Queer Performativity in the Abyss

by Nikola Velkov

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Eszter Timar
Second reader: Dr. Jasmina Lukic

Budapest
2013

Abstract

The debate surrounding *mise en abyme* is a very interesting intersection between ontology and epistemology that asks for an ethical concern about sincerity. The questions that *mise en abyme* explores are integral to the theory of deconstruction and critical thinking. What this touches upon are debates about originality and the vicious circle of infinite mirror reflexions. These fields of thought, as approached from the thinking of affect theory, exhibit traits of reflexivity that can either surprise or let us anticipate the future. Through the anticipation and the representation of what has been expected, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick points out that what is represented is a strong theory of negative affects. In other words, the openness for a surprise welcomes reparative work as well – in the sense of knowledge production that points to what is missing or flawed in itself. This reparative work is illustrated in the process of hiding and showing within André Gide's use of *mise en abyme*. I argue that his work opens up varied moral debates surrounding the issues of sexuality, sexual identification, coming out, and the significance of personal freedom through the use of the potentialities of *mise en abyme* for open readings. The (inter-)personal reparative character of *mise en abyme* shows great potential for use in queer performativity and, as I show, reexamining *mise en abyme's* role as a catalyst in queer theory and queer performativity offers subtle ways of discovering identity and the multiplicity of the Self through concealing and revealing the underlying binaries through which we understand existence.

Acknowledgements

"I,"

whomever, however, wherever, and whenever, the "I" persists in needing outer "I's" to learn, reflect and figure paradoxes out and/or enter new ones.

Table of contents

Introduction

The trope of *mise en abyme* has a fairly frequent use in all art and multimedia production types known to us, from writing, paintings, photographs, music videos, movies, concerts, and so on. *Mise en abyme is* mostly known through the idea of representation *ad infinitum* of a visual reduplication of an image/recording within itself, until one ca no longer distinguish "the original." As integral the part about infinite repetition may be of *mise en abyme*, it is not all that *mise en abyme* relates to. I am inquiring into the work of *mise en abyme's* partial understanding and use through the practice of reflexivity, an integral part of critical thinking. Moreover I claim that it has been overlooked as a catalyst to thinking about queer performativity. What I want to do is reexamine the role of *mise en abyme* and how it matters, how it is influenced and how it influences queer performativity and to explore the reflexions connecting the two. This work is also a search for a way of understanding gendered and sexual identities through what is shown and hidden in/from our (distorted) readings of reality saturated with representations of infinite repetitions and critical thinking that resonates in the same lines. I will also try to show that the limits of queer performativity lie within *mise en abyme* as a practice of self-reflexion and representation of multiple subjectivities within the "I" of the characters, narrators present.

In Chapter 1, I write about the possible basis for *mise en abyme* as writing and reading processes. Beginning with Gide who coined the term and offered the first ambiguities, a debate unfolds about the mirror and the shield. Through Lucien Dällenbach I define *mise en abyme* as a triple concept within a wholeness.

In Chapter 2, I explore the usage of reflexive[1] themes in deconstruction through the work

---

[1] In this thesis I am using reflexive, the British-English version with the same meaning as reflection (also used by Dällenbach for example) – the distinction I make is etymological. While reflection refers to

of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler's inquiry into the originality of gender performativity. I relate this to older debates surrounding reflexivity, that is the debate of originality in Plato. Lastly I try to show an attempt similar to *mise en abyme* in its wholeness, the one of diffraction to engage with thinking about effects outside yet possibly still within the field of critical thinking and reflexion through the work of Karen Barad.

In Chapter 3, I try to point to how the practices of queer performativity as shown previously interact with affect theory and form a performativity which as Sedgwick helps to show is intimately connected to *mise en abyme* through the affect of shame, which can effectively lead to a reparative reading position.

In Chapter 4, I offer attention to the work that Philippe Lejeune has done to allow reparative reading, in order to argue for possibility that needs to be permitted by paranoid thinking of works whose author:character:narrator express a need for sincerity as a form of autobiographical writing. Lejeune calls this expressiveness a phantasmatic pact that opens to the author of fictions the autobiographical space for such reading of their work. This has been further elaborated by some remarks on debates about coming out, especially through the way Gide used his space to present works that echo his understanding of freedom.

---

something being bent backwards, reflexion on the other hand directly encompasses the meanings of image, and copying, to god as an idol, and further to representation

Chapter 1 The founding work on *mise en abyme*

The founding work that I use to establish the grounds for operating of *mise en abyme* is the work of two people, a writer of literature, André Gide, and a writer of literary criticism and theory, Lucien Dällenbach. Their works together open the lines for thinking of the trope *mise en abyme* that so far has been described as replication of oneself in/onto oneself *ad infinitum*. Well not only that, in the title of this thesis: "Queer performativity in the abyss" you are reading, and I offer an embodied perception of depth as the *mise en abyme* becoming the abyss. Yet this is only a part if the initial exploration of *mise en abyme* and we need to start with the origin. Dällenbach does a great deal of work on the process of *mise en abyme* in his work *The mirror in the Text* (1989). It is in my opinion the only exhaustive inquiring into *mise en abyme* from its various points of view, and intersecting possibilities, revealings and secrets, and it tries to account for its multiplicity and unity.

Firstly, the origin of naming the trope *mise en abyme* was coined by Gide in his *Journal* from 1893. And in the tradition of the few thinkers that assigned themselves the task of exploring into the possibilities of *mise en abyme* for the various purposes in their work, I give you the full quote of the *Journal* of Gide as it offers the first thoughts on this trope and some examples of its possible predecessors before Gide himself does the work of exemplification in his books:

> "In a work of art, I rather like to find thus transposed, at the level of the characters, the subject of the work itself. Nothing sheds more light on the work or displays the proportions of the whole work more accurately. Thus, in paintings by Memling or Quentin Metzyz, a small dark convex mirror reflects, in its turn, the interior of the room in which the action of the painting takes place. Thus, in a slightly different way, in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*. Finally, in literature, there is a scene in which a play is acted in *Hamlet*; this also happens in many other plays. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, there is a piece that is read to Roderick etc. None of these examples is absolutely accurate. What would be more accurate, and what would explain better what I'd wanted in my *Cahiers*, in *Narcisse* and in *La tentative*, would

be a comparison with the device from heraldry that involves putting a second representation of the original shield 'en abyme' within it." (Gide in Dällenbach 1989, 7)

Regarding this passage from Gide, as suggested by Dällenbach, it offers several possibilities for thinking of *mise en abyme* yet furthers only the interest that Gide had at the time of writing it. That is the heraldique (heraldic). It is the shield of representation of the combinations of bloodlines, heritage, and the past, which at the same time through the representation of a sign combined of other signs tells a deeper story within its stability on the first layer. From Note 8 by Dällenbach (1989, 189-191) we find out more about how the shields were made, against a narcissistic position of closing the sign in reflexion of itself previously described. This additional aspect to the making of a shield, according to which a shields was not always placed in another shield, but two shields were combined to represent the family lineage through the mother, wife, grandfather, great-grandfather etc. Still, as Gide positions the ideas about *mise en abyme* the shield is the visual representation he chose to best suit his interests.

Another visual form of representation of what Gide initially envisions *mise en abyme* to open the possibility for is the mirror reflexing on the moment of creating a piece of art, in this case a few paintings are enumerated. This is what Dällenbach takes first in account, the dismissal of the mirror reflexion and the forwarding of the shield image as a more representative sign for the newly named trope with its varieties of uses. Therefore Dällenbach initially considers *mise en abyme* to be a kind of reflexion that brings out the meaning and the form of the work in which it is included. Dällenbach rebells against the intuitive relation between the heraldic and *mise en abyme* offered by Gide and tries through the analysis and use of *mise en abyme* in critical theory as mirror reflexions to place a mirror in its stead. Still I will at times, as we shall see, use the term *mise en abyme* to indicate both the mirror and the

4

shield metaphors interchangeably yet as separate content to consider. Dällenbach looks deep

into the shields and reflexions of the work of Gide and through the analyses of many critics

he reaches to a theory of the three possibilities of *mise en abyme*. Namely:

> "(a) *simple duplication* (a sequence, which is connected by similarity to the work that
> encloses it);
> (b) *infinite duplication* (a sequence, which is connected by similarity to the work that
> encloses it and which itself includes a sequence that … etc.); and
> (c) *aporetic duplication* (a sequence that is supposed to enclose the work that encloses
> it)." (Dällenbach 1989, 35)

Dällenbach thus exposes *mise en abyme* as a triple concept encompassing but not

excluding any of its components. Moreover he concludes that the *mise en abyme* as defined

by Gide and as employed in this work simply represents a "work within the work", an

"internal duplication" (Dällenbach, 19). This in its turn does not satisfy a need for

reformulation of the term to encompass what it has become to mean through the use of *mise*

en abyme not only a simple 'flawed' duplication into the shield image. That is why he takes on

to analyze in the second chapter "A Critical Heritage" what has over time the technical term

mise en abyme came to be. It had conjoined the mirror reflexions with its metaphysical

manifestation through the implication of the word *abyme* and its closeness and inclination to

the meaning of abyss. Thus, it has become to mean a "mathematical infinity, an 'infinite series

of parallel mirrors'" (Dällenbach, 22). Yet the third position, the aporetic/paradoxical

duplication offers the possibility for different approaches towards the work that encloses the

work within the work itself. This, and the desirability for wholeness (gestalt) of the trope

mise en abyme, as I shall explain further is best done in Gide's work by his writing *The*

Counterfeiters and exemplified his personal concerns in most of his work. To explain those

concerns of Gide which are related to communication, psychoanalytical thinking, and

personal ethics, I refer to Dällenbach's insights into the kinds, functions and strategies of *mise*

5

en abyme.

Yet to offer that understanding, Dällenbach returns again to Gide's *Journal*:

"I wanted to indicate, in *La Tentative amoreuse,* the influence the book has on the author while he is writing it.[...] our actions have a retroactive effect on us. 'Our actions act upon us as much as we act upon them...*"* (Gide in Dällenbach 1989 14)

Post-Lacanian psychoanalysis has clarified this in terms of linguistic communication that the "sender gets back from the receiver his/her own message in inverse form." (Lacan in Dällenbach 1989, 15) Taking this issue of communicating to the reader as to oneself further the desire to be self-sufficient yet unavoidably fail by going to the other; and thus falsifying itself. "[T]his is, at its most basic level, the unavoidable requirement of Gide's wish for *sincerity.*" (Dällenbach 1989 ,15) In order to address this sincerity, which can never not be flawed by the impossibility to account for every singularity of experience, Gide chooses the medium of writing. This way the othering of the fictive character is avoided by placing the activities of self-reflexion of the author into the doing of the character i.e. writing through self-reflexion that is itself flawed.

