Sex, Literature and Communication

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Summary

This paper addresses the question of the literary representation of the relationship between sex and communication by focusing on a number of pertinent instances in literature (and in one case cinema) where clues are afforded concerning the generation of meaning in this area of human experience. Various philosophical-theoretical perspectives are employed to shed light on the specificity of communication in a sexual context, guided by the question whether communication is more basic than sex or vice versa. It is especially the work of Kristeva that enables one, finally, to grasp sex – as represented in literature or cinema – as being comprehensible in terms of the *semiotic*, as opposed to the *symbolic*, mode of signification.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die literêre voorstelling van die relasie tussen seks en kommunikasie deur op 'n aantal pertinente letterkundige gevalle (asook een in die rolprentkuns) te fokus wat leidrade verskaf oor die skepping van betekenis in hierdie veld van menslike ervaring. Verskeie filosofies-teoretiese perspektiewe word benut om lig te werp op die spesifieke aard van kommunikasie in 'n seksuele konteks, gedagtig aan die fundamentele vraag of kommunikasie meer basies is as seks of omgekeerd. Dit is veral die werk van Kristeva wat 'n mens uiteindelik in staat stel om seks – soos dit in literatuur en die rolprentkuns voorgestel word – aan die hand van die *semiotiese*, soos onderskeibaar van die *simboliese*, betekenisregister te begryp.

In Roald Dahl's short story, "The Last Act" (Dahl 1976: 81-111),[1] one witnesses a splendid instance, in literary terms, of how not to communicate in the context of a sexual relationship, or in this case, a brief sexual encounter. Yet, for someone to miscommunicate in such a fashion that the attempt to make love – or perhaps rather, to have sex – fails so miserably, he or she either has to be pathetically inept at communicating in such a situation fraught with pitfalls of all kinds, *or* ... as it happens in this case (and as I will show), the person in question could be brilliant as a "communicator" (manipulator?); to such a degree, in fact, that the effect and the response on the part of the interlocutor are predictable. One could call it communicative manipulation – or what Habermas terms "strategic action", as opposed to "communicative

action", where, in the case of the former, the "communication" is disingenuous, proceeding on the basis of a hidden agenda aimed at gaining power over the other, while the latter embodies a genuine attempt at "reaching" the other by putting all one's so-called "validity claims" on the table, as it were (Brand 1990: 15-16). In the case of strategic action, of course, such validity claims are scrupulously kept out of sight, even if fake ones – pseudo-validity claims – may indeed be, and often are offered for the sake of attaining strategic goals.

It is not coincidental that my point of departure here is literature – a short story, as well as other literary texts and one cinematic instance. Part of my aim in this paper is to explore the extent to which a certain kind of literature – or the literary employment of a certain mode of signification, to be more exact – has the capacity to impart an awareness of mostly unacknowledged levels or registers of communication and miscommunication, here specifically concerning sex, by the way the latter is represented – so much so that interstitial communicational spaces which are usually ignored, suddenly swim into focus, revealing their colours for the first time, as it were. I believe that Julia Kristeva's work on the *semiotic*, as opposed to the *symbolic* niveau of signification provides the literary-theoretical means for appropriating (among other things) the communicational import of literarily represented sexual transactions between individuals which may assume the contours of either "strategic" or "communicative" action. While my focus here is literary (and cinematic) fiction, and Kristeva's distinction pertains primarily to different, but co-existing modes of literary language, the upshot of her work is that these modes of signification function at the level of the lifeworld – in ordinary, everyday communication – as well, because this is where they are rooted.

How does "strategic action" function in Dahl's "The Last Act" (1976)? When Anna and Conrad, having made contact with each other again after an interlude of more than twenty years, meet each other in the bar of her hotel (see Note 1 for the background to this meeting), the stage is set for (in Habermasian terms) either communicative action or strategic action between them. From their exchanges it seems fairly clear that Anna has no hidden agenda of the type that motivates strategic action – she was feeling lonely and, as she candidly confessed to Conrad over the phone earlier (Dahl 1976: 93), in need of a friend. But what about Conrad? After some of the usual pleasantries, including informing each other about their present life-circumstances (such as the fact that Conrad has been divorced from his wife for a long time and that he is a gynaecologist and obstetrician), he slowly, systematically, starts eliciting from her an account of the state of her health in relation to her husband Ed's death. Anna finds it easy to relate the full story to him, including the suicidal tendencies that she experienced in the face of the unbearable loss of her husband, lover and lifelong companion. Conrad listens attentively to her every word. Nor does he miss an opportunity to inform her – apparently

reluctantly – about the detrimental effects of her favourite drink, a gin martini, as well as the cigarettes that she smokes, on her health. And not simply on her health in general terms; for all appearances, she has to draw the "truth" from him in this regard, namely that the juniper berry oil in gin "has a direct inflammatory effect upon the uterus" (p. 97), and, a little later, that the menthol in her cigarettes "is a well-known anti-aphrodisiac" (p. 100). In other words, he steers the conversation in the direction of her sexuality.

