 137)].

Cavarero continues, moreover, and writes that only

> nel caso improbabile di una vita spesa in perfetta solitudine, nel deserto senza sguardi, l'autobiografia di un essere umano potrebbe raccontare l'assurda storia di un'identità inesposta, senza relazioni e senza mondo (*Tu che* 51)

> [in the improbable case of a life spent in perfect solitude could the autobiography of a human being tell the absurd story of an unexposed identity, without relations and without world (*Relating Narratives* 36)].

Central to the model of selfhood that Cavarero develops in *Tu che*, then, is relationality. It is a fact of uniqueness that one is related. The uniqueness of the self, her/his singularity,

only makes or acquires sense, significance, *in relation*, recalling Jean-Luc Nancy's claim that singularity is "*one* only by virtue of concatenation" (*Sense of the World* 113). This is crucial to understanding the intertextuality of Didion's memoir. The intertextuality of *The Year* indicates Didion's relation to the world, an observation that is, on the surface, quite simple. This becomes more complicated, however, when that relation is understood as the very means by which the self is singular, when the concatenation of uniqueness is understood as the means by which the singular is distinguished. If the effect of the intertextual is to open a space of recognition, that recognition works only in its limitation, only in deference to the *relation*, and not the overlapping, of singularities, of uniquenesses. That is, reference in *The Year* to Shakespeare, Hopkins, Freud and Klein, etc., does not, in fact, articulate what is personal to Didion by generalising, by making accessible or understandable, a common experience of grief. In their function as substitutions for Didion's own words, examples of intertextuality emphasise not simply their own difference, but difference itself. Gerard Manley Hopkins' experience of grief is not Didion's experience, for example, even if the experience he articulates is similar to Didion's. If the intertextuality of *The Year* opens a space of recognition – which is Chawla's claim and one that I maintain – this recognition does not work intersubjectively (it does not necessitate the identification of the reader with the narrator) but instead relationally. It attests to uniqueness because it structures *difference*: the intertextual draws difference (uniqueness) *into* relation. It is *by way of* and *in* relations of difference, then, that Didion's memoir *affects* its reader. The affect of *The Year* is sensed through the difference in experiences of grief and mourning and their relation to each other – a relation that does not subsume the particular into the general. Uniqueness is sensed, then, through this particular structure of difference: its affect is 'stirring' or 'moving' because it is the *particular* experience of a woman in mourning making sense of, reorienting herself in, a new world. This particularised effort is the content of, as well as that which is registered by, *assaporarsi*, 'tasting oneself' and others. Didion's particularity and the effort of its "penetrable" communication is the means by which *il sapore*, the 'taste' of Didion is effected.

The tension between the general and the universal that the intertextual in Didion's memoir represents acquires a kind of urgency and violence in Levi's *Se questo*. In the second chapter of that text, Levi writes: "per la prima volta ci siamo accorti che la nostra lingua manca di parole per esprimere questo offesa, la demolizione di un uomo" (23) [for the first time, we became aware that our language lacks the words to express

this offence, the demolition of a man" (*If This Is a Man* 26)]. Levi makes this observation soon after his journey from the detention camp in Fossoli (in one of twelve crowded goods carriages) to Auschwitz-Monowitz where the rubber factory, 'Buna' is located. The chapter in which Levi's observation appears is entitled "Sul fondo", "on the bottom". In this chapter, Levi, and the others with whom he has been deported, are 'sunk'; they are 'sunk' to the basest of conditions. Stripped of their clothes, their hair is shorn. They are showered and disinfected. Handed rags and shoes with wooden soles, they are not allowed to dress until they have run a hundred metres "sulla neve azzurra e gelida dell'alba […] scalzi e nudi […] fino ad un'altra baracca" (23) ["in the blue and icy snow of dawn, barefoot and naked […] to the next hut" (*If This* 25)]. In this other hut, once they have dressed, Levi recounts, hauntingly, that:

> ciascuno è rimasto nel suo angolo, e non abbiamo osato levare gli occhi l'uno sull'atro. Non c'è ove specchiarsi, ma il nostro aspetto ci sta dinanzi, riflesso in cento visi lividi, in cento pupazzi miserabili e sordidi. Eccoci trasformati nei fantasmi (23)

> [everyone remains in his own corner and we do not dare lift our eyes to look at one another. There is nowhere to look in a mirror, but our appearance stands in front of us, reflected in a hundred livid faces, in a hundred miserable and sordid puppets. We are transformed into […] phantoms (*If This* 25)].

These scenes are the first to detail explicitly the kind of horror and degradation endured by Levi and others in Auschwitz-Monowitz. Distinct, to some degree, from this kind of detail, the first chapter accounts for the horrors of Levi's deportation proleptically. The events leading up to, and in preparation for the journey are gestured toward but not fully articulated: "nessuno dei guardiani, né italiani né tedeschi, ebbe animo di venire a vedere che cosa fanno gli uomini quando sanno di dover morire" (13) ["not one of the guards, neither Italian nor German, had the courage to come and see what men do when they know they have to die" (*If This* 12); "[m]olte cose furono allora fra noi dette e fatte; ma di queste è bene che non resti memoria" (14) ["[m]any things were then said and done among us, but of these it is better that there remain no memory" (13)]. As Levi and the others near Auschwitz-Monowitz, and, particularly, once they arrive there, the intensity and explicitness of Levi's description of panic and degradation increases, however. The intensification of detail is commensurate with the 'sinking' of the human. Levi asks the reader to imagine the scale of such 'sinking':

> Si immagini ora un uomo a cui, insieme con le persone amate, vengano tolti la sua casa, le sue abitudini, i suoi abiti, tutto infine, letteralmente tutto quanto possiede: *sarà un uomo vuoto*, ridotto a sofferenza e bisogno, dimentico di dignità

e discernimento, poiché accade facilmente, a chi ha perso tutto, *di perdere se stesso* (23; my emphasis).

[Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: *he will be a hollow man*, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily *loses himself* (*If This* 26; my emphasis)].

This "uomo vuoto" ["hollow man"] is precisely what *Se questo* is at task to elaborate. The irony of Levi's later observation that "[p]iù giù di così non si può andare: condizione umana più misera non c'è, e non è pensabile" (23) ["it is not possible to sink lower than this, no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so" (*If this* 26)] is what is saddest about it. The narrative structure of *Se questo è un uomo* requires that things do get worse. The irony of this, then, is what initiates the affective relation the reader has with Levi's memoir. The scale of Levi's 'sinking' and the degree to which he is made "vuoto" ["hollow"] is constantly shifted. The situation, the site of *il fondo*, is never quite met. Indeed, the metonymic spatiality of *il fondo* fails to capture the precariousness of the persistent falling that Levi experiences in the *Lager*. This is what is affecting in *Se questo è un uomo*: the structure of precariousness and the shame it induces affects the reader and is the means by which uniqueness is articulated. It is not much the demolition of a man that language lacks the words to express, but the *evacuation* of everything by which he might be recognised, as unique: *Se questo è un uomo* accounts for a systematic attempt to eradicate uniqueness, to reduce the singular to a violent and generalised sameness. Levi's being "vuoto" ["hollow"], and the protraction of the process by which he is emptied, hollowed out, is the experience by which the reader is affected. In what follows, then, I discuss the mediating or auxiliary function of affect in language as well as the significance of shame and its effect on (the recognition of) uniqueness.

In *I sommersi e i salvati* (2007), Levi reflects on "incomunicabilità" [incommunicability] and, observing the necessity of communication, questions the limitation he discerns in language to express the demolition of a man. In this consideration, Levi criticises a theory of incommunicability in vogue during the 1970s. For this fashionable theory, incommunicability

sarebbe un ingrediente immancabile, una condanna a vita inserita nella condizione umana […] siamo monadi, incapaci di messaggi reciproci, o capaci solo di messaggi monchi, falsi in partenza, fraintesi all'arrivo (68)

[was [supposedly] an inevitable ingredient, a life sentence inherent to the human condition […] we are monads, incapable of reciprocal messages, or

capable only of truncated messages, false at their departure, misunderstood on their arrival (*The Drowned and the Saved* 89)].

Levi writes that this theory of incommunicability is "frivola e irritante" [frivolous and irritating] because, for him, "[n]egare che comunicare si può è falso: si può sempre […,] per la comunicazione […] siamo biologicamente e socialmente predisposti (69) [To say that it is impossible to communicate is false; one always can […,] we are biologically and socially predisposed to communicate (*Drowned* 89)]. More than a biological and social predisposition, however, communication is, for Levi, a necessity: "comunicare si può e si deve: è un modo utile e facile di contribuire alla pace altrui e propria, perché il silenzio, l'assenza di segnali, è a sua volta un segnale, ma ambiguo, e l'ambiguità genera inquietudine e sospetto" (69) [one can and must communicate, and thereby contribute in a useful and easy way to the peace of others and oneself, because silence, the absence of signals, is itself a signal, but an ambiguous one, and ambiguity generates anxiety and suspicion" (*Drowned* 89). For Levi, communication is the means through which the human is figured. And *Se questo è un uomo* is testament not simply to this necessity, but to the horrors of its occasional failures, it abuses and constraints.

But Levi's insistence that one is always able to, and should, communicate challenges his coming-to-writing in *Se questo* because a paradox emerges between those observations developed in *I sommersi* that insist on communication and the impossibility of expressing, in *Se questo*, through language, the horror and offence of "la demolizione di un uomo" [the demolition of a man]. This is the same ironical position occupied by Didion in *The Year* when she observes that she requires *more* than words in order for her experience to be penetrable. But unlike *The Year*, the very experience of the *lager* is characterised by the inability to communicate. Distinct from the difficulty Didion is met with in understanding, in accepting, her situation, Levi's experience *is* the limit of communication *tout court*. The representation of Levi's experience is complicated, then, by putting into words the fracturing of experience *by* the incommunicable; that is, the difficulty in representation Levi has in *Se questo* is not simply the effect of an experience but the experience itself.

Gail Gilliland (1992) writes that Levi's inability to express his experience in the *Lager* is a necessary limitation that preserves his humanity. Gilliland's observation hinges upon Levi's comment, in the preface to *Se questo*, that

A molti, individui o popoli, può accadere di ritenere, più o meno consapevolmente, che «ogni straniero è nemico». Per lo più questo convinzione

giace in fondo agli animi come una infezione latente; si manifesta solo in atti saltuari e incoordinati, *e non sta all'origine di un sistema di pensiero*. Ma quando questo avviene, *quando dogma inespresso diventa permessa maggior di un sillogismo*, allora, al termine della catena, sta il Lager (9; my emphasis).

[Many people – many populations – can find themselves holding, more or less wittingly, that "every stranger is an enemy". For the most part this conviction *lies deep down* like some latent infection; it betrays itself only in random, disconnected acts, *and does not lie at the base of a system of reason*. But when this does come about, *when the unspoken dogma becomes the major premiss* [sic] *in a syllogism*, then, at the end of the chain, there is the Lager (*If this* 5; my emphasis)].

The movement from inexpression to expression is, for Gilliland, in her interpretation of Levi's comment, also the movement from inaction to actualisation. For Gilliland, Levi's insistence on the Lager's inexpressibility, its incommunicability, is the means by which his humanity is preserved, for at "the point at which the experience becomes expressible, he, too, will be cooperating in the perpetration upon man" (203). Gilliland gives particular emphasis, in this interpretation, to the variety of languages spoken in the Lager and suggests that what is left untranslated by Levi in *Se questo* is formative of the memoir's "topos of inexpressibility" (204). Inexpressibility is codified, for Gilliland, "in Levi's careful attention to retain in the original text a sense of the polyglot of languages spoken in the Lager", a Babelic confusion which prevents the assimilation of the Other (those interred in Auschwitz) into the German Self (205).

The philosophy against incommunicability that Levi develops in *I sommersi* must be emphasised, in light of Gilliland's analysis, as one directed toward a general assumption that inheres incommunicability in the human condition as a universal characteristic. There are few situations that necessitate or, indeed, merit, the description "incommunicable". The Holocaust warrants such a description because its content is a radical departure from the general, from the normal. In it, the biological and social instinct to communicate is radically compromised and manipulated. And yet, between Levi's observations and those of Gilliland, the affective quality of a text and its function or contribution to recognition and communication remains unconsidered.

An emphasis on the linguistic and the discursive configuration of the Lager and its experience is common to much of the scholastic interpretation of Levi's *Se questo*. The problem with this emphasis is not so much the priority of (linguistic) incommunicability preferred by such interpretation but that this priority – whether articulated in terms of the (in)capacity of language to convey Levi's rationalism (Lang, 1999); the relation between language, the self and testimony (Tager, 1993); or the distinction Giorgio

Agamben (1999) draws between testimony and the archive on the basis of the potentiality of the 'sayable' and the 'unsayable' (145) – overlooks the affective, the emotive relation established between *Se questo* and its readers. This is not to suggest that the move away from the emphasis on the discursive element of Levi's memoir undoes its "topos of inexpressibility" (Gilliland 204), rendering the text and the experiences it represents fully articulate. Nor is it to suggest that the affective does away with the discursive, as if the two weren't imbricated: language is precisely the means by which the affective is established in *Se questo*. An analysis of the affective elements in *Se questo* does, however, move away from "incommunicability", understood as lack, and instead proposes the (emotional) significance of what the memoir *does* achieve, of the ways it does or might affect an understanding (however impartial) of an event as significant as Levi's internment in Auschwitz. For, the Lager is shameful. Its effect on those interred there is shameful. This is what Levi intended the reader *to feel*. It is in this establishment of feeling, in the intention to feel, moreover, that uniqueness is most acutely brought to bear in *Se questo*. Feeling it, the readers of Levi's experience recognise it.

In an interview with Marco Vigevani (1997) about the style of *Se questo*, Levi crucially observes that:

> Io volevo raccontare quello che avevo visto. E in più vorrei aggiungere che qui c'entra anche una questione di temperamento, di stile […] È più efficace una testimonianza fatta con ritegno che una fatta con sdegno: *lo sdegno dev'essere del lettore, non dell'autore* e non è detto che lo sdegno dell'autore diventi sdegno del lettore. *Io ho voluto fornire al lettore la materia prima per il* suo *sdegno* (213–214; original emphasis on "suo"; my emphasis elsewhere)

> [I wanted to narrate what I had seen. And I would add here, moreover, that this a question of temperament, of style […] Testimony is more effective when it is written with reserve than when it is written with disdain: *the disdain must be the reader's, not the author's* and it isn't necessarily the author's disdain that is the reader's. *I wanted to provide the reader with the raw material for* her/his *disdain* (origin emphasis on "her/his"; my emphasis elsewhere)].

In these remarks, Levi establishes the intentionality of feeling, of affect, in *Se questo*. His memoir offers the content of or the stimulus for a necessary feeling that relates reader to text, and reader to textual selves. This observation distinguishes itself from the earlier discussion of the incommunicable, because, here, *Se questo* is invested with a particular task: the communication (the narration of what he had seen) of events which stir, incite, a particular affective attitude: disdain. There are several possibilities for the translation of the Italian 'lo sdegno' into English; among them: 'scorn', 'disdain', 'resentment', 'indignation'. I suggest that the first two are the most appropriate and easily substitutable.

In any case, what is significant about the function of the word is its connotative proximity to 'contempt' and the relation of this to the affective continuum Silvan Tomkins nominalises as "Contempt-Disgust" alongside "Shame-Humiliation".

For Tomkins, contempt contrasts with shame in the degree to which the subject is self-conscious of her/himself. He writes: "contempt is a response in which there is least self-consciousness, with the most intense consciousness of the object, which is experienced as disgusting" (qtd. in Sedgwick and Frank 135). Shame, on the other hand, "is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation" in which the subject "feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth" (133). The relation between 'Shame-Humiliation' and 'Contempt-Disgust', something distinguished only by the position of the subject in each, is significant for this analysis of *Se questo* because the difference that characterises it (the subject's position) represents the kind of relation *Se questo* establishes between the reader and the textual selves (predominantly Levi) that are read. That is, the reader's scorn, her/his contempt or disdain, is dependent upon, or coextensive with, the shamefulness of the situation represented in Levi's memoir and, indeed, the shame that Levi feels himself. It is through the a/effects of 'Shame-Humiliation' and 'Contempt-Disgust' that uniqueness is recognised because through them the self and the other are bound in, or brought into, relation. The reader disdains the human suffering in *Se questo* because that suffering is by one who is unique. And yet, though this distinction between subject positions, and thus types of affect, is useful in understanding Levi's memoir and the concomitant relation between reader and textual self, it is also complicated and made more ambiguous by uniqueness and its destruction. But before I address this ambiguity, I want first to address the question of "temperamento" that Levi invokes above and its significance for how the affect of "lo sdegno" is structured in *Se questo*. The question of 'how' the raw material of Levi's memoir effects the reader's disdain begins to address the complexity of distinctions between affect. An elaboration of 'how' disdain is structured in Levi's memoir underpins the claim I will later make about the shame that is *common* to both the textual selves in *Se questo* and their readers. This common shame is the effect of the tone in which much of Levi's memoir is written and in Lev's treatment of biological processes.

Narrating what he had seen in the Lager is, Levi describes to Vigevani above, "una questione di temperamento" [a question of temperament]. And here, I want to bring "temperamento" and 'tone' into relation with one another, such that the temperament of *Se questo* is synonymous with or reflective of its tone, its tonality. With

the two terms, I want to describe the character, the personality of the text in order to elaborate how it affects its readers with shame/disdain. For this, I draw from Sianne Ngai's conception of 'tone' in her *Ugly Feelings* (2005). In this study of negative emotions, Ngai surveys the ways in which tone has historically been conceived, addressing I.A. Richards' disassociation of tone from emotion, T.S. Eliot's "stance", William Empson's "Mood", and Reuben Brower's "dramatic situation" (Ngai 41–42). Ngai's conception of tone resonates with Heidegger's conception of moods as "attunements" which, Ngai writes, "arise from and shape or modulate the totality of Being-in-the-world, disclosing the 'situatedness' (*Befindlichkeit*) that enables things to *matter* in determinate ways" (42–43; original emphasis). For Ngai, tone is "a global and hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world" (43). 'Tone', in this way, fulfils the function that I have elsewhere described as 'sense' and *assaporarsi*, the phenomenological means or mechanism by which one is oriented in particular ways within the world by sense experience. What distinguishes tone from 'sense', however, is its relation to temperament, the kind of character, personality or quality the presentation of a text has. By the text's character, I refer to the organisation of attitudes and feelings that might 'accumulate' (Watkins 269) in order to acquire a significance as 'happy', as 'sad', as '(melo)dramatic', as 'angry', etc. The tone of a text, to the extent that it refers to the orientation of feeling or affective attitude, is dependent upon a general accumulation of affective resonance which makes one feel (in) a particular and 'characteristic' way. The description of a text's tone parallels the affective processes by which someone describes a person's character, her/his temperament. In each situation, the self is related to *an*other, whether real or textual, by a 'feeling', an atmosphere, a general and affective situation that directs attention to what is significant, to what matters. The tone or temperament of *Se questo* might be described as 'calm', 'reflective', 'unemotional' (by which I mean that emotions are not dramatised in *Se questo*, not that the memoir is unfeeling or lacks the capacity to make one feel), or 'reserved'; for in keeping with his desire simply to present what happened in the Lager – "volevo raccontare quello che avevo visto" (Vigevani 213) [I wanted to narrate what I had seen] – without himself being disdainful, a certain distance or detachment must have been required in order to create a sense of objectivity.

This objectivity or detachment is achieved or assisted by first person plural and third person plural verb forms and the relative absence. or largely indirect and implied presence, of the Nazis. *Se questo* relates the experience of those interred in the Lager, not

those responsible for that interment and Levi's experience is related to, but not subsumed within, a general horror: its horror is the horror of many. Levi's concern for the general establishes a reflective tone because what *matters* through it is the scale of the *event* rather than, or without being consigned to, the drama of horrors inflicted upon one man, upon the singular. In this way, the 'calm', 'reflective', or 'reserved' tone of *Se questo* presents the content of the disdain that the reader feels. Where Levi is seemingly objective, the reader is permitted the space to react subjectively and emotionally. I argue, then, that this tonal 'reservation' and 'calmness' – rather than the "topos of inexpressibility" elaborated by Gilliland (204) – is responsible for Levi's preservation of his humanity. Through such 'reservation' and 'calmness' Levi distances himself from judgement or perpetration, leaving this for the reader instead. Levi's account of biological processes more forcefully structures and provokes the negative (disdainful) affective relation of reader to the textual selves of *Se questo,* however. Where the text's tone, its 'temperamento' [temperament] affords *space* for the reader's affective judgement, the representation of the biological compels the reader more forcefully toward disdain. Or, as I now come closer to substantiating, *Se questo*'s representation of the biological *shames* the reader and brings her/him into ambiguous identification with Levi's experience by way of projection and empathy. In this ambiguity, moreover, the seemingly obscured status of uniqueness in Levi's detached representation of plural and general experience is countered.

"Distruggere l'uomo è difficile," ["to destroy a man is difficult"] Levi writes in one of the closing chapters of *Se questo*

> quasi quanto crearlo: non è stata agevole, non è stato breve, ma ci siete riusciti, tedeschi. Eccoci docili sotto i vostri sguardi: da parte nostra nulla più avete a temere: non atti di rivolta, non parole di sfida, neppure uno sguardo giudice (133)

> [almost as difficult as to create one: it has not been easy, nor quick, but you Germans have succeeded Here we are, docile under your gaze; from our side you have nothing more to fear; no acts of violence, no words of defiance, not even a look of judgement (*If this* 179)].

