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### TIME OUT OF TIME: DERRIDA, CIXOUS, IMPROVISATION

**Abstract:** This article considers the paradox of improvisation as a gift out of time, which is completely in tune with time, subject to time. It does so through an alignment of Jacques Derrida's philosophy and the poetic writings of Hélène Cixous. Ever mindful of the possible impossibility of improvisation in Derrida's work, improvisation here is given over to Cixous, to the side of life, and is theorised as a type of 'feminine writing', as an inventive strategy that calls forth the unknown other and dreams of a gift in life that is out of time.

**Key words:** improvisation, deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, *écriture féminine*, gift, time, life, death

*One time alone*  
*Improvisation*  
*Takes place*

~ Geraldine Finn, 'One Time Alone'<sup>1</sup>

Improvisation takes place. One time alone. Out of time.<sup>2</sup> And yet absolutely of the time, in tune with time. Creating its own time. Bringing Derrida and Cixous together through the concept of the gift offers an opportunity to think critically about improvisation and its paradoxical relationship to time, or, more fittingly, to out of timeness. Derrida reads improvisation as an impossibility that is only ever possible as the impossible. Cixous dreams of the possibility of improvisation, of the possibility of poetic contradiction, which make the impossible improvisation possible.

#### I. Derrida: Impossible Improvisation

The improvised act must, by definition, offer the wholly new and the heretofore undiscovered. It must be completely unique and *ex-tempore*; out of time. However, to appreciate the extempore nature of

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<sup>1</sup> G. Finn, 'One Time Alone', *LAND2: symposia*,  
<<http://www.land2.uwe.ac.uk/symfynn.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> To improvise is, according to *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, to 'compose or perform (music, verse, etc.) extempore' (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, 710). Extempore means 'without preparation', 'on the spur of the moment', literally 'out of the time' (494).

improvisation, it must be captured within a ‘system of *conventions*’ or an ‘economy of time’ that will ensure its position more generally in culture and society.<sup>3</sup> The improvised act, in other words, can only be analysed or understood through pre-existing or prevailing laws of language, music and temporality; it can never be completely out of time or beyond the law of the musical text; it exists only in relation to an original timeline, melody, theme or musical tradition. In the words of Charles Mingus, ‘you gotta improvise on somethin’.<sup>4</sup> To do otherwise would make its recognition *as* improvisation impossible.

For Derrida, it is a paradox or ‘*aporia*’ that improvisation is constituted by its nontemporality and yet wholly dependent on the economy of time for recognition and legitimation.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, improvisation *as such* is an impossibility. To say that improvisation is impossible, though, is not as negative as it first sounds. Improvisation is governed by the law of *différance*, a law which prohibits ‘at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself’.<sup>6</sup> Impossibility is thus not the opposite of possibility; instead, it is ‘the condition or chance of the possible’.<sup>7</sup> In Derridian terms, ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ say the same thing’.<sup>8</sup>

It follows then that Derrida is ‘not against the impossible’, not against improvisation.<sup>9</sup> Quite the opposite. As he stated in one interview: ‘I believe in improvisation and I fight for improvisation. But always with the belief that it’s impossible’.<sup>10</sup> Improvisation thus loses nothing in being impossible.<sup>11</sup> For if it were truly possible, in the sense of being ‘totally present’, it would be completely outside our time

<sup>3</sup> J. Derrida, ‘Psyche: Inventions of the Other’, in: L. Waters and W. Godzich (eds), *Reading de Man Reading*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 28, emphasis in original; D. Wood, *Time After Time*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007, 37-56.

<sup>4</sup> B. Kernfeld, *What to Listen for in Jazz*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, 119.

<sup>5</sup> *Aporia*, from the Greek *aporos*, means ‘without passage’ or ‘without issue’. ‘An *aporia* is something which is impracticable. A route which is impracticable is one that cannot be traversed, it is an uncrossable path. Without passage, not treadable’. In: R. Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, 32.

<sup>6</sup> J. Derrida, *Positions*, London and New York, Continuum, 2002, 26, emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> J. Derrida, ‘A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event’, *Critical Inquiry*, 2007, 33, 441-461, 454.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>9</sup> J. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997, 20.