From here – the effect of gin and menthol on her sexual health – it is but a short step to a related topic, namely their relationship years ago, which ended abruptly when she met Ed Cooper. To Anna's disconcertment – given the fact that he almost immediately started dating Araminty, the woman he eventually married – Conrad makes no bones about the devastating effect that it had on him when Anna dropped him. The words he employs to get this across are so extreme – "quite a shock", "I lost a wife!", "just about destroyed me" (pp. 101-102) – that Anna can't help responding by telling him that she has "a queer feeling" that he still hates her for jilting him so long ago (p. 102). Instead of answering her, Conrad uses the gap to make a pass at her, phrasing it as "a bit of unfinished business" (p. 103). Not surprisingly, she is taken aback by this bold move, which reminds her that she has only made love to and been made love to – wonderfully, passionately – by one man, her husband, Ed, in her entire life. She also recalls that, in light of her long depression after Ed's death, her doctor told her in no uncertain terms that she needs to have a sexual relationship with another man to get back to normality – something she could hardly imagine (pp. 103 -104). But this was different. Conrad was, after all, her boyfriend years ago, and he was still as dashingly handsome – like a Greek mythological hero – as ever. Hence, after another gin martini, which made her feel (as it always did) as if she was floating, she lets Conrad guide her out of the bar towards the elevators and into her room.

If there was any doubt before, it is here that the signs emerge unmistakably that Conrad is a past master at "strategic action" – that is, what seems and has appeared, for all intents and purposes, to be linguistic as well as tactile-sexual signifiers embodying intended, straightforwardly decodable meanings, gradually assume another, countervailing meaning, even to the point that it bathes what preceded their sexual engagement in a different, rather sinister light. Recall his unsolicited, yet ostensibly reluctant revelations about the detrimental effects of gin and menthol on Anna's sexual being. This should be kept in mind, as should what follows concerning the sexual-somatic interaction between Conrad and Anna, with a view to interpreting Dahl's literary elaboration on what I hope to show (in literary-theoretical and philosophical terms) is a very specific mode of signifying practice. Once in her room, he commences making love to her enthusiastically and deliberately, "kissing her with great gusto" (p. 105) and using his tongue in her ear, "electrifying" her,

sending Anna into a frenzy of desire. When they finally sit down on the bed to take off their clothes, Conrad suddenly remarks on her scalp showing signs of hair follicle-inflammation, which could cause baldness. When Anna suggests ordering a bottle of champagne, he refuses and tells her rather abruptly to stand up, proceeding to undress her further and dropping her clothes unceremoniously on the floor. Then he turns away from her "as though she didn't exist" and proceeds undressing himself (p. 107). Anna, meanwhile, has not been unaware of what seems to be a sudden change of mood on Conrad's part. Dahl gives his readers telling clues regarding Conrad's strategic intentions where he describes the methodical, almost mechanical manner in which he undresses before the fascinated Anna:

> She became hypnotized watching him. She was watching his fingers, the surgeon's fingers, as they untied and loosened the laces of the left shoe, easing it off the foot, and placing it neatly half under the bed. The right shoe came next. Then the left sock and the right sock, both of them being folded together and laid with the utmost precision across the toes of the shoes. Finally the fingers moved up to the top of the trousers, where they undid one button and then began to manipulate the zipper. The trousers, when taken off, were folded along the creases, then carried over to the chair. The underpants followed.
>
> (Dahl 1976: 108)

One would probably not often be wrong in doubting the authenticity of passion or desire on the part of someone who is able to be this cold-bloodedly methodical in a situation where engaging with one's lover or partner should be (and usually is, one would hope) given distinct priority over folding up one's clothes.[2] (As will become apparent later, Dahl's description of Conrad's actions here is crucial in terms of a certain mode of meaning-generation, specifically what Kristeva terms the "semiotic".) Naked now, Conrad sits down on the bed next to Anna, and eventually, to her great relief, pulls her down on the bed next to him, where he starts touching her expertly and, to her, exquisitely, triggering another frenzy on her part. Dahl's (p. 109) description of Anna's sexual experience at his hands highlights Conrad's strategic "communicational" – perhaps rather "technical" – ability to impart to his sex partner all the pleasure that she could wish for, as well as Anna's contrasting somatic rhythm of subjecting herself completely to the imperatives of passion. When he has lifted her up, so to speak, to a summit of irreversible pleasurable anticipation, he swiftly swings his body on top of hers, and

