

Exilic Consciousness and Meta-Cosmopolitanism: Rise and Fall of Barriers

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Faced with a reordering of geopolitical landscapes, Western discourse, after an eighty-year hiatus since World War II, promises to raise new barriers, inaugurating a model of exclusivist, purificatory discourse. Consequently, current representations of non-belonging subsist under the assault of grand narratives which only serve to foreclose the very thinking of exilic representations in polemical and radical form.

My paper theorises the raising of barriers as an adherence to master discourses which perpetually seek to discipline, regulate and neutralise exile in a 'well-trodden, pathologized aesthetic' (Baal 2015). As a researcher and playwright I will be considering how the effect of dominant narratives impacts upon our capacity to imagine and dramatize new mythico-metaphysical terrains and readdress cosmopolitanism. Given that any truth must first be allowed into speakability by the schemes of linguistic and political permissiveness, I will be asking, as a woman dramatist and researcher, how it might be possible through narrating this marginalized existence, to cause the barrier to fall, and to what extent the project of cosmopolitanism has been undermined by the structured layering of orders and ideologies. Drawing on deconstructive approaches, and principally on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and his work on sovereignty, womanhood and Cosmopolitanism, I consider how embedded discourses constitutive of subject-formation lead to historically sanitized notions of nationhood and identity.

Progressing from Derrida's position on exteriority and exile as conditions of possibility (Derrida 1998), I conclude that the drama of exile compels us to rise above the barrier and re-theorise foreignness and citizenship by revealing a space of meta-cosmopolitanism; a space of energising movement and privileging the signifier of anarchy over event.

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...ein Besuchsrecht, welches allen Menschen zusteht, sich zur Gesellschaft anzubieten, vermöge des Rechts des gemeinschaftlichen Besitzes der Oberfläche der Erde, auf der, als Kugelfläche, sie sich nicht ins Unendliche zerstreuen können, sondern endlich sich doch neben einander dulden zu müssen, ursprünglich aber niemand an einem Orte der Erde zu sein mehr Recht hat, als der andere.

A right that all men have, founded upon that of the common ownership of the surface of the earth, which, on account of its spherical form obliges them to suffer others to subsist contiguous to them, because they cannot disperse themselves to an indefinite distance, and because originally one has not a greater right to a country than another.

(Kant 1795. *Perpetual Peace*. Author's translation)

It is only four summers before the dawn of the eighteenth century, and the world is ripe for Kant's enlightened debate on global movement and every citizen's unquestionable right to reap the common benefits of our '*Kugelfläche*', our spherical world. It is again Kant who, three years later in 1798, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, inaugurates the 'rational being endowed with freedom' (Kant 1799, 7:285), proceeding in the *Anthropology* to determine the universality of character as belonging to a person who 'relies on principles that are valid for everyone' (Kant 1798, 7:293). Kant's rational man, the deracinated, Cartesian, abstracted being, has since provided the foundations for liberal and neoliberal prototypes in social science by relativizing our epistemic agency (our ability to know things) to our own standpoint. The Kantian man finds himself at the centre of the universe where he, as the knowing subject, can be bound by norm-governed activity only to the extent that the highest order of norms has its source, ultimately, in him. Kant's philosophy subsumes the particular within the universal and reduces qualities to quantities with the result of raising the barrier of exclusionary sovereignty and national territorialism. By disabling internal differences, Kant's cosmopolitanism has predicated human consciousness on territorial space which is sovereign and institutionally circumscribed. In his famous 1784 essay *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment"* Kant repeatedly decrees that the idea of human 'maturity' be set as a necessary condition for proper engagement in a public realm in order to safeguard institutionally established freedoms: 'Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large part of mankind gladly remain minors all their lives [...] the overwhelming majority of mankind – among them the entire fair sex – should consider the step to maturity, not only as hard, but as extremely dangerous' (Kant, 1784:1). What is evident in this passage is that Kant successfully applies the veneer of cosmopolitanism as a condition of universal goodness while justifying a regime of exceptionalism reserved for 'mature' individuals along with all the prejudicial exclusions that this state of exceptionalism promotes and entails.

