

# SOUTHERN SEMIOTIC REVIEW

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## About

This journal (ISSN – 2202-2783) welcomes papers with general semiotic methodology and subject matter, as well as ones with special themes. Contributions of completed papers and commentaries, including works in progress or reviews, can be sent to [southernsemioticreview@gmail.com](mailto:southernsemioticreview@gmail.com). Readers are welcome to supply contact details for updates on new issues. All inquiries will be followed up.

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## **Rationale**

### **i) Content**

This journal is fully international in focus, and responds to the promise of semiotics at many levels – philosophical, educational, conceptual, cultural, social change and self understanding.

It also responds to a perceived need and opportunity to develop a more comprehensive approach to the study of semiotics in Australia—and perhaps in other countries more distant from mainstream traditions and practices in Europe and North America. This appears to be the first journal of its kind in this country, and, as a general inter-disciplinary English language publication, perhaps in the Southern hemisphere.

This publication, on occasion, addresses themes specific to the cultures, locations and geopolitics of regions of its publication. It should be remembered that Claude Lévi-Strauss undertook research into indigenous peoples on the three continents of the Southern hemisphere: Australia, South America and Africa.

However the journal is general in scope, and special issues and themes will be conducted in addition to general papers. Topics could include but not be limited to popular culture, the environment, creative arts, media and religion.

The ‘southerly’ tag in our title is also intended to connote emerging expressions of culture generally, and governance in our global public life as well as expressions in identity in international and individual contexts.

## ii) **Format**

“Southern Semiotic Review” has online and print versions. Online editions are open sourced, and widely read. Statistic overall and for particular papers can be supplied on request. Faster publication schedules for individual papers are encouraged. The journal maintains an inclusive and comprehensive brief, and contributions from all international scholars and writers of varied subject matters and approaches within a consensual, eclectic understanding of semiotics are invited. It is felt that wide subject matter and international contributions will assist—and indeed be necessary to develop—study in a specific region or country. The review/journal seeks to provide a repository of material and a digital and print footprint. It seeks to provide material that is accessible to a wide audience, with integrity of content and good quality of presentation. The journal seeks to maintain an ongoing and dynamic conversation, and comments on featured and selected papers will be encouraged.

Ongoing expression of interest for positions of editorial associate and assistants, and applicable links and affiliations, welcomed.

## **Submissions**

APA style is preferred. Numerical footnotes. No numbers or subscripts in sub-headings. We can adjust fonts. Authors of papers should supply an abstract and keywords. All illustrations to be supplied as separate jpeg files. Clearly indicate via subscript location of individual illustrations in body of article. Author bio and even picture can be sent. All formal contributions and papers will be subject to suitable processes of editorial, peer and blind review, to ensure quality and originality of content and stylistic quality. English is the preferred language al-

though bi-lingual papers welcomed, and non English material considered. Length is discretionary – both the long text as well as shorter styles, and separate print publication of longer works will be considered.

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**The Chimerical Tale of the Feminine.**  
**Intersections between the Question of Sexual Differences**  
**and the Question of Readability of the Text in Jacques Derrida**

Julia Ponzio  
University of Bari "Aldo Moro"

**1. The question of sexual difference: the name of *Dasein* and the name of Woman**

I will start from the question posed by Tina Chanter in a paper published in 1997: "Has Derrida's work on the question of sexual difference ever been read?" (Chanter, 1997: 87). The question of sexual difference, in Derrida, is in effect, as I'll try to show, a question of readability. Readability is deeply linked with the question of 'name' and with the way in which the name is linked both to what is named and to other names. In this sense, the question of the readability of sexual difference is, according to Derrida, a reconfiguration of the idea of text.

The question of sexual difference, intended as a textual operation of attribution of names, is no longer more a pure problem of gender, or a sociological question about the consideration of woman in modern society. The question of sexual difference becomes, in Derrida's thought, a theoretical problem because it deeply interferes with the possibility of Truth.

In his essay *Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference*, Derrida works on the question of difference as sexual difference, starting from a name. At the beginning of this essay he writes: "It is by the *name* of *Dasein* that I would here introduce the question of sexual difference" (Derrida 1983: 68).

Starting from the *name* of *Dasein* (and not from the concept, not from the idea of *Dasein*) Derrida highlights that Heidegger does not explain why he calls *Dasein* the entity which puts the question about Being. This

assignment of a name in *Sein und Zeit*, as Derrida says, is ungrounded, brutal and elliptical to the point that it seems a donation of the name, a baptism, rather than an explicative definition (Derrida 1983: 68-69).