> now Anna felt her passion being drawn out of her as if a long live nerve were being drawn slowly out of her body, a long live thread of electric fire, and she cried out to Conrad to go on and on and on and on and on, and as she did so, in the middle of it all, somewhere above her, she heard another voice, and this other

voice grew louder and louder, more and more insistent, demanding to be heard.
(Dahl 1976: 109)

The other voice, of course, is Conrad's, and – incongruously, in the middle of the most crucial moments of the sex act (what might have been a love act) – he is demanding from her to inform him whether she is "wearing" something because, he claims, there is some kind of "obstruction". Predictably, the more insistently and persistently he addresses her in this peremptory tone, the more Anna is inexorably dragged back from ecstasy, to the point where she becomes aware of Conrad as someone who is, inexplicably, interrupting a joyous surrender to intense sexual pleasure for the sake of imparting to her a bit of irrelevant – given her unambiguous expression of enjoyment – mundane information. Even when Anna, interrupted, and finally able to talk, assures him that she is not wearing an appliance of any kind, adding that everything is "wonderful", and that he should "be quiet" (p. 109; what more does a lover need?!), Conrad continues on the road to disaster, pedantically giving her clinical instructions on the "proper manner" to insert a diaphragm. This is more than Anna can take, and, realising that their sexual encounter is beyond redemption, she informs Conrad that she is feeling sick, and that she would like him "to go now" (pp. 109-110). Ostensibly taken aback by her change in mood, Conrad seems to do his best to persuade her to calm down, and tells her that she cannot "suddenly change [her] mind like this, in the middle of everything" (p. 110). Refusing to let her go, Conrad suddenly seems to Anna to resemble a gigantic toad, "gripping her with everything he has", and urging her to "stop struggling". Just to get rid of him, she cries out that he is hurting her "terribly", but instead of letting her go, he proceeds to explain to her that this is because she is "not manufacturing any fluid", and that the "mucosa is virtually dry " (p. 110). To add insult to injury, Conrad even informs her of the name of this supposed condition (p. 111): "The actual name is senile atrophic vaginitis. It comes with age, Anna. That's why it's called *senile* vaginitis. There's not much one can do ...". Then Anna starts screaming – screams of utter agony – to which Conrad responds by rolling off and away from her, pushing her aside so forcibly that she falls on the floor.

When one reaches this point in the narrative, it comes as no surprise to read that Anna, after slowly getting to her feet, staggers into the bathroom, calling Ed's name repeatedly, like a mantra, and closing the door behind her. Equally unsurprisingly, one is informed that Conrad lies still, listening intently to the sounds of sobbing emanating from the bathroom, until the metallic sound is heard of a cabinet door opening – a sound that galvanises him into action, dressing himself quickly, wiping lipstick from his face, combing his hair and checking the room before carefully stepping out into the corridor and shutting the door gently behind him. The rest – Anna's departure from this world in an

effort to rejoin her dead husband and only lover in another – is left to the reader's imagination.

Why does the "communication" (or perhaps rather "one-way information-flow") between Conrad and Anna fail? In a nutshell, because Conrad orchestrates it – successfully – as "strategic action", with a view to exercising power in the shape of revenge over her (for being jilted by her many years ago). It should not be difficult to grasp that, by clinically commenting on pertinent parts of Anna's body, or on some or other physical condition that he ostensibly detects in her, even when his technical manipulation of her body is expertly done to begin with, Conrad is engaged in reducing what *could* be "lovemaking" to mere physical manipulation (Latin *manus*: hand), that is, literally handling her body, instead of engaging her *communicatively* in tactile-sexual and affective terms as a person. To engage with someone as an act of sexual-communicative action, one would have to be attuned to one's lover at the level of reciprocal passion, which here becomes something shared, and, moreover, something which both lovers are in a sense "subject to", and to which a certain commensurate mode of meaning-generation – what Kristeva calls the "semiotic" – is indispensable. Intuitively therefore, most of Dahl's readers, I'm willing to wager, would understand why Anna is left cold, very cold, by this hopelessly inappropriate, reductionistic approach on Conrad's part. But what does it mean to engage someone *as a person*, sexually or otherwise, through communicative actions? And especially in the case of communication *in the course of* – or perhaps in the very form of – love-making between two people? I ask these questions advisedly, given the general tendency, in current cultural practices concerning human bodies – themselves situated in the context of a global culture of the "image" – to "glamorise" one's body optimally via gym routines aimed at producing maximally "toned and tuned" bodies,[3] clad in designer clothes and combined with cosmetic and hair fashions similarly aimed at embodying the "cool" look of what Susan Faludi (1999: 35)[4] has so aptly labelled "ornamental culture". In such a culture young lovers are constantly bombarded with information in various shapes and media to the effect that *all* that matters in matters of sex and sexuality (the two concepts not being interchangeable) is one's body, especially as far as appearances are concerned, the rest being at best incidental. While it is a truism that one's body is indispensable in a sexual encounter – even in cybersex, through iconic representation and imaginative suggestion via virtual textual exchanges – it may easily be forgotten that what makes human sexuality and the sex that is made possible by it distinctive, is human subjects' capacity for language (or more broadly for signifying), and the ability to communicate that depends on one's subjectivity being thoroughly linguistic in the encompassing sense. In fact, Virgil Aldrich (1963: 103), in a book on the philosophy of art, makes the pertinent observation that among all the materials of the arts,