The purpose of this paper is to argue the case for meta-cosmopolitanism as an imagined, dramatized and differential striving towards a democracy-to-come in the midst of all the 'homogenizing hegemonies' of the post-Kantian project (Derrida 2004, p.158). I will argue for a commitment to a certain opening, a mythico-metaphysical terrain that keeps the dialectic open and promises to overcome the blockades of fossilized historical necessity. To apprehend it, I will examine the aesthetics of dramatic textuality witnessed in my own practice as a dramatist as a metaphysics of structural exteriority, as 'the absolute indigestibility [...] the element excluded from the system, yet endowing the system with the quasi-transcendental function which assures the system's space of possibility' (Gasché 1995, p.189). As a dramatist, I write exile and my methodological temptation is precisely to reassess the limits of the transcendental motif by radicalizing the dramaturgical boundary of that which is outside or underneath, the un-thought or the excluded; that which, in its deferred function, organizes the ground to which it does not belong. As a starting point, Sophocles' *Antigone* serves to demonstrate that politically and ontologically, the female protagonist must find it impossible to overcome the barrier. Yet, she provides the ballast, the difficulty and the unwieldiness of the woman in both ontological and territorial exile; the element of inadmissibility to the system, an instant or instance which 'precisely *because* of its indigestibility can play a fundamental role *in* the system' (Derrida 1974, p.151). In the Classical dramatic canon *Antigone* is an insurgent. She renews her revolutionary significance by reminding us that, despite her

insurgency, her womanhood prevents her from exercising her civic rights in statehood. A bride of Hades before surrendering to matrimonial delights, Antigone underwrites the trans-categorical condition of possibility of the system itself, to which she will always be exterior. Both Gasché and Derrida position this ‘exteriority’ within Antigone’s asymmetry to convention (Gasché 1994, p.188). Antigone carries the stain of Oedipus’ exile: exile from sovereign space, exile from citizenship and from normative womanhood. As a proto-feminist paradigm, Antigone also consolidates what I term *exilic consciousness in drama*: an urging, a pressure exercised by the exterior (a voice of what is linguistically and culturally designed as exiled) against centric discourse. It is imperative that in this time of provocation, Antigone supplies the conditions of possibility for encapsulating the paradox of the female condition. Speaking in a foreign language, forced onto foreign territory and ostracized from civic fraternities, Antigone sets the foundation for transforming her own singularity into the ‘system’s first moment’ (Gasché 1994, p.193). Exilic consciousness for the female is still legally problematic. The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, around which much of individual states’ approaches are based, is founded with men as its principal beneficiaries. Individual states equally benefit from linking citizenship and statehood criteria to earning potential which, structurally, also favours men.

Against this background, my own play, *Lesbos*, commissioned in 2016, was born to me primarily as a site, and subsequently a character, of exile. The dramaturgy of this piece is based on character emplotment inverting itself against essentialist anticipation, against the ‘normal and normalizing narratives’ (Gasché 1986, p.188) of what is expected of the female body as a universal quality of its supposed essence. The play explores the gendered impacts of exile against the essentialist position that the female body’s duty is accomplished in nature, not in civilization. Patriarchal privilege assigns a place to the feminine which is always complementary and supplementary to civilization, if not entirely exterior to it. My initial decision to deploy two women as protagonists was founded in the desire to debunk this essentialist exteriority. Structurally, the gendered representation provides both theme and form to the narrative. Dramaturgically, each exchange is designed to counter an expectation of ‘normal womanhood’, thematically and aesthetically. Each woman is meticulously constructed to take great pleasure in her anarchic choices, counter to notions of victimhood, injury and nostalgia. In the course of their first encounter, we are shocked to discover a veiled Sarah defending ‘Europeanness’ against Maria’s rather obtuse romantic belief in Communism. Sarah is the vocal, brave one. Maria recedes as Sarah advances away from nostalgia and loss.

