

Swinburne University of Technology

Dominique Hecq

Beyond the mirror: On experiential knowing as research mode in creative writing

Abstract:

Inherent in ‘practice-led research’ is the dialectic between practice and research. For some time, this dialectic has been problematised in varying ways and to varying degrees across the creative arts in terms that are reminiscent of Deleuze’s ‘disjunctive synthesis’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 14). Further, creative writing has mostly theorised its practice and research according to models offered by the visual arts, thereby ignoring its own ‘domain specificity’ (Baer 2012). This paper, however, posits that creative writing is a way of apprehending, knowing and being in the world; and more specifically it functions simultaneously as a perspective, an epistemology and an ontology specific to *writing*. It argues that our conceptual tools need to be made over in order to fit creative practice in writing: rather than being in thrall to the regime of images, these tools should enable us to deal specifically with writing in relation to the experiential and to subjectivity – that is, from the inside out. Reading Kristeva’s central argument in *Revolution in poetic language* (1974) against the grain, I reassess the relevance of the term ‘practice-led research’ for creative writing, asking how the poetic text can challenge the dominant paradigm and how it can be considered as research. More pointedly, building on Kristeva’s theorisation of the semiotic chora and on Lakoff’s work on metaphor, I ask what the epistemological thrust of creative writing might be, particularly if it is non-mimetic or experimental and hence destabilises polysemy and the syntactic function. I do so by questioning the role of sign, image and metaphor in the process of knowledge production from within an experiential practice which mobilises the unconscious, perception, pre-language and language. In such light, creative writing is a form of research in its own right which triangulates two seemingly mutually exclusive discourses encompassing (tacit) *knowing* and (explicit) *knowledge*.

Biographical note:

Dr Dominique Hecq is Associate Professor at Swinburne University of Technology where she is Research and Discipline Leader in Writing. She has a PhD in literature and a background in French and Germanic languages, with qualifications in translating. She has published in the areas of literary studies, translation, creative writing, psychoanalysis and pedagogy. She is the author of eleven works of creative writing. *Out of bounds* (Re.press) is her most recent collection and *Stretchmarks of sun* is due

out later this year. *The creativity market: Creative writing in the 21st century* has recently been released by Multilingual Matters.

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We are all haunted houses (H.D. 1985: 146)

The house of fiction does not readily admit the self... Your relationship with it, as its creator, is tenuous, complex, subtle, utterly demanding. (Roe 1994: 51)

Mirrors

Creative writers in the academy have been debating the relationship between theory and practice for quite some time now and the emergence of practice-led research has both extended and restricted the boundaries in considering how practitioners contribute to research inquiry (Harper & Kroll 2007; 2012; Krauth & Brady 2006; Magee 2008; 2009; Smith & Dean 2009; Webb & Brien 2009; 2010). In Australia, the emergence of projects such as *Double dialogues* (www.doubledialogues.com) was critical to this debate as these brought practitioners from diverse arts into the conversation. *TEXT* crystallised and re-focused the debate on creative writing. What is striking from this now global debate is how much creative writing owes to the visual arts in terms of theorising practice-led research (see for example Barrett 2007; Barrett & Bolt 2007; Biggs & Büchler 2007; Bolt 2004; Chalmers 1996; Sullivan 2005). Yet as creative writing continues to grapple with the appropriateness of the very term 'practice-led research' it becomes clear that the dominance of the scopic field in research paradigms may hamper the way we think about creative writing research.

Because creative writing is an experiential form of practice involving an intertextuality which is first and foremost intra-textual, that is, played out from within, I argue here that we need conceptual tools tailored to the domain specificity of writing rather than taken off the rack of a germane domain such as the visual arts, or even the wider field of the creative arts. Drawing on the work of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), the practice of *methexis* (Carter 1996: 80) and more specifically on Kristeva's concept of the *chora* (Kristeva 1974: 25-26), I refute that practice-led research is a mere dialectic practice which could be theorised in terms of Deleuze's concept of 'disjunctive synthesis' (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 14) and suggest instead that creative writing research is a triangulation of two seemingly mutually exclusive discourses, one recognising the reality of the unconscious, and the other the importance of rational and critical process. To put it differently, this triangulation would encompass (tacit) *knowing* and (explicit) *knowledge*. This conception naturally collapses the distinction Jen Webb (2012) makes, perhaps reluctantly, when she argues for the recognition of creative practice as either 'creative representation' or 'theoretical investigation' within the contemporary university system. Webb's distinction, of course, reminds us of the spurious, albeit useful distinction between practice-based and practice-led research (Candy 2006). Suffice it to say, the topos of 'beyond practice-led research' provides us with an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between our scholarly arguments and the modes of expression we adopt to record, represent and communicate them. As writers staking a claim for our practice to be regarded as a form of research, we have to consider the consequences of our chosen modes of expression, its appropriateness to our inquiry, its generic assumptions and its epistemic implications. At this point, the term 'creative writing