language is in a sense privileged because it is "closest to being our form of life", as evidenced by the fact that one (even) talks in the course of making love, instead of sculpting or painting.

Hence, instead of following Habermas (in Roderick 1986: 85-86) where he points to the anticipated "ideal society" as an approximation, if not exemplar, of the so-called "ideal speech situation", where undistorted communication is most likely to occur, I am inclined to follow the American philosopher Karsten Harries instead, who once remarked that "lovers' talk" would be a far better model of the ideal speech situation.[5] And indeed – to anyone eavesdropping on two lovers exchanging "sweet nothings", or, for that matter, expressions of eternal devotion, what may seem utterly vacuous in communicational terms is usually perfectly understood by the lovers concerned. The question is: why? What makes love-making, not only, but also in the course of individuals engaging in sex, such a communicationally exemplary activity? A clue to answering this question is afforded by a distinction that is often overlooked: love-making *usually* involves sex and lust, but not the other way around. However, love-making could, and does frequently occur at a communicational level where the physical sexual act does not (yet) happen, as in a telephone conversation (or an erotically charged exchange of e-mail and/or sms-messages) where there is verbal love-making. Where this happens, it enhances or "informs" the mutuality of the sex when it does take place. Moreover, as sexologists would probably confirm, where sexual relations have broken down between individuals, it invariably has something to do with a breakdown in communication, and the sexual "problems" in question are a symptom or function of a problematical communicational relation. Why? Why is sex such a precarious locus of human interaction that the question of whether or not two (or perhaps more?) individuals are "reaching" or "connecting with" each other receives an affirmative or a negative answer in the warm or, alternatively, cold light that it generates?

On the way to attempting to answer this question, I would claim that, unless the linguistic mark of human sexuality finds expression in fully communicative sexual exchanges between individuals, and sex were to be reduced to mere bodies copulating, there would be no essential difference between sex with another person and bestial sex (that is, with an animal), or with a blow-up rubber doll – something implicit in Aldrich's remark referred to earlier. Don't get me wrong on this – while I agree with Aldrich that we differ as a species from other species in so far as we are creatures who engage in love-talk when we "make love" (that is, "generate" love), it is not only through strictly *verbal* language that one communicates with one's lover in the act of love-making – body-language can be as effective a part of love-making, if not more so. From Dahl's fictional example we already know that a certain kind of language-employment may actually be destructive of the mutuality or reciprocity of the

event. It may even be the case that, in the absence of "normal" linguistic communication in the narrow sense of "linguistic" – that is, pertaining to "natural" languages like English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, and so on – "sexual" or erotic communication may flourish. In Jane Campion's film, *The Piano* (1992), for instance, the central character, Ada (Holly Hunter), who is mute – apparently by choice, metaphorically ostensibly providing affirmation of Lacan's claim (in Lee 1990: 177-178) that woman has no place or subject position in the symbolic realm – communicates through written notes as well as sign language, but is most fully "herself", communicatively speaking, when she is playing her beloved piano – in other words, when she is communicating through music, a medium that escapes the abstract symbolic realm of language.

The piano accompanies her to New Zealand, where her "husband" (Sam Neill) by arranged marriage leaves the cumbersome instrument behind on the beach when she and her daughter (Anna Paquin) are fetched there with their belongings. Her silent, persistent presence, rather than her request that he take them (herself and her daughter) back to the beach, eventually persuades her husband's neighbour, George Baines (Harvey Keitel), to do so, and one witnesses her playing the piano on the beach throughout the day with a blissful expression on her face, her daughter dancing and playing on the sand and a perplexed, but communicatively susceptible, Baines looking at her while the sounds of the piano surround and embrace them. One gets the impression that it is Ada's playing that has entranced, captivated George Baines because – to cut a long story short – he persuades Ada's husband to barter the piano for a piece of land that he owns, on the subterfuge that he wants to learn how to play it. It seems fairly inevitable that it is Ada who becomes his supposed piano teacher – "supposed", because it turns out that George only wants to "learn" by listening to Ada playing the piano. And it is here that Campion shows her understanding of the kind of communication at stake in a (not-yet but incipient?) sexual or erotic relationship, for what George is intent on "learning" is not piano-playing in any ordinary sense.