SARAH Where were you born, Maria?

MARIA What?

SARAH Where? Here? Right? Look where I’m pointing.

Maria does.

SARAH Born here, Maria. *On* this island? Under this sun? And what do you get for it?

Maria is perplexed. She doesn’t agree but sees an argument

SARAH Us. Thousands. Millions of unwanted peoples. Foreign things claim priority over your own. I see them. I smell them: trampling all over your *right* to be here before we come and take over your schools and your health service.

MARIA This isn't what the Left was about you know-

SARAH I am talking about civilisation.

Silence

Maria scratches her tattooed arm, exposing the fading ink of a hammer and sickle design.

MARIA Still, we was talking about this tattoo-

SARAH No, we were talking about Europe and values. Which *I* embrace.

(*Lesbos* Act I Sc 3)

The two characters are also constructed to foreground the structural dis-analogy between cosmopolitanism and the narratives (colonial and others) of impurity.¹ Traditionally termed, cosmopolitanism, understood as a voluntary act, is the self-affirmation of the romantic exile. Kings and queens, pop-stars and internet tycoons exile themselves as a matter of course in order to affirm their status, portability and interestingly adaptable linguistics. They are cosmopolitans. They can go where they like, when they like, as opposed to the migrant (a linguistically negative category that has been widely used in political polemics) who, in principle, exercises the same right of freedom of movement. The unbalance occurs when the latter category (the migrant) finds herself unable to erase the linguistically and culturally constructed stain of her 'origin and skin tone, rebelliously staining the purity of the imperial quest' (Said 1994, p.16). Undergirding the imbalance of essentialist expectation (the woman's primary duty to fulfil her 'essence' which is principally her reproductive function), the two principal characters in *Lesbos* are women preoccupied with what I previously referred to as Gasché's 'non-normal and non-normalisable things'.² One of them discovers a plague, the other is an engineer; one of them sleeps with a gun under her pillow; the other is veiled; the veiled woman incites nationalism; the other woman will retreat and then respond; the veiled woman initiates an enquiry about sex; the other woman will retreat and then reciprocate; the veiled woman will betray and follow her calling towards scientific excellence; the other woman will kill and follow her calling towards political revolution.

Lesbos proposes to disquiet our ordered sense of exile by inserting the concept of meta-cosmopolitanism into the dramatic equation. To do this, I follow a deconstructive approach where the imagined space of a democracy-to-come, Derrida's '*à venir*', is textualized in dramatic form using the metaphysics of time and space. Direct dialogue provides the linear model in *Lesbos* with the Cantos functioning as a conscious ordering of the spatial aesthetics of the text against clock time. Spatial aesthetics engages the notion that art is political, by

¹ Colonial narratives of territorial entitlement entail a corresponding narrative of exclusion and racial purity, which combine to constrict the colonized spatially and discursively (see Said 1996; Harvey 2009).

² I use Gasché's term 'normalisable' (derived from Derrida) with a degree of poetic license to indicate a departure from the lure of sovereign discourse, an anti-foundationalist proposal.

vexing our very perception of how a text or work of art functions *in a given space* and lending political ballast to the concept of space as a construct of class and gender consciousness (see Papastergiadis 2010). On the other hand, imagined temporalities challenge imperialist rhetoric and the discourses of colonialism which are always formed to justify domination of one group over another. In *Lesbos*, this typology of domineering rhetoric lends itself to a rupture: the multi-directionality of narrative time is aimed at structurally undermining the colonial project and its rigid layering of orders and ideologies. In the excerpt that follows, the two protagonists engage in an interplay between principles.

SARAH You a nurse?

MARIA Yea.

Sarah's eyes politely travel to Maria's tattoo.

SARAH And a tattooed lady?

MARIA Ex-dreamer.

SARAH ex-...?

MARIA Yes, like a dreamer before but now... not really, not the time for this shit, you know what I mean?

SARAH Oooohhh...