Jacques Lacan calls this a "narcissistic doubling with the creative experience […], 'mirror stage' or 'mirror phase'" while addressing a process of "auto-generation" in the process of writing in which a certain deviation from the reflexion occurs. (Lacan in Dällenbach 1989, 16) Another consideration given by Dällenbach is that Gide at times wrote in front of a mirror and would look at himself "after each sentence" (Gide in Dällenbach 1989, 16). Regarding reflexivity as part of *mise en abyme*, Dällenbach claims that it is "an imaginary reflexion" which tries to represent the process of writing itself against the shift that happens between the time of writing further representing a work of fiction i.e. of how the writer imagines himself to write. Moreover, as we are discussing the envisaging of *mise en abyme* the need for the

6

work of art to be a reflexion does not necessarily suffice, a requirement that it speaks of its own reflexion is placed in the first place i.e. "the reflexion must become the subject of the reflexion" (Dällenbach 1989, 17). Thus, we return to the issue of narrator and character as "it is through the fluctuation between the two narrative levels that the retroaction can occur" by relating to the same subject and reflexivity as part of it for both *narrateur* and *narrataire* [2](ibid.). To be able to understand further the interconnections between the three possibilities of *mise en abyme* he analyses the relations between the three narratives, of the author, narrator and character appearing in two of André Gide's works, *La Tentative Amoureuse* (1893) and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925 – *The Counterfeiters*). On the account of whose voice is taking over the work, the 'je' (the *I*) in Gide's *La Tentative* he states in Dällenbach's first chapter "*André Gide's Shields*":

> "[...] the secondary narrative in Gide reflects the primary one in as far as the process of retroaction requires an analogy between the situation of the character and that of the narrator, in other words between the thematic content of the main story, and that of the story contained within it." (1989, 18)

Thinking through *La Tentative amoreuse* about this interaction and identification between author: narrator: character, a *'je'*, an "I" constantly appearing, telling a story of a sad lover and his unattainable love, who in turn tells a story entitled "Envoi" of an *I* who is happily in love. Here Dallelnbach states:

> "So the imaginary identification that the narrator himself contrived finally has a great therapeutic value for the story teller. Restored by his fictional work he can devote himself [/herself] to more real adventures with a joyful heart" (18)

And we are already starting to relate *mise en abyme* with its reparative possibilities.[3] In this context, of *La Tentative amoreuse* reparation occurs in regard to sadness and unfulfilled

---

[2]   Narrator and character-narrator - narrateur and narrataire as used by Gerard Genette
[3]   More on what the affective psychological process of reparation means and how it is used in this thesis in Chapter 3.

love. Yet this is just one of the many stories that Gide had used the process of *mise en abyme* to write; and amongst the many that Dällenbach chose because due to its early publication in Gide's career, and its closeness to the journal notes that he analyzed. Gide on the other hand dedicates a lot of his writing to a defense, exemplification, or simply reflexion on his alternative sexuality often spoken of by Gide as pederastry. And who in his work states his thoughts about sexuality, and I will dare say contributing greatly to the debate about homosexuality[4]; but not only homosexuality as what we see as politics of identification and progressivism in the 21st century, which have nothing to do with the reflexive affective conditions of the body itself, more like the confessions hidden behind words, like Michel, the main character of *The Immoralist*, relating to his sexual encounters with young boys in Tunisia. It is very important now that his reflexive approach opens many questions about shame, depression and responsibility. On the other hand it is also important to note for further analysis of writing as pratice of representing which is identificatory, such as the autobiographical writing, that the names of the author, narrator, character are different and that the titles of the books, the 'real' and the one within the book are all different in Gide's work.

Nevertheless, exploring Gide's approach to his stories/narration, as we have mentioned, a doubling appears of the narrative, where a second narrative is introduced that is reflexing on the primary one. This includes a retroaction of reflexivity between the

> "thematic content of the main story and that of the story contained within it. One can therefore define Gide's *mise en abyme* as a coupling or twinning of activities related to a similar object; or as a relationship of relationships, the relation of the narrator N to his/her story S being the same as that of the narrator/character n to his/her story s." (18)

---

[4]   Details regarding the importance of Gide in the development of a debate surrounding homosexuality can be found in WEIGHTMAN, JOHN. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar* 59, no. 4 (1990): 591-601.

From this quote we can see how Dällenbach proposes that the problematic in Gide's writing and his interest in separating *mise en abyme* as a separate trope is the emphasis on an ambiguity of the subject in the work he does. "[W]e realize that the 'subject of the work itself', for Gide, is *relational*." (18) This functions not only in the relationship between the narrators that reflect on each other, also on the relation between the author and the entire work done in a book and as I shall claim in Chapter 4. onto the work of the entirety of artistic expression, in Gide's case his *œuvre as a w*hole. But before thinking about the whole and get lost in the infinite paranoias that could compose the perspectives of an infinite wholeness I propose to go into the small details on the outside of infinity and in *mise en abyme*.

In the third chapter, "*Triple meaning*" Dällenbach informs more in detail on his analysis of the three possibilities of *mise en abyme* in literature, as simple, infinite and aporetic or paradoxical duplication. With these tools/laws he reads the narratives of *Paludes* and *The Counterfeiters*. *Paludes* is the work of Gide that has been considered in its turn the long foreseeing precursor of the Nouveau Roman genre in literature[5] developed in the 20th century and where the use of self-reflexion, repetition *ad infinitum, mise en abyme,* is/are predominant. "J'écris Paludes" (I am writing Paludes). This phrase is repeated throughout Gide's *Paludes*. This alienable character of the "I" that designates the person that says "I" and "'can only be identified by the discourse that contains it'" (Benveniste in Dällenbach 1989, 29). In linguistics it is better known as the concept of 'shifters' and is marked by it's "infinite mobility". And as the title of the secondary narrative the one of *Paludes* is 'Paludes' as well, the only mark of differentiation between the "I" of the narrator, character and the hidden yet omnipresent author is the discourse. Thus opening possibilities for interchangeably reading "I" as well as making a connection between them altogether in the form of a "'fork', whose

---

5 But not only in literature, also visual art, especially film Ex. The movie of Alain *Robbe-Grillet*, *Last Year at Marienbad* (1962)

9

main function is to provoke spectacular concatenations of the three narrative levels." (ibid.)

When Tytire, the character of the second narration, uses "I" it is clearly to dissociate from the other levels of narration as his narration is mostly in the third person singular. In any case the reflexion on the other two levels is constant and serves a purpose. To be more precise, according to Dällenbach it has:

> "[...] triple objective: tracking down the fleeting figure of the narrator and forcing him to renounce his annonymity: allowing the author to step out of his role and to appropriate the name on the title-page; and giving the book an insoluble aspect through this interchange of function and identity. Are we in Gide's *Paludes*, or in the narrator's? [...] Continually hesitating between interior and exterior, it takes us into the realm where eccentric and concentric circles intersect and where the mirror of the painters recurs, with all it symbolizes; the integration of the different into the same, the osculation between the within and without."
> (29)

This includes in as much as it has not included in *Paludes* the possibility for infinite reflexions. Therefore a possibility to accept opinions that do not only qualify *mise en abyme* as a process of writing a "novel within the novel", but also a vague possibility for following a logic of two other thinkers that work with *mise en abyme*, C. E. Magny and P. Lafille who conceive of it as a profess of writing a "novel of the novel" or a "novel of the novel of the novel." (30) Or as Magny puts it :

> "At the tenth remove one could have a novelist who would tell the story in terms of algebraic symbols, or of internal organs, or of reaction times" (Magny in Dällenbach 1989, 22)

This is a very important part to note as it opens or rather closes *mise en abyme* to the possibilities of internalized worlds and not living in the terms of viewing/writing of reality in reality's actual terms, words. That is why the next work of Gide that Dällenbach takes on to analyze, *The Counterfeiters*, the only one Gide himself marks as a novel, is a novel that tackles the issue of a 'pure novel' and positions itself in direct opposition to the literary

10

movement of Realism as his own way of portraying the ambiguity of representationalism and

the failure of full class/sexuality/gendered identity disclosure thereof. This work is also

considered to be the one most exemplifying of *mise en abyme* as it can be viewed to include

all three levels of understanding the trope. For that let us take a look at a very interesting way

of summarizing the book and the processes of it:

> Gide keeps a Journal while writing a novel; his hero is a novelist who also keeps a
> Journal while writing his own novel about a novelist who keeps a Journal while writing a
> further novel. It is as if one were looking at oneself in a mirror reflected in another mirror and
> so on to infinity. (J. M. Cocking, Enid Starkie, and Martin Jarrett-Kerr. 1960, 196)

I offer this quote simply because it was the most concise reference that relates to the

body and work of Gide as the author. Starkie, otherwise pays little attention to the trope *mise*

en abyme and offers very little to consider. Yet maybe with justification. Gide slowly over

time stops using *mise en abyme* as referencing to the shields retrospection. And one of the

most important things about it is, as Dällenbach notes the fact that after making the journal

that the protagonist, Eduard, writes resembling greatly to the symbolic of the shield, he

claims: "It is my pocket-mirror" (Gide in Dällenbach 1989, 130) This is the point at which

many of my internal debates about reflexivity, its meaning and the confusion between

reflexivity and *mise en abyme* started to clear up. The distinction to be made here is the one

offered by Dällenbach, between "focusing and spying." (Dällenbach 1989, 130) Focusing as

a sort of a approximation of self-reflexion through the physical association of looking closely

in a mirror differentiates greatly from the element of using a mirror to spy. With the latter use

of a mirror, an introducing of reality is done which is out of our direct reach, while still

making the observation of such a thing possible. Moreover

> "[...] the spy-mirror has less the role of integrating an 'external' reality into the novel than
> of abolishing the opposition between within and without, or rather achieving a sort of
> oscillation between them." (31-32)

11

Taking this argument even further, one can maybe connect how this approach to reality itself, the writing of it as well as the oscillation between reality, and the domains of human representations of reality such as the affective conditions that guide many of our everyday decisions, allows Dällenbach to see in the work of Gide an attempt to resolve ideological issues as well as personal. This approach of reality and representation; or the personal and the perceived resounding similaritu to the final remarks of the text on "Quantum Physics, Depth Psychology, and Beyond" that resounds with a concern about the "unity of psyche and matter":

> "[I]t is recognized at the deepest level of our psyche that reality always has and always will infinitely transcend our representations of it. As a result, we are most in touch with reality when our experiences go beyond our representations of reality" (McFarlane http://www.integralscience.org/psyche-physis.html).

Coming from such a desire to represent reality, in my opinion, Gide sets out to write a 'pure novel'. Gide decides that the only way he could do so would be by putting the theory of the 'pure novel' within the novel itself. In *The Counterfeiters* this theory can be found within the Journal of Eduard where he speaks of the possibility of putting his work in the abyss of its-own. To do that Gide goes even further in extending the reach of *mise en abyme* by publishing later on his *Journal* where he comments on *The Counterfeiters* as well as the *Logbook of the Coiners* (*Le journal des faux-monnayeurs* – 1926). In it are his notes on the process of writing and his explorations of and within *The Counterfeiters.* This book, which he also considered publishing with the novel, but did not out of fear it would become the central point of interest for the reader and "for the greater irritation of the reader." (note 19 Gide in Dallebach 1989, 199-200) Moreover, this very process of relating to reality through engaging the reader in a paradox of flawed representation and shame can be very explicative of the desire for expressing some thoughts Gide himself had prior to writing *The Counterfeiters*,

about the need for "reconciliation of contingence and necessity, of vitalism and symbolism, of reality and ideal, and of life and art" (34).

In the end Dällenbach concludes by offering a definition of *mise en abyme* as a triple concept, with its three representative species which function within the wholeness that is *mise en abyme*. He states:

> "This triple recognition challenges any simplistic view and requires a pluralistic definition of the *mise en abyme* which we might hazard as follows: *a 'mise en abyme' is any internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by simple, repeated or 'specious' (or paradoxical) duplication*." (1989, 36)

This division, again, can lead to various modes of conceiving of reality. The simple and reflexive duplication lead to thinking of theories of infinity of space and time while the aporetic allows the connection with the "I" of the body, the multiple "I" that is "we" and "you" all encompassed in the abyss.

That is why in "Reflexivity and Reading" (1980), Dällenbach addresses mise en abyme as a rhetoric of reading that "can diffuse the void and permit us to read by exercising negativity" (444). Of what kind of negativity this is about is also further hinted by Dällenbach. Mise en abyme "can be seen as reparative" by opening the suggestion that there is something missing from the narrative. Insinuation that produces misreading and misunderstanding about what is represented, and possibly and the problems of representing such work of discourses about sexuality (445).