George lends credence to Schopenhauer's contention (1969: 257) that music is the immediate embodiment of the irrational will (as opposed to reason), when Ada's playing moves him to persuade her by bargaining for the (return to her of the) piano to grant him various "favours". These include *seeing* and *touching* her arms, her shoulders, her stockinged legs – already plenty in the Victorian age of scrupulously covering people's bodies, especially female ones – and eventually her nude body, lying next to him on his bed. Campion's camera follows George where he gently, with a kind of longing curiosity, looks at Ada's arms, her bare shoulders, touches her skin through a hole in a stocking and caresses her nude body wonderingly next to him on the bed. During most of this – until she takes off her clothes after a particularly tempting bargaining offer (ten metonymic "black piano keys" instead of the one per exchange visit

agreed upon) – Ada's playing produces music that envelops George and audience alike, and which functions almost tangibly as erotic language. If Ada did not intend it as such when she first started playing for George – that is, if it was one-sidedly erotic at the outset – it gradually attains reciprocity, as Ada cannot fail to notice the effect that it has on George, and is drawn in under its spell too (as one realises in retrospect at a certain point). Looking and playing, seeing and listening, image and musical sound, touch and being-touched intertwine to become less a dialectic (which is too rational) than a *web* of erotic communication – matched visually in cinematic terms by the spidery trees surrounding them.

The significant point is that, as the film's conclusion shows, the reciprocity of Ada and George's love-making – commencing when George falls under the spell of Ada's music-making, and developing through listening, looking and touching to sexual intimacy – opens a space for Ada to re-enter the sphere of the symbolic or language willingly. In this way, by way of the cinematic re-presentation of a certain kind of sex and love-making, *The Piano* provides a paradigm for the possible transformation of the symbolic sphere from its still largely phallocentric, patriarchal structure – within which woman has no place – to that of reciprocity or mutuality (see Note 14) where "power" in every sense (from sexual to political power) is shared between men and women, instead of being hierarchically enforced by men. Small wonder that Ada's husband loses her, in the end, to George, despite her attempt, at one stage, to draw the former into a sphere of mutuality by caressing his naked shoulders and back – when she reaches his buttocks, he cannot take it any longer, and uncomprehendingly, desperately, tries to impose his way of "loving" her (the only way he knows) on her. But Ada is not to be dominated in sex or love; she finds the reciprocity that she needs with George.

Why are sex and love-making, as some of the areas where human sexuality asserts itself, so fraught with possible interpersonal communicative pitfalls, but simultaneously rich with potential communicative interpersonal understanding and reciprocal insight, as the two fictional instances dealt with so far demonstrate? Milan Kundera (1981: 236) sheds further light on this where, in response to Philip Roth's question: "What does sex mean to you as a novelist?" he replies:

> These days, when sexuality is no longer taboo, mere description, mere sexual confession, has become noticeably boring. How dated Lawrence seems, or even Henry Miller with his lyricism of obscenity! And yet certain erotic passages in Georges Battaille have made a lasting impression on me. Perhaps it is because they are not lyrical but philosophic. You are right that with me everything ends in great erotic scenes. I have the feeling that a scene of physical love generates an extremely sharp light which suddenly reveals the essence of characters and

> sums up their life situation ....The erotic scene is the focus where all the themes of the story converge and where its deepest secrets are located .... And precisely (p. 237) because it is the deepest region of life the question posed to sexuality is the deepest question.
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> (Kundera 1981: 236)

It should surprise no one that Kundera makes these remarks; after all, it was Freud who pointed irresistibly, against the current of repressive Victorian sexual mores, at human sexuality as the most fundamental determinant or motivating factor of human behaviour. But this insight, so strikingly formulated by Kundera in the above excerpt and instantiated (with mutual fulfilment) in the relationship between George and Ada in Campion's *The Piano*, raises the possibility that the position arrived at earlier should be reversed, or at least be modified. Instead of saying, as I did earlier, that a breakdown in sexual relations between individuals signals a more fundamental breakdown in communication, it seems as if it may be more accurate to say that a collapse in the ability to communicate would signal a conflict of some kind at the level of sexuality. Unless, of course, sexuality is understood as constituting a – perhaps the "fundamental" – domain of interhuman "communication", in which case the concept of communication requires radical "reconceptualization", broadening it to encompass that which is usually taken as falling outside of the discursive domain, namely interactive exchanges between individuals at the level of the body. Both examples addressed above seem to point in this direction, testifying to the power of literature and cinema – fiction – to bathe the familiar in a new light.