<sup>10</sup> J. Derrida, ‘Unpublished Interview’, 2004, <<http://www.derridathemovie.com/readings.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> J. Derrida, ‘Psyche...’, *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> P. Birmingham, ‘Towards an Ethic of Desire: Derrida, Fiction, and the Law of the Feminine’, in: N. Holland (ed), *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, 127-146, 131.

and experience.<sup>12</sup> If this were the case we would ‘be deprived of all relation with it’ and could not know it *as* improvisation.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore ‘the attempt at such an improvisation, necessarily failing’, which ‘leaves a trace or a mark that can be seen as a *promise* of such an inaugurality’.<sup>14</sup> It is in its failure that improvisation survives.

## II. Derrida: Giving Time to Time

Improvisation: a gift out of time in tune with time. To say ‘gift’ here is deliberate. For Derrida, the gift is governed by the same ‘logic’ as improvisation. Both concepts confirm a certain thinking of ‘the impossible possible, of the possible *as* impossible, of an impossible-possible that can no longer be determined by the metaphysical interpretation of possibility or virtuality’.<sup>15</sup> The impossible possibility of the gift lies in the fact that the only ‘pure gift’ would be one that is ‘out of time’, ‘at the instant’, entirely beyond the ‘economy of restitution’.<sup>16</sup> Derrida explains:

For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other *gives* me *back* or *owes* me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference ... So we are saying that, quite obviously, if the donee gives back the same thing, for example an invitation to lunch ... the gift is annulled. It is annulled each time there is restitution or countergift.<sup>17</sup>

This is the paradox of the Derridian gift. Recognition of the gift *as* gift annuls the gift. There can be no true gift; no giving, with its reciprocal gratitude and thank yous, always remaining in the restricted economy of exchange.

The impossible possibility of the gift owes itself, in part, to the ‘temporization of time’.<sup>18</sup> The present of the present destroys the present. For there to be a gift, it cannot appear, be perceived or received, be present in the present as (a) present.<sup>19</sup> Not even an immediate forgetting of the present *as*

<sup>13</sup> J-L. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000, 60.

<sup>14</sup> G. Bennington, ‘Double Tounding: Derrida’s Monolingualism’, *Khoraographies for Jacques Derrida, on July 15, 2000*, D. Kujundzic, ed., <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympanum/4/bennington.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> J. Derrida, ‘The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the ‘Humanities,’ what could take place tomorrow)’, in: T. Cohen (ed), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, West Nyack, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 24-57, 54, emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> D. Wood, op. cit., 52.

<sup>17</sup> J. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 12, emphasis in original.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

present will suffice. The event of the gift, or gift event, is already caught in an economy of time,<sup>20</sup> which makes impossible an ‘absolute forgetting’.<sup>21</sup>

From the moment time is apprehended on the basis of the *present* now as general form and only modifiable or modalizable in such a way that the past and the future are still presents-past and presents-to-come, this predetermination entails the aporetic of a time that is not, of a time that is what it is *without being (it)* [sans l’être], that is not what it is and that is not what it is not, which is to be it *without being*.<sup>22</sup>

Time shares with the gift the paralysis of paradox: ‘neither the gift nor time exist as such’.<sup>23</sup> This means neither can be fully present in the presence of the present. This is the mystery of difference, of *différance*.<sup>24</sup> Neither purely present nor absent, only unresolved deferral of identity.<sup>25</sup> Meaning endlessly differed, its original presence endlessly deferred.<sup>26</sup>

### III. Cixous: Giving Time to Time

Alongside Derrida, the Cixousian gift ‘can never be (a) present, a gift as such, that is, it cannot present itself *for* a subject’.<sup>27</sup>

How does one give? It starts in a very simple way: in order for a gift to be, *I* must not be the one to give. A gift has to be like a grace, it has to fall from the sky. If there are traces of origin of the *I* give, there is no gift – there is no I-give. Which also signifies: say ‘thank you,’ even if the other does not ask you to say it. As soon as we say thank you, we give back part or the whole gift. We have been brought up in the space of the debt, and so we say thank you. Is it possible to imagine that there can be a gift?<sup>28</sup>

Against Derrida, though, for Cixous, the gift is thought in relation to what she calls ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ economies. These economies, while not biologically-determined categories, distinguish themselves as ‘differences in behaviour with regard to the preservation of the self, the spending of the self, and the relation to the other’.<sup>29</sup> Cixous explains:

<sup>20</sup> D. Wood, op. cit., 37-56; J. Derrida, *Given Time...*, op. cit., 16.