research' would therefore seem more appropriate than 'practice-led research', if only because creative writing entails seeing, knowing and being in the world: as such creative writing is a perspective, an epistemology and an ontology which all collapse the boundaries between practice-led and practice-based research, as well as research-based practice.

In utilising the term 'practice-led research', the emphasis is on data creation rather than data collection, where research and practice are reciprocal. For Brad Haseman, for example, 'both the artwork itself and the surrounding practices *are* research' (2006 76). There is no doubt that these ephemeral qualities are what make 'practice-led research' and its cousin 'research-led practice' such appealing paradigms for understanding art making, due to their limitless possibilities. At their core, the common goal of these paradigms is to disrupt the known, and thus move us interrogatively to the borderline of the unknown as is the case with the even more encompassing 'artistic research' (Biggs & Karlsson 2010). Finding methods for an artist to examine her own practice has the potential to open vast new avenues of 'knowledge' and may in fact, assist in redefining exactly what knowledge is. The description of practitioners' methods provides a unifying framework, but utilising existing methodologies, that are regulated by form and vocabulary, appears to be problematic. Two recent publications have highlighted these issues; namely *Practice-led research, research-led practice* (Smith & Dean 2009) and *The Routledge companion to research in the arts* (Biggs & Karlsson 2010). In the latter, Donna Lee Brien and Jen Webb explain why the term 'practice-led research' is problematic for creative writing: 'while creative writers do draw on the main body of literature on practice-led research, [they] have to adapt and adopt other methods and modes of approach' (2010: 193), which means that 'much of the recent discourse around practice-led research lacks a comfortable fit with the methods and approaches that suit writing' (Webb & Brien 2010: 193). Importantly, the understanding of research in the humanities, they stress, 'with their focus on the critical, and often *a posteriori*, investigation and interpretation of textual content' (Webb & Brien 2010: 193), does not offer a satisfactory research methodology for creative writers. This may be precisely because creative writing practice and research *are* reciprocal, hereby *creating* a third element which covers the spectrum from *knowing* to *knowledge*.

If only we could map out the nature of this reciprocity, perhaps we could begin to approach the idea of a common idiom in order to speak of creative writing research, and in turn, artistic research which would underscore rather than erase 'the domain specificity of creativity' (Baer 2012). The premise of this paper is that creative writing research is first and foremost an 'experiential knowing' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 19) whereby affects and emotions interact with rational processes. Therefore an understanding of subjectivity is critical to such reciprocal process (Mullin 2010: 185). One way of understanding how this reciprocity works is through studying metaphor, for 'human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 6). Although this might at first seem problematic, I briefly draw on Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live by* (1980) to assist in the transition from the arts to creative writing and then turn to Julia Kristeva's concept of the chora in order to suggest how creative writing research might work as a dialectical practice that is both subversive and

inclusive of the social order, suggesting a triangulation of two modes of apprehending the world rather than a mere dialectic between two mutually exclusive paradigms or discourses as Deleuze would have it (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 14). The triangulation at stake here concerns the interplay between *knowing* and *knowledge*. Knowing would denote grasping a situation or event using prior (unconscious) knowledge and synthesising as well as integrating new information, affects or stimuli into a personal knowledge base. Knowledge, on the other hand, would include identifying and evaluating new (rational) knowledge and making decisions about what the next steps or possible course of action might be.

Ash in the mirror

From the experientialist perspective, say George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, ‘metaphor is a matter of *imaginative rationality*’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235). Because metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another, it enables ‘an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another, creating coherences by virtue of imposing gestalts that are structured by natural dimensions of experience’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235). This is why new metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities, as is ‘obvious in the case of poetic metaphor, where language is the medium through which new conceptual metaphors are created’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235). As we shall see, although seemingly confined to the realm of the symbolic, Lakoff and Johnson’s point about metaphor does not necessarily exclude Kristeva’s concept of the metaphorical object which concerns the very splitting that establishes the psyche and ‘bends the drive toward the symbolic of an other’ (Kristeva 1983: 31).