Later, says Derrida, in his lessons of 1928, Heidegger tries to justify this assignation of name. In these lessons, Heidegger says he uses the name *Dasein* because of its neutrality and specifies that this neutrality has to be intended first of all as asexuality. But according to Derrida, in this attempt of justification, Heidegger again carries out an operation of designation, of assignation of a name, rather than an operation of definition of something: the feature of asexuality is, according to Derrida, assigned to *Dasein* in an unjustified, brutal and elliptical way, exactly as its name (Derrida 1983: 68-69).

In order to understand the sense in which this neutrality as asexuality has to be intended, it is necessary, according to Derrida, to highlight that Heidegger's definition of neutrality is not negative. Heidegger doesn't describe this neutrality as a lack of something, as a lack of sexuality, for instance. Neutrality intended first of all as asexuality, in Heidegger's discourse, makes the *Dasein* an 'originary positivity' and a "power of essence" (Derrida 1983: 72). Derrida explains this original positivity, this power of essence, as the impossibility to inscribe *Dasein* in one of the two sexual genders or, more widely, as the impossibility to reduce *Dasein* to binary logic in order to classify it, thereby going beyond the pure facticity of its existence.

Now, the point of the whole discourse here is that if *Dasein* is an assigned name, given without any reason or justification, and if its main feature is neutrality (intended as the impossibility to catch it by a category, by a general concept) this means, according to Derrida, that *Dasein* works, in Heidegger's discourse, as *proper name* rather than as common name.

Peggy Kamuf writes in *Derrida and gender: the other sexual difference*:

*Dasein* seems to be proper to someone's language. Indeed the fact that Heidegger's English translators most often leave this term in German suggests that it has the force of a quasi-proper name. *Dasein* is not a proper name in the common sense, of course. On the contrary it is a very common

name for existence in a certain language. Nevertheless, this effect of properness must be related to what Heidegger wants us to understand about *Dasein*, that is, as he puts it, “in each case mine” (Kamuf 2001: 92).

According to Kamuf, there emerges in Derrida two “modes of *Dasein* neutrality or non-neutrality”. *Dasein* is neutral in relation to its sexuality, but it can’t be neutral in relation to its own Being, because it is by definition the entity that poses the question about its own Being, that is to say the question of “mineness”. Kamuf maintains that in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger tries to establish a relation of subordination between these two modes, in order to confirm the priority of ontological difference over every other form of differentiation (Kamuf 2001: 93 and following). But this priority of ontological difference is threatened when *Dasein* appears as a proper name. Proper name threatens the priority of ontological difference because it is able to act on the structure of the “mineness”, in other words, it is able to deeply modify the idea of property which links *Dasein* and its Being in the *Eigentlichkeit*. This deep modification is the displacement of Ontological difference to Sexual difference.

This presence of the proper name in the core of Heidegger’s discourse, says Derrida in *Geschlecht*, acts as a powerful lever which is able to threaten not only the possibility of Heidegger’s philosophy to inscribe itself in the discourse of Truth, but is also able to threaten the possibility of the Truth in general.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida dwells on the power of proper names and their effect on the question of Truth (Derrida 1997: 113 and following). The proper name is what resists every possible translation, as the word *Dasein*, for instance. The proper name is a signifier that refuses to be substituted by another signifier with the same signified. But, at the same time, the proper name marks something that can’t be substituted by something else only because it bears its same name. The relation between proper name and what it names is not a classical semantic relation. The proper name doesn’t say anything about who bears the name and doesn’t establish any link between people who bear the same name. The attribution of a proper name is always

a gift, and for this reason it is always 'brutal' and gratuitous, it is an act without a justifying past.

The common name, on the other hand, is what attributes a role, a function, a classification. If you follow the traces of a common name, you reach a meaning, a concept, which keeps many singularities together indifferently. In this way, the common name marks who belongs to a gender. This mark implies a verification of provable features. The borders that common name marks are the borders of the property right, in which existence and Being are linked in a relation of *Eigentlichkeit*, which means originary ownership, original mineness. Originary mineness means a relation that does not happen in a precise moment of the human history and that, for this reason, belongs from an immemorial time to the history of Being.

Proper name<sup>i</sup> is a signifier, as common name. But if you follow its traces, you don't reach any concept, any meaning. What you reach following its traces, is a singular body, which is irreplaceable in its singularity and which lives interpreting its name: proper name is in this sense a vocative absolute (Derrida 1997: 112). This relation between named and name, between 'my' name and me, is very far from Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit*. This relation has to do with the structure of the gift, which, differently from the structure of *Eigentlichkeit*, individuates a moment in which the property is established, constituted, written. This act of institution of a property (the donation of name, for example) is not something already written in the history of Being. This act of institution hasn't any justification in the past because gift is always gratuitous. For this reason, it has not to be read in a line of time in which present is justified by its past and promises the future. It has to be read as the unexpected and arbitrary event that breaks the linearity of time, so that from that moment on nothing is the same <sup>ii</sup>.