<sup>21</sup> J. Derrida, *Given Time...*, op. cit., 16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 28, emphasis in original.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, ‘We are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views’, *Hélène Cixous Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, 1-115, 64.

<sup>25</sup> P. Deutscher, *How to Read Derrida*, London, Granta Books, 2005, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> P. Kamuf, ‘To Give Place: Semi-Approaches to Hélène Cixous,’ *Yale French Studies*, 1995, 87, 69-89, 85, emphasis in original.

<sup>28</sup> H. Cixous quoted in: J. Still. ‘The Gift: Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida’, in: L. A. Jacobus and R. Barreca (eds), *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*, Amsterdam, Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1999, 123-139, 129.

<sup>29</sup> P. Salesne, ‘Hélène Cixous’ *Ou l’art de l’innocence: the path to you*, in: S. Sellers (ed), *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1988, 113-126, 122.

In the movement of desire, of exchange, he is the en-grossing party, loss and expense are stuck in the commercial deal that always turns the gift into a gift-that-takes. A gift brings in a return. Loss, at the end of the curve, is turned into its opposite and comes back to him as profit.

But does woman escape from this law of return? Can one speak of another spending? Really, there is no 'free' gift. You never give something for nothing. But all difference lies in the why and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms, causes to circulate; in the type of profit the giver draws from the gift and the use to which he or she puts it. ...

She too gives *for*. She too, with open hands, gives (to) herself pleasure, happiness, increased value, enhanced self-image. But she doesn't try to 'recover her expenses.' She is able not to return to herself, never settling down, pouring out, going everywhere to the other.<sup>30</sup>

The Cixousian gift thus comes to us less desperate than Derrida's. It comes to us in love. Maternal love 'that goes much beyond an anatomic maternity and consists in letting oneself be taken by the other'.<sup>31</sup>

This gift in and of love, 'the most difficult thing in the world', finds possibility in what Cixous calls 'feminine writing' or *écriture féminine*.<sup>32</sup> She explains in relation to Brazilian author Clarice Lispector, whose work represents the most complete example of 'feminine writing':

How can a gift be given without creating the other the prisoner of the gift? This is extremely hard to do in reality, even in the strongest and most generous relationships. It is the subject of Clarice Lispector's writing. She does not make a theory of it, she gives concrete examples. Her narratives contain the possibility of a practice. Perhaps this possibility can only exist in texts. But at least in her writing it is there, it makes itself felt, it appears.<sup>33</sup>

The Cixousian gift: most difficult, but ... not impossible, it seems.

The possibility of the Cixousian gift is also that of 'feminine writing'. For Cixous, Western philosophy and literary thought are, and have always been, predicated on an endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions, which always come back to the fundamental 'couple', man/woman, with the male being privileged over the female.<sup>34</sup> Cixous's entire theoretical project, and that of *écriture féminine* in general, is to create a 'feminine' way of writing: a language that subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism (i.e., the privileging of Logos, the Word, as a metaphysical presence) colludes with

<sup>30</sup> H. Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays', *The Newly Born Woman*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1996, 63-132, 87.

<sup>31</sup> H. Cixous, 'Apprenticeship and Alienation: Clarice Lispector and Maurice Blanchot', *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 74-109, 84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> H. Cixous quoted in: S. Sellers, 'Introduction', in: S. Sellers (ed), *Hélène Cixous Reader*, London, Routledge, 1994, xxx.