This 'docility' is the result of deprivation and the routine degradation, the destruction, of the body. Indeed, the body in *Se questo* functions metonymically as an archive, as testament to the atrocities of the Third Reich, in this way confirming Mario Marino's (2012) observation, in his critique of Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), that "l'intreccio di corpo e umanità consente di decifrare la demolizione dell'uomo prodotta

nel campo" (46) [the interweaving of body and humanity enables the deciphering of the demolition of man produced in the camp]. The body and its simplest, basest functions are manipulated in the Lager as means of subordination. The representation of this is, perhaps, the most affecting of situations recounted in *Se questo*. Emblematic of this kind of torment and manipulation of basic needs is Levi's description of a room with a tap upon his arrival at Auschwitz-Monowitz:

> Siamo scesi, ci hanno fatti entrare in una camera vasta e nuda, debolmente riscaldata. Che sete abbiamo! […] [S]ono quattro giorni che non beviamo. Eppure c'è un rubinetto: sopra un cartello, che dice che è proibito bere perché l'acqua è inquinata. Sciocchezze, a me pare ovvio che il cartello è una beffa, «essi» sanno che noi moriamo di sete, e ci mettono in una camera e c'è un rubinetto […] Io bevo […] ma devo sputare, l'acqua è tiepida e dolciastra, ha odore di palude (19).

> [We climb down, they make us enter an enormous empty room that is poorly heated. We have a terrible thirst […] We have had nothing to drink for four days. But there is also a tap – and above it a card which says that it is forbidden to as the water is dirty. Nonsense. It seems obvious that the card is a joke, 'they' know that we are dying of thirst and they put us in a room, and there is a tap […] I drink […] but I have to spit it out, the water is tepid and sweetish, with the smell of a swamp (*If this* 20)].

Alongside the thirst described above, hunger characterises the experience of internment in the Lager. In a passage indicative of the kinds of narrative shifts that structure *Se questo* – where a reflective distance is established by a perspective that reminds the reader of Levi's survival, where it becomes narratively apparent that Levi is thinking *back on* his experience, – Levi muses on the nature of perspective itself. The nature of perspective in the Lager is, for Levi, one that always makes relative and orders one urgency over another, such that "non appena il freddo, che per tutto l'inverno ci era perso l'unico nemico, è cessato, noi ci siamo accorti di avere fame: e ripetendo lo stesso errore, così diciamo: «Se non fosse della fame!…»" (66) ["as soon as the cold, which throughout the winter had seemed our only enemy, had ceased, we became aware of our hunger; and repeating the same error, we now say: 'If it was not for the hunger!…'" (*If this* 85)]. This reflection is broken, however, by the interjection of the memory of the extent to which hunger pervaded experience in the Lager. Indeed, Levi metonymically relates hunger to the Lager, describing it as a condition constitutive of their selfhood: "Ma come si potrebbe pensare di non avere fame? Il Lager *è* la fame: noi stessi siamo la fame, fame vivente" (66) ["But how could one imagine not being hungry? The Lager *is* hunger: we ourselves are hunger, living hunger"]. The intensity of the hunger that characterises the Lager requires also that new words be created to express it. "Noi

diciamo «fame»," ["We say 'hunger'"] Levi writes, "diciamo «stanchezza», «paura», e «dolore» […] e sono altre cose. Sono parole libere, create e usate da uomini liberi che vivevano, godendo e soffrendo, nelle loro case" (110) ["we say "tiredness", "fear", "pain […] and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their houses" (*If this* 147)]. So desperate, so total are these conditions in the Lager that the words commonly used to describe them lose their significance, their function.

Acutely demonstrable of the degradation in the Lager, of the means by which those interred are subordinated by way of manipulation of the biological is a scene in which proof of one's diarrhoea corroborates his dysentery and thus secures him a bed in Ka-Be, the infirmary, which for Levi is "il Lager a meno del disagio fisico" (48) ["the Lager without its physical discomforts" (*If this* 61). This lack of physical discomfort in Ka-Be comes, however, at a cost: the temporary reprieve of those in the infirmary from the manual labour that everyone in the Lager is required to perform means that with enough time to think, one becomes aware of what he has become, what he has lost. Yet despite this self-consciousness, which reveals the fragility of the human, there is a desperate attempt to stay on in the infirmary. Levi describes this desperation in his account of the indignity endured by those with dysentery to prove they still require respite:

> Fra coloro che attendono, alcuni si torcono nello spasimo di trattenere la preziosa testimonianza ancora venti, ancora dieci minuti; altri, privi di risorse in quel momento, tendono vene e muscoli nello sforzo opposto. L'infermiere assiste impassibile, mordicchiando la matita, uno sguardo all'orologio, uno sguardo ai campioni che gli vengono via via presentati. Nei casi dubbi, parte con la bacinella e va a sottoporla al medico (48).

> [Of those waiting, some are contorted in the pain of keeping in their previous evidence another ten, another twenty minutes; others, without resources at the moment, strain veins and muscles in a contrary effort. The nurse watches, impassive, chewing his pencil, one eye on the watch, one eye on the specimens gradually presented him. In doubtful cases, he leaves with the pot to show it to the doctor (*If this* 60)].

What is significant about these passages, especially in the abjection that is established in the scene above, is the empathetic relation produced between reader and textual self by way of the weakened body. If the body metonymically represents humanity, as Marino suggests (46), its demolition is the means by which an affective appeal is made. The metonymical significance of the body establishes empathetic relation by appealing to what is common between the textual self and the reader of *Se questo*: human corporeality.

Levi's account of the biological processes that are abused and manipulated in the subordination of those interred in the Lager shames the reader. Shame thus becomes the affective character or content of an empathetic ethics between text and reader. Shame, furthermore, and more significantly, is the means by which Levi's uniqueness is attested to because at work in the movement between disdain and shame, is a fallacy of identification, one which installs a confused proximity that is, in actual fact, testimony to the real distance between Levi and the reader.

To understand this claim, I reiterate: for Tomkins, 'Shame–Humiliation' and 'Contempt–Disgust' are differentiated by the degree to which the self is conscious of her/himself. In Contempt-Disgust, the affect is directed toward, or manifest in, a consciousness of an object, which is disgusting. In 'Shame-Humiliation', on the other hand, the subject's affect is directed toward her/himself: disgust, insecurity, embarrassment are felt about oneself. The reader of *Se questo* is offered content to disdain; s/he is provoked, in various ways, to direct that affect toward the situation in which Levi and the others in the Lager find themselves, toward those responsible for that situation. But the metonymic association between body and humanity at work in Levi's memoir also provokes the reader's identification with a common humanity so that disdain is also directed inwardly. That is, disdain (located along the axis of Contempt-Disgust) moves inwardly to become shame because the reader identifies her/himself as belonging to an exploited and demoralised humanity. Indeed, in part, empathy requires this kind of identification, this self-consideration, because the feeling *for* others is effected by the representation of an experience that is real or applicable, comprehensible to some degree, for the self. This, however, is, the case only in the time and space of reading the memoir; or, rather, one does realise or acknowledge at certain points, the extremity of the situation recounted in *Se questo*, as well as its past-ness, its not-being-one's-own experience. Yet the shame that is induced in the reader of Levi's memoir, by images of weakened and abused bodies, establishes an affective proximity through which shame identifies the self (the reader) with the other (Levi).

"Shame," Emmanuel Levinas writes, in *On Escape*, "is founded upon the solidarity of our being, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves" (*On Escape* 64). Because of this, shame "arises each time we are unable to make others forget […] our basic nudity. It is related to everything we would like to hide and that we cannot bury or cover up (64; my emphasis). This observation usefully points toward what is problematic about the reader's identification with Levi's experience through the confused

direction of shame's affect. If shame indicates Being's "incapacity to break with itself" (64), if it is "founded upon the solidarity of our being", then the reader's identification with the human (body) in *Se questo* claims to have experienced what has only ever been contained in the experience, the being, of another. Empathy in this sense indicates the fallacy of identification and signals, in its fantasy (which the reader is ultimately aware of because disdain works to establish a necessary distance of subject positions even if that process is confused), the actual uniqueness, the singularity, of Levi and his experiences alongside the other men interred in the Lager.

The reader's identification with the human body in *Se questo*, an identification which is, in actual fact, misidentification, is understandable to the extent, as Dominick LaCapra observes, that "intensely 'cathected' or traumatizing objects, such as the Holocaust […] demand a response from the reader not restricted to purely empirical-analytic inquiry or contextualisation" (66). The cathexis of Holocaust testimony instead requires, or does solicit, a form of relationality that is empathetic and (thus) projective (67). Attention to this kind of empathy reveals, however, that this form of relationality is premised on the reader's reduction to sameness of represented experience to that of her/his own. The fallacy in this attests to the actuality of uniqueness, the distance between, or distinction of, selves and experiences such that in the confusion of self and other, the other emerges truly as *an* other. The recognition of uniqueness in Levi is, in this way, the result of affective investment in what is general or common to the human, but the shameful response that is stimulated by Levi's representation assures a kind of separation of self and other, the difference of each. Returning to the vocabulary Cavarero offers in her model of unique selfhood: in *Se questo*, *what-ness*, the general, acquires greater significance – than is permitted by Cavarero – as the *means* by which *who-ness*, the unique, manifests itself. In *Se questo*, the generality of *what-ness* makes *who-ness* possible.

Within the intertextual space of Didion's *The Year* and through the affect of shame in Levi's *Se questo*, the general, *what-ness*, opens a space of recognition that insists upon the reducibility of *what-ness* to the uniqueness of the self, to *who-ness*. Cavarero writes, in "Who Engenders Politics?" that *what-ness* has a preliminary function in the organisation or bringing-together of a collective (101). The priority of *who* is what is at stake for Cavarero, however, and it contextualises the collective predicated on *what-ness*. "In other words," Cavarero writes, "the relational setting produces the meaning of the self and prevents the common identity from becoming a static figure with an exclusive identification" (101). It is the function of relationality, then, that determines whether or

not *what-ness* is an irreducible quality or something fundamentally "inscribed in the very expressivity of the embodiments of uniqueness" there exposed (101). More than this, however, and upon reading the intertexual in Didion and the shameful in Levi, I claim that *what-ness* is not something to be overcome, decided-upon, or evaluated. It is rather an always-necessary aspect of relation that begins and structures relation itself. Underpinned by Didion and Levi, the difference between Cavarero and my formulation of this function of *what-ness* is that where Cavarero allows for the possibility of *what-ness* not to matter, I instead argue that *what-ness* always does matter. As the condition for the possibility of recognition – as the inauguration of a space of recognition, a space of 'tasting' uniqueness – *what-ness* acquires its significance in its always-being-present in, if not determinative of, uniqueness its *assaporarsi*. Didion and Levi's memoirs attest to the necessity of *what-ness* as the means by which *who-ness* can manifest itself and be 'tasted'. The phenomenological basis of *assaporarsi*, the logic of this form of recognition, now leads to my discussion in the next chapter where *what-ness*, as the possibility of *who-ness*, is politicised in the reader's responsibility for the uniqueness of selves in two testimonies that account for experiences of being gay and living with AIDS.

4 | Vulnerable Uniqueness and the Politics of Reading: AIDS, *What-ness*, and Responsibility |

"Nel rivelarmi che era sieropositivo," [When he revealed he was HIV positive to me] Brett Shapiro recounts in *L'intruso* [The Intruder, 1995 (1993)], "Giovanni fu molto franco, nonostante un certo impaccio, e molto ansioso per come avrei potuto reagire" (14) [Giovanni was very frank, despite a certain awkwardness, and very anxious about how I would react]. When Shapiro responds to Giovanni's revelation, he asks: "Cosa ti aspetti che ti dica? Che non voglio più vederti? […] È ridicolo. Tu non sei un virus, hai un virus" (14) [What are you waiting for me to say? That I don't want to see you anymore? […] That's ridiculous. You're not a virus, you have a virus"]. But following this conversation the temporal perspective of Shapiro's memoir shifts and with hindsight he writes:

> A volte, nei sei mesi prima della sua morte, ho rimpianto la decisione di non scomparire subito dopo quel lunedì a pranzo [quando Giovanni ha avuto rivelato che era sieropositivo] […] Amavo Giovanni. Ma ogni giorno che passava, lui diventava sempre più il suo virus (14)

> [At times, in the six months before his death, I regretted the decision not to disappear straight after that Monday at lunch [when Giovanni had revealed he was HIV positive] […] I loved Giovanni. But with every day that passed, he was becoming more and more his virus].

In a passage from a different text, Timothy Conigrave's *Holding the Man* (2009 [1995]), Conigrave and his lover John sit and talk on Bondi Beach. They have just been to see a play about a man who watches his lover "being crushed by AIDS but slowly growing to acceptance" (202). Conigrave – shocked by some of the things one of the play's protagonists had said but which he'd not considered himself, and moved by the play's thematic of acceptance – recounts the moment he and John

> sat on the sand watching the waves rippling in to shore. Talking to him [John] about my fears, my anger, was not easy. There was stuff I felt I could never bring up, for fear John would say I was undermining his positive thinking. But the play had given me courage. 'Do you think you are going to die from AIDS?'
>   'Probably.'
>   'How does it feel?'
>   'Scary.'
>   We spoke of our fears for ourselves and for each other. How long did we think we had? Was he going to die before me? He wanted to know it all (203).

The two passages above from *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* establish the importance for this chapter of the political, complex, and often-precarious relation between being-gay, living with AIDS, and the ontological vulnerability of the unique self.

Translated from English into Italian and first published in 1993, Shapiro's text narrates his life, from 1990 until 1993, as lover, carer, and survivor of Giovanni Forti, an Italian journalist, living in New York and writing for *L'Espresso*, who dies from AIDS in 1992. Giovanni's letters to friends and family, and to Shapiro, intersperse the latter's narrative, contributing to what Derek Duncan describes as "a composite text" (*Reading and Writing* 141) that "combines the convoluted energies of reading and writing" (145) theorised in Ross Chambers' *Facing It* (1998). In that study, Chambers conceives of the autobiography of a dying person as prophylaxis. He writes that on "the condition of the death of the author […] something is preserved from the effect of death: an occasion of survival is offered and even a mode of posthumous action, through the authority a text can enjoy, by virtue of its readability, 'beyond' the extinction of its author" (5). For Duncan, Chambers' formulation of AIDS diaries and witnessing establishes "a kind of relay that allows the dead and the living to commune" (145). The protagonists of *L'intruso* partake in and enable this kind of writerly prophylaxis-from-death through their reading and writing of each other's letters, which are embedded within the larger narrative of the text (145). But for Shapiro, as Rosanna Rossanda writes in her preface to *L'intruso,* "la percezione dell'oggetto comporta la perdita dell'oggetto', scrivere è anche elaborare il lutto" (xiv) ['the perception of the object involves the loss of the object', to write is also to elaborate mourning]. The composition that characterises Shapiro's text is an affective and textual means of accounting for the *past-ness* of a situation of reciprocity and relationality – the trajectory of which is necessarily retrospective and, in that retrospection, constitutive of the political import of testimony as the *demonstration* of the ways in which *what-ness* can be and has been lived uniquely – as much as it is *futural* in the sense that Duncan formulates through Chambers.

The passage from *L'intruso* with which I began this chapter narrates the anxiety Shapiro's lover feels in a moment of exposure and revelation, in the disclosure of his HIV positivity. Giovanni and his investment in a life lived with Shapiro is suspended within the anticipation of the latter's reaction. In that suspension, where the constitutive contingency of the relational scene is acutely manifest, Giovanni is made vulnerable. Shapiro's reaction confirms this vulnerability. In the ridiculousness that Shapiro determines in Giovanni's anxiety, the latter's vulnerability and the force of the contingent

is exposed in the very promise of its being-otherwise, in the destabilisation of its affective intensity: "Cosa ti aspetti che ti dica? Che non voglio più vederti? […] È ridicolo" (14) [What are you waiting for me to say? That I don't want to see you anymore? […] That's ridiculous]. In the emphasis he places on Giovanni *having* rather than *being* a virus, moreover, in the weakening of a metonymy that determines Giovanni by his HIV status, Shapiro permits the investment each has in the endurance of the other as lover. When his reflections shift in perspective, however, Shapiro writes that Giovanni "diventava sempre più il suo virus" (14) [was becoming more and more his virus], foreshadowing the totality of Giovanni's vulnerability to AIDS and the difficulty involved in Shapiro's living with and responsibility for him. Shapiro's reversion to the metonymical "becoming" a virus is the means by which he explains or justifies the affective significance of regretting not to have disappeared immediately after Giovanni's revelation. But, to the extent that it foreshadows the deterioration of his lover, as well as explains the occasional regret toward his decision to stay, Shapiro's reversion to the metonymical conflation of Giovanni and his virus also foreshadows his commitment to a form of relationality in which vulnerability structures a particular and often affectively laborious kind of responsibility and attention. Shapiro's only-occasional feeling of regret – "a volte, nei sei mesi prima della sua morte" (14) [at times, in the six months before his death] – signals the emotional quality of his responsibility for his dying lover.

Whereas *L'intruso* is condensed in its focus on the two years of Shapiro and Giovanni's relationship, Conigrave's *Holding the Man*, first published in 1995, is, as the text's blurb describes, an account "of growing up gay". It begins in Melbourne, Australia, "at the end of the sixties," when the "world seemed very exciting for a nine-year old" (3) and ends in 1992 on the Italian island of Lipari after the death from AIDS of John Caleo, Conigrave's lover. In 1994, Conigrave also died from AIDS related illnesses shortly after completing *Holding the Man*. Unlike the composite text that *L'intruso* is, the narrative perspective of *Holding the Man* is consistently the author's. In many ways Conigrave's text conforms to a traditional autobiographical structure of development, with priority given to Conigrave's nascent homosexuality and his 'coming out'. Three-quarters of the text are devoted to the development of a political consciousness around issues of marginality, particularly that of sexual minorities, and that of people with AIDS. The narrative details Conigrave and John's high-school romance (the pressures and advantages of being gay in a Jesuit school), Conigrave's politicisation at Monash University, his acting education at

NIDA[5] in Sydney, and his attempts to care for John – who develops cancer and pneumothoraces from the pneumonia related to the breakdown of his immune system – while also enduring the symptoms of his own AIDS.

The passage from *Holding the Man* that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter represents a situation in which two lovers attempt to make sense of their finitude, a finitude marked for them by the AIDS that each of them has. Encouraged by a form of cathartic identification with the play they have just seen, and exposed to some of its unfamiliar ideas and events, Conigrave and John begin to orient themselves within a futurity conceived as the protraction of a kind of undoing of the self: "'Do you think you are going to die from AIDS?'," Conigrave asks, "Probably," replies John (203). This moment in Conigrave's memoir is the point at which its protagonists 'face' (cf. Chambers, *Facing It*) the significance and the consequence of what AIDS might mean for the rest of their lives. The play they have been to see impacts upon Conigrave and John as a provocation to accept and to become aware of the particularity of their condition. From the representation of a shared or common experience comes the force of the particular. 'Facing it', in this way, involves a negotiation of particularity, a negotiation of the ways in which the particular might manifest itself. That potentiality means, moreover, that 'facing it' – though it must consist in the immediacy of the present, in the comprehension of what is particular about (the self within) the present – involves a kind of deferral of meaning, a deference to what is unknown about the particular, to what is potential. This moment of 'facing it', and the temporal orientation of self that it implies, is submission to the vulnerability of the self: "We spoke of our fears for ourselves and for each other. How long did we think we had?" (203). But, like the permission Shapiro's determination of ridiculousness gives to the form of attachment between him and Giovanni, the intimacy and openness of Conigrave and John's 'facing it' – the fear and then courage Conigrave feels about talking to John; John's desire to "know it all" (203) – gives vulnerability an ethical character through the significance of reciprocity it establishes. In both memoirs, vulnerability is the beginning of an ethics of responsibility, a form of relationality that attends to the demands the other makes on the self and the uniqueness of each of them.

In the relation that *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* establish between being-gay, having AIDS, and the ontological vulnerability of the unique self, the responsibility of selves for other selves is politicised in a way that offers an important means of both

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[5] National Institute of Dramatic Art.

critiquing and affirming Cavarero's model of uniqueness in narration. Conigrave and Shapiro's texts configure the ways in which *what-ness* is made particular by the selves who live it and demonstrate the necessity of a politics and a philosophy that recognises the particular in the general. The co-implication of past and future in these texts – the anticipation of the textual self's survival in the content and significance of self-writing and narration – organises a politics in which to read is also to care for, to be responsible for, and to recognise the uniqueness of the protagonists in *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*, and the association the texts make between being-gay, living with AIDS, and the vulnerability of the unique self. Shapiro and Conigrave's texts emancipate *what-ness* from its subordinated priority under *who-ness* and demonstrate the imperative and political significance it has for the selves who live it and make it unique. *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* attest to the *who-ness* of *what-ness*.