For these reasons, Derrida writes in *Of grammatology* that every society capable of producing proper names, practice writing (Derrida 1997: 109). In this sense, as we will see in the following chapter, the body we find following the trace of proper name is, according to Derrida, not perceptible, but it is readable. This interpreting body is a not biological body. This body

is not a fact; it is rather a text, constituted by an act of writing. The traces of the proper name conduct to a reference without referent, as Derrida says speaking about *Khora* (Derrida 1995, 95-98), and this reference without referent is the living body of a text. Proper names, says Bennington, in Derrida's thought never indicate or nominate something external to language. They are never anchored to a "reality", to a matter of fact, which precedes the trace. (Bennington 1993: 114).

If *Dasein* is a proper name, a different sense of property is introduced in the core of ontological difference provoking, as we will see better in the following chapter, a sexualization of difference.

Proper name and common name, however, in Derrida's discourse, don't set up a new binary opposition. They don't obey to the principle of non-contradiction because every common name can work as a proper name exceeding the logic of semantic signification. In *Glas* Derrida calls this transformation of a common name in a proper name (and vice versa) *Antonomasia*. It, says Derrida in *Glas* quoting Littré, is "a kind of synecdoche that consists in taking a common name for a proper name, or a proper name for a common name" (Derrida 1986, 181). In *Glas* Derrida shows this structural confusion of language, displacing the name of Hegel and Genet, in their semantic significations ("eagle" for Hegel, and "Spanish broom" for Genet). If a proper name becomes a common name, it can be translated, in another language, for instance, without leaving rests, without remaining after its translation. *Antonomasia*, which displaces proper name and common name, shows the internal and irreducible contradiction of names: they mark, on one hand, the irreplaceable singularity, and, on the other hand, the act of the classification, which catches something in a nomenclature, in a gender, erasing every singularity.

Derrida writes in *Glas*: "To give a name is always, like any birth (certificate), to sublimate a singularity and to inform against it, to hand it over to the police" (Derrida 1986, 7).

And, some years before, in *Of grammatology*: "There was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which

consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute” (Derrida 1995: 112).

The relation between the named and its proper name is therefore always “violent”: this relation is an encounter between two elements, which from that moment on is not possible to separate, as if they begin to have sense only in that relation, exactly as it happens to the two columns of *Glas* or to the two columns of *Tympan* (Derrida 1982: IX-XXIX).

The structural ambiguity of antonomasia shows that every name can be interpreted as a proper name, it shows that every name is “assigned” in a brutal and elliptical way. This means that every name is a metaphor, is a trace of what is impossible to catch. Antonomasia always marks something for which, as Husserl says speaking of the time of consciousness, we have no names (Husserl 1991: 381-82), but that we can describe using images written on the margins of what is impossible to nominate.

In *White mythology* (Derrida 1982: 207-271) Derrida explains Aristotle’s concept of “good metaphor”. A good metaphor, according to Aristotle, Derrida says, is based on a name, but here name has to be intended as *Onoma*, which is the name in the broadest sense. *Onoma* is everything that is possible to nominalize, that is to say everything that could be reduced to a simple semantic unity, which signifies alone, regardless of its syntactic relations with other names and regardless of its syntactic relations with what it names (Derrida 1982: 233 and following). In this sense a common name can be defined *onoma* because it establishes a relation with the named and justifies this relation by a third term (the signified) to which both the name and what bears the name correspond. On the contrary, a proper name can’t signify anything if it is not connected with the person who bears it: it signifies only within the relation with the named. In the case of proper name, this relation between the name and who bears the name is a *syntactic* relation in which the name and who bears it are sewed together without a third term which justifies this relation.

In a good metaphor, two things exchange their names, and this exchange is justified by an analogy, which can be perceived, observed, certified, and proven. In a bad metaphor, the semantic relation between

signifier and signified is substituted by the relation between two texts sewed together without any analogy that justifies their connection. In this sense Derrida in *Glas* plays with the word *denomination* (Derrida1986: 10) that means both the act with which something assumes a name and the act with which a gap, a fracture a de-nomination is inserted between the name and who bears the name. This gap, this fracture, comes from the possibility that my name, my proper name, to which I'm linked to the point that I can't conceive myself without it, could have been different, because it doesn't come from me, because it hasn't any analogy with me, because neither its meaning nor its etymology explain how I am, and because it doesn't indicate any common feature with other people who bear my name.