But that's nothing new, one may object – everyone knows about "body-language", mentioned earlier, which operates in sexual encounters as well as in ordinary communicational situations such as social conversation, political speeches and so on: one's body (facial expressions, nervous twitching of hands, etc.) reveals as much, and sometimes more than the words one utters (Shlain 1998: 20-21). However, it is not this sense of the body's role in communication that I have in mind at present, but something which, at first blush, surpasses – or perhaps, as Lyotard (1991: 156) would say, "sub-passes" – the realm of symbolic or discursive exchanges. Isn't this a contradiction in terms? How could one "communicate" in any intelligible sense via bodily exchanges without engaging, however indirectly, the symbolic or the discursive, even if the latter is conceived of in terms of what Lyotard calls the "figural", where the latter operates as much at an iconic level as in language by way of signalling, anamorphotically, a "torsion", "dis-tortion" or re-configuration of power-relations? Think of the manner in which a raised fist communicates specific intentions of aggression or resistance, for example.[6]

To be able to answer this tantalising question – if indeed it is not a pseudo-

question – consider that Lyotard's (1991: 156) coining of the word "sub-passing" in the context of musical reception is an allusion to what Lacan has theorised as the "*real*" (the sphere of "nature" or the "body" in its "pure", unsymbolisable, "resistant" organic state) in contradistinction to the registers of the *imaginary* (the realm of images where the subject's imaginary ego-identifications occur) and the *symbolic* (the abstract, conceptual realm of language where the subject as "I", that is, the subject of the discourse of the Other or unconscious is inscribed).[7] Per definition the body in its unsymbolisable organic state as "real" body is outside of the discursive, linguistic realm, and at best one can talk about it as "that which cannot be talked about" – it is, as Caputo (1993: 78), following T.S. Eliot, says, "effanineffable": sayable and unsayable at the same time. Hence the puzzle: if one cannot address the body and its symbolic functions in terms of the register of the "real", except in paradoxical fashion as indicated, how could it possibly fulfil an important, if not essential communicative function which affects communicational exchanges between individuals at symbolic-discursive level?[8]

I would be inclined to suggest that it does indeed do so, because of something that is irreducibly constitutive of humans as embodied beings, and which Heidegger (1978: 172-182) articulated in terms of the fundamental existential-ontological category of "state-of-mind" (also sometimes translated as "moodness" or "attunement"), which is non-discursive. That there is an immediacy about "state-of-mind", is evident from the meaning of the German word, *Befindlichkeit* (which the translators admit not to be able to capture adequately in their English translation; Heidegger 1978: 172, Note 2), namely "the state in which one may be found" (as implied in the German expression: "Wie befinden Sie sich?" that is, "How are you [feeling]?"). It is the (ontological) condition of the possibility of having moods (such as being depressed or being cheerful) or, as Heidegger (p. 172) says, of "Being-attuned". In other words, it suggests a mode of being according to which one is "inserted" into the world in such a way that one's mood (*Stimmung*, attunement) immediately reflects this "contact" with one's world and the things or people in it. It is significant that "attunement" (German: *Stimmung*; Afrikaans: *stemming*) is a musical metaphor, in so far as this emphasises that one is here witnessing a non-discursive, albeit in a broader sense "signifying" phenomenon.[9] One only has to think of the manner in which one's mood is affected by another person's unspoken attitude of either friendly acceptance or sullen hostility, manifested in a combination of bodily "symptoms" such as an expressionless face, a stiff bearing of one's body, downcast eyes, or simply an impenetrable silence maintained in one's presence, to understand how the human "being-attuned-to-the world" "discloses" the "Being of the 'there'", or "*Dasein in its thrownness*" as Heidegger (1978: 173; 175) puts it.

Perhaps the most important source for stating as clearly as possible what I

am trying to articulate here – and one that casts valuable light on the signifying value of affects or feelings highlighted by Heidegger – is the work of Julia Kristeva, specifically her distinction between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* in her work, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1997: 32-39). Building on and modifying, where necessary, the work of thinkers such as Husserl, Freud and Lacan, she maintains that one can only have a partial understanding of the human practice of signification or meaning-generation (e.g. in communication) if one does not take into account what she terms the *semiotic* as a mode of signifying that precedes and paves the way for the entry into language or the *symbolic*. The semiotic is introduced in conjunction with the "semiotic *chora*" (where *chora* is a concept borrowed from Plato), which is described as follows by Kristeva:

> In this way the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.
> (Kristeva 1997: 35)