I have described the relationship that *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* establish between being-gay, having AIDS, and the vulnerability of the unique self as complex and often-precarious. That description results from a cautious attempt to avoid the conflation of gay identity with illness, with HIV/AIDS – the kind of conflation that Shapiro resists in the difference he discerns between 'being' and 'having' a virus. Conflation of this kind is the subject of Susan Sontag's (2002 [1989]) renowned and forceful critique of the paranoid and politicised metaphoricity of AIDS diagnoses and the deployment of this within political scenes and public policy. For Sontag – whose critique is directed toward a history closer to that of *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* than it is to 2014, the year of this study – the often-militarised metaphoricity of AIDS has the effect of imputing shame upon s/he who is diagnosed with the illness. Michael Warner's (1999) study of US regulation of the disease echoes Sontag's observations. For Warner, US regulation of AIDS creates "damaging hierarchies of shame and elaborate mechanisms to enforce [them]" by promoting normative ideals of coupledom and abstinence before marriage (Warner 195), by directing individuals "towards a 'healthy' norm" that measures and appraises people "in terms of the extent to which they deviate from this norm" (Elbe 413). For Sontag, then, the "sexual transmission of this illness, considered by most people as a calamity one brings on oneself, is judged more harshly than other means – especially since AIDS is understood as a disease not only of sexual excess but of perversity" (111). AIDS thus exposes the practices and identities of particular groups of people (110). It is not, Sontag writes,

a mysterious affliction that seems to strike at random. Indeed, to get AIDS is precisely to be revealed, in the majority of cases so far, as a member of a certain 'risk group', a community of pariahs. The illness flushes out an identity that might have remained hidden from neighbours, jobmates, family, friends (110).

Before Sontag's famous study, Simon Watney (1987) conceived of AIDS not only as "a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale" but "a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure" (9). Supporting this claim, Dennis Altman's (1986) research on AIDS and the media shows how "early reports on AIDS tended to set the tone for future journalism, in particular the categorization of AIDS as intrinsically 'gay,' which was all the more newsworthy when it affected anyone else" (16–17); the "homosexual character of the disease was firmly established by the media, and the discovery of other affected groups did little to change this perception" (17). And in *AIDS Narratives* (1996), Steven F. Kruger turns from a comprehensive account of the metaphors within scientific discourse, which construct AIDS as "itself an *intentional* identity" (3; original emphasis), to consider "the ways in which gendered and sexualized discourses of AIDS shape *narrative* understandings" of the illness (3; original emphasis). On this, Kruger writes

[o]n the one hand, AIDS is constructed as an invariably fatal weakening of an individual's bodily defences, a depiction often used to reconfirm an identification between disease and gayness imagined as itself always already weak and vulnerable. On the other hand, AIDS is understood in terms of the narrative of an epidemic 'spread' largely attributable to gay 'immorality' and 'unnaturalness' (3).

An important passage from Conigrave's *Holding the Man* records the anxieties manifest within the kind of representational crisis theorised above. Shortly after moving out of home, Conigrave breaks up with John in order to pursue adventure and "to explore [his] sexuality" (151). He moves to Sydney after successfully auditioning for NIDA. His chronicle of the three years he and John are apart is focused largely on the different men with whom he had sex and his burgeoning acting career. "Those three years," Conigrave writes, however, "were also about a strange new disease. Gay cancer became GRID: Gay Related Immune Dysfunction. There was lots of speculation about its cause. Was it immune overload from all the sexually transmitted disease gay men got? The use of recreational drugs like amyl nitrate? Or perhaps the enormous amounts of semen taken into the rectum were immunosuppressive?" (156). Amongst conjecture about its causes, Conigrave writes that because of what would become known as AIDS "a pall of fear" (156) lay over his groups of friends:

> The world was changing. The words 'anal sex' were starting to appear on the front pages of the newspapers, and gay men's lives were combed thoroughly. There was a lot of hysteria. 'Mosquitos Spread AIDS,' screamed one headline. 'Die poofter, Die!' read another, quoting a father whose newborn triplets had died after a blood transfusion traced to a gay man. AIDS and the fear of it were chipping away at us (157).

Conigrave exemplifies the suspicion and fear prevalent during the early history of AIDS when he recounts sharing an orange juice with a woman in his class at NIDA. Taking a sip from her glass, he returns it to her only to be told he can keep it:

> 'Are you afraid that I might have AIDS?' She was. 'I don't think I do, but even if I did you can't get it from sharing a drink.'
>   'That's what they tell you. What about all those people who don't know how they got it?'
>   'If it was that easily spread, a lot more people would have it.'
>   I didn't feel like a leper but I was concerned for her, living in such a frightened world (157).

The syntactical structure of the association I make in this chapter between being-gay, having AIDS, and the unique self's vulnerability ostensibly resembles the conflation of self with illness that the above studies criticise and for which the passage from Conigrave's text account above. The risk of recuperating that questionable *identity* between being-gay and illness is what makes the *association* precarious. What makes it interestingly complex, however, is the seemingly simple fact that, within *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*, "it is the body, the gay body, on which the narrative of AIDS is inscribed" (Duncan, *Reading and Writing* 143). In addition to the malicious fictions that sustain it, the identity of gay-ness and AIDS is also problematic because it overlooks differences between cultural responses to the disease and its demography.

While the inscriptive relation of the gay body and AIDS is true of *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*, that inscriptive relation isn't generalisable across all self-writings by gay men about AIDS. Indeed, in "Pier Vittorio Tondelli: An Art of the Body in Resistance?" (1999), Duncan writes that the association between "gay identity, politics and AIDS" (56) in works like Watney's *Policing Desire* "do not obtain in Italy" (57). "As an issue" in Italy, Duncan observes, AIDS activism "had not mobilized the gay community in the same way as in some other Western countries" (56), nor did AIDS provide Italy with "the urgent motivation for artistic production in any number of different media" as it had elsewhere (59). For Duncan, the Italian response to AIDS, as well as particularly Italian cultural framings of homosexuality ("Pier Vittorio Tondelli" 56–58), challenge Bersani's

claim that "[n]othing has made gay men more visible than AIDS" (*Homos* 19) as well as the referent of Conigrave's description above of a "world" (157) that was changing. Questioning, David Moss' explanation, moreover, for Italy's reticence about gay identity and AIDS – which claims "[o]ne effect of declining to identify any category of victims as especially significant is to refuse both to legitimate its members as deserving of special treatment and to acknowledge their representatives as institutionalized interlocutors in a joint campaigns to contain HIV infection" (Moss qtd. in Duncan "Pier Vittorio Tondelli 56) – Duncan instead reads the Italian response to AIDS as "a difficult and negotiated silence around the issues of sexual identity and identities grounded in illness and death; a silence that has no single meaning" ("Pier Vittorio Tondelli" 63).

In light of Duncan's important delimitation of the relation between gay identity and AIDS, it is tempting to explain *L'intruso*'s difference – for I suggest the relation between gay identity and AIDS is acutely manifest in Shapiro's text – as American importation: Shapiro is an American; much of *L'intruso* takes place in New York; and the text was translated into Italian from its original English by Marina Astrologo. But this explanation – unnecessary in the first place – would reify cultural difference, promoting an essentialised and monolithic conception of 'Italian' and 'American' culture rather than intercultural dialogue of the kind manifest in the very relation between the lovers, Shapiro and Giovanni, themselves. It would also deny the success of *L'intruso* in Italy (cf. Garbesi). Duncan's conception of the inscriptive relation between the gay body and AIDS thus underscores the importance of avoiding essentialised notions, in the first instance, of the relation between gay-ness and illness, and, in the second instance, of universal attitudes toward that same relation.

The inscription to which Duncan refers is not the same, then, as the kind of narrativised relations that sustain the identification of gay-identity with AIDS in Kruger. Inscription does, however, insist upon a meaningful (but not causal) relationship between the gay identity of the narrators and protagonists in *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* and their experiences of AIDS. This is to insistence further on the particularity of the lives that are narrated in those texts: they are the lives of gay people who have, or are affected by people who have, AIDS. But that association between being-gay and having AIDS is not inevitable; it is the result of happenstance, something subordinate to the "drama of contingency" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 124).

Duncan exemplifies the inscriptive rather than conflating association between gay bodies and AIDS narratives with reference to an observation Shapiro makes in *L'intruso*.

As a means of discussing the particularity of a gay experience of and with AIDS, without identifying the latter with the former, Duncan describes Giovanni and Shapiro's relationship as "eroded and destroyed by the 'intrusion' of the HIV virus that determines the rhythms of their days and the contours of Giovanni's body. It becomes the medium through which their relationship is conducted" (*Reading and Writing* 143). Duncan then cites Shapiro's description of the "erotics of the hospital ward" (143):

> le flebo della sera divennero la nostra nuova forma d'intimità: alla fine della giornata, soli nella nostra camera da letto, immersi nella concentrazione, eseguivamo con delicatezza un atto in cui dei fluidi penetravano nel corpo dell'uno per effetto delle azioni dell'altro. Erotismo da corsia (*L'intruso* 86).

> [the evening drip became our new form of intimacy: at the end of the day, alone in our bedroom, totally focussed, we carried out with great care an act in which fluids penetrated the body of one as a result of the actions of the other. The erotics of the hospital ward (trans. Duncan 143)].

AIDS intervenes in the immediacy of the relation between Shapiro and Giovanni. The drip to which Giovanni is attached enables a symbolic kind of erotics; its insertion into Giovanni and its provision of essential fluids metonymically replaces, even displaces, the sex Shapiro and Giovanni used to have. AIDS makes of Shapiro and Giovanni's intimacy a medicalised and routinised form of attachment. Shapiro's description of the form of intimacy enabled by Giovanni's drip as an 'erotics of the hospital ward' is a deflated acknowledgement of the 'intrusion' into their relationship that Giovanni's virus represents.

In "Some Considerations on Sexuality and Gender in the Context of AIDS" (2003), Gary W. Dowsett wonders "what would happen were we to consider seriously" that "HIV/AIDS is actually an epidemic of desire" (25). In *Practicing Desire* (1996), moreover, commenting on the almost entire neglect of the participants at a 1987 Gay and Lesbian Studies conference to talk of sex, to elaborate empirically the enacted and embodied concepts of "sex, sexuality, sexual identity, gay community, and so on" (8) – Dowsett writes, that neglecting sex, regardless of "discursive sophistication" on questions of social constructionism (8), "is ironic when one considers that the social construction of anything implies, first, the presence of sociality, and, second, the existence of a means, a mechanism, an action wherein construction occurs" (9). Dowsett's criticism of the theoretical neglect for the empirical realities of sex is echoed in Leo Bersani's study of the "*desexualising*" tendencies of "gay critiques of homosexual identity" (*Homos* 5; original emphasis), a study that recalls the provocative opening line

that underpins observations about the psychic complexity of sexual identity in "Is the Rectum a Grave" (1987) that "[t]here is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it" (197). On the desexualising discourse of gay social critique, Bersani writes that "[g]ay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their sophisticated awareness of how they have been *constructed* as gay men and lesbians" (6). "We have erased ourselves," he continues, "in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us" (6). There "are many ways of being gay," Bersani permits. "Sexual behaviour is never only a question of sex, […"Gay identity"…] is embedded in all the other nonsexual ways in which we are socially and culturally positioned" (3). Nevertheless, "[y]ou would never know, from most of the works I discuss," Bersani quips, "that gay men, for all their diversity, share a strong sexual interest in other human beings anatomically identifiable as male" (5–6).

Symbolic and deflated though I have described Shapiro and Giovanni's 'erotics of the hospital', the erotics nevertheless situate AIDS within a form of intimacy, a form of sexuality that further substantiates the association between being-gay and having-AIDS. The erotics of the hospital situate AIDS within an economy of desire, gesturing toward Dowsett's formulation of AIDS as an epidemic of the same and avoiding the desexualising attitude toward gay identity of which Bersani is suspicious. This is also manifest in Conigrave's summary of some of the conjectures about AIDS' transmission, where the disease is linked, however speciously or problematically, to a number of sexual practices, to a number of ways in which sexual identity is "enacted and embodied" (Dowsett, *Practicing Desire* 8). In *L'intruso* this link is also discernible in the inclusion of an autobiographical article Giovanni wrote for the Italian newspaper, *L'Espresso*, where Giovanni reflects "[s]ono stato diagnosticato sieropositivo nell'aprile del 1987 anche se ritengo di essermi contagiato nell'estate del 1981 durante una settimana di sfrenatezza nelle saune di San Francisco" (104) [I was diagnosed with HIV in April, 1987, though I believe I was infected in the summer of 1981, during a week of debauchery in the saunas of San Francisco]. The association between being-gay and having-AIDS is not etiological or inevitable but it is nonetheless vulnerably present within the lives that are lived and narrated in Shapiro and Conigrave's texts.

Duncan's formulation of AIDS as something "inscribed" on the "gay body" (*Reading and Writing* 143) usefully conceives of the *interrelation* between virus and the forms of relationality the gay body signifies. The association of being-gay and having-AIDS and the vulnerability of the unique self designates the interrelatedness rather than

identity of the constitutive elements of that association. The significance of this interrelation lies in the types of recognition it elicits and demands, for it insists upon the particularity not only of the individuals it describes (within *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*), but also the particularity of the socio-cultural responsiveness and responsibility it provokes and necessitates. A specific kind of *what-ness* is effected in this association, one for which the terms in Cavarero's philosophy of unique selfhood are unable to account without first being deepened.

Altruism, Cavarero writes in *Tu che*, "[p]rima ancora di essere un generoso stile di vita a servizio degli altri […] è infatti il principio basilare di un sé che si sa costituito dall'altro: l'*altro necessario* (109) ["[p]rior to being a generous life-style in the service of others […] is indeed the foundational principle of a self that knows itself to be constituted by another: the necessary other" (*Relating Narratives* 84)]. For Cavarero, unique selfhood, the uniqueness the self exposes, "porta sulla scena un sé fragile e impadroneggiabile. Tanto il sé esibitivo dell'azione quanto il sé narrabile sono *irresidualmente consegnati agli altri*" (109; my emphasis) ["brings to the scene a fragile and unmasterable self. Both the exhibitionist self of action and the narratable self are *completely given over to others*" (*Relating Narratives* 84; my emphasis)]. In many ways, this altruistic relation, the self's being completely given-over-to the other, defines the vulnerability that constitutes the relations between selves in *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*. Cavarero's altruism designates the significance of the politics of responsibility articulated within those texts.

But in her more recent work, Cavarero (2007, 2009) departs from 'altruism' to elaborate instead a more demonstrative ontology of vulnerability and dependency that is exemplified, predominately, in contemporary forms of "orrorismo" ["horrorism"]: "una violenza che, non accontentandosi di uccidere, perché uccidere sarebbe troppo poco, mira a distruggere l'unicità del corpo e si accanisce sulla sua costitutiva vulnerabilità" (*Orrorismo* 15) ["a violence that, not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body, tearing at its constitutive vulnerability" (*Horrorism* 8)]. In "Recritude" (2013), moreover, Cavarero sets herself the task of "deconstructing the vertical subject that inhabits modern individualist ontology" and dedicates herself "to featuring an inclined subjectivity in order to revisit what we could call a relational ontology, calling on vulnerability and dependence for illumination" (222). The vocabulary of 'altruism' is replaced in Cavarero's recent work by an emphasis on

"vulnerability" and "postural ontology", which "presents us with the issue of a relational subjectivity, structurally asymmetrical and unbalanced, consisting of the paradigmatic exposure of the human as vulnerable to the inclined posture of the other who bends over him or her" (229). Cavarero's most recently published monograph, *Inclinazioni: Critica della rettitudine* (2014) develops this philosophy.

The specificity of Cavarero's current research, however, especially that of "orrorismo", is not easily translated into my own study of uniqueness and self-writing because its focus is an exceptional and spectacular form of bodily violence. For this reason, I maintain the significance of 'altruism' as the complete consignation of self to other in order to account for more banal, less spectacular and demonstrably violent forms of relations of dependency between selves. There is, especially for the protagonists in *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*, a certain force or intense momentum within the drama of contingency, however, which thus requires a more generalisable notion of the 'violence' of being vulnerably related and completely consigned over to others. This generalisable violence is, Judith Butler writes, something "[w]e cannot […] will away", something "[w]e must attend to […], even abide by […], as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose others" (*Precarious Life* 29).

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler writes that "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies," by the self's vulnerability to illness, to conflict, by subjection to the possibility of violence or its realisation (20). "Loss and vulnerability," Butler continues, "seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (20). Distinct from the specificity of "orrorismo," Butler offers a more general conception of vulnerability as something that relates to the self's attachment to others and the precariousness of those forms of attachment such that when they come or are made undone, the loss and consequent grief or mourning represents a particular psychic and embodied violence. It is the violence of detachment, of being severed from "*the tie*" of relationality (22; original emphasis). In the realisation of what is always-potential – detachment – in the self's vulnerable ties with others, indeed, in the condition of vulnerability itself, one "finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen […] Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing" (21). The grief that might accompany detachment and undoing displays "the thrall in which our relations

with others hold us" (23). The violence of detachment and grief disrupts the self "in ways that we cannot always recount or explain […] in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (23). This observation also describes the previous study of Didion's magical thinking, where psychic processes cannot always be knowingly described, but which nevertheless exert particular force over the self.

For Butler, this conception of the relational as circumscribed by conditions of vulnerability, of precarity, furnishes

> a sense of political community of a complex order […] by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the 'we' is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against (23).

Vulnerability, as an intrinsic quality of the self's relations with others, as that which furnishes a political community, corresponds to the ethical altruism of selfhood in Cavarero's *Tu che*. For Butler and Cavarero, the ontology of vulnerability is the point of departure for an ethics of relation between the self and the other, one that centres upon the self's constitutive dependency upon the other. Where, for Cavarero, however, the category of vulnerability (as the development of that earlier category of altruism) underpins the analysis of an extreme form of contemporary violence directed toward the figural unity of the self as singularity, as uniqueness, for Butler, violence relates in perhaps more anodyne and certainly more generalisable ways to vulnerability, even though *Precarious Life* does consider extreme cases of violence, situations in which "vulnerability […] becomes highly exacerbated under social and political conditions" (29). Vulnerability predominates in Cavarero's *Orrorismo* as the prior ontological condition that is exploited by violence to render the self defenceless. For Butler, vulnerability relates to a more ordinary violence as an effect of the ways in which the other constitutes and impacts upon the self. Murphy formulates the difference between Cavarero's recent philosophy and that of Butler's, then, as the difference between "conceptions of the body in the service of ethics" (587). "Cavarero," Murphy writes, "is invested in the ethical provocation of uniqueness, Butler in the "constitutive obligations" that each of us assumes by virtue of our generalized or anonymous availability to each other" (587). The difference that emerges from the "ethical ontologies" (588) Cavarero and Butler propose is, for Murphy, finally, a productive one "insofar as it gestures toward the possibility of a humanism whose scope is broad, but not blind to embodied difference" (579). Butler's difference from Cavarero also enables a simplified form of

violence to be associated with Cavarero's "etica altruistica della relazione" (*Tu che* 120) ["altruistic ethics of relation" (*Relating Narratives* 92)].

This association is read in the prolepses of the initial two passages from Shapiro and Conigrave's texts with which I began this chapter. Shapiro's narrative intervention following Giovanni's revelation about his HIV status anticipates the latter's death from AIDS: "ogni giorno che passava, lui diventava sempre più il suo virus (14) [with every day that passed, he was becoming more and more his virus]. In *Holding the Man*, John's presumption that he will "probably" die from AIDS similarly anticipates the reality of that event. The anticipation of death in these key moments, the narrative prolepses which structures them, focuses the ontology of vulnerability that underpins the model of selfhood common to Cavarero and Butler. Prolepsis gives focus to the contingency of existence, what Butler describes as the recognition of something "larger than one's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing" (*Precarious Life* 21), and what Cavarero describes as the self's irremediable openness to the possibilities of wounding and caring (*Orrorismo* 30; *Horrorism* 20). The anticipation of death foregrounds the undoing of the self by forces outside of her/him and to which s/he is inevitably exposed.

The specific kind of undoing of the self in *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man* that AIDS represents is articulated by the kind of violence Cavarero relates to vulnerability when it is coupled with defencelessness. Ultimately the self is rendered defenceless by AIDS; untreated, it undoes the self. It disintegrates the body. The link Cavarero makes between vulnerability and defencelessness captures the force of being undone, its havoc, its devastation. But Butler's more generalised conception of violence and vulnerability offers a crucial means of resisting the identification of AIDS with the "horror" of violence that emerges from Cavarero's philosophy in *Orrorismo*. Butler's contribution of grief and loss to the relation between vulnerability and violence insists upon the significance of the self's constitutive ties with others and enables the implication of AIDS to be registered in relations between selves rather than simply or solely in its cumulative or totalised effect on the body.

The relational model of selfhood common to Cavarero and Butler's theories has greatest political import for *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*, however, in Cavarero's vocabulary of altruism and uniqueness. Where Butler's more generalisable conception of violence and vulnerability as subtended by loss and mourning offers an important means of avoiding the reduction of AIDS to the spectacle of violence, the anonymity and

generality of Butler's formulation of vulnerability (Murphy 582) is instead importantly personalised by Cavarero's vocabulary of uniqueness, a category which gives priority to the specificity and singularity of circumstance as well as the relations between selves that respond to it. Moreover, the uniqueness that results from the total consignment of the self to the other politically engages the question of recognition and reciprocity in the *what-ness* of being-gay and having-AIDS. In altruistic relation, the selves in Shapiro and Conigrave's texts give substance to the concept of *what-ness* as something that can be lived uniquely, as a generality than can be *made* particular. AIDS becomes a political question in these texts through the structure it is given by, and in the way it structures, the *what-ness* of vulnerable selves in relation. Relations between selves are structured by particular attitudes toward particular cases of *what-ness* so that forms of attachment condition the quality of vulnerability, its greater or lesser determination of life at a given point in time. Relations between selves, their negotiation of *what-ness*, organise the effects of AIDS, itself a structure of the forms attachments can take.