For, as Lakoff and Johnson rightly point out, metaphor is not merely a matter of language:

It is a matter of conceptual structure ..., [which] involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc. *These dimensions structure not only mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well. Each art medium picks out certain dimensions of our experience and excludes others.* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235. My emphasis)

This may explain why ‘much of the recent discourse around practice-led research lacks a comfortable fit with the methods and approaches that suit writing’ (Webb & Brien 2010: 193), dominated as it is by the scopic field and associated dualistic paradigms of what constitutes knowledge and research. In order to examine the relationship between ‘mundane experience’ and ‘aesthetic experience’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235), or ‘language’ and ‘conceptual structure’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 235), we need to pay attention to the nature of subjectivity, and more particularly to the intersection between the symbolic and the imaginary (of which the semiotic partakes) at the heart of subjectivity. I address this nexus in the next section, invoking writings by academics, arts practitioners and psychoanalysts. My main focus will be Kristeva’s concept of the *chora* (Kristeva 1974: 25-26).

‘The world’, writes Morwenna Griffiths, ‘is understood through the body and perceptions of our bodies constrain our relationships with others and our relationships

with others and ourselves' (Griffiths 2010: 169). Arguably, this observation was made by the British painter, psychologist and psychoanalyst Mary Milner (1952; 1971) long before her writing was published and long before it entered the realm of theory in different guises. Nonetheless, it is also at the heart of the imaginary as Jacques Lacan first conceptualised it (Lacan 2002 [1949]: 75-82) and as Julia Kristeva (1974; 1980) later reconceptualised it according to her own psychoanalytic orientation. Yet, as Lacan and Kristeva show in their differing ways, if art making is a way of making sense of ourselves including 'our relationships with others' (Griffiths 2010: 169), this process is and ought to be mediated through language.

Lacan's initial 'return to Freud' demonstrates that Freud was in fact the first to identify the important role that language played in the psychic life of human beings. Much has been made of Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' (1949) to argue that it is only when the child acquires language that the unconscious begins to form and therefore that no real or true self exists before the acquisition of language. This view, which presupposes that the imaginary is just a stage in human development, and not an inherent component thereof, is erroneous, for Lacan's tripartite conception of subjectivity only mirrors Freud's earlier model. As such, it is a linguistic model and it emphasises that we, as subjects, are created by language and culture.

Thus, at the risk of simplifying too much, for Lacan there is no true self, only a 'divided subject' who can only re-invent herself through language because 'truth has the structure of fiction' (Lacan 1977: 12).

French literary and cultural theorist Julia Kristeva, strongly influenced by Lacan, also believes that the subject is an effect of language; and that we do not become fully conscious of ourselves until language acquisition. However, unlike Lacan, she posits a role for pre-linguistic affectivity and perception in our sense of self. Thus in her doctoral thesis *Revolution in poetic language* (1974) she flies in the face of Lacan's imago in the mirror, as it were. Drawing on Plato's *Timaeus*, Kristeva famously revised the notion of 'chora', to evoke an imaginary space where subjectivity begins through awareness of sounds, rhythms and bodily sensations (Kristeva 1974: 25-26). This pre-linguistic 'semiotic' realm of experience is, it should be stressed, not lost when the subject moves into the realm of language and remains as an essential part of signification or meaning making. It is particularly prominent in poetic language, which Kristeva maintains, has the power to disrupt our tendency to take on fixed identities in language by enhancing our capacity as 'subjects-in-process' (Kristeva 1974: 28).

Kristeva's departure from Lacan, influenced as it was by the work of Melanie Klein, is her own 'return to Freud'. In *Revolution in poetic language* (1974), she argues that Freud's theory of the drives is the key to the 'semiotic', and therefore to the negativity of poetic language repressed by the bourgeois symbolic system, of which, in her view, Lacan's writings partake. *Revolution in poetic language* refers to the capacity of poetic language to bring symbolic performance to interact intimately with its own process of production, namely what Kristeva calls *signifiance*, for *signifiance* involves a performance that is not simply symbolic. Semiotic performance, though paired with

the symbolic function, is distinct. However, as we shall see, these two functions meet at the heart of the Freudian drive.