Marian Hobson writes analyzing Derrida's *White Mythology*:

If metaphor is everywhere then there is no clear demarcation of metaphorical language; if the whole opposition between metaphorical and proper use is undermined, if there is no centralizing force which holds metaphor and proper apart gravitationally, if the opposition between semantics and syntax is set in doubt (...) what connection on thought *are* valid? If not guided by the resemblance, which brings metaphors back to base, relation will be nothing but a relation, one that is *post hoc*, visible from after, based on the word seen as a bearer of historical sediment, which is not to be neglected, yet which does not gravitate in any continuation of thought, but on the contrary which engages at different historical points in work within quite different systems. (Hobson 1988: 209)

Antonomasia eliminates the opposition between proper name and common name and in this way lets the metaphor be everywhere. At the same time, antonomasia puts in doubt the binary opposition between semantics and syntax provoking a proliferation of sense that is no longer more anchored to anything and is for this reason always about to change. For these reasons in Derrida's discourse, not only the proper name, but also the name in general, becomes a "graft" which leaves a sewing, a scar. Derrida often uses in *Glas*

and in *La dissemination* the verb *greffer*, which means both the graft and a sewing which marks, stigmatizes.

Derrida writes in *Glas*:

A graft does not supervene upon the proper. The proper begins with finding in the graft its bursting: its appearing or its blowing, but also its morseling (Derrida 1986: 34)

The graft at the origin of the proper, at the origin of the mineness, let the proper appear as something that could have been different from what properly is. The artificial, the prosthesis is what substitutes the lost proper. For these reasons graft lets proper appear, but at the some time it dismembers it. Graft shows the proper as an interweaving in which signifiers are sewed to other signifiers, that is to say it shows the proper as a *text*. In this sense if in *Geschlecht* “*Dasein*” is a de-nomination, an unjustified assignation, a graft, a bad metaphor, it opens a gap in Heidegger’s discourse because it shows, exhibits the textual, grafted body of every discourse of truth. For these reasons, in Derrida’s discourse, the proper name *Dasein*, exactly as the proper name “Woman” in *Éperons*, becomes a “but one name for the untruth of the truth” (Derrida 1976: 43). Both “*Dasein*” in *Geschlecht* and “Woman” in *Éperons* work, in Derrida’s discourse, as proper names rather than as common names, because they don’t refer to their referent by the mediation of a signified, as in the classic model of signification, but they refer to an interpreting body, that is to say, to the living body of a text grafted on another text.

## 2. **Style: from ontological difference to sexual difference**

*Style* is the name by which Derrida denominates this syntax of graft. *Style* is another proper name: it doesn’t work as *onoma* because it designates but doesn’t define and because it doesn’t refer to a unique signified. I will follow in this chapter one of the traces of the infinite polysemy of *Style*, that is the one connected with “flower”. The trace that from style conducts to flower is very important for the discourse I’m conducting here, because it

shows exactly the point in which Derrida, acting on the structure of mineness by the idea of “graft”, changes the ontological difference in sexual difference, producing a deep modification of the graphic of *mimesis*.

In *Glas* one of the things designated by the name *Style* is a part of the flower (Derrida 1986: 21-22). Flower, in *Glas* and in other texts as for example *White Mythology*, is a metaphor, a bad metaphor, of names hovering between proper and common names, such as *Woman*, for example, or *Dasein*. In the *Glas*' left column, Derrida, analyzing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, dwells on what Hegel defines “the religion of flowers”<sup>iii</sup>. It, says Derrida, constitutes for Hegel, the passage from a “religion of innocence” to a “religion of guilt”<sup>iv</sup> (Derrida 1986: 2). In order to admit a guilt is necessary a self able to distinguish himself from others, that is to say able to recognize himself in a name, to call himself as distinct from the others and from the world. Flower represents, in Hegel's discourse, according to Derrida, the beginning of this distinction, of this differentiation. It is the prelude of a self which affirms the sphere of what belongs to him, the sphere of his “mineness”, so that he can admit a guilt (that is to say he recognizes the guilt as his guilt) or can claim to be innocent (that is to say he doesn't recognize the guilt as his guilt). What comes before the religion of flowers in Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* is, says Derrida, is the “religion of sun”. In the stage of the religion of sun there is only a total light, a light without shadows, without any distinction and border: it is a fire which burns itself without leaving any trace, any rest of this combustion.

Derrida writes:

This difference without subject, this play without labor, this example without essence, devoid of self (*Selbst*), is also a sort of signifier without signified, the wasting of an adornment without the body proper, the total absence of property, propriety, truth, sense, a barely manifest unfolding of forms that straightaway destroy themselves (Derrida, 1986: 239).