In other words, she is referring to a source of energy and (intermittent) movement, which is ultimately theorised as being tied into a distinctive mode of signifying, albeit not the linguistic-symbolic mode. She further states that the *chora* "is analogous only to vocal and kinetic rhythm" (Kristeva 1997: 36) and insists that the function of the semiotic as a preverbal process governing the "connections" between the body, objects and family-structure representatives (e.g. parents) can only be clarified "within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of presymbolic functions" (pp. 36-37).[10] We should keep in mind that for Kristeva, as for Freud, the concept of "drive" refers to "attacks" in the form of "waves" of energy against "stases" which result from the repetition of such "charges". The upshot of this is that drives are involved (in Dionysian fashion) with both generative stases *and* their destruction (something of which the Freudian "death drive" is exemplary), and in so far as Kristeva theorises this process as occurring within the "space" of the semiotic *chora*, it means that it "is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated", where its "unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases" by which it is produced. (Note the analogy between this process of generation/negation and music as a similar process.) In other words, *before* the subject discovers ("misrecognizes", to use Lacan's word) his or her "unity" in its own mirror image, which forms the foundation of its "identity", and *before* the subject's subsequent entry into the symbolic system of language through the assumption of a name which situates him or her in the field of the "Other" (or culture as embedded in the system of language), it is subject to the

"discontinuities" of drive facilitation, and it is therefore not difficult to grasp what Kristeva means when she says that the temporary "arrest" of such drive facilitation instantiates

> *discontinuities* in ... the various material supports ... susceptible to semiotization: voice, gesture, colors. Phonic (later phonemic), kinetic, or chromatic units and differences are the marks of these stases in the drives.
>
> (Kristeva 1997: 37)

This is essentially what she has in mind with the semiotic as distinct from the symbolic: "a psychosomatic modality of signifying processes", and, not surprisingly, she connects it with the hypothesis (spawned by generative linguistics) that "genetic programmings [including "innate language universals"] are necessarily semiotic ..." (Kristeva 1997: 38).

What is the point in the present context? one may wonder. This becomes clearer in the light of Kristeva's remark (p. 34), that "there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example)". This means that the semiotic as signifying mode on the part of the subject *precedes* the imaginary and the symbolic, but even *after* the subject's successful entry into language continues (like the imaginary) to (co-) function alongside and in conjunction with the symbolic "in" the subject's "signifying practice". The semiotic is therefore truly a "quasi-transcendental" in the Derridean sense[11]: it is the condition of the possibility of the imaginary and of the symbolic, but *also* of their ruin, that is, of their "impossibility" in any pure sense, in so far as it returns in quasi-sublated guise in human signifying *practice* (to inhibit or destabilise the "clear" functioning of symbolic signification) – which thus includes both the symbolic *and* the semiotic (Kristeva 1997: 34, 45). This is most evident in music, poetry and literature, but also in the rhythms, grain and voice-timbre of the subject's everyday speech, as well as in bodily actions endowed with meaning, such as gestures and the way in which a person moves – that is, in all those aspects of interpersonal relations (including attempts at communication) which refuse being reduced to clear conceptual understanding (McAfee 2004: 23). In fact, these insights on Kristeva's part explain why not all communication in the widest sense of the term can be reduced to the symbolic function of language. There are "body rhythms" and gestures that resist symbolisation, but which nevertheless have a signifying function, as in the example that Martin Buber (1968: 48) gives of a lover merely inclining his or her head in a telling manner, to which the beloved responds in a similar gestural fashion which is as full of significance as, despite the absence of, linguistic communication in the strict, narrow sense.[12] This also enables one to return, more insightfully this time, to the short story ("The Last Act") reconstructed at the outset in this paper where

– it will be remembered – "strategic action" aimed at revenge on Conrad's part prevails over the reciprocity of "communicative action" at a sexual level. Recall Dahl's chilling literary evocation of the revealing, methodical manner in which Conrad folds his clothes, after dropping Anna's garments unceremoniously on the floor, as well as his technically adept manipulation of Anna's body, to which she responds with passionate, but incommensurate surrender. All the movements implicated here belong to Kristeva's semiotic, as opposed to the symbolic register of signification, as do those on the part of George and Ada in *The Piano*, visually accessible in the film, which impart to the audience the erotic significance of George touching Ada with tender curiosity while she is playing the piano – music, movement, gesture and tactility comprising a rich textural tapestry of semiotic import in Kristeva's sense.