MARIA Sorry, I hope this don't offend you.

SARAH No, please....Let me look.

Sarah studies the tattoo

MARIA Ex-communist.

SARAH This...?

MARIA Sickle.

SARAH Oh...and this...?

MARIA Hammer.

SARAH *is shocked*

MARIA Harmless

SARAH Harmless hammer...?

MARIA Harmless hammer. I know. That's before. *EX*-communist. Now...just dreaming of some weirdness of what it could have been if it hadn't all turned out bad...oh, fuck it, I can't think about this anymore.

(Lesbos Act I Sc 3)

Furthermore, the use of Cantos energizes a forward motion of the narrative. The Cantos are situated in the future in Melbourne, Australia, where Maria, as a Greek citizen, is ‘now’ seeking political asylum. Their futural action has a powerful deconstructive effect as it carries the retentive into the present. In exile however, temporalizing is a supplementary device. What matters above all is the *where*, not the *when* or the *what*. At every stage of writing the dialogue I could not help myself drawing a parallel with Derrida’s *Glas*, where the syntactic text, the writing itself, plays second fiddle to the use of space and textual absence as the principal means of signification. That is to say, that the syntactic text itself is made dormant or, more precisely, becomes a latent undercurrent of the spatial elements of the play. This has a further anaesthetic effect in terms of the reader’s approach to the text. Whereas in a textual space (the reader’s own space for receiving and perceiving the text) the reader still engages primarily with the syntactic text, within the spatial text (the reader’s perception of the aesthetics of space within which the text is acted) the reader is invited to read the ‘linguistic holes’, which are silent. She who finds herself out of her naturally inscribed space, symbolically the Syrian, the veiled woman, will not be denied cosmopolitanism, the Kantian ‘suffering of the other’; she is indeed welcomed, duly arrested, registered, offered a mattress in a container. Sarah Al-Asari, the physicist from Damascus, will find the courage to escape the horizon of historical truth: she will overcome the universally inscribed label of ‘migrant’, she will enter into an intimate relationship with the foreigner from Lesbos and finally decide to forego the intimacy for the sake of her science thereby demarcating her own space in civic subjecthood and developing exilic consciousness in action rather than in victimhood.

What follows is a section of dialogue between the two protagonists. The anarchic potential of the Syrian engineer’s invitation to Maria to remember ‘when she lost herself in something bigger’ sparks the outpouring of canonical language anti-immunizing against its own pathogen. Maria confesses to arson. And then it gets worse: they debunk the masculinity of the Divine.

SARAH When was the last time you lost yourself in something bigger?

MARIA In 2004. After the demonstration. After I’d doused that fascist prick’s car in petrol and watched it go up like a faulty firework.

SARAH God may not forgive you Maria.

MARIA Hear, this: I doused the engine first. The Mercedes sign. Poured liquid all over it and then the leather seats. Bright red leather seats for the fat arsed protector of the working classes. And I watched the flames encircle the motherfucker like it was the Second Coming.

SARAH *Whispers some prayer in Arabic*

MARIA Don’t pray for me. God will stop loving you if She heard you.

SARAH She?

MARIA Yea. Mother used to say “God’s got to be a woman. Who else can make it so we’re be born between shit and piss alive?”

SARAH stops praying. She takes a sugary confection and places it in Maria's mouth.

(*Lesbos* Act I Sc 9)