In the conclusion to his analysis of *L'intruso*, Duncan discusses the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo's response to Giovanni's autobiographical article about AIDS, which was published in *L'Espresso* on the 16th of February and written, for the most part, during treatment in hospital. Marina Garbesi (1992), writing for the Italian newspaper *la Repubblica*, celebrates Giovanni's article, 'La mia vita con l'Aids' as

> Un 'manifesto' senza precedenti […] sulla malattia, la sofferenza, il tabù della morte. Una testimonianza a bassa voce, volutamente dimessa, minimale, in cui si parla senza perifrasi di fleboclisi e diarrea, che ha catturato l'attenzione più di tanti drammi clamorosamente sbandierati dalla "Borsa dolori" televisiva. Uno sguardo semplice sul vuoto…

> [An unprecedented "manifesto' […] on disease, on suffering, on the taboo of death. A softly spoken testimony, intentionally worn, minimal, which speaks, in no uncertain terms, of drips and diarrhoea, which captured attention more than most dramas sensationally bandied about by "stock exchange pains" on TV. A simple look at emptiness…].

For Vattimo, most famous for the philosophical development of 'il pensiero debole' [weak thought], however, Giovanni's article "relies on the […] stigmatization of AIDS for its effect" (Duncan, *Reading and Writing* 145). It depends upon a kind of "spectacularization" and "public avowal of an identity […that] empowers whoever performs the action, yet daunts those for whom such self-publicity is not an option" (145). Duncan makes the decisive observation, however, that Vattimo's emphasis on individuality, Giovanni as a "Person With AIDS […] overlooks the narrative dimension

of the text through which Giovanni charts the construction of an identity that is the product of *varying bonds of inter-relatedness* that ensure that his AIDS diagnosis does not belong to him alone" (146; my emphasis). Vattimo's charge of "spectacularization" reifies and singularises "an identity that is in the process of construction, and at the same time, poignantly and inexorably, being undone" (146). The significance of the relational character of identity that Duncan importantly claims for Giovanni's article, against the charge of a solipsistic "spectacularization", is reinforced by the position of Giovanni's article within Shapiro's autobiography. Within *L'intruso*, Giovanni's article consolidates the composite significance of the text. It is a condensed perspective of a number of the same events, or situations more generally, that Shapiro chronicles over the course of *L'intruso* as a whole, before Giovanni's death. The relational character of the texts, their speaking to and through one another, parallels the relational character of the lives Giovanni and Shapiro shared together. Giovanni's article within Shapiro's text can be said to function, then, as *mise en abyme*, one that represents, and in that representation sustains, the co-implication of identities and the dispersal of the effects of AIDS that impact upon those identities.

The relational character of Shapiro and Giovanni's identities is organised, moreover, by the significance the lovers give to the structure of the family. Indeed, as Duncan writes, "the presence of family dominates" Shapiro's text (141). The two men, each already with a son, met through an advertisement Shapiro placed in *The Village Voice*. In addition to the details he gives of himself – "[m]aschio gay 34enne, *single*, affettuoso, saggio e di buone letture" (10) [34-year-old gay male, single, affectionate, wise and well-read] – Shapiro writes that he has a one-year-old son and ends his advertisement, importantly, with the question "Sai cambiare un pannolino?" (10) [Do you know how to change a nappy]. Living in Brooklyn, "isolato e lontano da tutto" [isolated and far away from everything], Shapiro placed his advertisement upon suggestion from his therapist to fulfil his need for company (9). Shapiro relates this company, moreover, to an aspiration for the kind of structure afforded by family. "[S]ognavo l'avventura," Shapiro writes [I dreamed of adventure], an adventure in which

> padre e figlio, e magari anche un partner, faranno qualcosa di folle alla Brett: entrare nel Peace Corps, scalare insieme l'Himalaya, o almeno vivere all'estero. Un padre e il suo amante e il suo bambino: non una famiglia nucleare, ma un team familiare, un'unità cementata (9).

> [father and son, and maybe even a partner, will do something crazy, Brett-style: join the Peace Corps, climb the Himalayas together, or at least live overseas. A

father and his lover and his son: not a nuclear familiar, but a family team, a unity made concrete].

Shapiro's advertisement is a movement toward the instantiation of what is seemingly deprioritised within the description of his dream by subjunctive construction: "*magari anche* un partner" [*maybe even* a partner]. His advertisement in *The Village Voice* is a means of countering the sense of vulnerability that inflects his being "isolato e lontano da tutto" [isolated and far away from everything] to the extent that it is directed toward the realisation of "un team familiar, un'unità cementata" [a family team, a unity made concrete], a specific type of company and form of attachment.

In his response to Shapiro's advertisement, Giovanni introduces himself through the figure of his son, foregrounding the paternal. His response thus begins:

> certo che so cambiare un pannolino! È esattamente quello che ho fatto per quasi tutto il 1979 e il 1980. Oltre a giocare, andare al playground e al parco, cucinare, fare le coccole, fare il bucato, ecc. Mio figlio Stefano è nato il 2 dicembre 1978, e da allora è il centro affettivo della mia vita (10).

> [of course I know how to change a nappy! That's exactly what I did for nearly all of 1979 and 1980. Apart from playing, going to the playing and the park, cooking, cuddling, doing the laundry, etc. My son, Stefano was born on the 2nd of December, 1978, and has been at the centre of my feelings and my life since then].

Following his introduction, and its description of a paternity characterised by proximity, domesticity, and responsibility, Giovanni describes what he considers to be New York's indifference toward children, his involvement in a Gay Fathers group, and how much he misses his son, who now lives with his mother in Italy. As a result of missing his son "da pazzi" [like crazy], Giovanni tells Shapiro, attentive to the contingency of meeting someone through "[le] pagine delle inserzioni" (11) [advertisement pages], that "[n]on mi dispiacerebbe fare amicizia con un padre gay per il quale essere padre è visibilmente una cosa essenziale, e vorrei che nella mia vita ci fosse di nuovo un bambino piccolo" (11) [I wouldn't mind making friends with a gay father for whom being a father is visibly an essential thing to be, and I would like a little child in my life again].

Giovanni and Shapiro's relationship is founded on the importance each determines in the role of fatherhood and the investment each has in the idea of family, that "unità cementata" [unity made concrete]. Duncan observes, moreover, that with Giovanni's deterioration "any anticipation of the future becomes visibly precarious" for the couple (142) and in response to this precariousness, Giovanni and Shapiro together

make plans to adopt a child, the presence of whom is symbolically invested with the implication of continuity, the idea of which temporarily relieves the couple of their vulnerability to the increasing likelihood of Giovanni's death and the undoing of their relationship. On this, Shapiro writes "[i]l bimbo sarebbe stato un legame, per qualche tempo una speranza, e alla fine il nostro lascito" (36) [the child would have been a tie, for some time a hope, and in the end our legacy]. The past conditional of Shapiro's observation here indicates, however, the couple's decision not to adopt another child in the end. Giovanni, despite believing that he would be "il primo a non morire di Aids pur avendo l'Aids" [the first person not to die of AIDS while having AIDS], becomes increasingly symptomatic and unable to care for himself, let alone another child. The decision not to adopt another child is described as a kind of death: "il nostro bambino era morto; e il pezzo di Giovanni che si portò via non era meno vitale di tutti i bersagli anatomici che l'Aids, di lì a poco, avrebbe preso di mira e distrutto a uno a uno" (50) ["our child was dead and the piece of Giovanni that went with it was no less vital than any of the anatomical targets that AIDS would shortly aim at and destroy one by one" (trans. Duncan 142)].

The figure of the child and Shapiro and Giovanni's aspirations for the unity of family register the interruption of the couple's temporality by AIDS and the alternative structure it imposes on their lives. Giovanni's illness imposes itself as an exacerbated structure of vulnerability; it is the imposition of that situation Butler describes where one "finds oneself foiled […by…] [s]omething […] larger than one's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing" (*Precarious Life* 29). "[T]utte le nostre decisioni," Shapiro writes, "vennero affrettate dalla sua malattia. Non immaginavamo neanche quanto poco tempo ci restava" (29) [All our decisions were spurred on by his illness. We had no idea how little time we had left" (trans. Duncan 142)]. For this reason, Shapiro describes the disease as "il terzo incomodo, l'anti-partner della nostra relazione" (14) [the third-wheel, the anti-partner of our relationship]. The interruption of the trajectory of the couple's relationship, their life, also demonstrates the particularity of the *what-ness* Shapiro and Giovanni live, their gay-ness. The fractured temporality that AIDS imposes queers a sexuality that Duncan describes, in his analysis of Shapiro and Giovanni's familial aspirations and their marriage, as a hoped-for "heterosexual *epopee*" (142). In this, the question of the political import of recognising *what-ness* as uniqueness asserts itself.

For Eve Sedgwick, "queer" refers broadly to

> the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically (*Tendencies* 8; original emphasis).

The impossibility of sexuality to be made "to signify monolithically" is what AIDS guarantees for the kind of recognition that Shapiro and Giovanni desire for their relationship. Duncan's observation about the hoped-for heterosexual significance of Shapiro and Giovanni's relationship is pertinent. It further demonstrates the significance of relationality as a means of structuring the implication of AIDS and the vulnerability it exacerbates in the couple's lives. Marriage, for Shapiro and Giovanni, is a means of reconciling their loosely-observed Judaism with their homosexuality (Duncan 142). More than this, however (and with a kind of significance similar to the aspiration for the familial and the symbolic introduction of life through the figure of a newly adopted child), partaking in the institution of marriage is, Shapiro describes, "lo sforzo per spremer fuori il meglio della tradizione in un contesto assolutamente eterodosso," ["the effort to squeeze the best out of tradition in a totally heterodox context"] which represents "una sfida al mondo e una sfida alla morte (45) ["a challenge to the world and a challenge to death" (trans. Duncan 142)]. But marriage, as the structuration of a form of attachment between selves premised on the ideas of longevity and stability, is ultimately undone by Giovanni's illness. Instead, the story of Shapiro and Giovanni is one in which the ambition toward heterodoxy is foiled "by the needs of the […latter's] ailing body" (Duncan 142). The vulnerability that AIDS exacerbates in Giovanni's body runs counter to the logic of longevity and stability. The impossibility of partaking in the heterodoxy of marriage is enforced by the destabilisation and devastation of AIDS that is to be read through Giovanni's undoing. Giovanni's symptomatic body is testament to the "lapses and excesses of meaning" in identity that *can't be* made "to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 8). The relation between Shapiro and Giovanni that AIDS mediates is queered by the impossibility, the fracturing of its stabilised signification. The lovers' relationship is determined by the aggravated accumulation, the *force*, of the contingent. "Controllare il futuro", [To control the future] Giovanni writes in one of the many letters included within *L'intruso*, "è un ambizione delirante per chiunque, ma in particolare per me" (38) [is a delusional ambition for anyone, but especially for me].

As *L'intruso* develops in its chronicle of the collapse of Giovanni's body – his exhaustion, his diarrhoea, his fevers, his weight loss, his bronchitis, and the suppression of his immune system – the queerness of the relation between him and Shapiro manifests

itself as disequilibrium: Giovanni becomes entirely dependent upon Shapiro, who assumes all responsibilities. Shapiro describes his realisation of this disequilibrium:

> Ogni volta che mi trovavo a passare davanti a una farmacia o a un dispensario ancora inesplorato, mi fermavo a far provvista di protein liquid e rimedi omeopatici con cui integrare il trattamento prescritto dal medico di Giovanni. Intanto il mio risentimento s'inaspriva sempre più. C'era uno squilibrio evidente nella divisione del lavoro e nella distribuzione dei compiti fra me a Giovanni. Cominciavo a essere oppresso dalla mia stessa efficienza. Cercavo di attribuire quel divario alla malattia di Giovani, ma sapevo benissimo che dipendeva dalla mia tendenza innata a occuparmi di tutto non meno che dalla generale avversione di Giovanni per le responsabilità (45).

> [Every time I found myself passing a still unexplored pharmacy or dispensary, I stopped to replenish the supplies of liquid protein and homoeopathic remedies which I integrated into the treatment Giovanni's doctor prescribed. Meanwhile, my resentment became sharper and sharper. There was an evident disequilibrium in the division of labour and the distribution of chores between me and Giovanni. I was starting to be oppressed by my own efficiency. I tried to attribute that gap to Giovanni's illness, but I well knew that it depended on my innate tendency to busy myself with everything as much as it did on Giovanni's general aversion toward responsibilities].

Following this observation, however, which questions the difference between Giovanni before and after the symptomatic manifestations of his illness and highlights a relation of disequilibrium, Shapiro writes that it was in fact "futile cercare di distinguere fra le attività cui Giovanni non partecipava per colpa della malattia e quelle cui non partecipava per via della sua pigrizia" (45) [pointless to try and distinguish between the activities that Giovanni didn't share in because of the illness and those he didn't share in because of his laziness]. Though this question of participation was often the subject of the couple's conflicts, those conflicts were solved "quando la malattia costrinse Giovanni a letto" [when the illness forced Giovanni into bed], upon which the distinction between illness and laziness "divenne chiara come il sole" [became as clear as day]. The character of Giovanni's responsibility to and within his relationship with Shapiro is in the end determined by the character of his illness. Shapiro's share in the labour of a relationship, at first the result of Giovanni's laziness, becomes an inevitable necessity as Giovanni deteriorates further and further. The relation between Giovanni and Shapiro increasingly becomes unilateral: irresponsibility becomes impossibility. Shapiro's labour comes ultimately to respond to the defencelessness that AIDS has rendered in Giovanni. In an important letter, Giovanni conceives of his defencelessness and the disequilibrium of the relation between him and Shapiro, as a loss of autonomy:

Brett fa assolutamente tutto, al punto che anche quando io faccio una cosa semplicissima, come lavare faccia e mani a Z[ach], lui [Shapiro] trova che è fatta male e la rifà. Tutti i segnali indicano che la mia dipendenza, anche fisica, da lui, aumenterà progressivamente. L'unico campo nel quale ho autonomia è quello del reddito (63)

[Brett does absolutely everything, to the point that even when I wash Zach's face and hands, he [Shapiro] finds that it's been done badly and redoes it. All signs indicate my increasing dependency on him, even physically. The only area I have autonomy over is our income].

In response to what is increasingly understood as the inevitability of Giovanni's imminent death, the couple decide to move to Rome, fulfilling Shapiro's dream of living overseas in a pyrrhic kind of way, and enabling Giovanni to be closer to his son. Amongst their preparations for the move, Brett writes a letter to Giovanni, addressing the issue of responsibility and ethics in marriage. He describes the substitution of "noi" [we] for "io" [I], the latter of which is, for Shapiro, officially renounced in marriage (66):

Responsabilità del 'noi'. Questa ha alcuni aspetti pratici, come tenere ben chiuso l'armadietto della farmacia per assicurare il benessere di Zach; ha altre sfaccettature più sottili e più tenere, come un abbraccio improvviso
[…]
Si deve accettare consapevolmente una rinuncia personale per il bene di tutti
[…] È questa la sostanza del matrimonio.
[…]
Giovanni, amore mio, prima di trasferirci a Roma ti chiedo di sottostare a una di queste rare evenienze. Devi fare varie cose alle quali non sei affatto abituato e che forse ti creeranno disagio e magari dolore.
[…]
Io mi trasferisco per il bene di tutta la famiglia. Tu devi dimostrarci che anche tu hai a cuore il bene di noi tutti (66–67).

[Responsibility of 'we'. This has some practical aspects, like keeping the drug cabinet tightly closed to ensure Zach's safety; it has other subtler and more tender facets, like a sudden hug
[…]
You must knowingly accept personal renunciation for the good of us all […] This is the essence of marriage.
[…]
Giovanni, my love, before we move to Rome, I ask you to submit to one of these rare examples of this renunciation. You have to do various things which are not at all used to it and maybe you will make you uneasy and cause you pain.
[…]
I'm moving for the good of the whole family. You must show us that at heart you also have the well-being of us all].

Shapiro's letter to Giovanni exemplifies Duncan's earlier observation, in response to Vattimo's reified treatment of Giovanni's identity, about the interrelatedness of identity

effects that AIDS has for the selves who live it. In Shapiro's letter the toll of a relationship determined by the illness of his lover is manifest. The tragedy of Shapiro's appeal to 'we' is that the necessity of its statement actually attests to the impossibility of its realisation. Even if Giovanni can demonstrate that he has the well-being of the 'we' at heart, that demonstration, and the sentiment behind it, cannot endure and doesn't. In many ways, Shapiro's demand for a certain character of responsibility from Giovanni is an unfair: it will soon become impossible for Giovanni to *be* anything.

In the final account of Giovanni's deterioration, the structure of *L'intruso* shifts from the interspersion of Giovanni's letters and Shapiro's narrative to a more conspicuously journalistic chronicle. Organised by dates, Shapiro charts Giovanni's descent into delirium, the rapid disintegration of his bodies, and the increase of what is earlier described as "la 'medicalizzazione' della […loro] vita" (97) [the medicalisaton of their life]. Giovanni's delirium and increased amnesia marks the end of his and Shapiro's relationship before his final, corporeal, his actual, death:

> "Ti ricordi?" chiedo.
> "Che cosa?"
> "Il nostro matrimonio."
> "No" (123).
>
> ["Do you remember?" I ask.
> "What?"
> "Our marriage?"
> "No."].

Moments similar to the one above, and in particular Giovanni's decision that "non ho bisogno di far parte di un gruppo. Non ho bisogno di nessuno" (123) [I don't need to be part of a group. I don't need anyone] effects a dramatic emotional questioning of identity in Shapiro, who reflects:

> Fintantoché Giovanni non parlerà in modo sensato per noi, cioè probabilmente fino alla sua morte, questa crisi d'identità (sua? mia?) non sarà mai compresa.
>
> For as long as Giovanni doesn't talk sense to us, that is, probably until his death, this crisis of identity (his? mine?) will never be comprehended.

For Duncan, Shapiro's uncertainty about whose identity is in crisis ("sua? mia?") in Giovanni's undoing, "on one level answers to the devastating effects of AIDS on both carer and patient" (*Reading and Writing* 144). On another, important, level, Duncan writes that this uncertainty "also speaks to the underlying problem that […the text poses]. What could Giovanni ever have said to allay […Shapiro's] uncertainty over whose identity was

at stake? Whose life could he claim ownership of? And which story might he have owned up to?" (144). I consider this question in this chapter's concluding discussion of Derrida's *The Ear of the Other* (1985) and Chambers' *Facing It*. For now, it is important to note, that *L'intruso* ends not with the tragedy of Giovanni's death but with Shapiro and his son one year later, still in Rome. He writes: "[l]a famiglia di Giovanni è diventata la nostra (135) [Giovanni's family became our family].

The forms of relationality presupposed in the concept of family are similarly restricted and enabled by the *what-ness* of gay-ness and having-AIDS in *Holding the Man*. Where in *L'intruso*, however, the family is most often an idealised form of relationality tied to the concept of marriage and responsibility (where, that is, the family is given a significance internal to the workings of Shapiro and Giovanni's relationship as something that might withhold the threat of AIDS), in *Holding the Man*, the family is often represented as an exterior force that affects and registers the significance of Conigrave and John's relationship and its associated *what-ness*. Conigrave and John's families register the social compulsion of selves toward recognisable forms of *what-ness* by others. The idealised significance of family in *L'intruso* is for much of *Holding the Man* rather a frustrated structure through which recognition makes particular demands of selves. Conigrave and John's AIDS gives rise to a certain type of *what-ness*, moreover, that sustains and exasperates the injurious effects of what is at times wilful misrecognition of already-extant forms of *what-ness* (gay-ness). But AIDS also relieves selves from the history of this misrecognition so as to compel different forms of recognition and relationality. The *what-ness* of gay-ness and of having-AIDS (re)structures, both harmfully and positively, the quality of recognition and relationality. It is predominately through the topos of 'coming-out' that *Holding the Man* illustrates the structural significance of these specific kinds of *what-nesses*.

Conigrave's first experience of 'coming-out' is with a girl named Berenice or "Berry. Holidaying over Easter with his neighbour, Caroline, the two went to an annual bush dance one particular weekend in the country town of Maldon. There, Conigrave was introduced to Berry. "I felt I had made a new friend in Berry," Conigrave writes, after describing an evening of "laughter and exhaustion". But, he continues, "I wondered what it might be like to have a boy treat me like this. That felt right. Nice" (39). Despite this feeling, however, Conigrave asked Berry if she wanted "to go round" (39) with him, to which she replied with an affirmative kiss, beginning a brief romantic relationship sustained clumsily through letters.

When Berry later visits Conigrave in Melbourne they go to the latter's Third Form social. There, despite having thought to himself with relief that "*There's no way I could have come to the dance without a girlfriend*," (42; original emphasis), Conigrave spends much of the night attracted to and watching a boy named Rhys. When Conigrave and Berry decide to go outside (Conigrave unable to stand the music anymore), Berry attempts to arouse Conigrave by kissing him and directing his hands over her body. When Conigrave is unable to get hard, he pretends that Berry is Rhys. After that fantasy works only partially, Conigrave and Berry go home, an embarrassed silence between them. Two days later Berry calls Conigrave. Feeling ashamed for having led her on, "feeling that […he] did really like her but knowing […they] could never be boyfriend and girlfriend" (44), Conigrave ends their relationship. "That night," Conigrave writes, "I dreamt I told her I was gay and we had a punch-up. She stood on the veranda at school yelling that I was a poofter. I made love to her and she laughed" (44).