Figure of absolute indifference, the religion of sun is the paradox of a pure signifier without writing. This signifier is only pure consummation, it doesn't mark anything, doesn't remain, it can't be inscribed and therefore it doesn't link to other signifiers in order to constitute a text. It is property without appropriation process, it is the Being in the pure relation with itself, without spaces, seamless, without grafts. But this signifier without body and relations is only a paradoxical signifier because, as Derrida shows in *Glas*, if this light without shadows is pure consummation, pure difference, it has already lost its pureness. Precisely for the fact that it is pure consummation, pure difference, this total light is already split. The verb *to be* acts as a blade, as a stylet ("stylet" is another thing that the French word *Style* names), which opens, divides, differentiates, cuts producing parts and shadow zones. To be what it is, says Derrida, the pure difference bends over itself, differentiating from itself, and constituting the ontological difference. The moment of this folding in Hegel is the passage from the religion of sun to the religion of flowers (Derrida 1986: 239 and following). This is exactly the point in which ontological difference becomes sexual difference in Derrida's discourse, because, according to Derrida, the relation between Being and being is not a semantic relation but it is a syntactical relation. Being is in this sense the proper name of being. Being which being attributes to itself doesn't signify it, it is not its identity modified, transformed in a signifier, but, on the contrary, according to Derrida, Being is a bad metaphor of being. Conceived in this way, Being is not a modification of identity, but is writing and re-writing which at the same time nominates and de-nominates identity, instituting it and founding it on this act of writing. The element which the verb "to be" introduces in the formula "a is a" in order to nominate, to describe, to define the border of a self, hides, under the reassuring appearance of a common name, the restlessness of the proper name, which is an unjustified and untranslatable gift. Proper name doesn't pacify in the illusion of a property, but troubles opening the possibility of mourning, that is to say the possibility of the loss of what is impossible to substitute or to translate.

In this sense, Derrida converts the ontological difference in sexual difference. Sexual difference is a link, a relation between elements that are reciprocally irreplaceable and untranslatable. These elements become, for this reasons, significant for each other in a relation opened in an empty space that at the same time links and separates them, on the border of mourning. The important consequence of this conversion of ontological difference in sexual difference is that in this way the syntactical relation is not outside Being, it is not an "otherwise than Being". Sexual difference inside Being, opens in it spaces in which Being as presence sinks and loses its sense. Sexual difference inside Being let it appear as writing, as syntactical relation between signifiers, in other word let Being appearing as a text. In this sense, if the ontological difference is displaced in sexual difference, the relation between Being and being, that is to say the sexual difference itself, becomes a text, and the problem of sexual difference becomes a problem of readability of the text.

The space that in an unstable way links, agglutinating them, being and Being which it attributes to itself, is what Derrida calls *hymen* (Derrida 1981: 208 and following), which is a point of union that is not a presence. The relation between being and Being becomes, in Derrida, agglutination between irreplaceable, love relation, nostalgia, and fear of loss. What Derrida in *Geschlecht* calls "another sexual difference" (Derrida 1983: 83), is linked to what in *Glas* Derrida calls with Hegel's words "unheard contradictions (*der ungeheuerste Widerspruch*) of love (Derrida 1986: 18).

The passage from the religion of sun to the religion of flowers is therefore the moment in which Derrida makes act the sexual difference modifying the graphic of mimesis, introducing in it a syntax which is a non-indifferent relation between singularities. Flower, says Derrida, in Hegel's discourse, is not able to attribute its being to itself. But the light which emerges from inside the flower as color is, on one hand, what characterizes it as singularity, what distinguishes a flower from all other flowers (the proper name) and, on the other hand, what delimitates its sphere of property, what let it assume a name and enter in a classification (the common name) (Derrida 1986:246). Therefore, like *Dasein*, flower is *neuter*,