Negative representations of exile derive from language capturing its object in ways to fit the political and geographical aims of nationalistic entities. Our linguistic modalities are sharpened to give public expression to these entities' evidential presence. I therefore argue that meta-cosmopolitanism is a call to mobilize dramatic textuality in reverse motion towards the effacement of the negativity of exile, one which is constructible and – as Derrida would have it – deconstructible in language. Cosmopolitanism has sustained a regime of staining human movement, subject to grave epistemological corruption and to all the vagaries of history, power, society, bourgeois morality and politics. Enlightenment ideals are the pegs on which conformism's barriers hang their bourgeois credentials, their exclusionary medals, the orders of their empires, their stately violence, their self-congratulatory discourses of majesty and humanity. Cosmopolitanism as the ontic representation of Homo Erectus' most noble intention to share the earth's 'spherical shape', ultimately acknowledges that he must *suffer* the Other because he knows that, in spite of his absolutism, interdependency is the vital condition of his remaining erect. To interrogate this tumescent rigidity, I will now discuss how the dramatization of Derrida's approach to Platonic philosophy mobilizes textuality towards a practice of deconstructive interrogation, thereby questioning abstract, absolutist, dogmatic thinking.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato appoints the textual semiotics of the *khōra* as ranging from habitation and place to country and national space. The *khōra* is an important innovation in Plato's middle metaphysics. It represents a 'third kind': an enduring substratum, neutral and amenable in its temporality. Progressing on Plato's observations in the *Timaeus*, Derrida appoints the *khōra* as an all-encompassing event because it 'comes before everything' and designates 'the call for a thinking of the event to come, of the democracy to come' (Derrida 2004, p.xiv). The discursive distance between habitation and national space is a woman's longest journey. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, King Theseus offers citizenship and succour to Oedipus, King of Thebes, eagerly looking forward to death at Colonus. Antigone's exile is not going to be resolved on the horizontal plane of the ties of citizenship and statehood. She will be exiled, and in exile she will mark a territory of revolt, building on structural exteriority to expose the system's annulations, the flaws of conventionally accepted authority. Developing the interpretation of the Platonic *khōra* in terms of theatrical space and textual dramaturgy, I had to take into account the *khōra* as both a metaphysical proposition and a temporal extension. The ecology of land and soil and the searing temperatures of the Eastern Mediterranean are fecund. This is where the protagonists in *Lesbos* come together and this is where they must endure the ills of exile and neoliberal cosmopolitanism. It gives the dramatist an ecosphere of Western-style character and *khōric* non-character, but, more importantly, it provides the gestational interval bearing the seeds of what comes *after* a national space has been excommunicated, emptied of meaning and exhausted. In its essence *khōric* emplacement *is* an interval. It is the physicality which you open to allow a temporal extension for things to take place *in*.

The *khōra* is a third form, neither a paradigmatic and eternal being nor a sensible copy of these beings. The limitations of the *khōric* ‘kind’ testify to the *khōra*’s indigestibility. It is where we remain, in perpetual motion. The privilege of the *khōra* is that it can escape the coordinate of commonality nevertheless participating in the intelligible. The *khōra* qua receptacle exceeds creation: it refuses to be assimilated immediately into the dualistic Platonic schema: it is ‘a spacing from "before" the world, the cosmos, or the globe, from "before" any chronophenomenology, any revelation, any "as such" and any "as if," any anthropotheological dogmatism or historicity’ as reinterpreted by Derrida in *Rogues* (Derrida 2005, xiv). The noun itself, gendered female in Greek, designates a matrix, an opening, a womb-like environment, an *arché* or origin. In metaphysics the notion of the primordial is conventionally linked to presence and thus manifests an irregular kind of temporality. In *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), Derrida notes that the difference constitutive of the self-presence of the living present reintroduces as trace the impurity of spatial depth; that is to say, a non-identity into self-presence. The trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not one’s own. To apprehend that which eludes the logic of assimilation, Derrida mobilizes the strategy of deferral, his innovative tactic of installing temporality into the syntagmatic of the sign. Contrary to the oppositional definitions of Saussure and Levi-Strauss, Derrida proposes that the field of narrative must not only bring out the chronological sequence of events but more essentially the chronology of their representation, a tenet which signals the liberation of textuality from the interpretative constraints imposed by traditional regimes of meaning and signification.