The anxieties in Conigrave's dreams increase after he writes a letter to Berry, explaining why he broke up with her: that he is gay. "The letter sat on my desk all night," he writes, "I woke up thinking, Tear it up! Tear it up! I dreamt that I had torn it up but next morning it was still there […] On my way to the station I hesitated at the letter-box, imagining my letter sitting on top of the others. Then I let it drop. *Can't do anything about it now. It's done* (45; original emphasis). When Berry calls to speak about Conigrave's letter, the latter's "heart jumped into […his] throat" for he had imagined her so disgusted that she wouldn't call (45). "I got your letter. It's okay", she tells Conigrave, however, adding that she still wants to be friends and would really like to see him. After making plans to meet that weekend, Conigrave writes: "I hung up the phone and sat there, numb. All at once I was hit by a wave of excruciating relief. Tears trickled down my face. I wasn't crying or even whimpering, just shaking my head, my face wet with tears" (46).

Conigrave's anxiety about Berry's reaction to his letter, to his 'coming-out', and his relief after her acceptance of his homosexuality, are very much related to the vulnerability of the self's exposure to and before others. In the interim period of Conigrave's sending the letter to Berry and her reaction to it, Conigrave is vulnerable to the contingent dynamics of recognition, the possible forms that relations between selves and others might take. Indeed, Conigrave's letter is a dramatic staging of the total consignment of self to the other that Cavarero describes as 'altruistic'. The dramatic suspense that for a time conditions Conigrave and Berry's friendship heightens the dynamics of a model of selfhood in which the self knows her/himself to be entirely

constituted by the other (*Tu che* 109; *Relating Narratives* 84). At this important point in *Holding the Man*, the recognition of Conigrave by Berry demands the recognition of his *what-ness*, his homosexuality. To fail to accept his homosexuality, his *what-ness*, is to fail to recognise him and the claims he has made about himself. For this reason, Conigrave is surprised by the apparent ease with which Berry accepts his homosexuality. Having dramatised her reaction to his 'coming-out' ("*She's probably so disgusted that she won't ring*"), Conigrave falters at her recognition: "'It's *okay*?' My mind was flooded with questions. *Did she suspect? Was it a total shock? What was it like opening the letter?* But I didn't think this was the time to ask them and we sat in silence for a moment" (45; original emphasis). Berry's recognition of Conigrave's homosexuality is the beginning of an end to a previously clandestine identity. Her recognition inaugurates a relation in which Conigrave is openly tied to his *what-ness*, *what-ness* that now constitutes part of their very relation itself. In relation with Berry, Conigrave becomes gay.

The difference of Conigrave's relation to Berry that results from 'coming-out' produces what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008 [1990]) describes as "epistemological space" (*Epistemology* 77). In coming-out, the vulnerability of exposure and its recognition (Conigrave's vulnerable exposure of himself as related to and invested in a particular form of *what-ness*) is conditioned by an epistemology of *what-ness*, which, in the case of Conigrave's sexuality, grounds the question of exposure and recognition of *what-ness*, gay-ness, in the tension between, *knowing* and *unknowing*. When Conigrave visits Berry the weekend after their phone call, then, the two are initially preoccupied by questions of knowing:

> 'How long have you known?'
> 'Two or three years. But I can remember having a crush on my cousin's boyfriend when I was eight years old.'
> […]
> 'Do you think I look gay? Did you pick it?'
> 'Don't you think it's a bit early to make up your mind? You're only fourteen.'
> […]
> 'You never know. Maybe it's because you're at an all-boys school. Have you ever had sex? I nodded, too embarrassed to go into detail. 'With a girl?'
> 'No.'
> 'Then how do you know?'
> 'I know' (47).

The 'epistemological space' opened by Conigrave's 'coming-out' is one in which *what-ness* is negotiated, *come to be understood*, through an interrogation of what Conigrave can and does know about himself. This 'epistemological space' is the meeting point between two

conceptions of the world, the point at which Berry and Conigrave's experiences and knowledge of the world and the self are brought into relation. After their discussion, Conigrave writes that for the "rest of the day we were two friends who shared a secret. I felt a special bond with her" (47). To the extent that 'coming-out' is an exposure of oneself to the vulnerable contingencies of the other's recognition, the epistemological space that 'coming-out' enables is the ground on which the meaningfulness of *what-ness* is staged as, and made the content of, relations between selves.

In contrast to the declarative knowingness of his 'coming-out' to Berry, Conigrave's romance with John is brought about by a performative encoding of what is known, by a ruse in which the known is staged as the *un*known. One afternoon, after rehearsing his part as Paris in *Romeo and Juliet*, Conigrave and his friend Joe catch a train home together. Sitting in the last carriage of the train, Joe tells Conigrave he had read something "in *Science and Nature*, a study of dolphins that showed they're primarily homosexual". Conigrave then writes Joe

> looked at me as if gauging my reaction. 'They swim in single-gender packs and a lot of their play is sexual. They only come together with the opposite sex to procreate .'
> He hesitated, then went on as if he had decided it was safe to continue. 'To say homosexuality is unnatural is ridiculous when clearly it occurs in nature.' *He's testing me to see if I am*
>
> […]
>
> [']Freud said that we are all born capable of sex with either gender. Do you think that's true?' I didn't answer, distracted by the thoughts traversing my brain. He was watching me intently (61–62).

A similarly encoded conversation occurs after another afternoon of rehearsals when Joe explains to Conigrave that he is trying to prove that "[i]f you know what others find attractive you can manipulate things so you're attractive" (65). The two of them attending an all-boys school, Joe presses Conigrave about which boys he thinks are attractive and why:

> 'Name a guy at school you think is attractive.'
> *John.* 'Rhys.'
> 'And what makes him attractive?'
> 'His suntan.'
> 'Anybody else? What about the Italian boy I've seen you talking to? John. What do you find attractive? His build? I nodded. 'His eyes?'
> 'And his eyelashes.' Joe scrawled away (65).

Joe's suspicion of Conigrave's sexuality is communicated in the above passages through its encryption, through the enactment of knowingness as *unknowingness* (cf. Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 77). In the first passage, Joe makes his recognition of Conigrave's homosexuality known, as well as his acceptance of it, through reference to the naturalness of homosexuality in dolphins. In the second passage, Joe hints at his knowledge of Conigrave's attraction to John by disguising the motivation for its confirmation in an experiment that makes that confirmation possible and acceptable, that makes its confirmation of little consequence (Joe's experiment is, nevertheless, an earnest one and also part of his attempt to prove Freud's theory of the self's essential bisexuality by coaxing another boy, Pietro, into having sex with him, despite the two having girlfriends [66]). *What-ness* is acknowledged through the performance of its being-unknown, unrecognised – through the superfluousness of its blatant statement. Only in blatant statement, through knowingness *qua* knowingness, however, does Conigrave find his feelings for John are reciprocated.

The first person at school to know openly that Conigrave is gay is his friend, Biscuit. Noticing that John and Conigrave are close, Biscuit initiates a game in which he pretends to be a jealous lover. In class one day, he interrupts John and Conigrave's conversation:

> 'You two seem to be getting along very well, I thought Tim was going out with me. Maybe we should have a triangle.' He was smiling, wide-eyed.
> 'Sorry,' I said. 'My heart belongs to someone else.' It felt so nice to say. John seemed unperturbed (79).

Following this, Biscuit and Conigrave talk at lunch and the former asks the latter directly: "'Are you gay?'" (80). When Conigrave confirms that he is gay, Biscuit's game of jealous-lover continues. A few days after their conversation, he intervenes in John's surprising, surreptitious rubbing of Conigrave's back in class to tell Conigrave that he must break up with John: "'I'm getting jealous. You have to drop him,' Biscuit said. 'Tell him you're going out with me.' I said yes, just to shut him up" (80). Conigrave later berates himself for the stupidity of feeling sad about having to end a relationship that doesn't actually exist and, when asked by Joe if he is ok on their way home from school, explains the situation to him. "Do you like this John?" Joe asks Conigrave:

> 'A lot.'
> Joe raised his eyebrows. 'Does he know that?'
> 'I don't know. I haven't told him as much.'
> 'Tell him. Ring him. Tonight.
> 'I couldn't.'

'He doesn't seemed freaked out so far.' I dissolved in terror. 'When I see you on the train in the morning, I want to hear that you did it. Onward and upward' (81).

And Conigrave does call John:

'Hi Tim.' We sat in silence for a moment. 'This is a nice surprise.'
'That's good. There's something I want to tell you.'
'I'm all ears.'
'You know this stupid game that Biscuit's been playing? Today he said I have to drop you, and I don't want to.' *Should I risk it?* I'm being serious.' *Maybe he doesn't understand.* 'What I'm trying to say is I like you.'
'That's good.'
I was fumbling. 'I really like you. I've liked you for some time.'
'I like you too.'
'Does this mean we're going out together?'
'You haven't asked me yet.'
'John Caleo, will you go round with me?'
'Yep.'
The undisclosed had ejaculated into daylight (83; original emphasis).

The performativity of unknowingness is responsible for the eventual affirmation of Conigrave and John's relationship. Biscuit's game of jealous-lover encodes Conigrave's homosexuality in such a way that the recognition of that homosexuality is actually permitted and enacted, but in a form of address or behaviour between selves that minimises the risk of its actual disclosure. Through the performance of a relationship, an actual relationship emerges. Far from the typical scene of high-school bullying, the schoolyard and Conigrave's friendships within it, is a context, on the whole, that supports Conigrave's sexuality. It even effects, or makes possible, particular aspects of it. As with Conigrave's 'coming-out' to Berry, the relational scene of recognition between Conigrave and his friends at school enables the manifestation of *what-ness*. Following their telephone conversation, then, Conigrave and John's relationship, their homosexuality, is lived visibly. Within their friendships with others, they are recognised as a couple. The epistemological space opened by the disclosure of self, by 'coming-out', enables *what-ness* and its recognition by establishing contexts in which its expression is facilitated and permitted. But for much of *Holding the Man*, this is not the case for Conigrave and John's families.

In response to accusations of being distant and irritable from his family and after telling them he won't be coming on the family trip to Sydney, Conigrave 'comes-out' to his parents:

Mum stared with hatred in her eyes, her arms folded. 'Why are you saying this?'
    'Because it's true.'

> 'You're just saying that to hurt us.'
> 'Gert, let the boy speak,' Dad interjected. 'Son, what makes you think you're gay?'
> 'I don't know, I just know I am.'
> 'When I was your age, guys used to muck around in the shower at the yacht club while the parents were sitting in the bar. Everyone did it. You'll grow out of it.'
> 'I hope you do,' Mum said. 'Otherwise you're going to have a sad life, a very lonely life.'
> 'Right now, I couldn't be happier'
> Mum fixed me with her stare. 'It's John, isn't it?' I nodded (103).

To make amends for the shock of 'coming-out', Conigrave agrees to go on the family trip to Sydney. But where in the original scene of 'coming-out', Conigrave's father responds less heatedly than his mother, in Sydney he is instead emotional, upset by Conigrave's declaration. On the balcony of their Travelodge, Conigrave and his father each smoke a cigarette and watch a number of men in the park below them, Conigrave deducing the park must be "*one of those gay pick-up places […he'd] heard about*" (104) and his father commenting:

> 'Sad. Thank God you'll never be like that.'
> 'How do you know?'
> 'You're not homosexual.'
> I was stunned. Hadn't they understood me the other night?
> [']I don't think we should talk about this now. It's going to be hard enough looking after your mother.' He threw his cigarette down on the homosexuals (104).

Upon the family's return to Melbourne, Conigrave's father begs, body shaking, "Please don't do this to us", having walked into Conigrave's room "like a four-year-old who'd lost his blanky" (105).

Conigrave's parents' reactions to his sexuality are involuted forms of recognition. Quite distinct from naïve fantasies of a scenario in which his parents "put their arms around [him] and said 'You poor bastard […] Being gay is not easy but we'll help you through the difficult times'" (102), Conigrave's coming-out to his parents is instead a scenario that stages the involution of recognition, its furling in upon the self who is rather compelled to recognise the other. Where one might anticipate (but probably not as romantically as Conigrave does) the *extension* of recognition toward its provocation, the other, this is only partially realised in involuted recognition. Instead, Conigrave's parents are themselves the objects of recognition: "You're just saying that to hurt *us*," Conigrave's mother says; "'When *I* was your age, guys used to muck around in the shower at the yacht club while the parents were sitting in the bar'," his father recollects;

"'Please don't do this to *us*'," his father begs (103). In these reactions, Conigrave figures as the cause of a kind of emotional injury in which his parents' genuine fears and concerns about what it means for him to be homosexual are displaced. Those fears, stimulated by Conigrave, move inwardly, away from him and 'into' his parents. To this extent the involution of recognition is an appropriative phenomenon wherein the social significance of the other's *what-ness*, the legitimate as well as illegitimate fears of its expression, are assumed by a self who is related to, but is not 'of', that type of *what-ness*.

Involuted recognition and appropriation articulate more emphatically, than what might otherwise be read straightforwardly as 'projection' of parental fears and concerns, the failure to recognise the unique self *who* is declared through her/his affirmative relation to categories of *what-ness*. Projection, might usefully describe the way in which ideas of *what-ness* stick to the self, are *stuck onto* the self, but Conigrave's coming-out *in spite* of these ideas attests to a movement beyond them, to their personalisation, their being-made-unique despite their influence. The socially determinative influence of received ideas about *what-ness*, moreover, what Louis Althusser (1971) and Judith Butler (1997) might describe as 'interpellation', is what Cavarero deprioritises as the self's incommensurable content in her distinction between *who-ness* (uniqueness) and *what-ness* (generality). 'Projection' might thus describe the self's exertion of the ideology of the incommensurably general over the other: Conigrave's parents relate to his sexuality through the general ideas about it; the ideology behind projection "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser 36). But the personal injury Conigrave's parents feel upon his declaration demonstrates an involution of recognition because his affirmation of uniqueness-in-*what-ness* is absorbed by their own experiences of themselves and of their relation to the general *what-ness* of gay-ness. Conigrave's parents are injured by their own appropriation of the ideology of the general. The concept of involuted recognition addresses this injury more fully than that of projection and it also grounds the effects of interpellation and its ideologies in the material and affective relation between Conigrave and his parents.

Distinct from Althusser's claim that "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*" (47; original emphasis), which he famously exemplifies in the description of someone turning in response to a policeman's call (48); and distinct also from, but in part addressing, Judith Butler's critique of Althusser's exemplification – "How and why," Butler asks, "does the subject turn, anticipating the conferral of identity through the self-ascription of guilt?" (107), – the involuted recognition of Conigrave's

parents demonstrates the identity effects that result from the particular intensity (at times) of familial relations. That is, involuted recognition does not explain how or why subjects are produced in and by the generality of *what-ness*. But it does address the emotional effects occasioned by the influence of general *what-ness,* which are *discernible in relations between selves*, between Conigrave's parents and Conigrave himself. Thus *what-ness* has a material significance registered in the involuted recognition of Conigrave's parents – their emotions, fears and concerns about Conigrave's homosexuality *for themselves,* – which (momentarily) fails, in its affective intensity, to recognise Conigrave's affirmation of *what-ness* because it absorbs the particular, the unique (Conigrave) into the general (the irreducible significance of the general and its ideologies).

The centripetal emotional force underpinning this involuted recognition is only broken upon the intervention of Conigrave's recently-arrived housemaster at school, Brenton Lewis, who offers to speak to Conigrave's parents. "Mum and Dad were a little suspicious at first," Conigrave writes, "but warmed to the idea, and so a Sunday lunch was organised" (105). After lunch, Brenton talks to Conigrave's parents, giving Conigrave a cue to leave the table. Conigrave, pretending not to watch, writes:

> Mum's laughing face became solemn. She was tense, her shoulders up around her ears. She looked tired. All I could see of Dad was his back. It was rigid. Mum wiped away the odd tear. Dad's hand reached out and patted hers. I couldn't believe my sexuality could cause so much pain" (105).

When he returns to the table, however, Conigrave writes that his parents "looked embarrassed until Dad toasted me with coffee. 'We love you, son.' A few days later, in his office and to effect some kind of closure, Brenton says that he believes the reactions of Conigrave's parents to be "'based in love […] It might take them some time to get used to the idea. These are new things for them. And I think they're blaming themselves. Give them time and don't push too hard'" (106). Despite signs of enduring involuted recognition – "they're blaming themselves" – Brenton's intervention eases the tension of emotions surrounding Conigrave's homosexuality. It inaugurates a space of recognition in which emphasis begins to shift away from fears of the inevitably 'bad things' that will come of Conigrave's homosexuality, from concerns that Conigrave is "closing off [his] options", to acceptance that whatever Conigrave and John do, they "will do it with dignity" (106).

The reactions of John's parents to his sexuality, however, are more aggressive: his father forbids him from seeing Conigrave and threatens Conigrave's father with court action, believing Conigrave had "corrupted his son, a good Catholic boy, trying to make

him homosexual' (119). Shortly after the heated encounter between the lovers' fathers, John sees a psychologist at his father's request. There, he is told that he is "well-adjusted", that John's father "is the one with the problem" (121). Despite this affirmation, John's father continues his hostility, for he "loved [John] as his son, but […] the Church tells him […] what [John and Conigrave] are doing is wrong. It's a sin and he can't condone it" (122).

Different from the involuted recognition of Conigrave's parents, in which fantasies and fears about the social implications of homosexuality are taken on by them, John's father's reaction is one in which recognition develops as distantiation. In the first instance, Conigrave is to blame for John's homosexuality. In the second, John is a sinner, his behaviour is imagined as incommensurable to him – "he loved [*John*] as his *son*" (122) – but cannot be condoned in a logic that separates sin from sinner, a logic hostilely oblivious to the difference John as his father imagines him and John as he declares himself to be. The distantiation that underpins this logic and the relation between John and his father, as well as Conigrave's place within it, determines a number of uncomfortable situations in which *mis*recognition of the lovers and their relationship undermines an ethics of responsibility toward the corporeally vulnerable selves that John and Tim become as a result of their AIDS. Where 'coming-out' to and being recognised by friends, especially family, asserts the meaningfulness of gay-ness for John and Conigrave's lives, for their senses of self, coming-out as someone with AIDS demands recognition not only of the dignity with which one lives one's *what-ness* but also of one's vulnerability, because of that *what-ness*, and the different kind of responsibility and responsiveness required from others as a result. John and Conigrave's deterioration from AIDS impacts upon the uniqueness their bodies attest to, and the unique ways in which they live through gay-ness, with AIDS.

Shortly after he is diagnosed with AIDS, and he and John having moved to Sydney, Conigrave is awarded funding from the Australia Council to produce his play, *Thieving Boy*. As the play begins to be workshopped, Conigrave's doctor advises him to steady his pace, to look after himself; he accepts he needs to inform his colleagues about his AIDS status (previously he and John had been reticent about this). Conigrave's friend Peter, also working on the play, offers to tell people on Conigrave's proviso that they don't tell anyone else. Aware, then, that others are soon to know about John and him, Conigrave begins fully to realise the implication of his disease and what it means for others to know about it:

> I have AIDS. What will the boys in the project think? What will my friends think? I don't want them to be scared of me or the fact that I'm dying. Am I dying? I don't know. I don' think so (213; original italics).

Similar to the appeal for recognition in 'coming-out', Conigrave's revelation of his and John's diagnoses requires the negotiation of responses to and the recognition of newly established forms of relations that are structured by *what-ness*: by having-AIDS, by the knowledge of terminal illness.

When Conigrave and John fly to Melbourne for the former's sister's wedding, John takes the opportunity to speak to his parents about their diagnoses, conscious of having to explain why he is soon to leave his self-established chiropractic business. "Went pretty good," he tells Conigrave afterwards, "Dad had already suspected something [...] He asked about my disability insurance. Mum was concerned about by weight and just kept blowing her nose. I think she wanted to cry but she wasn't going to in front of anyone else" (200). When Conigrave tells his parents, his father "stared at [him] from under his furrowed brow" and got "down to business" with the details of the lovers' health (201). Conigrave's mother, however, "crossed her arms, put her head in her hand and started to shake. She was crying. 'What a waste. All that talent'" (200). Conigrave, already volunteering at a counselling call-centre for people with, or concerned about, HIV/AIDS, arranged for his parents to see a counsellor. His mother agreed to go but felt she didn't need to go a second time. "'[W]ouldn't it be better to set up a relationship with her now, so that if things get worse you have something established?'," Conigrave asks her, to which she replies, perhaps callously, "'It's not me. I've survived bigger crises. I was an orphan at eleven'" (202).

Despite the harshness of this statement, when Conigrave receives a letter from the Red Cross informing him that a donation of his blood in 1981 was responsible for another person's development of AIDS, his mother comforts him and importantly frames the question of responsibility with which I want to close this discussion of *Holding the Man*. "'In 1981, we didn't know there was an AIDS virus [...] You didn't know you were infected'," she counsels after Conigrave tells her and his father "'It's awful to think I may have infected someone'" (208). The question of being responsible for infection is raised before this moment by John who 'ponders' one night whether he infected Conigrave, his HIV at that point more advanced than Conigrave's. Conigrave comforts John by saying:

> We don't know if that is what happened. We can never know. Don't blame yourself. We didn't know that such a thing was lurking. It didn't even have a name. We're both infected. That's all we can know (170).

Conigrave's reflectiveness here is challenged by his letter from the Red Cross, however, because the date of his donation "could mean that [he] had been infected for nine years instead of five" (207). For Conigrave this means he is probably responsible for John's illness. "I sat there, my mind swimming with the thoughts of the man I had infected and the boyfriend I had infected," Conigrave writes, "I was comfortable with the thought that John had infected me, but it was awful to think I may have infected him. *As though I have killed the man I love*" (208; original emphasis).