Chapter 2. Reflexive copies and methods of 'getting out of there'

To the domain of mise en abyme I came mostly through my studies of French Literature. Yet to the debates that surround, expand, explain and take mise en abyme to the possibility for a reparative project I came through my study of theories of translation, linguistics, and finally and most importantly gender studies and queer theory with an interest in phenomena and phenomenology. Through these theories, in the next chapter I will try to give an account of the engagements of *mise en abyme* in 'critical' theory through three mainstream thinkers that are related to performativity as a theoretical field, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Karen Barad. Within this chapter I also include a section that relates some of the debates encompassed in this chapter to Plato's ideas reaching beyond today's 'modern' world views and constructions of gender sexuality and performance. In the first part I focus on deconstructive theory's use of *mise en abyme* through relating this work to the analysis of how Derrida reads. In the second and third parts I focus on expanding a debate deep within reflexivity itself, the question of the origin and originality through the work of Butler and Plato. Thus I show how performance of self is always mimetic yet creates a sort of a queer, uncanny, unfamiliar concealment. In the last part I speak of new attempts of knowing and perception of experiences as well as the processes leading to the lived events through the work of Barad. In the whole of this chapter I try to show how all of these concepts are connected through mirrors and/or shields to the concept of *mise en abyme*.

2.1 Deconstructive mise(s) en abyme

"Perhaps […] there is still hope we may yet be spared all the potential utopias of

deconstructive theory, where little aporias and *mises-en-abyme* are extrapolated from the world's textuality as easily, normally, and literal-mindedly as 'close-readings' once were."
(Felperin 1985, 266)

As we can see from this paragraph by the time I had gotten to the task of discovering the practice of *mise en abyme* it had already passed onto critical thinking and created many reflexive discourses such as deconstruction. Which in their turn had gotten into a small debate over their own usefulness. Jaques Derrida made use of this trope through the signification of mirrors reflexing in various works of his as a basis for deconstructionalist thinking and reading text. Thus this project gets a deconstructionist mission, to deconstruct *mise en abyme* itself as part yet a outsider of the deconstrucctive practices of today's institutionalized education such as critical thinking "with its insistence on negative capability, its inbuilt recalcitrance [tends] to being turned into 'positive and exploitative truth'" (ibid.). But how much truth can be portrayed?

For this purpose of figuring out what deconstruction offered and gained from the quest for truth and reality of *mise en abyme* I use the work on Derrida by Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (2002).

> "Now mirrors create doubles. Interest in the way the work of art or literature refers to itself, and in the mirror as symbol for this, was current at the time Derrida wrote these articles; the process was usually referred to as *mise en abyme*, a heraldic term that Gide had used. In literary theory, with the mise en abyme as a series of reflections or internally contained scale-models of the literary work, such doubles might give consistency and coherence to the literary or pictorial work by encapsulating images which reflect the whole, by reinforcing and repeating it. The work was reflexive, it reflected itself, and contained that reflexion" (Hobson 2002, 75).

Probably a lot can be said about the mirror reflexing, yet maybe there are some things hidden from within the reflexion. It seems very interesting how in the description offered here both "mirrors create doubles" as well as "mise en abyme [is] a heraldic term." (ibid.) By

15

doing this, in a way a further inquiry and confirmation of Dällenbach's dilemma of which is

the more precise metaphor to use in describing the process of *mise en abyme*. As previously

shown, the importance of this dilemma is great because it poses *mise en abyme* between two

closed systems that either repeat to infinity and/or draw a image of falling in the abyss of past

remembrance and remainders[6].

> He [Derrida] is denying in 'The double session' that there is a 'system closed on itself',
> as it has to be if it encapsulates mirror images. The work on the contrary 'has' he says (the
> obligation is interesting) to be both open and closed, the mere fact that it is both in writing
> and about writing is not enough. The determination of self-reference and reference to other
> writing is to be done not just through the textual equivalent of mirror images, that is unit-like
> symbols, but through textual operations of quotation: by grafts, borrowings, incisions. […] A
> work will not then be a mirroring of mirroring through tidy embedding, but a palimpsest of
> excerpts, an overlapping stratification of quotations. (ibid.)

The question of writing and quoting is part of the process of mirror reflexions for

Derrida. While at the same time a debate opens about the interiority; passivity of the writing;

the implied meanings of the "I" and the reality of subjective living as non-existing yet

functioning through an existence that is removed from the Now yet makes the decisions of

itself.

> "[I]ndeed the arguments about the subject are reversible – if the 'subject' is a phantasm,
> an effect of the mirror, the mirror does still produce effects, they are there. To dissolve the
> idea of the subject is merely to enact the other pole of the assertion of the individual." (79)

Yet this enactment of the subject "I" as the phantasmatic reflexion in the mirror in the

text through *mise en abyme* has the potentiality of establishing a mutual core between the use

of actual words towards the self-reflexive instability of "I" and the possible subjects/topics

---

6   My gratitude goes to Ada Demaj for pointing to this part of the work of Luce Irigaray. The following quote
     concerning femininity, motherhood and materiality opens this term to a reading of life and reality and what
     is besides: "The debt of materiality, life, existence, that both men and women owe to the mother *cannot* be
     paid back, it cannot be reciprocated. But in exchange for this life which comes from the mother's body, the
     child/father/culture must acknowledge that, beyond her maternal roles, the mother is also a woman, a
     subject, with a life, sex and desires of her own. The mother cannot be entirely consumed in/by maternity.
     The excess or *remainder* left over is her specificity as a woman. (Irigaray in Jones 2011, 25)

covered in such a work. Nevertheless I need to point further to the resistance of the 'identified

subject' against remaining identified. For example:

> "[...] Sollers has written not just a novel showing up the subject as textual effect. He has written a novel about the experience of the subject as a textual effect from out of the words of a novel. However, even this does not stabilize as a dichotomy between writing and experience of writing. Since both the process of writing the experience of the subject as writing, as being written, and the sense of an actual writing taking place as one reads (the latter a common technique for creating the illusion of authorial presence) are part of the novel, they are also an illusion. They are an effect of presence, not real presence – the opening into the presence of the experiencing subject is only apparent." (81)

Another very important point in the the visual representation of *mise en abyme*, by

Derrida pointing to the illusion of authorial presence in reading is the form of folding (*pli*).

Derrida uses it in parallel to *mise en abyme* to represent utterances, enunciation, and

signification which fold in layers onto the fold itself.

> "There is then in this novel a proliferation of doubles (the sense of a process of writing of the sense of process of writing of the sense . . .) which short-circuits presentation because it is quartered into a similar series (the process of writing the experience of the subject as writing) so that writing and being written fold into each other. It is in this way, I believe, that Derrida's text can argue that what we have is an existential judgment ('il y a'), there is writing; but against Sartrean accounts of language, that writing is not fixable, however dialectically, into a point of time where an act, that is, an act of enunciation, might take place. Indeed, Sollers' novel, and Derrida's article, might be said to be constructed in order to make this separation between act of writing and what is written impossible to make cleanly [...]. The contrast between act of enunciation and what is said, or the point of articulation of a spatio-temporal set-up exterior to language and the statement made at that point, is rendered insecure." (ibid.)

Such a practice of folding of *mise en abyme* has the potentiality according to Derrida in a

space-time of between binary thinking offering the possibility for transcendental

methodology for critical thinking. Yet this practice is of "hovering" in between spaces is

more closely related to the mirror and mimicry than with the shield that partake in the

thinking of *mise en abyme*.

> "[...T]o make of it a hovering between two determinate readings of the syntax, one

active, one passive. (This develops the Heideggerian analysis of Kant, where the transcendental imagination is at the root of and beyond the distinction between spontaneity and reception, between active and passive.) This syntactic hovering is attributed to a mirror, that is, to mimicry" (82)

And a critique of the mirror regarding this practice comes from Felperin who writes in

"The Anxiety of Deconstruction" (1985):

"There are even signs that deconstruction may prove, in the course of its progress, to be self-deconstructing, i.e. self-curing, so that those who come down with it may eventually find themselves diagnosed as normal once again, well and truly able to carry out the institution's business as usual." (Felperin 1985, 254)

Yet, I hope that *mise en abyme* shows a truly reparative character, one that not only allows the return to the institution of patriarchal relations of sexual difference and relations of requesting originality, but quite differently i.e. the return to institutions that function through the collective force of multiple *mises en abyme*; which in turn reflect on the personal, emotional level of communicating, observing and selfishly caring for oneself within the abyss of humanity and of it.

2.2 Originality and **mise en abyme**

My use of Butler's work in *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* is to exemplify a self-reflexivity that has the potentiality of a thinking in *mise en abyme* yet which stops at the level of the secondary infinite duplication. The questions Butler points to are related to the bodily existence and subjectivity through the framework of performing genders and exemplifying sexual difference through the identity as lesbian and through drag. The first two quotes are the same with which Butler starts this very essay and point to the interest in ontology.

"So what is this divided being introduced into language through gender? Is is an

18

impossible being, it is a being that does not exist, an ontological joke." (Monique Wittig in Butler 2012, 307)

"Beyond physical repetition and the physical or metaphysical repetition, is there an ontological repetition?... This ultimate repetition, this ultimate theater, gathers everything in a certain way; and in another way, it destroys everything; and in yet another way it selects from everything." (Gilles Deluze in Butler 2012, 307)

The main concept that I would like to pay attention to from this work of Butler is of a phenomenon that she analyses in regard to both the gay and straight community. It is actually a conceptualization of the 'originality' of gender, and the 'copying' of it in drag. In her view, "heterosexuals" suspect anyone for being gay or lesbian. They find their 'other' in comparing drag to themselves. And because drag takes many forms we shall speak of drag as including all the othered identities, copies of the "original" that heterosexuality is trying to present itself to look like. This representing of drag as Butler says has a purpose to expose the binaries of patriarchy as established gender:

"If a regime of sexuality mandates a compulsory performance of sex, then it might be through that performance that the binary system of gender and the binary system of sex come to have intelligibility at all." (Butler 1993, 318)

Nevertheless, Butler is explaining the functioning of this binary process. She states that drag, as it is her and our example for now, it simply copies from "real" heterosexuals, both men and women and perform it on the streets. Furthermore she sees the copy, the drag, switching places and moving in front of the "original" heterosexuality thus helping in its creation and reinforcement as a category. And logically, one would presuppose that there is no actual problem, that since drag helps create heterosexuality, then drag is more "original".

"But simple inversions are not really possible. For it is only as a copy that homosexuality can be argued to precede *heterosexuality as the origin.*" (Butler 1993, 313)

19

But it is not only gender or sex, or sexuality that is performed. It is our entire existence. It is a being confirmed by others, some that we would call copies. Yet we are not different from them because we also construct them, the others by othering or allowing them to other you and so on to infinity. This belongs to the debate of subjectivity and the excess and concealment of identity in claiming an "I"/self.

> "To claim that this is what I *am* is to suggest a provisional tantalization of this "I." But if the I can so determine itself, then that which excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself. In other words, such a statement presupposes that the "I" exceeds its determination, and even produces that very excess in and by the act which seeks to exhaust the semantic field of that "I". In the act which would disclose the true and full content of that "I," a certain radical *concealment* is thereby produced." (Butler 1993, 309)

Furthermore, for Butler this psychological turn is "identificatory mimetism" in that it places the "Other in the self" and becomes "other to itself." (316) that further reiterates as performance of the self as a singular aspect of sexual difference usually either through accepting normativized gender or through the exposition of its various possibilities such as the many forms of drag.