This endeavour is inherently problematic in the translation of the *khōra* from the metaphysical to the sensible. I purposely positioned the two women in *Lesbos* at the farthest point to the east which separates Greek from Turkish national waters, defined as the off-shore zone which is extended from the ‘straight baseline’ or the coastline into the sea.³ The textual metonymy of the sea as a site of ever shifting territory is what drew me to the decision. The Aegean’s positioning as a site of perpetual confrontation between East and West, mythologized in Homer’s *Iliad* is today the site of reception of over one million arrivals from the East, gives the dramatist ample licence to imagine a maritime barrier or, more suitably, a bridge between two points. In *Glas*, Derrida writes the *khōra* as metaphysical deferral in textuality. He proposes a copulative moment between the father of German Idealism and the vagabond of French literature, former rent-boy, enlightened, misunderstood, maid’s son, playwright and poet Jean Genet. The reflections between the columns and the contrasts between them (the French word ‘glas’ meaning ‘death knell’) thus form a mobile discourse within the text, replete with fecund gaps, penetrated and penetrating.

Glas follows Derrida’s program of writing that provokes the very limits of language. And it is only when language is tested that meta-cosmopolitanism as an unconditional injunction of hospitality towards an *arrival* is enacted. A genuine affirmation of what in a dramatic encounter is open to the arrival of the Other bears all the allure of wantonness: the arrival or the *arrivant* (the one who is arriving) is untranslatable because she appears before textuality, ‘un-languaged’, because she is polyglot, affirming the licentiousness of the intellect’s wonderings

³ ‘Straight baseline’ as termed in article 8 of the Montego Bay Convention, is the line which is ‘formed by joining the very end sea bound points’ (UNCLS 1994).

and the randomness of human beginnings. Maria, the nurse, does not *want* the arrival. But she is brought to know that she cannot but bring the gestation to term. The womb will contract. The arrival must arrive. Inhabitation of our spherical world *must*, in Kant's words, 'suffer' the Other (Kant 1795, p.214), and in suffering the Other, the protagonist lets go of the security, the certainty and the indictment of sameness. The copulative activity that follows between the veiled *arrivant* and the heavily tattooed nurse from Lesbos contaminates the trace and elevates it above epistemic certainty, above the sensible into the sphere of the incommunicable. The aesthetics of the textual space privileges a certain spatio-temporal register where the accent is now placed on the use of space as the primary signifying process – the process capable of the transmission of what is otherwise inexpressible: the politics within the polis. The question of spatial aesthetics is extensively visited by Derrida in '*Parergon*', the introductory chapter in *The Truth in Painting*, where he effectively positions Kant's *Third Critique* as a resolution between mind and nature, 'internal and external phenomena, the inside and the outside etc.' (Derrida 1987, p.5). Whereas a full discussion on aesthetics is beyond the remit of this paper, *Lesbos*, as a dramatic text, continually vexes the borders of *aesthesis* as a subjectively perceived idea of what is pleasurable within its given spatial environs. In that sense, the play text exercises its aesthetic influence, the very idea of its apartness from the world, its own intensity and affect on individuals. However, I will agree with Derrida that whereas this affect remains resolutely subjective, the beautiful, the intense and the spatially aesthetic are also to be found in the political, 'in the outside, in the object and independent of its existence' (Derrida 1987, p.13).

Outside the *Khōra*

National space is jurisdictionally circumscribed. Laws are made and remade to identify the precise limits of what is legitimately interior and accepted by the polis and what will be deemed foreign and exterior. The question therefore arises as to how we demarcate exteriority. How do we set the limits of exilic consciousness and mobilize the need for meta-cosmopolitanism? In tragic dramaturgy, democracy subsumes commitments of the individual to the collective in a particularly heightened manner. Athenian democracy privileges horizontal relationships of citizenship. In democracy's institutional function, 'fraternity', as also argued by Derrida at length in *Politics of Friendship*, is instituted and remains central to the ideology of modern Western politics as a trace, continuation and relation to ancient political theory. Cosmopolitanism in that sense affirms the horizontality of the signifier as a concept of fraternity, *not* sisterhood. And women are content to be complicit with the phallus under the fraternity banner of Enlightenment revolutionary politics. In this all-embracing shift in political rhetoric, and against the claim of fraternity, sisterhood raises its head, but timidly. Sisterhood begins to learn to speak, and Antigone's voice fails in the symmetry of citizenship versus blood bond. Her sister Ismene will not support her determination. I insist on Antigone's paradigm as a foundational instance of structural exteriority.