The central argument of *Revolution in poetic language*, however, is that poetic language of the non-mimetic or experimental kind is the means by which the ideological notions of subject, structure and meaning can most readily be challenged:

Within this saturated if not already closed socio-symbolic order, poetry—more precisely, poetic language—reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it. The theory of the unconscious seeks the very thing that poetic language practices within and against the social order: the ultimate means of transformation or subversion, the precondition for its survival and revolution.... Literature has always been the most explicit realization of the signifying subject's condition. Indeed it was in literature starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, that the dialectical condition of the subject was made explicit, beginning in France with the work of Nerval, but particularly with Lautréamont and Mallarmé (Kristeva 1974: 81-82).

In viewing the text as a revolutionary practice whose operations cannot be recuperated by the linguistic sign (Kristeva 1974), Kristeva's concept of the semiotic sees the literary work 'as irreducible to the level of an object for normative linguistics' (Kristeva 1986: 86). Thus Kristeva establishes the specificity of the literary work by viewing it as different from other modes of discourse, hereby reinstating the distinction between the literary and the non-literary concept of the text. This distinction is reinforced by Kristeva's assertion that literature, and more particularly poetry, may work against the social order. Claiming that poetry's rhythmical patterns, rhyme schemes and intonations have already performed an opening in the linguistic sign, Kristeva suggests that poetic language is the means by which the ideological notions of subject, structure and meaning can most readily be undermined. In a similar vein, although Kristeva insists that 'literature does not exist for semiotics' (1986: 86), that it is merely one productive practice among many with no particularly privileged status, she argues that the poetic text has the 'advantage' of 'making more accessible than others the production of meaning' (1986: 86). At first, the modern text, written after the 'epistemological break' in the late nineteenth century, is in her view most effective in this regard. In Lautréamont's *Poésies II*, for example, she finds that the accumulation of short, choppy sentences produces an 'accelerated rhythm that engages the reader in a way that makes their meaning fade into the background' (Kristeva 1974: 354), while Sollers' *Nombres* performs a similar function by disrupting syntax and privileging the auditory register over the visual register of language (Kristeva 1974: 356). In a lecture delivered at the Collège de France in 1975, Kristeva acknowledges that her thesis may be applied to all poetic texts (in Lucy 2000: 77-79).

As suggested above, the practice of writing is an experiential activity which mobilises both unconscious and conscious processes. As such it presupposes an intertextuality which is intra-textual; that is, played out from within. From reading Kristeva's (1974) *Revolution in poetic language* (and earlier work such *Semiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969)), the privileging of these textual aspects would seem to go against the grain of Kristeva's argument. The *semiotic chora* makes its impact through *negativity* (the negativity at work in the Hegelian dialectic as the play of contradiction

and which Kristeva conceptualises via Freud as material process), through which the rhythm of drives and their ephemeral stases impacts at the level of the *thetic* or the threshold of the symbolic (stabilising syntax, maintenance of hierarchical order, of logical procedure, grammaticality, stability of register, tendency to the monological etc.). As this paper recognises, Kristeva's argument is not so much about the *sign* as entity, but what radically *destabilises*, disrupts and dissolves the sign (*into the metonymic relay of signifiers*) and thus what destabilises the 'unitary' subject before the symbolic as Law of the Father. The *semiotic chora* is the space where the subject's originary split is *re-iterated* (rather than smoothed over as in the Lacanian mirror stage). Negativity is a play of contradictions, a movement of destabilising and heterogeneous drives which, when at work in an avant-garde text (taken as working through the materiality of the signifier), leads to the potential infinitisation of signifiers and, in extreme cases, the pulverisation of subjectivity. However, in later works Kristeva increasingly conceives of the poetic text as destabilising and even warns against this movement of negativity and calls for the containment of the semiotic by the symbolic for the text (and the writer) not to break into the realm of the psychotic (see for example her radical advocating of sublimation in the context of *The sense and non-sense of revolt* (2002: 54-57)).

While the Kristevan semiotic is at first understood as the engine of creative work in avant-garde poetic language, it must also be taken *in its dynamic relation* with the symbolic. One of the two key writers Kristeva focuses on in the first half of *Revolution in poetic language* (1974) is Mallarmé, who wrote of his own experimentation that there needs to be a guarantee against the dissolution of all meaning: that is syntax. In her analyses of Mallarmé, Kristeva looks at negativity working in terms of sound (paranomastic play, or the sound chains which she, after Saussure's 'anagrams', termed 'paragrams'). The paragram, running through an avant-garde text such as Mallarmé's, tends to dissolve the boundaries of lexemes, or signifiers, and thus 'pulverise' the subject implied in the text in what Lacan called *jouissance*, which as the term denotes in French, is a form of enjoyment to excess, and therefore bordering on suffering. For Kristeva, the gaps in the poetic text, as in the work of Céline or Barthes, it should be stressed, fulfil a similar function to syntax (2002), that is as stop gaps against subjective dissolution (see also Hecq 2011).