<sup>34</sup> H. Cixous, 'Sorties...', op. cit., 64.

phallogocentrism (i.e., the privileging of the phallus as the symbol or source of power), thereby creating phallogocentric ideology.<sup>35</sup>

Dismantling phallogocentric ideology and language from within phallogocentric ideology and language is no easy task, though. Terms such as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ remain alive in Cixous’ texts, even though they seemingly keep intact those hierarchical oppositions she seeks to dismantle. She explains in her essay ‘Extreme Fidelity’:

What I call ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ is the relationship to pleasure, the relationship to spending, because we are born into language, and I cannot do otherwise than to find myself before words; we cannot get rid of them, they are there. We could change them, we could put up signs in their place, but they would become just as closed, just as immobile and petrifying as the words ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and would lay down the law to us. So there is nothing to be done, except to shake them like apple trees all the time.<sup>36</sup>

Cixous thus comes to us shaking apple trees, dreaming of the possibility, however rare or difficult, of a different relation to giving, one that will alter the very condition of language and writing.<sup>37</sup> Refusing to ‘appropriate or annihilate the other’s difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery’,<sup>38</sup> Cixous moves toward ‘something that only exists in an elsewhere’.<sup>39</sup> Dealing with the no-deal, relating to ‘what gives no return’, the Cixousian gift gives (to) the other (in) writing; a gift out of time, ‘[i]nside the time of writing’.<sup>40</sup>

#### IV. Cixous: Possible Improvisation

While Cixous would not deny the paradoxical nontemporality of improvisation, she responds to this paradox ‘with a music that is different from his [i.e., Derrida]’.<sup>41</sup> Improvisation, for Cixous, is a gift out of time in tune with *écriture féminine*; it sings, as she does, of life, of writing life and living writing.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2002, 103, 191.

<sup>36</sup> H. Cixous, ‘Extreme Fidelity,’ in: S. Sellers (ed), *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1988, 9-35, 15.

<sup>37</sup> V. Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, New York and London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, 39.

<sup>38</sup> S. Sellers, ‘Introduction...’, op. cit., xxix; H. Cixous, ‘Sorties...’, op. cit., 97.

<sup>39</sup> H. Cixous, ‘Sorties...’, op. cit., 97.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, op. cit., 34-35.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>42</sup> Cixous’s affirmation of life is described in further detail in section V below.

Improvisation *is* ‘feminine writing’: ‘A capacity for improvisation should mark a reading process that could be qualified as feminine’.<sup>43</sup>

To say that improvisation shares anything with ‘feminine writing’ may sound strange to many readers. Especially jazz improvisation, which has always been viewed as a masculine language.<sup>44</sup> Both improvisation and *écriture féminine*, however, dream of ‘living the instant’, of life in the ‘eternity of the instant’.<sup>45</sup> Both dream of a gift out of time, which is on the other side of time, on ‘the other side of nowhere’.<sup>46</sup> Not to deny the impossibility of truly escaping death, or the Selfsame or the already existent (and thus escaping the limitations placed on the creation of the entirely new). Yet, here, for the time being at least, I take Cixous’s side and dream of life.<sup>47</sup>

The dream of life is the dream of the other, it is dreaming the other. In both improvisation and ‘feminine writing’, invention is linked to singularity is linked to alterity. Creativity (musical, literary or otherwise) is concerned with a concern for the other, for making possible the coming of the other. Defying codes, risking the unknown, all the while running the risk of becoming fully codified itself, that is the extemporary improvisation-as-*écriture féminine* or *écriture féminine spontanément*.<sup>48</sup> A dedication to heterogeneity, alterity, and suspension of law.<sup>49</sup> Vigorously shaking apple trees and greedily – guiltlessly! – devouring the ripe fruit that falls from the branch.

<sup>43</sup> H. Cixous, ‘Sunday, before falling asleep’: A Primal Scene,’ in: V. Andermatt Conley (ed), *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, 3-10, 4.

<sup>44</sup> As one unnamed male pianist declared: ‘Jazz is a male language. It’s a matter of speaking that language and women just can’t do it’. Quoted in: M. J. Budds, ‘American Women in Blues and Jazz,’ in: K. Pendle (ed), *Women and Music: A History*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2001, 467.

<sup>45</sup> H. Cixous, ‘*Agua viva*: How to Follow a Trinket of Water’, in: V. Andermatt Conley (ed), *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, 11-59, 38; I. Blyth and S. Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*, New York and London, Continuum, 2004, 76.

<sup>46</sup> D. Fischlin and A. Heble, ‘The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue’, in: D. Fischlin and A. Heble (eds), *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2004, 1-42, 1.

<sup>47</sup> For the time I took Derrida’s side, see S. Ramshaw, ‘Deconstructin(g) Jazz Improvisation: Derrida and the Law of the Singular Event’, *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, 2006, 2:1, 19, <<http://quasar.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/csieci/article/view/81/188>>.