Citizenship conceptions are moulded on the norm of the universalized male enshrining man's economic primacy over the female's domestic concerns. As King Oedipus walks towards his death in Colonus, he is assured closure, the recognizable relief and respite from life's unchosen travails, an honour bestowed on him by Theseus, king of Athens. His male body, the body politic of the king and warrior, is promised reprieve, but the pact between men

excludes the female body. Antigone, whose fate is one of perpetual mourning in exteriority, an existence only recognizable in vertical blood ties, is ultimately denied the ‘pact’ of horizontal civic redress. The *khōric* element in this context is the very *atopia*, the very ‘a-locality’, which makes philosophy possible, a space in which language does not merely obey an epistemological function of reproducing the sensible world. It is the very condition which opens the world to systematic interrogation and transformation. In the excerpt that follows Maria receives an item in the post. She begins to realize that the ‘innocent’ rhetoric of assimilative practice carries within it an incalculable threat: that of total immunity to the world. The twisted logic expressed in the ‘letter’ demonstrates what language could do if only left to its epistemological function, the dry, assimilative, ‘copycat’ paradigm propagated by hegemonic discourses. Therein lies the immunity to the Other and the extent to which our own refusal to welcome the *arrivant* breaches our civic and moral duty to the world.

Maria sitting next to a huge pile of unopened letters.

Spotlight on MARIA. She opens the first one

MARIA “Dear Maria, I’m watching them lying in their containers. All infected; and this excellent operation of making Greece great again. Keeping them safely sealed. I’m watching this: the power of your convictions. And I’m thinking: I’m with you. Solidarity. Love. The Olympic Games. Technology. Starbucks. Smoothies. Tofu. All the things that unite the civilised world. Openness, global outlook, a free-for-all economy, a love of Shakespeare, vicarage values. I’m sorry, I’m getting a little carried away but you’re all over SKY and I can’t help it. I’m single. 42 years old. Blue eyes, brown hair. Steady job. Own a BMW. Love dogs (not a cat person, sorry!).

It's not funny, Maria. We need those containers. I’m with you Maria. I love you. God is on our side.

Yours sincerely,

NOT a citizen of the world”

Maria slowly places her face on the floor and begins a slow, lingering lament

(*Lesbos* Act II Sc 5)

Venkat Rao poignantly remarks that ‘Justice and ethics for Derrida are acts undertaken in the “night” of non-knowledge by means of a leap over knowledge [...] decisively opposed to the machine and the calculable’ (2009, p.305). I will progress this position and argue that the transcendental principle of a given structure can never be immune to its other, to citizenship of the world, the empirical, the historical, the ontic, the contingent. Meta-cosmopolitanism is necessitated by this very concept of the quasi-transcendental as excess; excess which affirms that the set of conditions of possibility of any given structure or system is always and unavoidably contaminated by the threat of its own failure.

I would like to expand on language and the ‘language-ing’⁴ of exile as a legitimization of exile’s un-governability, its unwieldiness in being controlled. This language-ing has helped to establish an officially sanctioned ostracism which will happily invent such terminology as migrants versus expats, exiles versus cosmopolitans. It is also a forced consensus whereby performing exile is predicated on the acceptability of injury. Women’s exile, because and on account of its non-horizontal civic ties, is particularly vulnerable to depictions of injury and voyeurism ranging from visual symbols to acoustics and the mythologies of veiled womanhood. So how is national space languaged, and can it be remade or at least reimagined in the first instance? Can the world as world be begun at the most radical level possible, that on which the ontic itself comes into being (Leonard 2010, p.341)?