In these reflections from John and Conigrave, the relational character of *what-ness* is literalised as the bodily means by which selves affect and effect the lives and identities of others. John and Conigrave's questions about who infected whom attest to the often messy ways in which selves are entangled with each other. The impossibility of coming to definitive answers about that question also demonstrates the essential vulnerability of those entanglements and their place within what is, consequently, an empathically contingent world. The possibility of being responsible for the other's infection confirms, however, the anonymity of the virus (as something 'out there' affecting others) more forcefully than the realisation of its effects within oneself. That is – as Conigrave's comfort with the idea of being infected but his horror at the thought of infecting suggests, – believing oneself responsible for infection personalises the severity of the disease in more definitive ways than acquiring it does.

The hopelessness of the question of responsibility for infection is further played out toward the end of the text in conversations between Conigrave and John's father, when John is soon to die. "'The funeral is going to be here in Melbourne at a Catholic church. And we don't want anyone making a statement'," John's father tells Conigrave, taking him aside, away from John:

> 'You mean about AIDS?'
> 'That and the gay thing. Everyone already knows, so there's no need.' *So what's the problem?*
> 'You know that's against John's wishes. Be it on your conscience,' I said acidly. We stood uncomfortably together in the corridor.
> Eventually he spoke again. 'It's such a tragedy. How did this happen?'
> I wanted to say, 'Your son takes it up the arse,' but chose to say instead, 'I'm sorry Bob, I don't know (268).

This conversation is the beginning of a process in which Conigrave and John's relationship is wilfully denied, a process in which their relationship is determinedly

misrecognised. Conigrave's sarcasm about the cause of John's death – "'Your son takes it up the arse'" – is connected, moreover, to an earlier conversation between the lovers, where "gay means AIDS" for John's father (161). This association, as well as the history of John's homosexuality is, for Conigrave, sterilised at his lover's funeral. He also explains his feeling of being shut out when talking to John's family priest after he performs last rites for John:

> 'I believe things between you and the family are pretty tense at the moment, particularly with Bob.'
>   'He treats me like I'm not there. It's like he's trying to reclaim John, save him from the dirty poofter who corrupted him. All this stuff about not mentioning 'gay' or AIDS at the funeral.'
>   'I want you to know that I will try my best to include you in the funeral. I'll talk about you as his friend. Are you happy about that?'
> 'He's my husband, we've been together for fifteen years.'
> 'I understand, but you must understand there'll be nothing gained by alienating his parents' (274).

Conigrave does not alienate John's parents. When John does die, finally drowning in his own mucus after a conscious decision to increase his morphine in order to stop coughing, to be more comfortable in the end, Conigrave and his friend Peter, are given the "chance to say goodbye" when nurses allow them to wash his body. Informing his parents of John's death, Conigrave says "it was a huge privilege. Not many people get to be there when their lover dies" (276). But from this point on, in addition to his actual death, John is further removed from Conigrave, becoming the subject of a history, of a narrative, in which Conigrave appears only partially. After John's funeral, then, a friend comments that "It didn't feel like John" and another inquires: "It's interesting that Michael [John's brother, who gave the eulogy] couldn't talk about John after the age of fifteen. Is it because that was when John became gay?" (285). In addition, Conigrave is forced to write his own obituary piece, having been conspicuously absent from that written by John's family.

John's family's sterilisation, in the end, of their son's biography and the biography of the lovers is indicative of a compromised, an irresponsible, ethics that results from the failure of recognition. John's funeral and his parents' treatment of his death, are, in their manipulation of *what-ness*, an affront to uniqueness. The manipulation of a narrative that presents only a sanitised version of what is easier, more comfortable, for certain people to remember about John, is a wilful misrecognition that sadly attests to a more malignant side of the significance of narrative in the construction of the self: "Part of oppression," one of Conigrave's friend's obituary notices begins, "is having

other people tell your story" (278). But in addition to the confirmation of this narrative significance, Conigrave's erasure from, and John's sanitisation within, the story about John that his family tells also attests to the meaningfulness of *what-ness* for the selves who live it, their investment in it, and the vulnerability that manifests when it is denied them. It attests to the political and ethical import of being recognised in and through one's relation to *what-ness*, the unique ways in which this is done.

But recognition is not simply thematised in *Holding the Man*, nor in *L'intruso*. As self-writings that concerns themselves with questions of recognition and identity, the texts make claims on their readers to acknowledge the (political) significance of their content. The political and ethical dimension of *what-ness* and its recognition extends, moves between, the writer and reader of Shapiro and Conigrave's self-writings.

In some ways, the attribution of a political and ethical import to the relationship between writer, reader and self-writing functionalises a text in ways that risk limiting its reception to a particular, political interpretation of it. It is a risk worth taking, however, because what is at stake in the claim to an ethical and political structure between reader and writer, is a relation between selves that allows for the significance of *what-ness*. It is precisely through this relation that the importance of *what-ness* as an experientially determining force emerges. The circuitousness of the relation between writer, reader, and self-writing is proposed, moreover, in Derrida's *The Ear of the Other*, wherein the "signature" of s/he who writes, the discernment of the person who is writing, the subject of the text, is "entrusted to the other" (51), to the reader. This is to give an ethical import to H. Porter Abbott's description of the "analytic awareness of the author" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 601) that guides the reader of self-writing. There are also direct correlations between the Derridean entrustment of one's signature to the other and Cavarero's relational model of storytelling and the altruism that underpins it, that complete consignment of self to other. The uniqueness of the self, the signature of the self *who* writes her/himself, has its "destination" (Derrida, *The Ear* 53) in the other. Otherness as uniqueness mediates and determines the significance of self-writing.

Derrida develops his formulation of the other's ear in his reading of Nietzsche's exergue in *Ecce Homo* (2007 [1888]), advancing the term 'otobiography' and naming a relation of ears (a recurring motif in *Ecce Homo*), of listening that discerns difference. As Derrida writes elsewhere on the same idea: "Uncanny is the ear: what it is – double; what it can become – large or small; what it can make or let happen [*faire ou laisser faire*] (we can say 'let,' since the ear is the most obliging, the most open organ, as Freud points out, the

only one the infant cannot close); and the way in which it can be pricked or lent" ("All Ears" 246). For Derrida, Nietzsche's exergue is important because, in its position "[b]etween the Preface, signed F.N., which comes after the title, and the first chapter", its "*topos*, like (its) temporality, strangely dislocates the very thing we, with our untroubled assurance, would like to think of as the time of life and the time of life's *récit*, of the writing of life by the living – in short, the time of autobiography" (*The Ear* 11). The significance of Nietzsche's exergue, for Derrida, lies in its not belonging in "the work (it is an exergue) nor in the life of the author" (14). But nor does the exergue exist completely outside of these things. Dated on his forty-fifth birthday, which he can "bury" knowing his works have made him "immortal", Nietzsche affirms a life for which he is "grateful" by narrating his life to himself (13). For Derrida, this structure is one of "eternal return", wherein Nietzsche "reaffirm[s] what has occurred during these forty-four years as having been good and as bound to return eternally, immortally" (13). Nietzsche engenders himself from a "strange present" constituted by an "eternal return" that isn't properly autobiographical because he narrates himself to himself within the text. There is no 'I' beyond writing. "He tells *himself* this life," Derrida writes, "and he is the narration's first, if not only, addressee and destination" (13).

To address the immersion of self within the textual, Nietzsche writes, however, that "I am one thing, my writings are another" (36), thus introducing the irreducibility of the 'I' that is narrated to 'myself' who narrates. Nietzsche thus calls for "ears" to hear his truths (36). It is by these ears that the message of the text is understood, and Nietzsche's signature signed: "I have, I am, and I demand a keen ear" (Derrida 21). The noncoincidence of 'I' and 'myself' opens the space for otherness to emerge. "To hear him," Derrida writes, "one must have a keen ear. In other words […] it is the ear of the other that signs. The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the *autos* of my autobiography. When, much later, the other will have perceived with a keen-enough ear what I will have addressed or destined to him or her, then my signature will have taken place" (51). Herein lies the political import of the circuitous relationship between writer, reader and text (51):

> the signature becomes effective – performed and performing – not at the moment it apparently takes place, but only later, when ears will have managed to receive the message. In some way the signature will take place on the addressee's side, that is, o nthe side of him or her whose ear will be keen enough to hear my name, […] or to understand my signature, that with which I sign (50).

For Derrida, "[e]very text answers to this structure. It is the structure of textuality in general. A text is signed only much later by the other. This testamentary structure doesn't befall a text as if by accident, but constructs it" (51). True of all texts, perhaps, this structure has a special significance when read alongside the model of uniqueness that Cavarero develops and when read through *L'intruso* and *Holding the Man*. If the Derridean 'signature' corresponds to Cavarero's 'uniqueness', then not only is the communication of the *message* at stake in the 'otobiographical' structure, but also the selfhood of s/he *who* communicates the 'message'. Derrida's appeal to a "general space of responsibility" (52) that is opened up by the otobiographical structure impresses the significance even further of reading politically and ethically – actively – the devastation and tragedy that AIDS inflicts on the subjects and identities in Shapiro and Conigrave's texts. If it is the reader who is "entrusted with the responsibility of the signature of the other's text" (Derrida, *The Ear* 51), there is a certain responsibility, moreover, to recognise what is offered as the meaningful content that underpins the text and the self *who* constructs it: the significance of *what-ness*. With Nietzsche still as his example, Derrida thus writes that it is not

> just Nietzsche's text or Nietzsche's signature that we are responsible for, […] the signature is not only a word or a proper name at the end of a text, but the operation as a whole, the text as a whole, *the whole of the active interpretation which has left a trace or a remainder.* It is in this respect that we have a political responsibility (52; my emphasis).

Referring again to Chambers' observation at the beginning of this chapter: in the death of the author "something is preserved […]: an occasion of survival is offered and even a mode of posthumous action, through the authority a text can enjoy, by virtue of its readability, 'beyond' the extinction of its author" (*Facing It* 5). The significance of politicising AIDs and gayness – *what-ness* – is invoked in this way, as is the appeal to an ethics in which the reader is responsible for recognising the investment selves have in categories of *what-ness*, categories by which they live their lives meaningfully, with reducible significance. In the next chapter, working toward a conclusion of this study as a whole, I claim the very foundation on which Cavarero basis her distinction between *who-ness* and *what-ness* – narrative – is in fact always already organised by, and is always already a structure of, *what-ness*. In this way I overturn Cavarero's deprioritisation of *what-ness*, demonstrating its *who-ness*.

5 | Concluding: The *Who-ness* of *What-ness*; Or, Plotting Uniqueness |

In *Tu che*, Adriana Cavarero provocatively ends her discussion of Scheherazade's narrative art of suspension in *The Arabian Nights* by claiming that "ad un certo punto, sicuramente, dovremo accettare che la realtà materiale esiste davvero, che essa urta contro di noi continuamente, che i testi non sono la sola cosa" (Liz Stanley qtd. in *Tu che* 165) ["at a certain point, surely, we must accept that material reality exists, that it continually knocks up against us, that texts are not the only thing" (Liz Stanley qtd. in *Relating Narratives* 127)]. Cavarero comes to this conclusion, a conclusion that underpins my own, upon analysis of Jorge-Luis Borges' revision of Scheherazade in *The Garden of Forking Paths*. For Cavarero, Borges' appropriation "ha inghiottito le vite [della storia]" [swallowed the lives [of the story] up] such that relations between them become "esclusivamente testuali, con-testuali" (*Tu che* 164) ["exclusively textual, or contextual" (*Relating Narratives* 127)]. Playing on the implications of *intreccio*, the Italian word for 'plot', which also carries the meaning of 'interweaving', Borges' Scheherazade exemplifies the necessity of what Cavarero formulates as "una sorta di 'teoria' letteraria" ["a sort of literary 'theory'"], which "dice in sintesi che, per lo meno ai suoi inizi, l'imitazione narrativa a intreccio risponde direttamente al contesto pratico che l'ha ingenerata" (164) ["begins by claiming that narrative imitation by plot responds directly to the practical context that engendered it" (*Relating Narratives* 126)]. Not content, Cavarero argues, with the linear simplicity of Scheherazade's perseverance in postponing death by telling a new story each night, Borges' interrupts the tale's conventional simplicity "con una delle sue tipiche finzioni letteraria" (155) ["with one of his typical literary fictions" (*Relating Narratives* 120)]. Thus the protagonist remembers "that night which is at the middle of the Thousand and One Nights when Scheherazade (through a magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the *Thousand and One Nights,* establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus on to infinity" (Borges qtd, in Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 120).

For Cavarero, the effect of Borges' "gioco *testuale*" (157; original emphasis) ["*textual* game" (*Relating Narratives* 127; original emphasis)] is to collapse the distance between the narrative frame of *The Arabian Nights* that is Scheherazade's persevering story-telling, and the stories that that narrative frame generates. Borges' intervention "mette infatti in bocca a Sheherazade proprio il racconto cha fa da cornice, facendolo

diventare una delle molte storie da cui esso dovrebbe invece distinguersi" (157) ["puts the story which acts as a frame into the mouth of Scheherazade, turning it into one of the many stories from which it *should* distinguish itself" (*Relating Narratives* 121; original English emphasis). The metafictional, infinite circularity of Borges' text – "un labirinto con mille percorsi possibili ma *senza uscita*" (160; my emphasis) ["a labyrinth with a thousand possible routes, but *without exit*" (*Relating Narratives* 124; my emphasis)] – means, for Cavarero, that

> [t]utto è interno a racconto e il racconto è tutto. Non sono le vite a produrre storie: sono piuttosto le storie a produrre personaggi che si credono in vita. Il racconto non si limita a sedurre con la sua capacità illusionistica il lettore, ma fa di costui l'illusione di una esistenza reale che ignora di essere racconto" (160)

> [[e]verything is inside the tale and the tale is everything. It is not lives that produce stories; it is rather the stories that produce the characters who believe they are alive. The tale is not limited to seducing the reader with its illusionist capacity, but creates for him/her the illusion of a real existence that is unaware of being a tale" (Relating Narratives 124)

Where, in the original *Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade is at the beginning and the end of the proliferation of stories, in Borges' revision, she is trapped in the text; she becomes "una mera funzione del racconto" (157) ["a mere function of the tale" (*Relating Narratives* 122)]. Because there is no exit from Borges' revision, the narrative art of suspension that is Scheherazade's means of survival, her resistance to the Sultan's misogynstic logic, is undermined. For Cavarero, the conventional *Arabian Nights* thematises, through the initial and final narrative frames, "una scena originaria" (165) ["an originary scene" (*Relating Narratives* 127)] that is erased by Borges (165). This "originary scene"

> non coincide con l'opera artistica, ma con una spontanea pratica narrativa, forse inscritta nella condizione umana stessa, che genera l'opera e la legittima. Detto alla buona, gli esseri umani si raccontano le loro storie e riportano storie che hanno sentito raccontare, in una pratica narrativa a intreccio che risale forse alla notte dei tempi. La scena costituiva del racconto contempla appunto un sé narrabile che vuole la relazione e appartiene a un contesto *reale* dove gli esseri umani si raccontano storie (163)

> [does not coincide with the artistic work, but with a spontaneous narrative practice, perhaps inscribed in the human condition itself, which generates the work and legitimates it. Put crudely, human beings tell each other their stories and bring back stories that they have heard being told, employing a narrative practice that goes back to the dawn of time. The constitutive scene of the tale completes a narratable self that desires the relation and belongs to a *real* context where human beings tell each other stories (*Relating Narratives* 126)].

Thus for Cavarero, the significance of Scheherazade's narrative art of suspension consists "nel ruolo centrale dell'intreccio" (161) ["in the central role played by the plot [/interweaving]" (*Relating Narratives* 124)]. Like the Homeric epic, Scheherazade's narrative art, a story itself, 're-presents' the relational scene of narrative exchange between selves: "similmente a Sheherazade, anche Omero enfatizzi l'intreccio raccontando di eroi che si fanno a loro volta narratori di storie che contengono il racconto altrui di ulteriori storie" (161) ["like Scheherazade, Homer too, emphasizes the interweaving/plot by telling of heroes who make themselves into narrators of stories, which in turn contain the other tales of later stories" (*Relating Narratives* 125)]. Scheherazade and her narrative art are mimetic of what Cavarero insistently refers to as the real, factual, material context in which selves narrate stories to each other. It is this scene, however, that is "swallowed up" (*Relating Narratives* 127) by the textuality of the Borgesian revision of the figure of Scheherazade: "[i]l testo nega la realtà da cui ha originariamente tratto ispirazione. La rappresentazione, invece che ri-presentarla, inghiotte la scena originaria e la cancella" (165) ["[t]he text denies the reality from which it had originally drawn its inspiration. The representation, instead of re-presenting reality, swallows the originary scene and erases it" (*Relating Narratives* 127)].

Cavarero's insistence on the 'real' significance of *l'intreccio* for narratable and relational identity offers a means of defending the also very 'real', ontological significance of *what-ness* for the unique self. The materiality of the scene to which *l'intreccio* mimetically corresponds and re-presents, is fruitfully at odds with Cavarero's earlier formulations in *Tu che* of narrative and the inessentiality of its textual elements, its content. The inessentiality of content underpins Cavarero's formulation of the affective, phenomenological basis of the irreflexive knowledge, *assaporarsi*, 'tasting oneself'. My third chapter's discussion of *assaporarsi* in Joan Didion's *The Year* and Primo Levi's *Se questo* attributed the accumulation of affect so imperative to readers' recognition of uniqueness to content. In this chapter, instead, I engage the question of content, of textuality, through narratological formulations of, principally, plot and the distinction between 'story' and 'narrative'. The material and determinative significance Cavarero reads in *l'intreccio* destabilises the inessentiality of content upon which her distinction between *who-ness* and *what-ness* depends. The association between 'plot' and 'interweaving' that *l'intreccio* carries leads crucially to my claim that narrative itself, the category most fundamental to Cavarero's model of unique selfhood, is already and always a structure of, and is always and already organised by, *what-ness*. It is only after an account, however, of

the ambiguity and imprecision that surrounds Cavarero's narrative taxonomy that the link between *l'intreccio* and narrative-as-*what-ness* can fully be articulated, its implications fully realised.

In the introductory chapter of *Tu che*, Cavarero quotes Arendt's claim that "la storia rivela il *significato* di ciò che altrimenti rimarrebbe una sequenza intollerabile di eventi" (8; my emphasis) ["the story reveals the *meaning* of what would otherwise remain an intolerable sequence of events" (*Relating Narratives* 2; my emphasis). Shortly afterwards, Cavarero distinguishes 'narration' from 'philosophy' and writes that "[l]a narrazione, si sa, è un'arte delicata, essa 'rivela *il significato* senza commettere l'errore di definirlo'" (10; Hannah Arendt qtd. internally; my emphasis) ["[n]arration, as is well known, is a delicate art […it] 'reveals *the meaning* without committing the error of defining it'" (*Relating Narratives* 3; Hannah Arendt qtd. internally; my emphasis)]. Philosophy, on the other hand, "si ostina a catturare l'universo nella trappola della definizione" (10) ["has persisted in capturing the universal in the trap of definition" (*Relating Narratives* 3)]. Because, for Cavarero, narration reveals "il finito nella sua fragile unicità e ne canta la gloria" (10) ["the finite in its fragile uniqueness, and sings its glory" (*Relating Narratives* 3)], it is positioned as a corrective to the generality of *what-ness*, the "universal in the trap of definition". But the common work of opposition that 'story' and 'narration' represent, against the universalism of philosophical definition, obscures the difference between those terms. They are conflated by the logic of Cavarero's study, which reads the implication of 'meaning' in the Arendtian 'story' with the same significance attributed to the mode of 'narration' that opposes philosophy's project of universal definition. This is a problem for Cavarero's model of unique selfhood because the political and ethical work Cavarero attributes to narrative and narration depends on the actual distinction she makes between 'story' and 'narration', a distinction that is undone, however, by the above analytic conflation of those terms and by their generally interchangeable use within *Tu che*. That conflation and interchangeable use of terms undermines the meaning that is *narratable*, living, here-and-now in 'narration' because the meaning of 'story', associated as it is in *Tu che* with its Arendtian formulation, is instead generated toward death and immortality.

Cavarero's distinction between 'story' and 'narration' is indebted to the categorical centrality of Arendtian 'action'. "Richiamandosi esplicitamente alla *Poetica* di Aristotele," ["Explicitly recalling Aristotle's *Poetics*"] Cavarero summarises,

Arendt sottolinea più volte come il protagonista della storia narrata sia *chi* si è mostrato nelle azioni da cui la storia medesima è risultata. Per dirla con il lessico di Roland Barthes, nell'idea arendtiana di narrazione 'il personaggio è sempre l'agente di una azione', dipende da essa e a essa si subordina [...L]'eroe di una storia, secondo Arendt, è necessariamente colui che, con atti e parole, si è rivelato *agli altri* lasciandosi dietro tale storia. La storia è subordinata all'azione rivelativa. Si può raccontare una storia perché c'è prima stato un attore sulla scena del mondo (44–45).

[Arendt repeatedly emphasizes how the protagonist of the narrated story is *who* was shown in the actions from which the story itself resulted. To put [...the Arendtian idea] in the lexicon of Roland Barthes 'the character is always the agent of an action,' dependent upon it and subordinated to it [...T]he hero of a story, according to Arendt, is necessarily the one who, with words and deeds, is revealed to *others*, leaving behind the story. The story is subordinated to the revelatory action. A story can be told because there was first an actor on the world stage (*Relating Narratives* 28)].

From this, Cavarero concludes that

[l]a storia, dunque, è distinta dalla narrazione. Essa ha, per così dire, uno statuto di realtà suo proprio, che segue l'azione e precede la narrazione. Dal che consegue che tutti gli attori si lasciano dietro una storia, anche se nulla garantisce, in misura certa, che questa storia venga poi raccontata. Detto alla buona, secondo Hannah Arendt, per quanto non possa mai esserci un racconto senza storia, possono tuttavia esservi storie senza racconto. La storia dell'eroe trova appunto la sua origine nelle azioni di costui, non nella narrazione epica. La storia è una serie di eventi, non un testo. La storia è una serie di eventi che, in grazia della loro luminoso grandezza, si espongono al lavoro immortalante del testo (45).