> "What performs does not exhaust the "I"; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that 'I,' for if the performance is 'repeated,' there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated. And if the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence, then there is no "I" that precedes the gender that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of the 'I.'" (Butler 1993, 311)

Within this text of representing and searching, the "I" becomes slowly incorporated through the framework of exhibiting psychological transference that originates and copies itself as the other to itself to the realms of infinity yet remaining a bodily experience through the conscious use of the tools for transforming into drag. Moreover, the performativity of gender, and in addition of sex and sexuality for Butler goes in the lines of:

20

> "Considering gender, for instance, as a corporeal style an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'." (Butler 1988, 521-522)

> "As performance which is performative, gender as an 'act', broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological inferiority." (528)

Judith Butler's ideas are very much connected to the human body. And it is true, bodily matters are an aspect that is apparently important to Butler, no matter what her reasons for that may be, whether queer activism or philosophy. They do however resound a very old debate coming from ancient Greek philosopher Plato.

2.3 Mise en abyme as infinite reflexion

What I am going to write about Plato is just a segment from his work, but a very important one. As far as my reading of the debate around thinking of an original/copy process where in itself a (self-)reflexion combines, recombines and creates copies of itself. This was published in Plato's book "The Republic, Book X".

> Now, the god, either because he didn't want to or because it was necessary for him not to do so, didn't make more than one bed in nature, but only one, the very one that is the being of a bed. […]
> Why is that?
> Because, if he made only two, then again one would come to light whose form they in turn would both possess, and that would be the one that is the being of a bed and not the other two. (Plato in Madison 1997, 1201 -1202)

In Plato's quest for truth and for the appropriate citizens and rulers of the Republic, Plato discusses imitation. But the ones that are taking part in the discussion that constitutes this particular text of Plato's are in fact Socrates and Glaucon. They state that imitation has no place in the Republic. And as the unacceptable part of it are the imitators, in this particular example: both poets and painters. They reach this conclusion following the logic of Socrates'

21

dialogues, filled with questions whose answers are supposedly self evident and clear to the thinker. Moreover, they come to several other conclusions while searching for imitation and its forms and manifestations, all related to the concept of original/copy. They speak of imitation as the third in line of products. And they draw a parallel line between the painter and the poet, marking them both as third in line in the production and therefore inappropriate to be in the Republic. Socrates suggests to take as an example *the bed*. There are three kinds/instances of beds, they conclude. The first is *in nature,* made by god as an idea. The second is *made by the carpenter*. It has the same form as the bed made in nature. The third is the bed *painted by the painter*. This third bed is for them an imitation. In spite of this, it is not an imitation of the one in nature but an imitation of the bed made by the carpenter. Thus the painter should have no knowledge of the object *in* its *nature,* and the idea that is behind the carpenter's making.

In the pages that follow they continue to speak about the importance of knowledge and experience explaining how much of it a poet (as synonymous to painter) has or more correctly, that he does not have because he, as well as the painter, is an imitator. Here they contradict their previous thought, they claim that:

> "A flute-player, for example, tells a flute maker about the flutes that respond well in actual playing and prescribes what kinds of flutes he is to make, while the maker follows his instructions." (1206)

A flute player is also synonymous to poet and painter, he has no place in the Republic. And here is where neither pay attention to the paradox they have offered. Thus, a flute maker takes knowledge from the flute-player (who is also an imitator as are the painter and the poet) when the flute-player is not supposed to have any knowledge related to the idea of a flute, but solely to its use. In contrast, since they know what is good and bad within the flute and the

making of one, it appears that they do have knowledge connected with both the use of flutes and its making by the flute maker and the idea that is of a flute in nature. Thus what do flute-players do? They go and tell the flute makers, the makers of the "original" how should it be made or corrected. And this is where Butler's understanding of copy as a process of reflexion appears. This copy is influencing the making of the original. What is more important is that we can not and should not stick blindly to Plato's or Socrates' ideas about the existence of god since god himself can be considered an idea of the human beings (this hypothesis is perhaps only temporary). So we conclude that not even the flute made by the flute maker or a bed made by a carpenter are originals since in an alternate plane of existence, the one of ideas, they already exist as *one*. The same conclusion can be drawn about god himself, because even if it is not humans who created him/her/them in the plane of ideas, someone or something must have created the constant presence of godly figures in everyday lives since we know of literacy. Whoever or whatever that is is by itself must have been also created in some way. Chiefly this can be created by human being's ideas. But human beings are supposed to be copies in a religious sense. From the "Bible" we take the idea that human beings are created the one from the other and the first from God. Therefore a question appears: Does it make sense that, on a certain meta-level, the cycle of copy creating another copy would end? Or, more precisely, is there a god? And although the search for existence (and existence of god) is not the project of this work, by combining Plato and Butler, one can conclude two things. First that Plato through his translators offers a paradoxical relationship within the conceptualization of the debate of originality or copying or translating. Thus participating already in thinking through the three characteristics of *mise en abyme*. Moreover, an understanding of self-inclusion and exclusion of Plato's own presence thus shaming himself and denying the 'reality' of originality with the example of possessing

23

knowledge as living beings; which essentially remains the only way at that time for the flute

player to have a flute that plays in the harmonies of his understanding (not to say desiring).

Butler on the other hand manages to reach a level of intoxication with the second, the infinite

duplication. Butler's positioning onto this same issue, through the more contemporary work

of gender and drag of course, in my view does not fully reach the potential of reparation by

shame, and moreover putting this work in an even greater trap, the one of representing.

2.4 Diffraction complementing the efforts of **mise en abyme** *within and without the reflexion*

> "I couldn't see darkness until now, only light" (Lamb, *Darkness*. "Between Darkness and Wonder." 2003.)

In the chapter "Diffractions: Differences, Contingencies, and Entanglements That

Matter" from the book *Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*

(2007) by Karen Barad writes about a methodological approach unlike the process of

reflexion, that of diffraction. Coming from a background in physics and with a deep interest

in quantum mechanics, these thinkers, Barad, as well as Donna Haraway, who is quoted at the

beginning of this chapter, point to a problem in the reflexive methodologies of conceiving of

and understanding the material reality.

> "Reflexivity has been recommended as a critical practice [which] only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real […] Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals."
> (Haraway in Barad 2007, 71)

Diffraction used here is an optical metaphor that serves as an effort to make a difference

without repeating the Same. (Barad 2007, 71) Furthermore, it is a methodological approach

24

for reading insights through one another. This all encompasses an ethics of attending to and responding to the various relations between differences and how they matter and which further maps the effects of these interactions between differences. (72) It is a tool, a trope that helps make apparent the "entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world" while offering a new way of thinking about "difference, and of space, time matter, causality and agency." (73)

To further explain the phenomenon of diffraction as well as the reason why I consider this additional trope to be helpful in the thinking of *mise en abyme* I give attention as well as Barad to the optical side of diffraction. Essentially it is a dualistic phenomena of waves and particles yet it functions through the use at the least of waves as such, not individual particles which are still part of the process. When waves, like the ones of air, water, and light are faced with an obstacle that either has an opening (or more) or of particular size smaller than the wavelength, the resulting waves form various patterns of interaction/entanglement. I make a small regression here from only referring to Barad's text because I want to make a visual comparison between these optical as well as physical phenomena of diffraction, infinite reflexion and *mise en abyme*.

25

2 Photograph of the actual shadow of a razor blade illuminated by a monochromatic light source. Notice the diffraction fringes—the existence of dark lines in light regions and light lines in dark regions created by the diffraction of waves around the inside and outside edges of the blade. From *Francis W. Sears, Mark W. Zemansky, and Hugh D. Young, University Physics, 6th ed.* © 1982 by Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc. Reprinted with permission of Pearson Education, Inc.
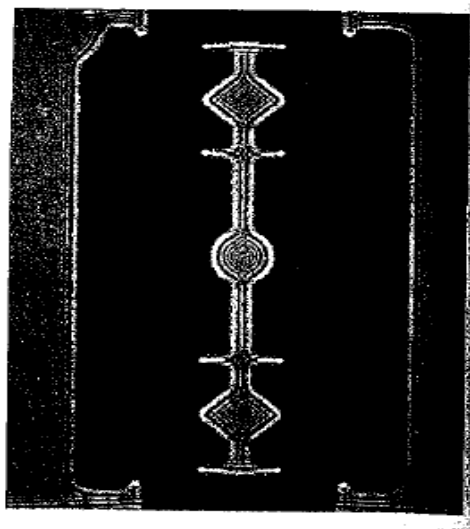
Picture 1. Diffraction (scan from Barad's work p. 76) and explication by Barad)

Picture 2. Infinite duplication of my hand through a reflexion of two mirrors facing each-other.
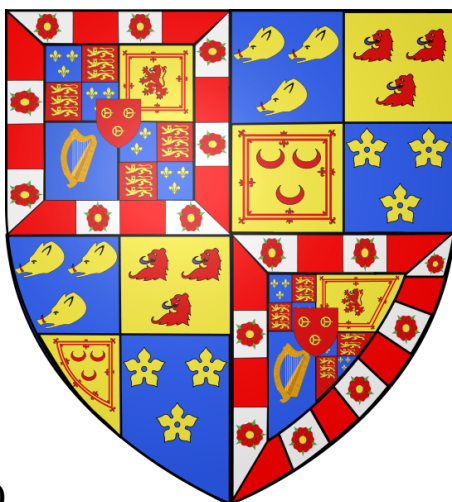
Double Tressure

a)   b)

Picture 3. a) Family shield; b) representation of a shield by Moshe (1987, 431)

26

It is maybe difficult to notice a certain connectedness between the phenomenon of diffraction and the representation of *mise en abyme*. I would like to point to the abysmal strength of light diffracting while looking at the 'shadow' of a razor in Picture 1. and the shield image and representation in Picture 3. Light diffracting in this case as points to the creative and destructive powers of light interaction in the process of making shadows and can be observed on small scales. Moreover, this shadow which is also bright in intervals is a combination of its creation's reflexing and further interacting within its waves off the body of the razor. I consider it to represent a very interesting holistic approach to thinking of methods that function beyond dualism. It offers in my view a king regard towards the future of the decision-making but a remark needs to be made to be considerate of the paranoid input of anticipating effects; which at the same time refers to a directionality of thinking back and forth between the event and the effect. And for me diffraction is also a directionality towards the effect, which I will speak about further as a failure towards a strong theory of paranoid thinking. What is lacking so far at least in my understanding of it, within the method of diffraction is the aporetic dimension and transdisciplinarity. Barad does offer a fertile ground for this discussion.

The methodology further discussed by Barad is a debate between representationalism as reflexive methodology and diffraction as a performative transdisciplinary approach. On the issue of representationalism Barad writes about how a false conviction that the possibility to "turn the mirror back on oneself" is being overly used through "words, concepts, ideas, and the like [to supposedly] actually reflect or mirror the things to which they refer" (Barad 86). Barad's critique of reflexivity relies in the opposition against critical practices and methodologies:

> "Reflexivity is a proposed critical scholarly practice that aims to reflect on, and

systematically take account of, the investigator's role as an instrument in the construction of evidence. Reflexivity aims to acknowledge the tripartite arrangement between objects, representations, and knowers that produces knowledge, as opposed to less-reflexive modes of investigation that leave the knower out of the equation, focusing attention narrowly on the relationship between objects ad their representations" (Barad 86).[7]

As one of the main problems of reflexive methodologies, Barad poses the failure of such thinking to account for "'gender in the making' – the production of gender and other social variables as constituted through technoscientific practices". Secondly, a claim that "reflexivity is based on the belief that practices of representing nave no effect on the objects of investigation and that we have a kind of access to representations that we don't have to the objects themselves" (87). Further on reflexivity, Barad states that it is simply "mirrors upon mirrors [which[entails the same old geometrical optics of reflexions." In contrast Barad places diffraction as the method that would participate with a "performative rather than representationalist mode" (88). "It is a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom". And the field of interest for such an analysis would be agential realism[8]. Thus "knowing, thinking, measuring, theorizing, and observing are material practices of intra-acting within and as part of the world" (90). Diffraction is a phenomena that functions in space and time as specific material positions and where the knower or observer do not necessarily need to be put back into the world:

---

[7]   I would like to point out that for me a note of difference is needed between representation, and presentation; of knower versus lived personal experiences; of theoretician and a whole person and a further distinction with the activist. All these are part of the possibilities of the "I" or in this case a poignant "you". Moreover I find it odd to have to make a delimitation on an economic level between public and private at this point in this analysis. The slippage of this part of Barad's work for me is not making clear this distinction in the first place because as a result I faced the placing of a generalizing embodied function on representation as to every "you". This in my personal opinion points at a delegitimatizing of the performative potentiality, as I will explain later in this work, of many persons who are trying to at least partially present an identity or a peformative identification and mutually inclusive fluid disidentification i.e. acceptance and refusal of identity. And another, out of the blue, need for clarification that is needed here is a reification of a phrase that has had become so close to my everyday existence that I will not put a quote around it. It is also a need that appears to reclaim the personal clearly away from representationalism. Therefore the reasoning behind this statement is simply: "personal is political".
[8]   This is one of Barad's most famous ideas where thinking about phenomena as constituting the real world in intra-acting agencies within and without each other (Barad 1999).