but however, as in the case of *Dasein*, this neutrality doesn't mean something absolutely indifferent, but, on the contrary, it means something that is unclassifiable, reticent to every attempt of generalization, identification, dissection, and reduction to the signified. At the end of *White mythology*, Derrida quotes a Bataille's essay titled *Le langage des fleurs* (Derrida 1981: 271). In this essay Bataille links the possibility of a knowledge about flowers to the possibility of *partition*. The knowledge based on partition consists in the distinction of the flower from plant, in the dissection of the flower in its constitutive parts in order to study their morphology and function and in the study of the functional relations between all its parts. In all this phases of knowledge, it is important the attribution of names. But, beyond this classificatory and functional knowledge, remains what Bataille calls the *real presence of flower*, that is to say its color, its freshness, its smell, in other words all that language cannot express without betraying it or manifesting its absence. What Bataille calls *real presence* manifests the flower's singularity. Real presence is what makes a flower irreplaceable with another flower with similar features: it is for this real presence that I hold *this*, and not any other one, flower between the pages of a book (Bataille 1970: 173-78). The image of the flower between the pages of a book, at the end of Derrida's *White mythology* (Derrida 1982: 229) is referred, on one hand, to the capability of writing of a flower: a flower which is donated, for instance, in order to mean something which is codified in the language of flowers, can remain as a rest between the pages of a book, and this means that it doesn't end with the understanding of its signified, because remaining as rest, it is able to build new chains of signifiers, new texts. On the other hand this image refers to the flowers as what (like hymen) remains *between* without being a center, between the pages of a book, for example, exactly as the pages with *priere d'insérer*, which Derrida writes for *Glas*. This being *between* makes the flower untraceable. Between the pages of a book, it is, at the some time, preserved and lost. It becomes *rest*. Rest, a central element in *Glas*, is what eliminates the contradiction between preservation and loss, what eliminates the contradiction between presence and absence. Preserved between the pages of a book, the flower loses all the features I wanted to preserve: it

becomes residual of itself, loses its real presence, loses its color, its smell, its form: all the features for which I picked the flowers or someone donated it to me are lost, but nevertheless is *this* flower I preserve, and every substitution is impossible. Derrida describes this ambiguity in *Glas* when he says that flower is *(de)part(ed) (partie)* (Derrida 1986: 15) alluding both to the partition and to the departure. Flower disappears both in the moment of classification and in the moment in which it is preserved in a book. In both cases it remains only something that alludes to the flower referring itself to a chain of signifiers, which are not reducible to their signified. This means that flower is already the interpreting body of a text, which for this character of being already (*Déjà*) can produce new writing.

*Style* is also the proper name, the bad metaphor of one of the partitions of flower. *Style*, Derrida says, means in French a part of the feminine reproductive system of flower which links ovary, where seeds are produced, with stigma, where happens the fertilization process (Derrida 1986: 21-22). *Style* is, therefore, a “between”, a little linking column, a space of connection. *Style* works, in the reproductive system of a flower, exactly like the white space between the columns of *Glas*, that is to say as an agglutinating space that at the same time separates and links.

*Style* is the name of what is able to establish a relation, to trigger a appropriation process, without any justification: it is the name of the link once taken out from the logic of justification. In this sense, *style* as link, as difference that connects without justification, but not in an indifferent way, is both what makes the difference a *sexual* difference, and what let us think sexual difference beyond the logic of opposition.

*Style*, as Derrida describes it, is a figure of distance, which constitutes a relation, but it is also, at the same time, a bad metaphor of the situation of hanging in the balance, of the *between*. *Style* is a bad metaphor of the undecidable which characterizes what in *Spurs* Derrida calls “Women”, or a bad metaphor of the neutrality of what in *Geschlecht* Derrida calls “*Dasein*”. *Style* is also what, in the anatomy of a flower, links the ovary to the stigma. In *Glas* Derrida underlines the polysemy of the word “stigma”, which refers to the mark, to the scar, that is to say to what remains impressed, tattooed,

to the stigmata. In other words “stigma” is a wound which cannot heal, which remains opened and which makes someone forever recognizable in his singularity (Taylor, 1987: 257 and following).

Style is the name of what displaces the ontological difference in sexual difference. This displacement, as I tried to show in the first two chapters, modifies the structure of mineness starting from the question of the name, and destroying the binary opposition between proper and common name. For these reasons, the question of sexual difference converges with the question of the readability of the text. Sexual difference itself, that is to say the relation between Being and being, once eliminated the opposition between proper names and common names, becomes a readable text. This text, however, is very far from the traditional idea of text because it is not a static link between signifiers waiting for an interpretation. The text of sexual difference becomes in this context, as I will show in the following chapter, an interpreting living body that by the means of its readability eludes perception.

### 3. The tale of sexual difference

The problem of style, therefore, intended as the problem of the sexual differences, beyond the logic of opposition, establishes what in *Spurs* Derrida calls “the epochal regime of quotation marks” (Derrida 1976: 83-84). “Woman”; “*Dasein*”, “*Style*”, “*Déjà*”, as all the names by which Derrida articulates his thought, posed in quotation marks, considered as marks in an unstable equilibrium on the question of appropriation, of mineness, dismiss the discourse of truth and let explode writing as “spurring operation” which is “more powerful than any content, thesis or meaning” (Derrida, 1976: 85). The “regime of quotation marks” displaces the question of sign from meaning to text, that is to say it puts in the foreground the syntactical analysis and in the background the semantic one.