Nonetheless, despite ambiguities and shifts of an ideological nature, for Kristeva, the early life of the drive consists essentially of instinctual activity. As such it is a primordial registering of the infant's encounter with the symbolic through the (m)other upon whom she entirely relies for survival. Kristeva conceives of the semiotic *chora* on the principle that 'corporeal life before the appearance of linguistic capacities, which, since it is a life dependent on and thereby exposed to the symbolic of another, is never mere corporeal life' (Beardsworth 2004: 44). Thus the *chora* denotes 'an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases' (Kristeva 1974: 25-26). This is of critical importance for creative writing as in this light, all discourse, that is, everything within the field supported by the distinction between the symbolic and the real, depends on and refuses this realm of the not-yet-symbolised in which the inside versus outside, and consequently subject versus object positions are not yet established.

Revolution in poetic language (1974) explicates the concept of the drives as an economy that takes into account the primordial impact of the symbolic encounter regarding the emergence of the sign itself and the ensuing configuration of the death drive. Interestingly, the most archaic moment in Kristeva's logic of the drives can be captured in a metaphor, thus showing how conceptual work is performed by metaphor. The logic of this movement is likened to the formation, breaking off and moving of wave patterns on a shoreline, conveying that drives and their vicissitudes are *both* corporeal and psychic inscriptions. Kristeva therefore stresses the meaning of the drive as an articulation, more particularly in terms of 'rhythmic totality' (Kristeva 1974: 68) which orients and connects the infant's body to the mother's body.

Although this 'rhythmic totality' of the chora is conceived of as a preliminary space, it manifests itself only at the symbolic level, presupposing the 'break' which posits the signifier/signified articulation, as well as the positions of object (outside) and subject (absent from the signifier). Semiotic functioning in the symbolic field is 'an activation [...] of the heterogeneous contradiction of semiotic and symbolic' (Kristeva 1974: 171), which is precisely Kristeva's *signifiance* or signifying process. The affirmation of art, and more specifically a modern non-mimetic kind of literature, in *Revolution in poetic language* (1974) rests on the claim that the heterogeneous contradiction of the semiotic and symbolic is recovered when significations, by which Kristeva means the meanings that compose prevailing discourses, are taken apart and thereby returned to their non-signifying, drive-invested elements, which are then amenable to a reconfiguration.

This thought makes up Kristeva's psychoanalytic version of the project in which modern literature departs from its role as representation (of an outside object) and seeks out the conditions of its own appearance as work. In this version what is vital is the thesis that certain material supports – voice, tone, inflection, gesture, colour, for example – are susceptible to the imprint of semiotic motility, and hence drive-rejection. The semiotic network is 'more or less integrated as a *signifier*' (Kristeva 1974: 47) and this is what enables the semiotic combinatorial system to obtain 'the complex articulation we associate with it in musical and poetic practices' (Kristeva 1974: 68). Poetic language brings semiotic motility to bear on symbolic functioning that is literally powerless in the face of a referent-less though mastering signification. In Beardsworth's words, 'dismantling the meaningful object (representation, idea, thing), deprives the object of the unity which it obtains in the specular captivation (optical, as in the mirror stage, and/or conceptual), substituting signifying elements for the meaningful object' (2004: 47). This crystallises Kristevan thought regarding the semiotic impact on the symbolic in the radical modernist text and by extension on all poetic texts of the non-mimetic or experimental kind.

The signifying elements – signifiers – are drive-invested fragments, notably rhythm, tone, inflection, colour, or words, which tend to return to non-symbolic negativity, which is to say, semiotic functioning. Although the return to the signifying elements brings the subject and meaning to the threshold of drive-rejection, in poetic language the fragments are equally subject to a combinatory moment – 'fitting together, detaching, including, and building up "parts" into some kind of "totality"' – which

prevents symbolic dissolution (Kristeva 1974: 102). It would thus seem that for Kristeva:

... the poetic text is rhythm made intelligible by a symbolic barrier. Moreover, given that the semiotic network is more or less integrated in the signifier, non-symbolic functioning is always in excess of intelligible translation, an excess that represents the possibility of the return and renewal of poetic subversion. (Beardsworth 2004: 47)