National space is little more than linguistically and discursively constructed space. In *Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida admits to the unlikelihood of escaping the metaphysical grip that ties humanity to the persistent enquiry into the ultimate nature of mind and being: ‘there is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history’ (Derrida 1977: 280). However, unlike metaphysicians from Plato to Husserl and beyond have been arguing for, Derrida invites us to attest to an opening in interiorizing the metaphysical margin, the exterior, that is, in creating exteriority’s own spatially inward temporality. Likewise, I would argue that any text that challenges institutional space by creating its own temporal structure facilitates a sustained mediation, a bridging between an accepted order and a renewed perception of the world.

Exile’s new provocations of the last two years demonstrate that our unending appeal to truth-values or truth-conditions is nothing more than a symptom of devotion to the outworn logocentric paradigm that ensures the presence and maintenance of barriers under the guise of economic necessity or principles of national security, or even outright ethnic purity. I hope to have shown why a progression towards meta-cosmopolitanism is now urgent and necessary, and how a close reading of the narrative of the structural exterior can provide its own conditions of possibility. On the margins of thinking, language must endure the loss of its epistemological superiority and its familiar resonances. Yet, the thematization of the margin simply requires the openness to play. On Derrida’s reading, language, in its function as an autonomous power, lacks a centre. It is rather defined by the free play of substitutions and differences; a dangerous dissemination without centrality, or a plurality of elusive signs that refuse to be encapsulated under an all-encompassing totality. In that respect, to eliminate the barrier, the recalcitrance, the impasse, we must use language against itself. We must expose language’s un-truth of its own realist-truths, which only serve as linguistic legitimization to its Apollonian surface of calm, its walled-off impregnability. Dramaturgy cannot cause a barrier to fall. It can, however, as dramatists from Sophocles to Brecht have demonstrated, imagine the fall of the barrier and inaugurate *play*; it can speak a resounding ‘yes’ as a mark of inaugural affirmation to demolishing the wall. The presence of the Other requires that this affirmation is performed; it requires the acceptance that a threshold will be breached and the Other will enter. This is the

⁴ I use language in its verbal function to indicate the unanimous approval, conscious and subconscious, of a concept, idea or politics which has been absorbed by and assimilated into accepted linguistic structures. For a full analysis of this concept see Alison Phipps’ *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival* (2006).

pre-performative and transcendental condition of all possibility, the ‘yes’ that comes before speech, before all possible dialogue, all interlocution; the ‘yes’ that carries the risk of wantonness, unpredictability and what I earlier referred to as the incalculability of the arrival. The affirmation remains the condition of possibility, and the possibility of the present moment accomplishing this deferral, and thus carrying with it a trace of itself as it disappears into the past and opens onto its future. All voices are heard in time: the polyglot, the silent, the foreign, the cacophonous and the adulterated. They all must suffer and revel in the deferral of any final word they may have otherwise uttered. They all exist as traces, retaining the past, its signs, its sins and its musicality, and extending as pretensions into the future, always remaining to come. To capture this temporality of anticipation, Derrida warns that it ‘must have the structure of a promise and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now’ (Derrida 2004, p.85-86). The notion of promise performs the function of an offer by the exterior ‘without which the system could not come into its own’ (Gasché 1994, p.191). The permanent futurity of the promise underwrites its impossibility as a permanent opening-to-come (*à-venir*) and ensures that the unconditional demand for this pure polity is ‘ineffaceable and transcends the possible’ (Derrida 2004, p.86).

Cosmopolitanism is failing us in its own finiteness. The decidability of its institutional mission, its imperialist inheritance and its noble potential have been deflowered by its refusal to consider an opening, the condition of divisibility of its sovereignty, Kant’s ‘*sich doch neben einander dulden zu müssen*’ (Kant 1795, p 214).⁵ For the barrier to fall – and our time will be dark and limited on this planet if it does not – cosmopolitanism must subsist under an unconditional injunction, always ahead of us, always imagined, always a promise which we must stand ready to fulfil.

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⁵ ‘man’s duty to tolerate one another’.

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