<sup>48</sup> J. Corbett, ‘Ephemera Underscored: Writing Around Free Improvisation’, in: Krin Gabbard (ed), *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995, 217-240, 223; *Ibid.*, 225; *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>49</sup> L. Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, 206.

Invention of the other. In music. In 'feminine writing'. Addressing the unknown other: other in so far as it is unknown, unknown in so far as it is radically other.<sup>50</sup> Bringing us into the realm of the ethical.<sup>51</sup> Creativity *as* ethics.<sup>52</sup> The push beyond the limit. Without any guarantee or certainty.<sup>53</sup> Where things do not go according to a preconceived plan.<sup>54</sup> *Improvisus*, unforeseen. Working both inside and outside codes in order to 'risk the unknown'.<sup>55</sup> Improvisation as 'feminine writing', opening up an ethical space and calling forth the other, beckoning 'this other invention of which we dream'.<sup>56</sup>

Improvisation and 'feminine writing'. Musical/Textual compositions woven from 'multiple and heterogeneous possibilities'.<sup>57</sup> Challenging the laws of traditional linearity and musicality. Endless possible alternatives to this law and to the 'hierarchy of linguistic, social and political relations the law creates'.<sup>58</sup> Here, an encounter with the other 'in all its various forms', 'open to the other as *other*', loving the other *as* other.<sup>59</sup> It is a desire for a love that 'lets the other live, that does not incorporate, but lets the other be other'.<sup>60</sup> The resulting text, be it musical or linguistic, is one that 'can hardly let itself be reined in or corralled'.<sup>61</sup> For who can 'bridle the divagation'?<sup>62</sup> Who can 'put the outside behind walls'?<sup>63</sup>

While the promise of improvisation and 'feminine writing' is said to lie in their resistance to immediate assimilation and interpretation, in their 'refusal to yield wholly to the codes and strategies', for Derrida, any invention (be it musical, linguistic or otherwise) exists 'only by virtue of those codes and strategies'.<sup>64</sup> He writes that it is only 'by bending these rules with respect for the rules themselves' that the other is allowed to come or announce its coming; and it is only by 'defying and exhibiting the

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 195-196.

<sup>51</sup> M. Cobussen, 'Silence, Noise and Ethics', *Deconstruction in Music*. Interactive Online Dissertation, par. 1, <<http://www.cobussen.com/navbar/index.html>>.

<sup>52</sup> M. Cobussen and G. Finn, 'InterMezzo: Creativity and Ethics, in Deconstruction, in Music', *ECHO: a music-centered journal*, 2002, 4:2, s.6, <<http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume4-Issue2/intermezzo/index.html>>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., s.12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., s.12.

<sup>55</sup> J. Corbett, op. cit., 225.

<sup>56</sup> J. Derrida, 'Psyche...', op. cit., 55.

<sup>57</sup> S. Sellers, *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France*, London, MacMillan Education Ltd, 1991, 143.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>60</sup> V. Andermatt Conley, 'Introduction', in: V. Andermatt Conley (ed), *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, vii-xviii, xiii.

<sup>61</sup> H. Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in: Deborah Jenson (ed), *'Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991, 1-58, 57.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> D. Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, 112.

<sup>65</sup> J. Derrida, 'Psyche...', op. cit., 59; Ibid., 59-60; Ibid., 60.



precarious structure of its rules, even while respecting them', that pure invention is possible.<sup>65</sup> For Derrida, it is through this 'mark of respect', this 'respect for the rules themselves', that invention occurs.<sup>66</sup> The resistant potential of improvisation and 'feminine writing' would thereby lie not in their revolutionary qualities, which pit them 'against codification'; instead, their power lies in their 'diffuse' nature, in their ability to work 'from the inside and the outside of codes',<sup>67</sup> highlighting internal contradictions or 'those laws' differences from themselves'.<sup>68</sup> Invention (and thus both improvisation and 'feminine writing') is both 'passivity' and activity; a *waiting* for the other to come and a *call* for just such a coming.<sup>69</sup> It is a dream, a dream of the 'other invention', which for Derrida is 'the invention of the entirely other, the one that allows the coming of a still unanticipated alterity and for which no horizon of waiting as yet seems ready, in place, available'.<sup>70</sup>

Cixous, it seems, is not the only one who dreams. Yet, she, in her dream, is far less respectful. Invention, for Cixous, be it in improvisation or 'feminine writing', is not simply or solely a question of demolishing the already-existent.<sup>71</sup> It is 'another approach, another language'.<sup>72</sup> In seeing 'what no one else saw', the improviser endeavours to be poetic in her style.<sup>73</sup> As such, she is given the poet's right, the right 'to say something and then to say, believe it if you want to, but believe it weeping; or else erase it, as

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 60, 59.