A text, says Derrida in *Plato's pharmacy*, differently from a referent in the semantic relation, has its laws and rules which “can never be booked, in the present, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception”

(Derrida 1981: 63). A text is something that is possible to read, but which is impossible to perceive. For these reasons, in his essay *Fourmis*, Derrida says that the sexual difference can be interpreted, deciphered, decrypted, read, but it can't be seen. Sexual difference, Derrida says in *Fourmies*, is readable, that is to say invisible, is an object of testimony and not an object of proof (Derrida 1994: 70 and following). Sexual difference is readable but invisible because the reference without referent of the proper names "Dasein" in *Geschlecht* and "Woman" in *Spurs*, is not a biological body, which owes provable and visible features. The reference without referent of the proper names *Dasein* and *Woman* is the body of a text, in other words, it is writing, interpretation, manifestation of a style, singularity beyond every possibility of generalization. The reference of "Dasein" and "Women" is an invisible, but readable body, is an interpretation, which can be reinterpreted it is writing, which can be rewritten. In this operation of rewriting (which is the only operation that the text allows, resisting to the reduction to its signified) the relation between the named and the name, between the text and its rewritings is a syntactical relation. This relation that doesn't close something within its margins but, on the contrary, introduces an unstoppable rhythm in which the encounter between two texts continuously writes other texts. What is produced in this infinite process of rewriting is a syntactical relation between signifiers, activated by what in *Dissemination* Derrida describes as the space of "between":

Through the re-marking of its semantic void (the between) in fact begins to signify. Its semantic void *signifies*, but it signifies spacing and articulation; it has as its meaning the possibility of syntax; it orders the play of meaning. *Neither purely syntactic nor purely semantic*, it marks the articulated opening of that opposition. (Derrida 1981: 222)

The question about this "between", which links two textual singularities in a relation that is both not-originally and not-indifferent, is the question of difference as sexual difference. If the question about sexual difference coincides with the question of the difference in general, mimesis

is no longer more a modification of identity but becomes an agglutinating relation between textual singularities that produces other texts. This kind of relation without justification is an unstable relation exposed to the danger of mourning: I can't lose what properly belongs to me, but I can lose what I met once and became so important to me that I miss it even before its loss.

This link between the question of sexual difference and the question of appropriation, which Derrida establishes, deeply changes the sense in which property has to be intended. This link makes what is proper to me no longer more what belongs to me because I can justify this belonging by a property certificate, by a proof that shows a history of the belonging. On the contrary the link between appropriation and sexual difference, triggers the appropriation process starting from what comes from elsewhere, from what doesn't coincide with me, from something which suddenly becomes proper to me only because it is for me so irreplaceable that even in its presence I feel the absence. In this sense of property the margin of the textual singularity is no more what separates what is proper to me from what is not. The margin of singularity becomes the place of hospitality, of the exposition to the foreign, which is the condition of the appropriation process in which two textual singularities become reciprocally irreplaceable.

This idea of a not-originally, improper relation between two irreplaceable texts is what in *Gescheht* Derrida calls "the other sexual difference", which is no longer more or not yet marked from the "seal of two", that is to say, from the binary logic of belonging and opposition. The irreplaceable, which is at stake in the "other sexual difference", is not the singularity closed within its border, which waits only to be classified. This irreplaceable is the singularity that becomes a text able to produce writing. The transformation of the question of difference in the question of sexual difference -of the other sexual difference- let us conceive the syntactic relation between textual bodies, as a relation between irreplaceable texts. The neutrality of Heidegger's *Dasein* intended also (but first of all) as asexuality, says Derrida in *Gescheht*, doesn't mean it is indifferent, it doesn't mean it is anything, but, on the contrary, it means it is impossible to categorize it, to catch in a general concept. The neutrality of *Dasein* marks

the resistance of the living body of text to any operation of identification, to any operation which tries to confine it within the discourse of truth. In this sense, in *Fourmis* Derrida writes that sexual difference is a tale, that is to say it is something is possible to read but not to see, which is possible to interpret but not to perceive, which is possible to testimony, but without any proof (Derrida 1994: 96). A tale is always out from the discourse of truth: in the voice of who tells me e tale I look for a testimony, I never look for proofs. Sexual difference is a tale, which you can always tell once more, in your own way, with another voice, in another sense, to another person, in another context. When someone tells me a tale I've already heard, also if the history is always the same, it can happen I miss a voice, a way to tell it, a context in which once I've heard it: it can happen I miss a style.