"[B]ut to take account of the fact that we too are part of the world's differential becoming. And furthermore, the point is not merely that knowledge practices have material consequences but that *practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world*. Which practices we enact matter – in both senses of the word" (91).

Therefore for this to have the possibility of becoming an invaluable tool for queer performativity a certain understanding against a representationalist subjectivity and objectivity. Here knowledge is no longer subjective, but coming from the world, and I would add through the internalized mechanics of grasping knowledge as it comes and becomes to us. Moreover, objectivity loses the need for a distanced representation of observation. It becomes further, "about being accountable to the specific materialisations of which we are part of" (91).

As a last point I would like to draw attention to the field from which this technocratic metaphor comes from, quantum physics. I would point to what quantum mechanics is in my general understanding, and compare it to a very interesting segment of Barad's writing in this chapter. In general it is a theory of the chaotic/unpredictable movement/appearance and reappearance at random unexpected locations of various particles. It is at the same time a tale about the characteristics of the void between the tiniest particles and how it translates their potentiality to create materiality. What Barad points in quantum mechanics in the case of using the process of diffraction of light onto the atom of hydrogen is the possibility to predict, to visualize and see the uncanny unpredictable tiny shift in the structure of the atom. She says: "that there is the possibility of measuring the effects of unrealized possibilities is nothing short of astonishing" (92). This is where I became very personal about reading this text. This is how I lived, with the "possibility of measuring the effects of unrealized possibilities" as a tool for measuring the anti-survivalist chaotic unpredictabilities of

everyone around me in a frightfulness and precariousness from/against pain till it would

create a paralysis. What I want to point out through this example is what Sedgwick helped me

learn, that there will always be ways to be more paranoid, but should one be?

A compassionate approach of *mise en abyme* itself would allow putting together the past

of thinking nondualistically through putting ideas and representational identifications in the

abyss, as well as the futuristic understanding of all things of nature that is represented by

diffraction as a tool, method and object of investigation in quantum mechanics and allow for

a reconciliation. This reconciliation between past and future, between modern technology and

ancient legacies would be allowed by the idea that we are talking about optical phenomena,

which as Barad concedes have been constructing our stand on reality since the time of

Ancient Greece. Which additionally include and disprove of simple reflection themselves as

holistic tools for inquiry both as well as the objects of the inquiry. This reconciliation goes in

the terms of permitting for reflexion on what one does/reflects upon as long as an awareness

of this action and the responsibilities that go about it is present as well. Even though this goes

under the lines of simple duplication that has the possibility of critically engaging with the

originality *ad infinity* of possibilities surrounding certain, if not all everyday activities, it also

encompasses an abysmal approach void of paranoia by placing compassion in its stead.

The ethics of mise en abyme is difficult to learn as well as the ethics of diffraction. Still a

combination of the both can help individual's understanding of identity as theirs own(s) and

as a politics of the use of language on/out embodyment.

30

Chapter 3. The compassionate abyss of performativity

"Whatever else we know, we know there isn't time to bullshit" (Sedgwick 2002, 149).

As another example of thinking nonlinearly and in ways outside the dualistic of the everyday patriarchal world is the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Mainly reading from several chapters from her book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2002). Sedgwick has offered a lot to the understandings of queer in its personal (self-)touching kind of ways and activist understandings of queer performativity. I am working on shortly/further inquiring into the field of performativity, its correlation to affect theory and the paranoid and reparative positions of reading and performing while keeping touch with a gut feeling over a connection between them and the work of *mise en abyme*. One can read Sedgwick's analysis of Henry James' prefaces as showing an involvement with himself when he was younger which invests in a *mise en abyme*. Sedgwick shows this practice of reflexivity to be intimately connected to *mise en abyme* in general and that is based in the explanation of a reparative reading position. In this chapter I engage the theoretical connections between performative affects, shame, paranoia, and reparation as such, and *mise en abyme* through reflexion..

Some of the important issues are shortly elaborated in the her *Introduction* to the book. As clearly and as self-evident it may what queer performativity is, it is important to state that queer performativity is about thinking nondualistically. But that may not be enough to say about this approach that is present in many sciences like physics, quantum mechanics, spirituality, race, gender studies as well as writing and arts, and many other scientific fields since the middle of the twentieth century.

31

Sedgwick conveys a message about the dangers of positing oneself in a nondualistic manner, where as its invocation in itself is a way to "fall into a dualistic trap" (Sedgwick 2002, 2). Additionally it appears that the way out of this type of traps, as a suggestion throughout most of the articles placed in this book, is to embed in one's work, a part of oneself, a poetic approach; a reflexive self-reflexion that mirrors the experiences of the individual in its many interrelations with the world outside as well as with the inner existences of one's selves; a description of the essential affective states that one is working with; whereas queer reflexivity makes use of *mise en abyme*.

3. 1 Critique of antiessentialism

There are a lot of tools put in this work, though not actually misemployed and explained as practical one, two, three … steps towards reparation from experiences in life that produce strong negative affects and create strong survivors and from those affective positions themselves. In order to start moving, in a linear way, in this thesis towards the states of affect whose presence may offer the possibility for such work Sedgwick writes of an understanding of language and its (understanding as having a) constructive power through Austin, Butler, Foucault, and Derrida.

> "I assume that the line between words and things or between linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation. " (6)

In order to arrive to such a powerful thought, we are obliged to revisit some of the initial thoughts and problems according to Sedgwick which are forming parts of performativity itself as a linguistic thinking as well as thinking of identity. Initially the use of queer performativity comes from a string of thinking moving from Austin's writing in *How to Do*

32

Things With Words. This text points to an interest on performative utterances that are not

descriptive and which are to be considered as having the power over the creation (at least

linguistically) of identity. A widely known and used example of such utterance, also pointed

by Sedgwick is the utterance "I do". "I do" in itself has the power to change and create a

different identity. From living as a man or a woman (I had a liberal urge to write here 'people',

yet I continue with a distinct differentiation between identities existing based on dominant

patriarchal living in a small tow in Macedonia) this man and woman become husband and

wife. This is in fact a fact. Whereas the process of preparation and execution of the "I do"

although sometimes seen as obsolete, after the performance defines the quality of living of

many still today.

As for otherwise moving away from language itself and linguistic thinking about the

power of performative utterances, as Sedwick views the latter work of Derrida and Butler,

she poses for an oversimplification towards a critique of antiessentialism. "Austinian

performativity" she writes "is about describing how language constructs or affects reality"

thus showing a productivity of language for "antiessentialising projects". (5) As such

antiessentialising thinking she places the work of Butler, Foucault and Derrida. A critique of

"Derrida's and Butler's performativities" is offered to the reader as pointing to an

"antiessentialist epistemological motive" while ironically perhaps remarking on their move

away from the perception of "*some* lanuage to *all language* [which] seems required by their

antiessentialist project" (Sedgwick 6). Moreover, from Sedgwick regarding Foucault's

approach in his work on looking at a possible history of sexuality in his first volume :

> "... in the area of history, the same antiessentialist projects have foregrounded Foucault's repeated demonstrations of the *productive* force both of taxonomies and disciplines that have claimed to be simply descriptive and of prohibitions whose apparent effect is simply to negate. That language itself can be productive of reality is a primary ground for antiessentialist inquiry" (5)

33

This issue of "the productive force of language" is a very important issue surrounding the very thinking of deconstruction and gender studies as it speaks of a tendency to where they may imply a unison between the possibilities opened by the use of "actual words" (Butler in Sedgwick 6) and contradictorily changing the focus from performative utterances to all utterances. Thus disabling a move away from the traps of escapism, and the move away from non-dualistic thinking. At the same time it opens questions about what enables a multiple existence, a non-dualistic being and points in the direction of an ethical need for queer understanding of affect theory.

3. 2 Affect in general – from thinking about cybernetic mechanics to the human psychology

"Shame as precarious hyperreflexivity of the surface of the body, can turn one inside out – or outside in. […] Shame is one of those affects whose digitalizing mechanism works to 'punctuat[e the system] as distinct.' Perhaps along with contempt and disgust, it can be a switch point for the individuation of imagining systems, of consciousness, of bodies, of theories, of selves – an individuation that decides not necessarily an identity, but a figuration, distinction, or mark of punctuation. And unlike contempt and disgust, shame is characterized by its failure ever to renounce its object cathexis, its relation to the desire for pleasure as well as the need to avoid pain." (116-117)

From this previos quote we can take a look at some important aspects of affect and what they are. As categorized by Tomkins in his enormous work on the topic of human psychology as the primary, so to say essentiallised pairings between human emotions. They are divided in nine categories plus pared to a double differentiating to one another in intensity. From a short look into *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (2008) in order to present here the list of the whole spectrum of primary affects as considered by Tomkins under the chapter entitled "Modification 5: The Number of Primary Affects is Differentiated" the pairings of affects are as follows: two positive: interest – excitement, and enjoyment – joy;

34

one neutral: surprise – startle; six negative: distress – anguish, fear – terror, shame – humiliation, contempt – disgust, anger – rage, and dissmell which stands unpaired. (Tomkins 2008, 627)

In Chapter 3 entitled "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold, reading Silvan Tomkins", Sedgwick tries to bring the reader closer to a part of the theory of the four volumes of Tomkins's *Affect Imagery Consciousness* ad to show how shame matters. This work is marked evidently by the understanding of affective positions in human everyday living interlaced with decision-making processes. Moreover the article tries to bring closer to the reader an understanding of human psychology, focusing of the affect shame through the ideas dominant at the time Tomkins was writing, regarding the construction of machines, cybernetics.

> "Any affect may have any object. […] Could someone design a truly humanoid machine? [...] One could not engage in such a project without the concept of multiple assemblages of varying degrees of independence, dependence, interdependence, and control and transformation of one by another. […] A human being could be and often is, terrified about anything under the sun. [… excitement had nothing *per se* to do with sexuality or with hunger, and that the apparent urgency of the drive system was borrowed from its co-assembly with appropriate affects as necessary amplifiers." (Tomkins in Sedgwick 2002, 100)

Bringing a person to think of their body in a more intuitive way, otherwise than through putting the sexual drives in the center of being, through the reactions they may arrive to through "simulation['s] increase, level and decrease " (Sedgwick 2002 102) returns with a confusion accompanied with a negative affect like fear, anger, shame. Therefore if communicating of the matters of the queer, can be perceived as seeing someone or something "strange" it is interesting to observe how such a reaction as the shameful tilting the head down and lowering of the eyelids appears almost instantaneously (96-99). Following the logic of Sedgwick's text, thinking of one self's identity becomes no longer a switch that one can turn On/Off, it is not a keyboard that one can type in a keyword and get a specific

consumer targeted response, be it porn or information that one seeks linguistically. A stage of 'may', as in "may I be thinking this way?", brings us to thinking of the body in gradual increases of impulses, feelings needs, touch, as in the turning of a circuit in the analog technology against the digital On/Off switch.