<sup>67</sup> J. Corbett, op. cit., 237. D. Attridge, Editor's Introduction, 'From Psyche: Invention of the Other', in: D. Attridge (ed), *Acts of Literature*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, 310-311, 311.

<sup>68</sup> D. Attridge, Editor's Introduction, 'From Psyche: Invention of the Other', in: D. Attridge (ed), *Acts of Literature*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, 310-311, 311.

<sup>69</sup> J. Derrida, 'Psyche...', op. cit., 55.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, op. cit., 57.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> This is taken from a poem found in Clarice Lispector's *Near to the Wild Heart*. In its entirety, the poem reads:

Margarita befriended Violeta  
one was blind, the other mad,  
the blind girl knew what the mad girl was saying  
and ended up seeing what no one else saw.

C. Lispector, *Near to the Wild Heart*, Manchester, Carcanet Press Ltd., 1990, 44.

Genet does, by saying that all truths are false, that only false truths are true, etc.,'.<sup>74</sup> Improvisation as poetry. The dream of a gift out of time that is in the time of the poem.

Thinking improvisation as poetry, as *écriture féminine*, enables us to believe once again in the unexpected. Not an unknown found in death, but one that lives and dreams. New life is breathed into the possibility of a possible not tied to an impossible. The poetic right of the improviser is the right to dream the unknown, the unexpected, the other. Dream-improvising, 'without the frame of interpretation'.<sup>75</sup> Outside the economy of logic and exchange. Outside of time. Improvisation, the dream of a gift out of time.

### V. Derrida and Cixous: The Gift of Death and the Time of Life

The divergent approaches of Derrida and Cixous in relation to improvisation are very much related to the relationship each has with the concept of death. While both begin writing 'starting from death', for Cixous, 'death is past. It has already taken place. ... It was at the beginning'.<sup>78</sup> For Derrida, though, death always awaits him; 'he is expecting death in the future'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, while the texts of Derrida are rife with undecidability, producing an extremely mobile and open discourse in which nothing is ever closed, they also produce the 'effects of death'.<sup>80</sup> '[W]e receive the effect of a corpse', Cixous says of Derrida's writing.<sup>81</sup>

The subject of 'what death has in store deep within life itself, before the end' is the source of an 'interminable 'argument'' between Derrida and Cixous, the latter standing '*on the side* of life whereas the former feels drawn *to the side* of death'.<sup>82</sup> Cixous is *for life*, says Derrida. And he, on his side, has to 'forever keep reminding her each time ... that we die in the end, too quickly'.<sup>83</sup> What does it mean to be *for life* or *for death*? Cixous says of Derrida that his mood is more tragic than hers.<sup>84</sup> Every beginning for

<sup>74</sup> H. Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity', op. cit., 15.

<sup>75</sup> V. Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, op. cit., 123.

<sup>78</sup> H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, op. cit., 82.

<sup>79</sup> It is an unhappy coincidence that Derrida, a philosopher who spent his life obsessing about death, is now actually dead. However, any discussion of Derrida being on the side of death in this piece is not meant to signify his literal death, but rather his relationship to death in the philosophic texts he wrote while alive. H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, op. cit., 82.

<sup>80</sup> H. Cixous, 'Apprenticeship', op. cit., 91.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> J. Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2006, xiii.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>84</sup> I attended a seminar given by Cixous at Queen Mary, University of London on Saturday 9 February 2008. This is taken from my own notes on the seminar.

him is always already an ending; and death ‘comes much too early, immediately’.<sup>85</sup> Derrida, obsessed with his own mortality, with the impossibility of dying his own death. Death, both inevitable *and* unforeseen. The most uncertain certainty or certain uncertainty. Life, too, that what Cixous is *for*: unpredictable and irrefutable. Yet, on her side, *yes* to the other *in* life, in her *dream* life.