[[t]he story is therefore distinct from the narration. It has, so to speak, a reality all of its own, which follows the action and precedes the narration. All actors leave behind a story, even if nothing guarantees that this story will later get told. Simply put, according to Arendt, although there can never be a tale without a story, there can nevertheless be stories without a tale. The hero's story finds its origins in his actions, not in the epic narration. The story is a series of events, not a text. The hero's story is a series of events, which, thanks to their greatness, expose themselves to the immortalizing work of the text (*Relating Narratives* 28)].

Cavarero's reference to Arendt's claim that "la storia rivela il significato di ciò che altrimenti rimarrebbe una sequenza intollerabile di eventi" (8; my emphasis) ["the story reveals the meaning of what would otherwise remain an intolerable sequence of events" (*Relating Narratives* 2; my emphasis) anticipates her innovation of the immortality Arendt associates with the story of the hero's action. But the content of that anticipation is only ever vaguely realised. Cavarero insufficiently addresses the different kinds of 'meaning' manifest in 'story', the series of events rooted in the hero's action, and the 'tale' or 'narration' of those events.

For Arendt, upon Cavarero's interpretation, "[l]a storia è una serie di eventi che, in grazia della loro luminosa grandezza, si espongono al lavoro immortalante del testo" (45) [The hero's story is a series of events, which, thanks to their greatness, expose themselves to the immortalizing work of the text (*Relating Narratives* 28)]. But, for Cavarero, this immortality is problematically associated with, grounded in, "una fama *post mortem*" (47) ["a *post mortem* fame" (33)]. The identity that results from the "luminosa grandezza" [luminous grandeur] of 'story' is one that follows from and depends upon death. In order to prioritise the *narratable* over the *narrated*, however, Cavarero deepens the significance of the 'tale' or 'narration' that proceeds from but isn't guaranteed by 'story'. "Fra identità e narrazione," ["Between identity and narration"] Cavarero begins her inauguration of 'tale' and its significance for unique selfhood, "c'è infatti un tenace rapporto di desiderio" (46) ["there is a tenacious relation of desire" (32)]. The proof of this thesis is for Cavarero most evident in Homer's *The Odyssey* upon the disguised return of Ulysses at the court of the Phaecians, where "il racconto dell'aedo incontra inaspettatamente il desiderio di narrazione dell'eroe [di Ulisse]" (46) ["where the rhapsod's tale encounters unexpectedly the hero's [Ulysses'] desire for narration" (32):

> Anche se essa [la storia di Ulisse] ha ormai una fama che giunge 'al cielo infinito' – e ha perciò già messo a frutto l'intrinseca memorabilità delle azioni dell'eroe – è in fatti la prima volta che Ulisse la sente narrare: ossia *si* sente narrare. La sua presenza in incognito è così qualcosa di più di un abile artificio drammatico. È piuttosto ciò che consente che il carattere narrabile dell'identità venga a Ulisse attraverso la narrazione imprevista di una storia di cui egli è il protagonista ma non il destinatario. La figura di Ulisse è infatti peculiare proprio per questo aspetto: egli sembra ignorare di desiderare *qui e ora* il racconto della propria storia (46).

> [Even if this story already has a fame that reaches 'to infinite heaven' – and thus already has the intrinsic memorability of the hero's actions – it is in fact the first time that Ulysses hears it narrated: that is he hears *himself* being narrated. His presence in disguise is thus something more than a clever dramatic device. It is rather that which allows the narratable character of identity to come to Ulysses through the unforeseen narration of a story of which he is the protagonist, but not the addressee. The figure of Ulysses is indeed unique because of this very aspect: he seems unaware of this desire *here* and *now* for the tale of his own story (32).

The opportunity to specify Cavarero's vague narrative taxonomy emerges from her observation above. Against "l'enfasi dell'agire sullo spettro della morte" (47) ["the emphasis on action towards the specter of death" (33)], which is the meaning [*il significato*] that Arendt determines in the hero's 'story', Cavarero prioritises the 'tale' in the other's 'narration' of the series of events that make up the self's 'story'. 'Narration' and 'tale'

make *narratable* what can only be *narrated* within the "*post mortem* fame" (*Tu che* 47; *Relating Narratives* 33) that might accompany death. It is thus not in 'story' that the kind of meaning Cavarero privileges over the universality of philosophy can be found, but rather in the meaning of 'narration', the re-telling of events within the context of the life in which they were lived and are *narratable*. The implicit logic of Cavarero's earlier analysis, which conflates, by virtue of the significance of 'meaning' common to each, the Arendtian 'story' with the 'narration' that opposes philosophical definition, is at odds with Cavarero's attempt to think otherwise than universally. The immortal meaning of 'story' runs counter to the finite fragility of meaning in 'narration'. Aware of this, presenting 'narration', indeed, as "un aspetto cruciale […] che Hannah Arendt trascura" (46) ["a crucial aspect […] that Hannah Arendt overlooks" (32)], Cavarero nevertheless undermines the innovation that 'narration' represents in her work through her interchangeable use of that term with 'story'. This displaces the 'real' context that *l'intreccio* mimetically re-presents by reifying the events that correspond to it. Cavarero's terminological inconsistency counters what is otherwise emphatically concerned with the relational, contextually finite particularity of the unique self and the narrative that coincides with her/him. To insist, as I am doing however, on the specificity of the terminological distinction between 'story' and 'narration' is to permit the possibility of that which Cavarero forecloses as solipsistic and irreducibly general, that which this dissertation has defended: the uniqueness of *what-ness* attested to in self-writing, the importance of the self, writing the self.

The distinction between 'story' and 'narration' is one that benefits from the classical narratological distinction between 'story' and 'narrative discourse'. The structuralist model of narrative, wherein narrative is considered "an autonomous object of study, a level or mode of semantic organization with specifiable rules and determinate patterns" (Herman, "Toward a Socionarratology" 221), postulated "a distinction between story and discourse, between the *what* of a narrative and the *way* those basic story materials are presented or linearized in a given stretch of narrative discourse" (Herman, "Toward a Socionarratology" 221). Similarly, H. Porter Abbott writes that "the difference between events and their representation, is the difference between *story* (the event or sequence of events) and *narrative discourse* (*how* the story is conveyed)" (*Cambridge Introduction* 15; my emphasis on "how").

For Barthes, then, in his "Structural Analysis", "there can be no doubt that narrative is a *hierarchy* of instances" (87; my emphasis), where "hierarchy" presumes the

priority of some instances over others for the construction of meaning that is not "'at the end' of narrative, […but that rather] runs across it" (87). For Barthes, the meaning of narrative "eludes all unilateral investigation", to understand it

> is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its *construction* in 'storeys', to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative 'thread' on to an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next (87; my emphasis).

And in the opening remarks of his *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette offers a tripartite definition of narrative that encompasses – and possibly explains – the variety and ambiguity of Arendt and Cavarero's terminology. The first meaning Genette determines "has *narrative* refer to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events" (25; original emphasis). Genette takes Ulysses' speech to the Phaecians in Books 9 to 12 of *The Odyssey*, as well as those Books themselves, as examples of this usage. The second meaning "has *narrative* refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc. 'Analysis of narrative' in this sense means the study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves, without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which knowledge of that totally comes to us" (25; original emphasis). Genette's example of this: "the adventures experience by Ulysses from the fall of Troy to his arrival on Calypso's island" (26). The third meaning, "apparently the oldest, has *narrative* refer once more to an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating *taken in itself*" (25-26; original emphasis on "narrative"; subsequent emphasis, my own). Thus, Ulysses' recount of his adventures is just as much narrative action as is the slaughter of his wife's suitors. "[A]nd if it goes without saying," Genette writes,

> that the existence of those adventures in no way depends on the action of telling (supposing that, like Ulysses, we look on them as real), it is just as evident that the narrative discourse ([…]in the first meaning of the term) depends absolutely on that action of telling, since the narrative discourse is *produced* by the action of telling in the way that any statement is the product of an act of enunciating (26).

The relationship between narrative discourse, in the first sense that Genette employs, and the "action of telling" that he importantly describes as producing it, offers the acutest means of applying the narratological distinction between 'story' and 'narrative discourse' to Cavarero's innovation of the Arendtian 'story' through 'narration'.

'Narrative' as the discursive *re*presentation of 'story', the sequence of events, corresponds, indeed, is the content of the 'narration', the re-telling, the 'tale', that Cavarero rescues from the decontextualised immortality of 'story' and its association with death in Arendt. 'Narrative discourse' is the action of, and which follows from, 'narration'. 'Narration' is the activity of the discursive representation of the content by which the self is constituted: events, action. As such, the content of 'narration' acquires an imperative significance, one that Cavarero distances herself from when she conceives of the inessentiality of the text, the content, for the revelation of *who-ness* in the narrative exchange between self and other. If 'narration' is the crucial innovation of the Arendtian 'story' that Cavarero claims it is, and if 'narration' is the means by which *who-ness* is revealed, *who-ness* must thus be thought to consist in, at least to coincide with, the discursive representation that is its activity. "Since any narrative […] is a linguistic production undertaking to tell of one or several events," Genette writes, "it is perhaps legitimate to treat it as the development […] given to a *verbal* form, in the grammatical sense of the term: the expansion of a verb" (30; original emphasis). 'Narrative discourse' and its 'narration' is the action of expansion, of filling-out, of increasing the meaning, the 'narrativity', of the verbal – of action itself. The movement from the simpler sequence of events that is the narratological 'story' toward the representational discourse that is 'narrative', Genette's 'expansion of the verbal' toward the greater "construction of meaning" that Barthes determines in 'narrative' is the action of Cavarero's 'narration'. The relation this claim supposes, between discursive representation and the increase of meaningfulness, has important consequences for self-writing and the uniqueness of *what-ness*.

The relationship between Cavarero's philosophy of uniqueness and her critique of the representational identities of postmodern, discursive subjectivity culminates in the discussion here with the claim that the 'narrative' that is the action of 'narration' is always already a structure of, and is always already organised by, *what-ness*. More radically, if *what-ness* designates the socially- and discursively-constituted, performative iterations of postmodern subjectivity, and if 'narrative' is the action of discursive representation, the re-telling of events in 'narration', then: narrative *is* what-ness.

The difficulties and complexities that attend the politics and ethics of 'representation' and the 'discursive' – now emphatically combined in this discussion of 'narrative' as the discursive representation of events – have informed the encounter each chapter of my dissertation stages between Cavarero's model of uniqueness and the *what-*

ness she accuses postmodernism of over-determining. In many ways, then, *what-ness*, as Cavarero understands it, is coterminous with the social and cultural systems, institutions – the discourse – by which the self is constituted. Woolf's *Moments of Being* and Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze*, the subjects of my first chapter, account for the philosophical significance of birth, 'generation', and finitude and offer a means of modelling the temporality of uniqueness. In their depictions of the mother, Woolf and Cialente relate the uniqueness of selfhood to the significance of natality, the 'being-born-ness' of the self, configuring, at the same time, the finitude of the self's relation to the past and the present. Through Woolf and Cialente, uniqueness acquires greater material significance as a particularity that opposes the abstract and the universal. The thematic of the daughter's sameness to, and difference from, the mother in Woolf and Cialente's texts fortifies the significance of Cavarero's philosophy of uniqueness by countering what I claimed are overstated relations of indifference between the self and the discursive, relations that neglect the symbolic framework of birth, and the significance of the mother as the some*one who* gives birth to *who-ness*. The relation between mother and daughter in Woolf and Cialente maps a more general model of relationality in which the generative and the finite are given priority over the undifferentiated relation of power between the self and the discursive. The discursive, in that chapter, is not a reified, abstract structure, but something that is actualised and manifest in relations between selves. The symbolic politics of sexual difference, to which Cavarero's philosophy contributes, and which Woolf and Cialente's texts thematise, outline the ways in which the discursive can shift and be shifted. The symbolic politics of sexual difference in Woolf and Cialente demonstrates the doubled-implication of the 'generation' implied in the mother-daughter relation to designate both the 'generative' and the 'historicity' (in and of the discursive).

In Chapter 2, I considered the 'surface' politics of bodies in Ghermandi's *Regina* and Lorde's *Zami* and critiqued Cavarero's claim to the irreducibility of *what-ness* to the self by considering the immediacy and the significance of skin difference for which those self-writings account and affirm. The theoretical premises of Ahmed and Probyn's work, read through Ghermandi and Lorde's texts, enabled a deeper political reading of Cavarero's formulation of the Arendtian category of 'appearance'. *Regina* and *Zami* elaborate specific instances in which the body becomes the site or scene of difference, and, more importantly, the means through which processes of *differentiation* between unique selves in relation might be mapped or read. In that chapter, Ghermandi and

Lorde offered a means of politicising the 'apparent' and embodied difference of skin and the socio-cultural, the discursive meanings that underpin and frustrate them.

My third chapter considered the implications of Cavarero's claim to the underlying structure of *assaporarsi* in the recognition of uniqueness in oneself and in others. Didion's *Year* and Primo Levi's *Se questo* outline the affective dimensions of testimony and recognition and what this means for a philosophy and politics of uniqueness. My discussion of these texts centred upon the textual accumulation of affect in the narration of one's life-story and the relation this establishes between writer and reader, self and other. In its discussion of Didion and Levi, that chapter outlined a kind of phenomenology of uniqueness, wherein narrative works as a means of affective orientation of selves within discursive worlds that are politically re-presented. I considered grief, loss, and the suspension of self in time, horror, shame, and empathetic representation in narrative in order to discuss the ways in which Didion and Levi *a*ffect their readers and *e*ffect themselves, their uniqueness.

In Chapter 4, I built upon the affective structure of the kind of phenomenology of uniqueness established in Chapter 3 by discussing the ways in which Conigrave's *Holding the Man* and Brett Shapiro's *L'intruso* articulate the 'person-ality' of gay-ness, through the experience of AIDS. I considered this in terms of Cavarero's formulation of the self's ontological vulnerability, a concept that resonates with the precarity of life that Judith Butler theorises (2004), and the "drama of contingency" that Sarah Ahmed describes in *Queer Phenomenology* (124). Conigrave and Shapiro's memoirs attest to the ways in which the general is lived particularly, uniquely such that Cavarero's claim to the irreducibility of these things – the general and the particular – is brought into question by the responsibility of the reader to apprehend, to care for, the uniqueness of *what-ness* there narratable, the very real ways in which it takes priority in people's lives. But Shapiro and Conigrave's texts also confirmed the violence of the discursive, of language's inability to capture the vulnerability of the self *who* is undone by disease, of the tension between determining the meaning of one's *what-ness* and of being determined *by* it.

Cavarero's observation that the narratable self is ontologically distinct from the text, from the content of her/his life-story, becomes untenable when it is read against the significance of content for the selves in the self-writings I have discussed throughout this study. That the self "irrimediabilmente si mescola a" (50) ["is irremediably mixed up with" (35)] the textuality of her/his narrative, its content and action, now borders on complete tautology. But the risk of that tautology is reduced by the now fundamental

significance of Abbott's conception of 'autography', self-writing, which maintains the significance of the particularity, the uniqueness, the self makes of her/his *what-ness* and the involvement of the reader in that process.

Recalling the theoretical parameters of Abbott's 'autography' which I outlined in my introductory chapter:

> the end of an autobiography is everywhere present in the writing of it. It is therefore not precisely an event, but an event in progress. To translate this into narratological terms, in autobiography the discourse is narrative action. It is this fact, rather than any real or presumed factuality of the events in narrative, that makes for a meaningful difference between autobiography and its textual neighbours, history and the novel ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 598).

Auto(bio)graphy stages "a form of personal action" (601). In my fourth chapter's discussion of Shapiro's *L'intruso* and Conigrave's *Holding the Man*, I drew from Derrida's *The Ear of the Other* to describe the process of recognition that is the reader's response to the autobiographical, or, indeed, the otobiographical, text. The application of the Derridean 'signature' to Shapiro and Conigrave's texts politicised the ethics of responsibility involved in the reader's recognition of testimonies about the relation between being-gay and living with AIDS. Abbott's 'autography' strengthens the reader's 'signature' and generalises the process that constitutes it with his claim to the "analytic awareness of the author in action" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 601) by which the reader of self-writing is guided and oriented. Read through Derridean terms, this autographical orientation of the reader describes her/his expectation to sign the signature of the writer.

Through Abbott, then, the tautological relation of *who-ness* and *what-ness*, upon my close-reading of Cavarero's narrative terminology, is countered. Narration itself is an action and narrative discourse is the action of narration. This permits the revision of Cavarero's conception that both action and narration

> appartengono al *significarsi* dell'identità […] ma, mentre sul piano dell'azione questo *significarsi* è radicato nella fragilità e nell'impadroneggiabilità del contesto, sul piano della narrazione il significato pertiene invece a una storia che è immutabile come il passato. Al presente fuggevole e discontinuo si contrappone l'immutabilità e la durata del passato. La differenza fondamentale fra azione e narrazione sta infatti proprio qui: il potere rivelativo dell'azione si brucia nell'attimo dell'accadimento, la storia conserva invece nel tempo – e qualche volta per sempre, se ha la fortuna di incontrare un grande narratore – l'identità del suo eroe (39; my emphasis)

> [appertain to the meaning [*significarsi*] of identity. But, while on the level of action this meaningfulness is rooted in the fragility and the unmasterability of

the context, on the level of narration the meaning pertains to a story that is as immutable as the past. The fleeting and discontinuous present is opposed to the immutability, and the duration of the past. The fundamental difference between action and narration lies in this: the revelatory power of action expires in the moment of its occurring, the story conserves the identity of its hero in time – and every so often for *all* time – if it has the fortune of finding a great narrator (25; original emphasis)].

The difference between 'action' and 'narration' in terms of their temporality is uncontroversial. And if the implication of 'narrative' as the 'discursive representation' – *re*-telling – of events is to be fully realised, the distinction between the time of 'action' and the time of 'narration' must be maintained. There are also differences between the time of 'action' that 'narrative' re-presents and the time of the 'action' that is the 'narration' of that 'narrative'. The time of 'narration' can be closer to or further from the time of 'action' that is represented in 'narrative'. Cavarero's claim that a story is "immutabile come il passato" ["as immutable as the past"], opposed to ["[il] presente fuggevole e discontinuo" (*Tu che* 39) ["the fleeting discontinuous present" (*Relating Narratives* 25) overlooks the time of 'action', the activity, that is the 'narration' of 'narrative'. The solution to this problem lies in the potential for the translation of *significarsi* in the above quotation.

Quoted above from his translation of *Relating Narratives*, Paul A. Kottman translates *significarsi* as 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness'. It is not an overtly controversial translation. But it does neglect the verbal implications of that word: 'to mean oneself'. The transitivity of that translation is awkward but it nevertheless gives emphasis, first, to the very activity of the relation between 'action' and identity, and second, to the capacity of the self to determine her/his meaning. The action of the self, 'means itself'; it produces identity. But the self also 'means her/himself' through the 'action' of 'narration'. This is another way of stating the central claim of my study as a whole: *what-ness* is made unique through the representation of the self's investment in it, through the 'meaning' one makes of oneself through it. As such, 'narration' is more firmly situated within the significance of 'action' from which Cavarero distinguishes it. The time of the 'action' that the activity of 'narration' represents in 'narrative' is different. But 'narration' is an 'action' itself. This means that the content of the 'narrative' that is 'narrated' acquires the temporal significance of the active present that Cavarero thinks peculiar to 'action'. *Significarsi*, 'to mean oneself' thus carries the implication of Genette's description of narrative as "the expansion of a verb" (30). Moreover, for Abbot, "[a]utobiographical narrative […] begins and ends in the present of its making" such that "[i]t is a narrative

mode that includes an acute awareness of the present as a constancy of 'passing' and [is] therefore […] incomplete and sharply opposed to eternity and oneness" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 603).

The verbality of *significarsi* that rescues 'narration' from the immutability of the past, by insisting upon its active present, also rescues *who-ness* and *what-ness* from their tautological relation. If *what-ness* is coterminous with the discursive representation of events that is 'narrative', if the general structure of narrative is the same as the general structure of discourse, and if 'meaning oneself' is constituted by an active present – then the personality of 'action' that is the 'narrative discourse' of self-writing (for Abbott) distinguishes itself from the generality of 'narrative' and allows also for a difference between the generality and the personality of *what-ness*. Self-writing as the 'personal action' of 'narrative discourse' stages the *who-ness* (the uniqueness) of *what-ness*. The general is made particular by a form of narrative discourse that personalises its general terms and the general conditions of its possibility.

Returning now to Cavarero's formulation of *l'intreccio*, I consider the *who-ness* of *what-ness* as a process of 'plotting' uniqueness. The functional implication of narrative, as the revelation of *who-ness*, unique *what-ness*, finds its most acute articulation in the significance of "plot", of *l'intreccio*. The material reality of the narrative exchange between selves that *l'intreccio* re-presents, with the implications of both 'interweaving' and 'plot' that that term carries, is a reality in which categories of *what-ness* are, contrary to Cavarero's claim, "constitutive […] elements of political agency" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 101). Self-writing, the narration of a "personal action" in a narrative discourse that is always already a structure of, and is always already organised by, *what-ness* establishes the political import of a philosophy of uniqueness for the social at large. But more than a re-presentation of the narrative scene by which the unique identities of selves are constituted, self-writing itself engenders uniqueness; it is itself a context for that engendering. Self-writing re-presents the reality of the context in which uniqueness is revealed and it is itself also a context that occasions that revelation. Narrative *intreccio* plots uniqueness within the social. It re-presents and thematises the relationality of narrative exchange between selves and politicises that relationality within the context that self-writing establishes between writer and reader.