This crossing from analog to digital and vice versa can be easily viewed in the practice of today's theoretical work as a *reflexive antibiologism*.

> "The tacit homolgy machine : digital :: animal: analogical (and concomitant privileging of the machine/digital) is, we argue, a very powerful structuring presumption for current theory and emerges especially strongly as a reflexive antibiologism. But it represents bad engineering and bad biology, and it leads to bad theory" (101).

This bad theory in current theoretical writings, and technical development which populate the realm of 'real life' of our bodies and everything that as people living in an age of information surrounds our bodies moves from the abyssal thinking of an embodied abyss and infinity; a limitlessness where affects are negative and as the next quote will show, present us with a trivializing approach to reality itself.

> "This adhesion may well be a historical development: as though some momentum of modernity (call it monotheism? All it Reformation? Call it capitalist rationalisation?) has so evacuated the conceptual space between 2 and infinity that we may require the inertial friction of a biologism to even suggest the possibility of reinhabiting that space. We have no interest whatever in minimizing the continuing history of racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise abusive biologisms, or the urgency of the exposures of them, that have made the gravemen of so many contemporary projects of critique. At the same time, we fear, with the installation of an *automatic* antibiologism as the unshifting central tenet of "theory," the loss of conceptual access to an entire thought realm, the analogic realm of finitely many (n>2) values. Access to this realm is important for, among other things, enabling a political vision of difference that might resist both binary homogenization and infinitizing trivialization" (108).

3. 3 Affect in queer performativity

Shame, Sedgwick offers as the exemplary affect for theory (115). A theory which gives

the possibility of a poetic which may consider a view over a *gestalt*, a whole, of the body, of the mind, imagination and production of work as well as identities which affectively allow themselves to shift, and fluctuate. Which through reflexion and representation of a *mise en abyme* with the use of actual words, and at the same time that demonstrates towards and thus induces, affective states as shame that have the performative character that leads to healing and reparation.

Taking queer performativity closer to shame Sedgwick in "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer performativity: Henry James' *The Art of the Novel*" with particular interest reads the possibilities of affect positions open by the prefaces of the his *Art of the Novel* in its several reissues. Furthermore, within the temporality of this process of rewriting a preface to each edition, she considers a sort of relation between shame and self-reflexivity by infusion of narcissism. On a different note, narcissism has been placed as another visual representation of *mise en abyme* and its many constituting parts, mirrors, reflexions, self-reflexions, shields both physical and psychological. Therefore this process of rewriting prefaces after some time, and the relationship towards jame's young self I consider as an approach of *mise en abyme*. [9]

3. 3. 1 Affect – shame and queer performativity

This affective narcissism turning over to the affect of shame though the work of Silvan Tomkins raises a lot of questions regarding the participation of shame as well as self-reflexion in the (de-)construction of identity. Further in this analysis it helps also understand the relationship between the three: author, narrator, character.

Starting since an early age, as early as the time between the third and the seventh month after being born, children exhibit the eyes down, head averted, protoform of the affect of

---

[9]   Maybe only because as I sit and write I use a mirror to reflect light in my direction, light itself reflected from parts of my body that I associate this narcissism with the observation of the body in parts.

37

shame "– at a particular moment in particular repeated narrative" (36). In addition directly

from the work by Tomkins:

> "Shame […] is an affect auxiliary to the affect of interest – excitement. Any perceived
> barrier to positive affect with the other will evoke lowering of the eyelids and loss of tonus in
> the face and neck muscles, producing the head hung in shame" (2008, 627).

Additionally, a narrative mutual gazing between the child and the caregiver, when

interrupted by the caregiver's refusal or unexpected failure to participate I the play is how the

affect of shame is defined. A child's mirroring and mutual gazing when interrupted turns to

shame and shame in interrupting becomes identity. "Shame floods in as a moment, a

disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication"

(Sedgwick 2002, 36). This mutual gazing in itself can be considered as a form of very early

narcissism which "throws itself sociably in the narrative view of the other" (36 -37).

Its power (or shame) lies within that interplay between identity and the moment of

shame. Here is where Sedgwick sees a potential for political projects, in the shame people

(prone to shame) could feel when faced with the mistreatment of someone, by someone. For

example, when a performer, activist, speaks in front of a group of people from a narcissistic

position, the one of the stage where they may face pride, dignity through their self-display,

exhibitionism and the interconnectedness of all these possible positions with shame. And

through this play of the affect of shame, pointing and projecting of the interlocutor with an

audience or themselves, is seen a performance, a transformative performative performance,

an identity showing/seeing/mirroring when this possibility of transformational shame "*is*

performance" (38).

On the other hand of performance shame appears in comparison to that of the affect guilt.

Sedgwick writes: "The conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt is that shame

attaches itself to and sharpens the sense of what one *is,* whereas guilt attaches to what one

does." (emphasis added) Thus clearly leaving us with an implication which is in this line

already at least doubly noticed – by Sedgwick and me – that "one *is something* though one

may not have secure hypotheses about what" (37). And is therefore essential to remember

that this possibility of being and becoming allows multiple identification.

Let us continue to two very important observations that link the identifications between

the body of the author, the narration of the work of art and its characters through Sedgwick's

thoughts on James's prefaces. She offers the connection of two circuits of exchange between

narcissism and shame; the first as "the drama of James's relation to his audience of readers"

and "the second […] narcissism/shame circuit dramatized in the prefaces is the perilous and

productive one that extends between the speaker and his own past" (39). The positioning in

the abyss in the earlier work of James functions on more levels. Firstly through the prefaces

to the writing of his young self, as narcissistic with the need for this work and as shameful for

its failure yet at the same time reflexing both externally, towards the audience and internally

in a certain direction of James's lived experiences, i.e. his past. Thus performing a self which

is old addressing and trying to figure out the young James, and even further a younger

version of him which is the work of fiction. Sedgwick notes that James himself uses the

metaphor of the inner child through which the narcissistic author of the prefaces of his own

work intesubjectively re-self-represents parts of his own past.

But why would shame be queerly performative in the case of James? What is expressive,

performative, and yet relates to a state of shame, or even further to stigma is the writing itself

of James. A writing relating to James touching himself; touching and exploring outside and

inside his anus and his excretion. Zach Rivers considered the following claim as he was

analyzing this writing of James regarding the "pleasure of exploring his [James's] compacted

yet-to-be excretion [as] reveal[ing] a subjectivity not scared of being other than itself, but committed to exploring, repairing, and letting go" (Rivers, 2012, 62). Talking about excretion at this point is one shure way to provide the reader with an excuse for shame, for reflexion.

"In this usage, 'queer performativity' is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick, 2002, 61). What Sedgwick offers as a possibility of the doings of shame as affective state in queer performativity and in any event is "perhaps offer some psychological, phenomenological, thematic density and motivation […] between reference and performativity, or indeed between queerness and other ways of experiencing identity and desire" (62).

This is a possibility to see how shame could take on a claim of opening doors for thinking in different ways about identity politics (ibid.). With an open interest to remember her lived experiences and the many shy, flaming queers, activism, shame turns into a political interest for Sedgwick "because it generates and legitimates the place of identity – the question of identity – at the origin of the impulse of the performative, but does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence" (64). And relating to the rest of the work in this thesis, how it has opened the doors for coming out of an abysmal existence into a more creative exploration of identity, through *mise en abyme* itself as a process of expression and maybe of assuming responsibility in the work of Gide.

3. 4 Affective paranoia and reparation

Before arriving to reparation of trauma through performativity, I would like to turn again to another of the essays in *Touching, Feeling* by Sedgwick, the "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You"

(2002). In this text, apart from the continuing observation over affects and the work of Tomkins, Sedgwick merges this work on affect to the earlier work on love, guilt, as well as paranoia and reparation by Melanie Klein. The framework of thinking at hand here is offered by the term/s "hermeneutics of suspicion" (124). This approach as well as the later explication of a paranoid reading position through the five qualities offered by Sedgwick reflexs deeply on the issues related to *mise en abyme* and we shall see in the performative possibilities of *mise en abyme* both as paranoid and as reparative.

3. 4. 1 Hermeneutics of suspicion

Shortly I will start with the concept of hermeneutics of suspicion. The reason for that is that it complicates thinking of reflexivity and even further positioning it in line with paranoia. It appears in Sedgwick's text along with thinking about the approaches one can choose from when thinking and addressing the issue of the appearance of AIDS as well as its prevalence in Africa. This term, initially conceived by Paul Ricoeur to point to the ways thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, as well as their intellectual offspring in a context where multiple modes of interpretation of text, phenomena existed. Today such an approach, Sedgwick claims is not one to choose from many possibilities in "the mainstream of New Historicist, deconstructive, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism" of thinkers such as Butler, and Foucault, but a mandatory direction. "The methodological centrality of suspicion to current critical practice has involved a concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia." Thus pointing a thinker of this age, to a state of paranoia always suspecting, and I would add, never learning where paranoia appears as the "prescription" (125). "That knowledge does rather than simply is" Sedgwick states "is by now very routine to discover" (124). Nevertheless a privileging of a certain approach towards expressing knowledge, through critical thinking, may have had as

Sedwick puts it:

> "an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they [critical thinkers, criticism] may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller" (124).

Here the metaphorical representation would be that of a shield losing its material form. That is why we need to always in an essentiallised way go back to thinking of affects to see how this shield is in fact through time material in space.

3. 4. 2 Paranoia or reparation through depression

> "To recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities. Here, perhaps, Klein is of more help than Tomkins; to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experiene, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates" (146).

This approach towards knowledge of paranoia as a tool for thinking and constructing reality rather than a diagnosis can offer a way of understanding current construction of knowledge. It is important to state here that it is not about thinking in the opposite direction of the thoughts of the paranoid thinker (of whether their fears are real or not) but of a different way to approach the issues that one faces, the "differentials of practice". (130) Interestingly, paranoia is not ruled out of the domain of love itself. On the contrary Sedgwick says: "[t[he problem is rather that, of all forms of love, paranoia is the most ascetic love, *the love that demands least from its object...* " (132). And the reasoning that enables this logic are the following capacities of paranoia in view of a thinking that produces knowledge proposed

by Sedgwick:

> "Paranoia is *anticipatory.*
> Paranoia is *reflexive* and *mimetic.*
> Paranoia is *a strong theory.*
> Paranoia is a theory of *negative affects.*
> Paranoia places its faith in *exposure*" (130).

I will offer a brief overview of all these positions as they are deeply connected with some of my instinctive doubts of *mise en abyme* which appeared a long time before conceptualizing the writing of a thesis. How much it matters that reflexivity is part of the paranoid position that relates it to at least a part of *mise en abyme*?

This principle of thinking that is placed in the first point, that paranoia is *anticipatory* is guided by one idea, that "*[t]here must be no bad surprises.*" Thus the paranoid needs to and prepares in their turn for any possible bad surprises. This preparation/or state of paranoid readiness of survival in this world that is always out to get us usually becomes reflexive, mirroring the same principle till it comes to the conclusion that one "can never be paranoid enough" (ibid).

Synonymously paranoia is *reflexive* and *mimetic* structure according to Sedgwick.

> "Paranoia seems to require to be imitated to be understood, and it , in turn, seems to understand only by imitation. Paranoia proposes both *Anything you can do (to me) I can do worse*, and *Anything you can do (to me) I can do first* – to myself. […] the way paranoia has of understanding anything is by imitating and embodying it" (131).

A synonym of the mimetic is anticipatory according to Sedgwick.