That the poetic text is made intelligible by a symbolic barrier is not lost to this reader/writer, as it has major repercussions on the way Lacan's concept of *suppléance* as both device and process may be both articulated and understood (see for example Hecq 2011; 2010; 2008). It may also shed light on the very mechanism which prevents subjective dissolution. To come back to Kristeva's seeming paradox, though, whereby on the one hand, the heterogeneous contradiction of the semiotic and symbolic never goes so far as the complete loss of symbolic functioning, and on the other hand, symbolic functioning can never fulfil the abstraction from semiotic functioning, it should be stressed that symbolic functioning as such involves a refusal of the semiotic, and a social symbolic order may be especially inflexible with respect to that refusal. This is Kristeva's thought when she characterises the bourgeois social symbolic system as what brings everything back within the field of unity. That is to say, the bourgeois symbolic system suppresses the recognition that symbolic functioning involves a refusal of the semiotic. In these conditions, poetic language recovers the dynamic relationship between the semiotic and symbolic dimensions of language (Beardsworth 2004: 48), as opposed to academic language, for example.

Thinking 'agnostically' (see Webb & Brien 2009), this conception fractures the nexus between, on the one hand, lack and desire, and on the other, form, knowledge and subjectivity. It enables a reconfiguration of the relationship between art-making and subjectivity in terms of a sustained dynamic dialectic that is necessarily transformative. This reconfiguration can be further theorised in terms of the performative principle of *methexis* (μέθεξις), a term denoting the relation between a particular and a form in philosophy (Plato), group sharing in Greek theatre, or a 'non-representational principle that involves an act of concurrent actual production' (Carter 1996: 84) in practice-led research. As an act of concurrent actual production, *methexis* is transformative and not merely representational. It engenders a material transformation that is not of a representational mode. Translated in Kristevan terms, this material transformation is enacted in the *chora*, or more particularly at the intersection of the symbolic and imaginary, and as such it constitutes a form of knowing, or 'fore-knowledge', if one wanted to shift epistemological paradigms (the root of mathematics is *mathesis*, itself meaning fore-knowledge).

What is critical here is that as an experiential practice viewed through the lens of *methexis*, creative writing is an 'act of concurrent actual production' through which embodied knowledge is produced (Carter 1996: 80), and therefore an act of research in its own right. Meanings emerge by accretion, oscillating between intuitive and reflective modes of knowledge creation. Rather than meaning being revealed or clarified, it is also through experiential practice that social meanings are produced. This is *methexis* in operation and not representation. In this scheme, the terms of the economy of representation shift and accrue. Images or words no longer stand in for

concepts, ideas or things, nor are they mere signs that ceaselessly circulate; rather meaning is produced as an embodied, situated event structurally akin to metaphor whereby rhythm, voice, tone, inflection, colour, image and word are reconfigured into patterns. This reconfiguration indeed *works like a metaphor*: it has an internal logic and it produces material effects. To put it differently, in methexis a pattern begins to emerge from amongst the swirling shapes of relational analogies. Methexis digs desires out of the hole of lack, as it were, and locates it in the drives. This is congruent with Kristeva's view of desire as activation or actualisation of the drives; a series of practices, bringing things together or separating them, making things, making reality, for desire does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it seeks – rather it aims at nothing above its own (metonymic) proliferation or self-expansion. It assembles elements out of singularities and breaks these into further singularities, which appears to conjure up the Deleuzian concept of 'disjunctive synthesis', except that in the case of disjunctive synthesis, it is linear, chronological time that is most crucially undermined, time as a causal connector and developmental ground for both understanding and intervention. For Kristeva, time in the activation of the drives, and hence in poetic practice at work, is abolished. The time of the semiotic chora is past-present-future and this time-less-no-time knows no negation – yet.

Liquefying the ash

The relationship between these two approaches or paradigms is not obvious. It does not constitute a dialectical correlation, but rather an entanglement at the heart of 'experiential knowing' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 19). It is as though in the act of creating we are haunted by a non-dialectical relationship between necessity and will, unconscious and rational processes. As such it is not a 'disjunctive synthesis' (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 14) as is the case with Deleuze's conception of the 'vitality' of Being, which is a productive univocity, but rather a triangulation of two orders. One way of understanding how this triangulation works is, as I have suggested here, through understanding metaphor in a way that takes account of the reality of the unconscious via the semiotic chora, for 'human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 6): we do indeed describe things in terms of other things felt, heard or merely sensed – rhythms, images, affects, sounds, or words.

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