Derrida is not ‘against life’. But, by his own admission, neither is he ‘for’ it.<sup>86</sup> Being *for*, for Derrida, is always an affirmation that is doubled, a ‘yes, yes’ or ‘*oui, oui*’. ‘Yes’, not once, but twice, ‘an affirmation that repeats and that affirms the repetition’, ‘affirms (itself as) repetition’.<sup>87</sup> ‘At the moment of beginning’, Derrida writes, ‘one will always have to begin again’.<sup>88</sup> Deconstruction as double affirmation both affirms the selfsame, the ‘I am here’, while simultaneously reaching out and engaging with the other, with alterity.<sup>89</sup> Never one without the other. No singularity without generality; no improvisation without the economy of time, no gift without the economy of retaliation.

The im/possibility that belongs to the gift and/of improvisation is, for Derrida, also that of death. ‘I’ can never encounter ‘my’ death, the death of the one who says ‘I’.<sup>90</sup> Death is only possible through language; and meaning and truth are ‘rooted in the human being’s mortality’.<sup>91</sup> ‘All of being must be given over to death for speech to be possible. Language itself brings this death, and we speak only *from* it’.<sup>92</sup> Blanchot best describes this paradox:

Of course my language does not kill anyone. And yet: when I say, ‘This woman,’ real death has been announced and is already present in my language; my language means that this person, who is here right now, can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence; my language essentially signifies the possibility of this destruction; it is a constant, bold allusion to such an event. My language does not kill anyone. But if this woman were not really capable of dying, if she were not threatened by death at every moment of her life, bound and joined to death by an essential bond, I would not be able to carry out that ideal negation, that deferred assassination which is what my language is.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> J. Derrida and H. Cixous, ‘From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous’, *New Literary History*, 2005, 37, 1–13, 7. In this interview and elsewhere, Cixous strongly refutes Derrida’s claim that he on the side of death: ‘You are against death and fiercely for life. But otherwise’; Ibid; See also: H. Cixous, ‘The Flying Manuscript’, *New Literary History*, 2005, 37, 15–46.

<sup>87</sup> P. Kamuf, ‘Deconstruction and Feminism: A Repetition’, in: N. Holland (ed), *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, 109–126, 122;

<sup>88</sup> J. Derrida, *H.C.*, op. cit., 1.

<sup>89</sup> D. Attridge, Editor’s Introduction, ‘Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce’, in: Derek Attridge (ed), *Acts of Literature*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, 253–256, 254.

<sup>90</sup> P. Kamuf, ‘Deconstruction’, op. cit., 113.

<sup>91</sup> R. Gasché, ‘The Felicities of Paradox: Blanchot on Null-space of Literature’, in: C. Bailey Gill (ed), *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, London and New York, Routledge, 34–69, 50.

<sup>92</sup> C. Fynsk, *Language and Relation ...that there is language*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1996, 230, emphasis in original.

Therefore it is accurate to say that when I speak: death speaks in me. My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exists in words as the only way they can have meaning. Without death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness.<sup>93</sup>

Derrida and Cixous, brought together here separate, he on his side, she on hers. On his side: We will all die, we are all dying. As we speak death stands at our shoulder, always in the frame of what is said, bringing definition, the possibility of comprehension, the certainty of the void, the paradox of a distance which holds us together as it separates us.

On her side: Life insists on the fictional and the poetic.<sup>94</sup> It insists on the *dream*, on the dream as the ‘omnipotence’ of thought which disregards the partition between life and death’.<sup>95</sup> Derrida says of Cixous:

...she writes *to* the dream [*au rêve*], if you will, she strides to the dream when she writes, that is if you follow the premises of my reasoning, she gives in writing, she gives to write, she advances to the dream, she advances on the dream, she nourishes herself with dream but she also strides *on it, towards it*, she goes to, gives herself up [*se rend*] to it, in advance...<sup>96</sup>

Derrida, on his side and in his own words:

I stride to the interruption of the dream or rather to a certain separation/reparation of the dream: I strangle the dream, the dream strangles itself in me, tightens and compresses itself, represses itself, prevails over itself also, like an ant at work, as an insect strangles, compresses, disciplines itself laboriously in the corset of its annuli. Hélène, as for her, lets the gift of the dream breathe in her writing. It is as if her dream were at home there.<sup>97</sup>