> "an affect theory is, […] a mode of *selective* scanning and amplification; for this reason, any affect theory risks being somewhat tautological, but because of its wide reach and rigorous exclusiveness, a strong theory risks being strongly tautological" (135).

The most important thing to understand, again, is of course that paranoia in thinking,

writing, reading, and relating to reality is one kind of affect theory among possible theories

from affects. Yet paranoia as strong theory has a "the reach and the seductiveness [which]

involve[s] both [its] assets and deficits" (134). About reading the *The Novel and the Police* by

Henry Miller, Sedgwick talks about the possibilities this book offers by taking the advantage

opened by the"tautologies of 'sexual difference' […] for a wealth of tonal nuance, attitude,

worldly observation, performative paradox, aggression, tenderness, wit, inventive reading,

obiter dicta, and writerly panache" (135-6). As if inviting some weak theories inside, but she

also notes the "limitations of this unarticulated relation between strong and weak theories"

(136). This additional work of *mise en abyme* is connecting the potentiality of *mise en abyme*

to include and exclude reflexions that are not so strong yet partake in the experiences of

living. The weak theories which have more potential for work on the self within everyday

reality and in expressing it through products such as writing are at an disadvantage.

> "[A]s a strong theory, and as locus of reflexive mimetism, paranoia is nothing if not teachable. The powerfully ranging and reductive force of strong theory an make tautological thinking hard to identify even as it makes it compelling and near inevitable; the result is that both writers and readers can damagingly misrecognize whether and where real conceptual work is getting done, and precisely what that work might be" (ibid.).

And as it has been hinted previously, trying to find a way out of paranoia is simply

because it is based on affects which Sedgwick considers as a theory of negative affects.

Because out of it the experiencing of positive affects when appearing can simply raise the

bars of the instincts of self-preservation and survival.

> "[A]s strong theory of negative aspects when [t]he only sense in which [the paranoid] may strive for positive affect at all is for the *shield* which it promises against humiliation, he writes. 'To take seriously the strategy of maximizing positive affect rather than simply enjoying it when the occasion arises, is entirely out of the question'" (emphasis added, Tomkins in Sedgwick 2002, 136-7).

This thinking leading to the shield, not as a representation of the abysmal past but as

44

shielding, away from pain, instead of searching for pleasure. This so called pleasure seeking

versus pain forestalling strategy has been conceived best by Melanie Klein.

> "Similarly in Klein's writings from the 1940s and 1950s, it again represents an actual
> achievement – a distinct, often risky positional shift – for an infant or an adult to move
> toward a sustained *seeking of pleasure* (through the reparative strategies of the depressive
> position), rather than continue to pursue the self-reinforcing because self-defeating strategies
> for *forestalling pain* offered by the paranoid/schizoid position. It is probably more usual for
> discussions of the depressive position in Klein to emphasize that that position inaugurates
> ethical possibility – in the form of a guilty, empathetic view of the other as at once good,
> damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care. Such ethical possibility,
> however, is founded on and coextensive with the subject's movement toward what Foucault
> calls "care of the self," the often very fragile concern to provide the self with pleasure and
> nourishment in an environment that is perceived as not particularly offering them" (137).

For this reason of considering the outside as hostile and the personal "I" in need of

paranoid shielding Sedgwick states that "paranoia is characterized by placing, in practice, an

extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se – knowledge in the form of

exposure" (138). Like the tradition of thinking on sexual difference in the last chapters of

Butler's G*ender Trouble* (1999) (139). Here Butler focuses on revealing the subversive power

of drag through its gender performativity. The interest of showing the non-existence of

original identities through the exposition of imitative models and reflexing illusions through

drag is the project of Butler's work. Such a project of exposure Sedgwick see as problematic

and possibly paranoid. This in its right presents a project of unveiling violence.

> "What is the basis for assuming that [unveiling violence/gender binaries/exposure] will
> surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is
> artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent" (141)?

Two reminders are needed here. Firstly that violence has already a history as being

exposed: public executions, beatings, stoning, various culturally specific forms of humiliation

through physical violence etc. Secondly that these things (enacting in the innocence of

ignorance acts of institutionalized violence) are done by people who have the obligation to do

so. Just random people with their own affective states of individualized living and bodies.

> "Subversive and demystifying parody, suspicious archeologies of the present, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure: as I have been arguing, these infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies. If there is an obvious danger in the triumphalism of a paranoid hermeneutics, it is that the broad consensual sweep of such methodological agreement [...] it it persists unquestioned, unintentionally impoverish the gene pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills" (143-144).

Let's take a more definitive turn towards the depressive position of reparation, Sedgwick, poses it through several aspects: the thinking of exposure, self-reflexivity, strong versus weak, positive versus negative, and the paranoid anticipation and refusal. Starting from the last, Sedgwick relates to projects of sincerity that aim towards reparation are rejected easily in critical theory and paranoid reading.

> "Reparative modes, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure ('merely aesthetic') and because they are frankly ameliorative ('merely reformist')" (144).

In line with writing about pleasure or including elements in writing, small aporias where readers of stronger pieces of paranoid theory are "impelled [...] by successive engagement with quite varied, often keenly pleasure oriented, smaller-scale writerly and intellectual solicitations [...]" appear (144). This through an exploration of the interactions that small weak theories have with strong theories like paranoia, Sedgwick claims, cannot be done without "respectful interest in weak as well as strong theoretical acts" (145). Furthermore Segwick leads to both a methodological issue and an issue directly describing a *mise en abyme* in the interest of writing, as well as reminds of Gide's project with *The Counterfeiters* and the need to write the impossible "pure novel" as the theory in the only novel (pure) which Gide writes – *The Counterfeiters* – as well as taking it all to a new level of comprehensibility, by asking:

46

"What could better represent 'weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain,' than the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading" (ibid.)?

"Doesn't reading queer mean learning, among other things that mistakes can be good rather than bad surprises?" (147)

And finally:

"What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them." (150-151)

Chapter 4. Gide does come out

> "[...] the best way of understanding the character would have been to look for what came to him from me" (Sartre in Lejeune 1989, 28).

In this next section I will try to exemplify as through the work of Gide and several other thinkers about Gide, the complex tropes that I tried to explain in the previous chapters of this thesis. Through the use of either mirror reflexion, waves and particles that about create these reflexions through, infinity, god, objectification ans the subject (linguistically, in literature and psychoanalysis as affect theory) and their incorporation in a system of *mise(s) en abyme* (used both as translation of 'placed in the abyss', and as the trope) in the "pocket mirror" of Gide. All this leading to the space of autobiographical expression in a person's writing, and dismissal of the subject as a possibility for the whole. Also leading to a theory that *mise en abyme* has in its wording of paradoxicality within the debate of sexual difference and coming out – to which this chapter is dedicated to explore – the possibility for personal reparative work through the engagement within a varied set of affective positions of approaching the representativity of reality that creates reality and which it also lives in it "when our experiences go beyond our representations of reality" (McFarlane

http://www.integralscience.org/psyche-physis.html).

But before that, I would like to point towards the possibilities of becoming and of coming out that the theory of autobiography by Philippe Lejeune is offering to this thesis.

To begin I am drawing on two aspects of autobiographical theory. The initial one relates to what the basis for autobiography as a literary direction, that is the requirement for sincerity in identification or as Lejeune calls it, the "autobiographical pact" (Lejeune 1989, 3). From Lejeune we can conclude that putting the name of author and principal character and narrator

to be the same, and presenting the work as autobiographic in the title page are two of the requirements of identification that make a work of literature autobiographical. The third part of this identification is the subject's persons , "I, you, he/she/it"[10]. Lejeune claims that as long as the the narrator and principal character are equivalent all three persons present autobiographical stories. Yet what I have been focused so far is speaking about is the subjectivization of the subject "I" as well as the attempts to open the "I" away from representation only, away from singularity of identification and towards fluctuating characteristics *mise(s) en abyme*. And although Gide refuses to completely do an unambiguous identification with the character or narrator Lejeune points in that direction towards today's perception of "coming out." Manning takes it further by claiming that coming out as the pact of identification between the writer:character:narrator is similar as the permissiveness of the act of coming out is opening towards the stating of an identity (Manning 2004 320).

   The second aspect to which I would give more attention is the so called, by Lejeune Gide's *autobiographical space*. The concept of an autobiographical space comes after thinking about the pact necessary for autobiography as a genre. Lejeune sees a relationship between the autobiographical pact and the rejection of it by Gide within Gide's peculiarities regarding the concerns of writing a "pure novel" and therefore rejecting autobiography as the way to express truthfulness and sincerity:

> "Memoirs are never more than half sincere, however great the concern for truth may be: everything is always more complicated than we say it is. Perhaps we even come closer to the truth in the novel" (Gide in Lejeune 1989, 26)

   Following this statement Lejeune takes up thinking that this may also be some kind of

---

[10]   Lejeune exemplifies this third person by using the masculine pronoun and sometimes he makes the distinction of sexual difference by using "he/she" in the text.

contract of reading the novel. Moreover, he proposes and tries to lay out as possibly existing

reading of Gide's work as autobiography in which the novel as work of fiction is

representative of the truth. Lejeune is stating that:

> "[T]hey[11] designate the autobiographical space in which they want us to read the whole
> of their work. [...] Indeed they establish the nature of the ultimate truth to which their texts
> aspire" (Lejeune 1989, 27).

This kind of relationality where an expressed desire or need for representing truth and

autobiographicity Lejeune calls the "phantasmatic pact" (27). That is the collected works of

art that a writer, waged against a work of autobiography would lack "accuracy", and the

latter, "complexity" (Lejeune 27). Therefore no dominance is understood between the pacts

and their importance but the need to be read " one *in relation* to the other" (27). Such writing

of multiple works to exemplify one's multiple existences, experiences, doubts, and failures to

interact with the reader as a person telling a story about their lives, as well as refusing to

present a single defined identity is part of the work of Gide that would be of great interest for

queer theory. A work that has made "a spectacular failure in [its] autobiography" is what

Lejeune calls it; a work which has failed in terms of identifying of the author through the

narrators and characters they portray, both as achieving partial subjectification, as well as the

refusal of identifying and rebelling against being subjectified. Moreover Lejeune concludes

his central thought that the "autobiographical genre is a *contarctual* genre" which gives it a

law of writing and reading where we must understand that "we are dealing with codes, and

not with 'natural' or universal things" (29).

"What is particular about Gide is having made explicit the system, of having seen all the

---

[11] "they" here refers both to André Gide and to Francois Mauriac who in his turn is quoted by Lejeune stating:
"It is looking much further back for excuses limiting myself to one single chapter of my memoirs. Is it not
true reason for my laziness that our novels express the essential part of ourself? Only fiction does not lie: it
half-opens a hidden door on a man's life, through which slips out of control, his unknown soul. (Lejeune
26)"

possibilities, and having transformed the non-reflective [doing/conduct] into a strategy. From a randomly produced effect he made a goal envisioned in the first place in a quite deliberate way: everything happens as if his work was actually read ahead" (Lejeune 165)[12]

All of Gide's texts can be read in relation the ones with the others like an echo. And this is something of an interest of Gide himself. When in preface of *The Immoralist* he is claiming: "The real interest of a work of art is the one that the future audience gives to it. […] Moreover, I have sought to prove anything, but to well paint and to enlighten well my painting."[13] (Gide 1902, 8) Gide exposes in his work various complex issues about morality without offering a solution. Progressively he draws parts of his character to the world ad his moral and ethical dilemmas. And he does this through a game, a puzzle, a *mise en abyme* of his work. And he enters there through falsifying the Self by presenting it in parts, always elusive, and ambiguous, yet constantly present and never simply reducible to the life of the author (Velkov 2010, 4).