In *Voice II* Derrida writes:

The style doesn't belong to me, it does not come back to me, it makes me come to myself from the other. Let us say that this is the sexual difference of me (Derrida 1992: 165).

Therefore, style is what constitutes the margins of text, in other words, it is what exposes it to the external and that makes it both closed in itself and vulnerable to rewriting operations.

Derrida says in *Plato's pharmacy*:

A text – is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game” (Derrida 1981: 63).

In his essay titled *Che cos'è la poesia*, Derrida describes this strange exposing closure of text with particular reference to the poetic text, by the (bad) metaphor of a hedgehog. The poetic text more than all the other texts resists to the translation and to the semantic interpretation, keeping its secret closed in itself. Giving a testimony, but without any proof, it allows the reading but not the perception. In this closure, Derrida says, the text shows

its external side, its borders, its margins, in other words, its style. Exactly as a hedgehog when it rolls it up to protect itself from a danger. The hedgehog is the bad metaphor of the text in the tale Derrida tells in *Che cos'è la poesia*: in this tale this hedgehog is blocked in the middle of a motorway which is unable to cross, because it is rolled up in order to protect itself from a danger.

Derrida writes:

It blinds itself. Rolled up in a ball, prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted (because it makes itself into a ball, sensing the danger on the autoroute, it exposes itself to an accident). No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding. (Derrida 1992: 297)

The hedgehog, closed in itself, but exposed to the external by its prickles, ready to hurt but also to be hurt, is the image of text. It, immobilized in the middle of the street of translation or interpretation, in the tale Derrida tells, doesn't ask to cross the street, to reach his starting point or its destination, but only to be displaced:

Destroy me or rather render my support invisible to the outside, in the world (...), in any case do what must be done so that the provenance of the park remains from now on unlocatable and unrecognizable. Promise it: let it be disfigured, transfigured or rendered indeterminate in its *port* (...). Eat, drink, swallow my letter, carry it, transport it in you, let the law of a writing become your body: *writing in (it)self*. (Derrida 1992: 293)

Therefore, the text doesn't ask to be interpreted. The text asks to be read, to be rewritten elsewhere, or, better, in a place without any support. The poetic text asks, Derrida says, to be learnt by heart in order to be repeated again, but, like a tale, with another voice, to another person, in another context. This need of the poetic text to be learned by heart, is a need to lose all trace of itself, and to trigger the appropriation process, in which the starting

point is lost in a past which is not possible to recall. The poetic text need to be learned by heart in order to protect itself from straight path of interpretation and translation. In the act of its repetition by heart the living body of text loses its origin, bears witness, dictating itself elsewhere.

In *Plato's Pharmacy* Derrida says speaking about written text:

Wandering in the streets, he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity –if he has one– might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. He repeats the same thing every time he is questioned on the street corner, but it can no longer repeat his origin (...) Uprooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal (Derrida 1981: 144)

The text, Derrida says, wanders without provenance, disconnected from its author, in this sense orphan, and incapable to recall its origin, as a traveller who can't recall the starting point of his journey. Written text is the illusion of a lost origin. On the contrary oral text, the text without supports, a tale, for example, the tale of sexual difference, for example, is a text which has no author, like the melody of popular music, or proverbs, or improvised music, which live through their rewritings. This text has neither author nor origin because the time of his production was too short to be controlled, because there was no time to sign, and just said the text was already dislocated elsewhere outside of itself.

This transcription without any support, in which the text becomes a singular interpreting body, which lives in its countless rewritings is a "chimerical text". Derrida uses this adjective "chimerical" in *The animal that therefore I am* (Derrida 2006: 402) to define all that which is outside classification in gender and species. This transcription without support is a chimerical text, which is not the static origin of dislocation and writing, but a living body, already dislocated, which lives bearing witness to its transcriptions, to its rewritings and to its innumerable sexual differences.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> On the question of proper names see also Marian Hobson *J. Derrida opening lines* (New York: Routledge, 1998) in particular the chapter *Singular and proper names*.

<sup>2</sup> This second sense of property, as Derrida often admits, is taken in consideration by Heidegger after the *Kehre* by the introduction of the concept of *Ereignis*. See above all 'Given time: the time of the King', in J. Derrida, *Signatures*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> About Derrida's reading of Hegel in *Glas* see: Simon Critchley, A commentary upon Derrida's reading of Hegel in *Glas*, in *Hegel after Derrida*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See Jane Marie Todd, 'Autobiography and the case of signature: reading Derrida's *Glas*' (*Comparative Literature*, 38:1), pp. 72 and following and Marc C. Taylor, *Altarity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 270 and following.

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