In "Narrative Time" (1980), Paul Ricoeur defines plot as the "intelligible whole that governs a succession of evens in any story" (171). For him, this definition

immediately shows the plot's connecting function between an event or events and the story. A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story. The plot, therefore, places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot (171).

Ricoeur's 'plot' in many ways resembles the narrative discourse that I discussed above, which can be read in his observation that

every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension according to which the plot construes significant wholes of scattered events" (178).

The distinction between 'story', as the succession of events, and 'narrative discourse', as the 'discursive representation' of those events, corresponds to Ricoeur's distinction above between narrative dimensions that are chronological and nonchronological. But Ricoeur's study of narrative time offers a vocabulary that permits the extension of narratological concepts into the terrain of existential analysis, a vocabulary that contains the implications of Cavarero's *l'intreccio* but which more fully accounts for the interplay between the particular and the general without sacrificing their distinction.

For Ricoeur, in his extension and application to narratological concepts of Heideggerian formulations of temporality, the narrative time that is constitutive of plot, which elicits "a pattern from a succession" (178), is an "existential now […] determined by the present of preoccupation, which is a 'making present'" (173). This "existential now" is different from the mathematically or abstractly temporal "now" – as being "of this instant" – and instead refers to the self's "within-time-ness":

Within-time-ness […] possesses its own specific features which are not reducible to the representation of linear time, a neutral series of abstract instants. Being in time is already something quite different from measuring intervals between limiting instants; it is first of all *to reckon with* time and so to calculate (173).

Thus for Ricoeur, after Heidegger, existential within-time-ness means that "a day is not an abstract measure […but] a magnitude which corresponds to our concern and to the world into which we are thrown" (173). It is important, then, Ricoeur writes "to see the shift in meaning that distinguishes the 'now' belonging to this time of preoccupation from 'now' in the sense of an abstract instant, which as part of a series defines the line of ordinary time" (173). The time of 'now' that is (sustained by) preoccupation, 'made

present' by preoccupation, is a kind of reckoning that has its "objective correlate […in] the act of following a story" (177). Narrative is thus a form of preoccupation in which events are grasped together: "to tell and to follow a story is already to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes" (178). The 'plot', the "configurational arrangement" of events and their succession "into significant wholes" correlates with "the act of grouping together" that is 'following the story', reading, listening, discerning (178). Ricoeur concludes, then, that the "making-present which interprets itself – in other words, that which has been interpreted and is addressed in the 'now' – is what we call 'time'" (Heidegger qtd. in Ricoeur 173–174). "Narrative activity," Ricoeur claims, "is the privileged discursive expression of preoccupation and its making-present" (176). Corresponding to the vulnerability of the self's relation to others and the world, that "drama of contingency" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 124) that my fourth chapter read in Shapiro and Conigrave, Ricoeur writes that "narratives, in fact, represent a person acting, who orients him- or herself in circumstances he or she has not created, and who produces consequences he or she has not intended. This is indeed the time of the 'now that…' wherein a person is both abandoned and responsible at the same time" (176).But, Ricoeur continues, narrative preoccupation, the telling and following of a story, "does more than just establish humanity, along with human actions and passions, 'in' time; it also brings us back from within-time-ness to historicality, from 'reckoning with' time to 'recollecting' it" (178). Ricoeur writes, then, recalling the kind of temporality that my first chapter's discussion of Woolf and Cialente modelled, that plot establishes the significance of human action not only in time, but also in memory (180), which "repeats – recollects – the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end" (183).

In an observation that affirms this dissertation's concern with the *investment* the self has in her/his *what-ness*, and with the self-writing of that investment, Ricoeur describes the historicity manifest in the repetition of events that are emplotted, grasped together in the plot, as "the retrieval of our most basic potentialities inherited from our past in the form of personal fate and collective destiny" (180). The relation between personal fate and collective destiny that the narrative plot establishes, for Ricoeur, sharpens and politicises the interplay between the general and the particular that is implied within Cavarero's *intreccio*. Where for Cavarero *intreccio* refers to the interrelation of selves in narrative exchange as well as the mimetic re-presentation of that originary context in stories, for Ricoeur, narrative time, in both its making present and its

historicality, its repetition, is a public time. "On the level of the narrative," Ricoeur writes,

> of course, 'others' exist: the hero has antagonists and helpers; the object of the quest is someone else or something else that another can give or withhold. The narrative confirms that 'in the "most intimate" Being-with-one-another of several people, they can say "now" and say it together. . . The "now" which anyone expresses is always said in the publicness of Being-in-the-world with one another' (Heidegger qtd. internally in Ricoeur 176).

More emphatic than the relationality *intreccio* intends as that between selves in narrative exchange and that which is mimetically re-presented and interwoven in the stories that are exchanged, Ricoeur claims that through "its recitation, a story is *incorporated into a community which it gathers together*" (176; my emphasis). Narrative plot, which gathers events into a meaningful and intelligible whole, which retrieves and repeats "our most basic potentialities inhered from our past" incorporates and is incorporated into the general. It is the movement from the singular, from the unique, to the general that matters most for self-writing in this claim: "a story" – the unique self's self-writing – "is incorporated into a community" – self-writing must in some sense be prior to the community if it is to be incorporated into it – "which it gathers together" – the community, the general, is apprehended by the singular, by the unique. This is to read against the claim Ricoeur derives from his observation above. For him "the communal form of destiny" takes priority over "the private form of fate" (188). But if self-writing is constituted by the 'action' of a 'narrative discourse' that personalises the general terms and conditions of its possibility, if self-writing stages the encounter between uniqueness and generality and privileges the former by way of the "analytic awareness of the author" (Abbot, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 601), and if the succession of events, which constitute that 'narrative', are governed by the intelligible whole of the 'plot' – then it is uniqueness that is 'emplotted': it is uniqueness that frames the community, the social, the general. This is then a compromise between Cavarero's *intreccio* – which insists on the 'real' significance of relationality for selfhood as well as the significance of the originary, relational scene that is mimetically re-presented in unique life-stories, but which distances itself from the sociality of the general, from the community – and Ricoeur's plot – which subordinates the narrative time of personal fate to the destiny of the community. Uniqueness is emplotted within the general; the general is gathered together by uniqueness, apprehended by the self-writing of the unique self. The dependent relation between *who-ness*, understood as *unique what-ness*, and the generality of *what-ness* is

analogous to the dependent relation between 'story' and 'narrative discourse'. Narrative discourse requires 'story' but is more than the succession of events it represents. Uniqueness requires the general in order to personalise its terms, in order to make them unique. With this claim, 'narrative discourse' and 'plot' can importantly be distinguished from another.

To distinguish between these things is ultimately to emphasise the functional and political imperative of self-writing. If narrative discourse is the representation of events that would otherwise be simply successive, 'plot' is the "thought" (Ricoeur, "Narrative Time" 179) that results from that discursive representation. For Ricoeur following "a story […] is understanding the successive actions, thoughts, and feelings in question insofar as they present a certain directedness," by which he means "we are pushed ahead by this development and that we reply to its impetus with expectations concerning the outcome and the completion of the entire process" (174). To this extent, the

> configurational arrangement makes the succession of events into significant wholes that are the correlate of the act of grouping together. Thanks to this reflective act […], plot may be translated into one "thought." "Thought," in this narrative context, may assume various meanings. It may characterize, for instance, following Aristotle's *Poetics*, the "theme" (*dianoia*) that accompanies the "fable" or "plot" (*mythos*) of a tragedy. "Thought" may also designate the "point" of the Hebraic *maschal* or of the biblical parable, concerning which Jeremias observes that the point of the parable is what allows us to translate it into a proverb or an aphorism. The term "thought" may also apply to the "colligatory terms" used in history writing, such terms as "the Renaissance," "the Industrial Revolution," and so on, which […] allow us to apprehend a set of historical events under a common denominator. In a word, the correlation between thought and plot supersedes the "then" and "and then" of mere succession (179).

Because I have claimed throughout that self-writing attests to the uniqueness of *what-ness* by attesting to and facilitating a process in which categories of identity are *made* unique by the self's investment in them, I suggest that, depending on the reader's responses to content, the plot of each of the texts I have discussed in the previous chapters contributes to "thought" on identity, on *what-ness*. This might correspond to David Herman's claim that one of the essential elements of narrative is the representation of *qualia*, the "qualitative, experiential, or felt properties of mental states" (Janet Levin qtd. in Herman, *Basic Elements* 145), the idea that "conscious experiences have ineliminably subjective properties, a distinctive sense or feeling of *what it is like for someone of something to experience them*" (Herman, "Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind" 314). Cavarero's claim that "l'imitazione narrativa a intreccio risponde direttamente al contesto pratico che l'ha

ingenerata" (*Tu che* 164) ["narrative imitation by plot/interweaving responds directly to the practical context that engendered it" (*Relating Narratives* 126)], would, in this case, not simply be the narration of stories, the account of 'action' passed, but what it was 'like' to have lived that 'action', to be the self who lived them. The vocabulary of uniqueness that Cavarero develops also means that 'like-ness', the quality of what it is *like* to have lived a particular kind of *what-ness*, is rescued from a logic in which difference is flattened and subsumed within notions of sameness.

Recalling again the claim Cavarero arrives at upon her formulation of *l'altro necessario*, the necessary other, the "thought" (Ricoeur, "Narrative Time" 179) of each text I have discussed in this dissertation, the 'what-it's-like-ness' of the worlds and experiences each describes, avoids dialectics and the flattening of differences into sameness because

> [q]uella che abbiamo chiamato etica altruistica della relazione non sopporta […] empatie, identificazioni, confusioni. Essa vuole infatti un *tu* che sia veramente un altro, un'altra, nella sua unicità e distinzione. Per quanto tu sia simile e consonante, la tua storia non è mai la mia, dice questa etica. Per quanto siano simili larghi tratti della nostra storia di vita, non mi riconosco *in* te, tanto meno, nella collettività del *noi* (*Tu che* 120).

> [[w]hat we have called an altruistic ethics of relation does not support empathy, identification, or confusions. Rather this ethic desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction. Not matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we* (*Relating Narratives* 92)].

I insist, through Cavarero, then, that it is not the case after reading Woolf's *Moments* and Cialente's *Le quattro ragazze* that one can say what it is 'like' in general to be a mother, to be a daughter, to be a woman, to be determined by history, the social and the cultural, and to determine those things by generating something new for and within them. Instead, one understands what it has been 'like' for *Woolf* and *Cialente* to be (or not to be) these things, to determine and to be determined by them. It is not the case upon reading Ghermandi's *Regina* and Lorde's *Zami* that Ethiopian and migrant identity, nor African-American and lesbian identity become generalisable experiences and relations to the world. Even if Ghermandi's *Regina* centres upon the affirmation of collective identity, even if Lorde's *Zami* depends on the otherness that is incorporated into its narrative structure, their readers can understand only what it is 'like' to have been Ethiopian, a migrant, African-American, a lesbian for the singular narrators of those texts. The 'thought' of Didion's *The Year* is not generally what it's 'like' suddenly to lose one's

husband, to grieve for him while attending to one's daughter's illness. Nor does Levi's *Se questo* offer a generalisable account of the experience of internment in the Larger at Auschwitz-Monowitz, even if the Nazi program responsible for that internment was bent on destroying the uniqueness of selfhood. *The Year* and *Se questo* describe what it has been 'like' for Didion and Levi to experience those things. What it is 'like' to watch one's partner deteriorate and die from a disease that is indifferent to one's uniqueness, what it is 'like' to contract that disease oneself, and what it is 'like' not to be recognised as living one's life with dignity, according to the destiny one has designed for oneself, by accident or with intention – are, moreover, not generalisable experiences articulated within Shapiro's *L'intruso* and Conigrave's *Holding the Man*. They are instead particular experiences, attested to as such by unique selves who self-write them.

"Per quanto siano simili larghi tratti della nostra storia di vita," [No matter how much the larger traits of our life stories are similar"], Cavarero writes, "non mi riconosco *in* te, tanto meno, nella collettività del *noi* (*Tu che* 120) [I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*" (*Relating Narratives* 92)]. Self-writing is the 'personal action' of a 'narrative discourse' that shapes its essential content, textuality, and emplots uniqueness within a 'thought' that accounts for what it is 'like' to be and to have been unique in that way. The priority of self-writing is not 'motherhood', 'daughterhood', 'sexual difference', 'ethnicity', 'sexuality', 'trauma', or 'disease', but *the self who has lived these things and made them unique, reducible, meaningful*, made of them a 'thought', given testimony to what it has been 'like' *for her or for him* to have lived and to live them. The social and political imperative of response to self-writing lies, then, in the ethical work of avoiding the subsumption of difference within a logic of sameness while *also* discerning and enabling the social, the shared significance of 'thought' and 'what-it's-like-ness' that uniqueness frames. The social and political imperative is thus one in which what is learned between the 'I' of self-writing and the 'you' who reads it is maintained and shared but not surrendered to a 'we' that flattens difference in a common identity. The social and political task of self-writing and its reception is thus to maintain the movement that self-writing enacts: the personalisation of the general terms and conditions of its possibility.

Cavarero concludes *Tu che* by claiming that

> [l]'unicità dell'esistente non ha infatti alcun bisogno di una forma che la progetti e la contenga. Radicata nel flusso impadroneggiabile di una costitutiva esposizione, le è risparmiato tanto il vezzo di prefigurarsi quanto il vizio di prefigurare la vita degli altri (187)

> [[t]he uniqueness of the existent has no need of a form that plans or contains it. Rooted in the unmasterable flux of a constitutive exposure, she is saved from the bad habit of prefiguring herself, and from the vice of prefiguring the lives of others (*Relating Narratives* 144).

Prefiguration is indeed at odds with uniqueness; it corresponds probably to the fallacy of identification with the general, with that which *is* prefigured, with that which *is* contained. Inverting Cavarero's formulation above, however, it is nevertheless possible to conceive of the ways in which uniqueness might plan the social, the general; this is to continue the project of re-symbolisation that is the task of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* [sexual difference thought]. If self-writing is an instance of *partire da sé*, the political underpinning of that practice, if it is not to limit itself to solipsism, which it does not, must make demands on the general, which is nevertheless its condition of possibility, and the content that is personalised.

In "Gender, Subjectivity, and Language" (1992), Patrizia Violi writes that "[c]ollective representations are the structures that, in a given society at a given time, give shape to the culture of that moment. They do not necessarily represent a rigid, homogenous whole, but they do possess an internal structure" (173). The task of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale* is to frustrate the repetition (Dominijanni, "Politica del simbolico e mutamento" 135) of that "internal structure" Violi describes. Because, Violi argues, "relationships between women have never been symbolized in male culture, as men's relationships have, and therefore cannot be internalized by women" sexual difference "remains invisible" (173). Moreover, "[s]ince subjectivity requires," Violi continues,

> a level of social generalization, some social and collective representations of gender are necessary, to mediate between individual experience and more general forms of subjectivity. These representations would have to be *socially visible* in narratives, in stories or in myths, as they are at present for men (173; my emphasis).

Violi thus signals Dan Sperber's (1985) epidemiological model of representation in order to suggest the process by which "collective representations spread and are diachronically transformed" (173). In Sperber's account, Violi summarises, "collective representations are presented as epidemics which spread by infecting single individuals" (173). The self-writing of uniqueness might work similarly. But where for Violi and Sperber the emphasis is on the infection of individuals by collective representation, I instead suggest the necessity of the collective's 'infection' by the uniqueness of selfhood that is self-

written. This means that the unique self is not simply the metonymical part of the collective, but the *necessary* element of its constitution and the potential for its reconfiguration. It is not 'social generalization' that must mediate individual and collective experience, but the cultural production of self-writing, which itself attests to the very process by which the collective, the general, is personalised by the individual, by the unique self.

Conigrave's *Holding the Man* cannot, for example, be read as the autobiography of collective experience of AIDS and gay-ness. It is the autobiography of Conigrave, of '*this* some*one*', and, in part, the biography of his partner, as well as the other selves to whom the two of them are *necessarily* related. The text establishes a relationship between Conigrave and me (for I am oriented in the conventions of a genre by the analytic awareness of the author [Abbot, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 601]), which, because of the demand it makes of me to recognise the uniqueness of its content, is always in potential as a relation that can be extended, but not generalised, across the relations I have with other people; it is part of, one of, the stories that constitute the narrative exchange between others and me, the narrative exchange by which I and others are in turn constituted. Thus the reality to which Cavarero appeals through Scheherazade is affirmed:

> Detto alla buona, gli esseri umani si raccontano le loro storie e riportano storie che hanno sentito raccontare, in una pratica narrativa a intreccio che risale forse alla notte dei tempi. La scena costituiva del racconto contempla appunto un sé narrabile che vuole la relazione e appartiene a un contesto reale dove gli esseri umani si raccontano storie (163)
>
> [Put crudely, human beings tell each other their stories and bring back stories that they have heard being told, employing a narrative practice that goes back to the dawn of time. The constitutive scene of the tale completes a narratable self that desires the relation and belongs to a real context where human beings tell each other stories (Relating Narratives 126)].

By proliferating stories of stories in which the general is personalised, the general itself has potential for reconfiguration, for subversion. Gesturing toward this potential, Walter Benjamin writes: a "story does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (90). Re-symbolisation of the social and the cultural begins with *this* some*one* who coincides with her/his life-story and has stories to tell, stories to write. Self-writing and the relation it stages between *who-ness* (as unique *what-ness*) and the generality of *what-ness*, instantiates the practice of "*partire da sé, cioè fare attenzione* a ciò che si vive concretamente, badando in particolare ai

sentimenti con i quali si vive qualcosa, che possono essere veri e propri affetti o sogni, immagini e impressioni" (Zamboni, "Fare un sapere" 155; my emphasis) [starting from oneself, that is, *paying attention* to what one lives concretely, taking particular care with the feelings by which one lives something, which can be real and true attachments, or dreams, imaginings and impressions].

To conclude: in the final chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, reflecting on freedom, declares:

> All explanations of my conduct in terms of my past, my temperament and my environment are […] true, provided that they be regarded not as separable contributions, but as moments of my total being, the significance of which I am entitled to make explicit in various ways, without its ever being possible to say whether I confer meaning upon them or receive it from them. I am a psychological and historical structure, and have received, with existence, a manner of existing, a style. All my actions and thoughts stand in a relationship to this structure […] I am free, not in spite of, or on the hither side of, these motivations, but by means of them. For this significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward (529).

Merleau-Ponty's observation that "I am entitled to make [moments of my total being] explicit in various ways, without its ever being possible to say whether I confer meaning upon them or receive it from them" runs, to some extent, counter to the kind of significance I have claimed for the self-writing of uniqueness. For self-writing, I have argued, is precisely the means by which the self confers meaning upon her/himself, *makes* meaningful and unique what might otherwise be the generalisable content of *what-ness*. Nevertheless, the potential of "being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present" corresponds to the absolute exposure of the self, *hic et nunc*, before the other in Cavarero's philosophy (*Tu che* 46; *Relating Narratives* 32), and the "affinché" ["up to a point" of narrative exchange: the self shares life-stories "affinché l'altra conosca una storia che può a sua volta raccontare […] a chi ne è la protagonista" (*Tu che* 85) [up to the point at which the other […] is familiar enough with the story to be able to tell it […to its protagonist] (63)]. But, for Merleau-Ponty, the radical context of the present is "a *manner* of existing, a style". The conditions of the self's possibility, her/his freedom, reside in and depends upon the *way* in which s/he exists. If *who-ness*, as unique *what-ness*, is a manner, or the manners of being, the style of the unique self's existence, then *what-ness*, contrary to Cavarero's claim, is always "inscribed in the very expressivity of the

embodiments of uniqueness" ("Who Engenders Politics?" 101), which in turn means that categories of *what-ness* are always positioned as "constitutive, primary […] even exclusive elements of political agency" (101).

Following Cavarero, I have claimed throughout this study that *this* unique some*one* is born into and given to the world by the mother – '*this* unique some*one* else'. The *who* of '*this* unique some*one*' is constituted along the stretch of time that is natality by relations of 'appearance' before, and exposure to, others; by action and speech, by the narration of life-stories. They are life-stories, moreover, which coincide with the self *who* is unique and unrepeatable by virtue of the fact that no one else can have lived the same life, nor have the same life-stories to narrate. '*This* some*one*' is all that s/he is at the present moment of her/his 'appearance' and the narration of her/his life-story.

Departing from Cavarero, however, I argue *this* unique some*one* 'appears' to others as *what* s/he is, or, rather, that her/his *what-ness* is always with her/him before others. It is inscribed "in the very expressivity" of her/his embodiment, and is always contained within the content of her/his life-story. Life-stories thus attest to the uniqueness of *what-ness*, narrating a life that has not and cannot be lived by anyone other than s/he who lives it. Because *what-ness* is contained within that life-story, the self's *what-ness* is particular in a way that escapes its general manifestations. It is made unique by living it and it 'living' is re-presented in self-writing. Adapting Abbott, then, '*this* unique some*one*' is "everywhere present" ("Autobiography, Autography, Fiction" 598) in her/his self-writing. The political and ethical act that the recognition and "analytic awareness" (601) of this writer demands of her/his readers is thus the continued narration of *who* was present there, in life and in the text: '*this* some*one*'.

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