"The Gidean ambiguity ultimately suppose that the reader can't reduce or fixate the position of the author, despite the desire he inevitably had to do so, given the ethical *problems* that are posed in almost all his works. This ambiguity would be implicit or explicit as the author hides or manifests" (Lejeune 1989, 167)

By opening autobiographical theory to the phantasmatic pact. Lejeune creates a theory for autobiographical thinking relating to Gide that offers to the author the permissiveness to voice the spaces of ambiguity of identity. The unstable phantasmatic pact that requires an ethics of sincerity enables the coming out of the author. As Gide puts it: "It would be time for me to tell the truth. But I could tell it only in a work of fiction" (Gide in Lejeune 1981, 28).

---

[12] "Ce que Gide a de particulier, c'est d'avoir explicité le système, d'en avoir vu toutes les possibilités, et d'avoir transformé des conduites non-réfléchies en une stratégie. D'un effet produit aléatoirement il a fait un but visé a priori de manière très volontaire : tout se passe comme si son œuvre était en réalité lue d'avance." (translated by the author) in Velkov p2

[13] "L'intérêt réel d'une œuvre et celui que le public d'un jour y porte […] Au demeurant, je n'ai cherché de rien prouver, mais de bien peindre et d'éclairer bien ma peinture" André Gide, *L'immoraliste*, Mercure de France, coll. Folio, 1986, 8 (translated by the author) in Velkov p. 3

Gide nevertheless wrote autobiographies which even though don't fully follow the

identificatory patterns of Lejeune's proposing he still considered them to be so. These are two

works, *Si le grain ne meurt* published in 1924 which speaks of his youth and sexuality, and *Et*

nunc manet in te from 1947 that focuses on his married life with his cousin Madeleine. These

two works function while reading Gide's works as guidelines around which the rest of his

works resonate as echoes. On the contrary, if one tries to focus on finding the

autobiographical parts in the rest of his works a failure about thinking of *mise en abyme*

occurs. It is as presenting only a paining of Gide as incompletely lived by Gide, and

forgetting about the shield representation of the varied levels of approaching his work that he

offers to every reader. And such reading could be characteristic of Gide's work where:

> "[...] he presents to the reader the extreme, or borderline cases of his own conception of
> freedom which is also a liberation. The game of Gide's texts is a game of fictions that permit
> him to use his "I" without falling into autobiography. At the same time, this allows for him
> 'purging, getting rid of, alteration, complexity' (Correspondance 1893-1938) and in a way his
> work becomes experimentation, remembrance, and auto-critique" [14] (Velkov 2010, 6).

But maybe it is time to use words that might resound in the lines of revealing violence,

actual words. Such as the words used in the work of Scott Manning "Revelation and

Dissimulation in André Gide's Autobiographical Space" (2004). This is how he starts the

debate:

> "Depictions of secrecy and disclosure related to hon-heterosexuality abound in the works
> of André Gide. […] The topic of sexual difference, or non-normative sexuality, is closely
> bound to the workings of secrecy and disclosure in all six[15] of these works, presented through
> techniques of allusion, implication, and negation" (Manning 2004, 318).

---

[14] "Il y présente au lecteur les cas extrêmes, ou les cas-limites, de sa propre conception de la liberté ce qui est
pour lui aussi une libération. Le jeu des textes gidien est le jeu des fictions lui permettant d'utiliser son Je
sans tomber dans l'autobiographie. En même temps, cela lui permet purge, débarras, alternance, complexité
(Correspondance 1893-1938) et, de la sorte, son œuvre devient expérimentation, souvenir et autocritique. "
(translated by the author) in Velkov 6

[15] Saül; Philoctète, Le Roi Candaule, L'Immoraliste, La Porte étroite, Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue.

52

And this work of "secrecy and disclosure"; of the interchangeability between these opposite binaries offers the possibility for a debate over identity and identity politics. Manning furthers the argumentation that a project such as Gide's opens for a reading about the multiplicity of identity. He therefore introduces the work Sedgwick has done on literature of the 20th century:

> "Of her own analytical approach, Sedgwick explains that her 'discussion of each of these structuring binarisms … move[s] through a deconstructive description of the instability of the binary itself, usually couched as the simultaneous interiority and exteriority of a marginalized to a normative term, toward an examination of the resulting definitional incoherence...
> (Segdwick in Manning 2004, 323).

Manning's critique only go so far as to claim that Gide's failures to bring his characters to present disclosure and "come out" is part of the process of self-reflexion that requires a point of reference – an actual word; which in its term, for most of the works of Gide is missing, a secret. His actual coming out is done in *Si le grain ne meurt*. This work participates directly into the debate that maybe so far has not been named as such, that is the debate over the fluid identity or queerness and the politics of (optionally required) identification over sexual and gendered identities. In the case of Gide, he is engaging in the debate since quite some time ago as an exemplification of the white upper-middle class male sexual ambiguities the ways of performing, and the ways of becoming. Gide is essentially bound by the side of language constructive of society itself. Therefore his desires for truth and sincerity are hidden behind the represented discourses of *mise en abyme*. Thus creating confusion, misrepresentation and a shared feeling of shame that provokes the active participation of the reader towards their personal reparation in regards to thinking about their gendered and sexual identities.

Lastly I think about mise en abyme I do not only think of reflexions but also of the

53

meta-form of the trope that is the embodied feeling; the fear and hope of a different telling of the story; through the multiplicity of voices that interpret our experiences, voices we can decide to hear, and follow up, or hush up, or just leave uncared for. Thoughts and positions like paranoia, provoked by fear, and shame, and shame of being afraid or ashamed. Additionally I want to point that the hermeneutics that bring about reflexion are different for each individual. A construction of knowledge that involves *mise en abyme* can after all be a personified experience that radiates a consensual ethics of sincerity into the "I" of the speaker:character:narrator, and represent reality as seen through the multiplicity of reflecting affective states. This in its turn brings about slow change as the effect of the experiences of the affect of surprise are affects of depression and misunderstanding that further teach reconciliation and reparation between the imbalances of the binary existences.

Concluding remarks

We have finally gone out of, at least for a moment, the debates about originality and the vicious circle of infinite mirror reflexions. I have combined the quest for limitless divinity with the personal strategies of everyday survival in order to show some of the ways that queer performativity reflects off of the bodies of people. Yet this is an approach that paranoid critical thinking expels from mainstream participation in the creation of realities, however partial they may be, through language. The workings of *mise en abyme* as reflexive and shielding, yet pointing at least indirectly or shamefully, to that which is not being reflexed or protected, brings to presence its potential for psychological reparative work. The potential of mise en abyme to bring into being its reparative function – in terms of addressing the paranoid position of critical reading – appears through the awareness of everyday essentiallised sets of emotions as affective potentialities that constitute our participation within real worlds and the establishment of the ethical pact of sincerity, which we explored in Gide's work. This work brings with itself shame and depression through the practice of reflexing secrecy and disclosure within *mise en abyme*. Therefore the abyss – in terms of the dark depressive pit as well as the infinite void in which particles randomly appear in front of the apparatus for measuring yet which constitute matter itself – is that which constitutes the space for the existence of embodied queer performativities.

The limitations of writing so shortly on a theory of *mise en abyme* are expansive therefore not all the secrets of *mise en abyme* are out. Some are. And maybe some others are still becoming. Still, we have laid out here some of the most important the paths on which *mise en abyme* takes us, and special attention from future research is necessary to explore how *mise en abyme,* as expanded on so far, influences the tools for analyzing existing and

future media production. This is where the limits of queer performativity lie, within *mise en abyme* as a practice of representation, that can both show and hide its character as well as the origin of the story represented by the use of actual words, or more subtle invocations that provoke misunderstanding, doubt, shame to the reader.

References

Barad, Karen. "Agential realism: Feminist interventions in understanding scientific practices." *The science studies reader* (1999): 1-11.

Barad, Karen. *"Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." Signs 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831*.

Barad, Karen. "Diffractions: Differences, Contingencies, and Entanglements That Matter" in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Duke University Press Books, 2007.

Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Abelove, Henry, ed. *The lesbian and gay studies reader*. Routledge, 2012.

Butler, Judith. "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory." Theatre journal 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.

Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble*. Routledge, 1999.

Dällenbach, Lucien, and Annette Tomarken. "Reflexivity and reading." New Literary History 11, no. 3 (1980): 435-449.

Dällenbach, Lucien. *The mirror in the text*. University of Chicago Press, 1989.

F. R. David, Words. Album "Words," 1982.

Lamb, Darkness. Album "Between Darkness and Wonder," 2003.

Felperin, Howard. "The Anxiety of Deconstruction." *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985): 254-266.

Gide, André. *Journal 1889-1939*. Libraire Gaillmard, 1948.

Gide, André. *L'Immoraliste*. Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1902.

Gide, André. *Paludes.* Gallimard, Éditions de la Nouvelle revue française, 1929.

Hobson, Marian. *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*. Routledge, 2002.

J. M. Cocking, Enid Starkie, and Martin Jarrett-Kerr. 1960. ***Marcel Proust, André Gide, François Mauriac : three studies in modern French literature*. New Haven : Yale University Press.**

Jones, Rachel. *Irigaray*. Polity, 2011.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *The psychology of the transference*. Vol. 16. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits.* Paris, Seuil, 1966: 298

Lafille, Pierre. *André Gide romancier.-Paris: Hachette (1954). XXII, 591 S. 8°*. No. 10. Hachette, 1954.

Lejeune, Philippe. "The autobiographical pact." "Gide and the autobiographical space." *On autobiography*. University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Gide et l'espace autobiographique*. 1975.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique: Signes de vie*. Vol. 1. Seuil, 1975.

Magny, Claude Edmonde. *Histoire du roman français depuis 1918*. Vol. 1. Éditions du Seuil, 1950.

Manning, Scott. "Revelation and dissimulation in André Gide's autobiographical space." *The French Review* (2004): 318-327.

McFarlane, Thomas J. "Quantum physics, depth psychology, and beyond." *RetrievedJanuary 26 (2000): 2007. Last accessed on June 2 2013.* http://www.integralscience.org/psyche-physis.html

Plato "The Republic, Book X" in Cooper, John Madison, and D. S. Hut*chinson. Complete works*. Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Rivers, James Zachary. *Subjectivity without return : reparatively weaving self(s) and other(s) on the same side*. Ma thesis in Gender studies, CEU, Budapest, 2012

Ron, Moshe. "The restricted abyss: Nine problems in the theory of mise en abyme." *Poetics Today* 8, no. 2 (1987): 417-438.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. : "Introduction." "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold, reading Silvan Tomkins." "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer performativity: Henry James' *The Art of the Novel*." "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You." *Touching feeling: Affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Duke University Press Books, 2002.

Szafraniec, Asja. *Beckett, Derrida, and the event of literature*. Stanford University Press, 2007. http://books.google.mk/books?id=MMGniM4cwEgC&pg=PA83&lpg=PA83&dq=derrida+mise+en+abyme&source=bl&ots=GdGYtDrGHL&sig=69uesuBoP7MPm9JGYersYK-L7zs&hl=en&sa=X&ei=vLGBUaLXB4OYtQbLpIHACw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=derrida%20mise%20en%20abyme&f=false

Tomkins, Silvan Solomon. *"Modification 5: The Number of Primary Affects is Differentiated." Affect imagery consciousness: The complete edition*. Springer publishing company, 2008. Last accessed June 2, 2013. http://books.google.mk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=l4GC6rqlmD0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Silvan+Tomkins+affect&ots=YA7fh0kkzr&sig=u0KhBAczXOrt3BtxwXEYiubPrtM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=interest%20excitement%20anger%20dissmell&f=false

Velkov, Nikola. *The autobiographical in* L'Immoraliste *and* Paludes. BA thesis in French language and literature studies, University Sts Cyrille and Methodius, Skopje, 2010.