Writing to the dream gives Cixous a slightly different relationship to improvisation. When Cixous dreams, she dreams not of origins, nor of the past, but of the present. Her dream is always one of ‘*writ[ing] in the present*’ – which in truth is an impossible dream for ‘one cannot write in the present

<sup>93</sup> M. Blanchot, ‘Literature and the Right to Death’, in: George Quasha (ed), *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays*, Barrytown, NY, Station Hill Press/Barrytown Inc., 1999, 359-399, 380.

<sup>94</sup> V. Andermatt Conley, ‘Hélène Cixous (1937-)', in: E. Sartori and D. Zimmerman (eds), *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1991, 66-73, <<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/cixous/conley.html>>.

<sup>95</sup> G. Michaud, ‘Derrida & Cixous: Between and Beyond, or ‘what to the letter has happened’’, *New Literary History*, 2006, 37, 85-106, 93.

<sup>96</sup> J. Derrida, ‘Fourmis’, in: H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber (eds), *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, London, Routledge, 1997, 119-127, 125, emphasis in original.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> H. Cixous and M. Calle-Gruber, op. cit., 78, emphasis in original.

because one writes *after* the present'.<sup>98</sup> In her view, the possibility of this impossible dream of 'writ[ing] the present' is what leads to 'transformations of writing', to transformations of language and world.<sup>99</sup> In other words, it is this writing of the present, this writing the present, which 'moves the place, the time of enunciation', which moves the origin; returning us perhaps (always perhaps) to the 'origin of the gesture of writing'.<sup>100</sup>

Cixous is for life while Derrida is on the side of death. 'We cannot prove anything', writes Cixous. 'We can only affirm or decide. Derrida is going to *decide* on the undecideable'; he is 'going to *decide* on the side of an impossibility of deciding'.<sup>101</sup> Cixous, on her side, is going to 'decide on the side of a decidable that is not taken in any type of philosophical discourse'; she is going to decide on a decidable 'where knowledge no longer lays down the law, where not-knowing takes over, not an ignorant nonknowing but an open knowing, which lets things happen'.<sup>102</sup>

Cixous, on her side, dreams too of a gift out of time that is impossible. However, for Cixous, this gift dreamt is without the need for a defining, framing, condition of death because she opens up to a more developed idea of multiplicity through her foreignness to herself, through her dream life. Cixous will never die, because who is she to die? What right does she have to die? By right she should die, would die. But beyond right, in the gift out of time, she dreams to live.

## САЖЕТАК

Сара Ремшо

### ВРЕМЕ ВАН ВРЕМЕНА: ДЕРИДА, СИКСУ, ИМПРОВИЗАЦИЈА

Импровизација се одиграва. Само једном у времену. Ван времена. Па ипак, апсолутно у времену, у складу са временом. Стварајући сопствено време. Таланат за импровизацију јесте таланат ван времена, који сања о времену. Разрешење ових различитих парадокса овде је потражено кроз паралелно постављање филозофије Жака Дерида (Jacques Derrida) и поетских написа Елен Сиксу (Hélène Cixous). Некима се ова веза може учинити чудном. Другима је, ипак, јасна блискост

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid; H. Cixous, 'Writing and the Law: Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, and Lispector', *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 1-27, 1.

<sup>101</sup> H. Cixous, 'Apprenticeship', op. cit., 91, emphasis in original.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

текстова Елен Сиксу и Деридиног приступа, посебно по питању заједничког интересовања за “таленат”. Повезивање Сиксу и Дерида преко концепта талента пружа овде прилику да се критички размисли о импровизацији и њеном парадоксалном односу према времену, или, још боље, према ван-временском. Дерида са своје стране (смрти), чита импровизацију, као и таленат и време, као немогућност која је једино могућа као немогуће. Сиксу, са своје стране (живота), сања о могућности импровизације, о могућности поетске контрадикције која чини немогућу импровизацију могућом. Импровизација је овде предата животу, сну о животу код Сиксу, а теоретизована је као тип “женског писма”, као онај који призива непознатог другог у снове о таленту у животу који је ван времена.