To elaborate further on this one could do no better than to resort, once again, to (literary) fiction.[13] The split between people who are within one's communicational reach and people who are not, is nuanced further in Milan Kundera's short story, "The Border" (1981: 195-228). The extent to which literary exploration of signifying practice (in Kristeva's sense of an inter-braidedness of the semiotic with the symbolic) can communicate the possibility or – in this case – the impossibility of "connecting" with someone else, especially in sexual terms, is here narratively instantiated in exemplary fashion. One might say that the central concern of the story is sexuality and the possibility of a meaningful or, alternatively, absurd existence. The central character, Jan, has been aware since his teenage years that there is but a thin, imperceptible line between humans while they unquestioningly proceed with their lives as if nothing is the matter, and those moments or events which trigger an awareness of absurdity on their part. This could happen, for instance, in the course of a solemn speech delivered at someone's funeral, when a gust of wind blows a mourner's hat from his head (Kundera 1981: 219-221). First, the hat lands on the ground halfway between himself and the speaker. Then, just as he is about to pick it up, another gust takes it to the edge of the grave, and finally, before he can rescue it, it tips over into the grave where it lands on the coffin. By this time, of course, everyone present is bursting with suppressed laughter, given the incongruity of the situation. If anyone should fail to contain his or her bottled-up laughter, and let it out – thus triggering waves of helpless, perhaps slightly muffled hilarity on the part of the others – it would reveal the absurdity of the situation which everyone has, up to that point, regarded as a perfectly solemn occasion for mourning a good friend.

Needless to say, the possibility of such an event – which Kundera calls "the border" – is not limited to funerals; it is omnipresent, and could shatter the apparently most meaningful series of events unpredictably, at any time. Nor is a situation pregnant with sexual possibilities an exception to this rule, even if laughter is not the symptom of what may be revealed as its particular variety

of absurdity, or the manner in which "the border" functions here. Hence Kundera's distinction among three categories of women in a man's life: those with whom he had affairs and one-night stands, those he desired, but who "got away", and another group:

> But there is also a third, mysterious, unsettling category of women: the women we could never have had. We liked them, they liked us, but it didn't take long for us to see that they were out of reach, that for them we were *on the other side of the border*.
>
> (Kundera 1981: 207)

Hence, at a certain point in the narrative (Kundera 1981: 207-209) Jan, who is a dedicated womaniser, finds himself on a train, reading a book, when an attractive young woman enters the compartment, nods at him and proceeds to observe him. Feeling that she anticipates something from him, he eventually strikes up a conversation with her, discovers that they met at someone else's house years ago, and inquires about her present circumstances. However, contrary to what usually occurs in similar situations, namely that he manages to "light a spark" between himself and the woman concerned, nothing like that happens this time, and – sounding to himself like someone conducting an interview – he stops talking and returns to his book, but without any concentration because of his constant awareness of the young woman's gaze on him. He tries again several times to "get through" to her – in the dining car, where he invites her, without success, and in the corridor, where he tries what is usually his trump card, namely to lift her hair imperiously from her forehead, telling her that she has changed her hairstyle, and looking at her face with great concentration. This time, however, it has no effect whatsoever, and Jan suddenly sees what he must look like through her eyes, performing "the pitiful pantomime of his touch and glance, a hackneyed St. Vitus dance robbed of all meaning by years of repetition .... He could not continue". When, leaving the station together at the end of the journey, she invites him over to her place, he declines (uncharacteristically). The question, why he said no to her keeps bothering him for weeks. As an indication of the irruption of absurdity in the sexual realm of human experience, no less than in others, Kundera (p. 209) concludes this episode in the story with the words: "He was on the other side of the border from her."

This last sentence captures succinctly what I tried to convey earlier when I said that, instead of understanding a breakdown in a sexual relation as a function of the collapse of communication between two people, one should perhaps see sex or a sexual relation itself as a significant type or form of communication, albeit not in the ordinary sense of verbal exchange. I turned to Kristeva's theory of (literary) signification in an attempt to get to the bottom

of this tantalising possibility, and found that her identification of a *semiotic* thread in human signifying practice, alongside of the symbolic thread, cast considerable light on the matter by singling out modes of signifying – or of communication, for that matter – which are pre- or extra-verbal, which overlap linguistic symbolic communication, but are not reducible to the latter. The semiotic, it will be remembered, includes signifying moments or elements of a somatic nature such as body-movements, or perhaps rather the manner in which a person moves, the precise, inimitable timbre of her or his voice, the distinctiveness of their smile, the smell of their skin and so on. All these things have semiotic significance, and convey "meaning" in a far broader and less conceptually specifiable fashion than language does. This is precisely what is at play, and at stake, in Kundera's notion of "the border" in a (potentially) sexually charged situation. The woman whom Jan attempted to "reach" by means of all his usual charming, disarming, seductive communicative ploys, was out of his reach not because she did not understand the language he was speaking (Czech), but because at a different level – the semiotic – there was no communication. All that there was, was information-exchange: where they had met each other, what she was doing at the time, and so forth. To "connect" sexually requires more than information – communication in a specifically sexual mode is indispensable for it, and Kristeva's semiotic seems to me to be the signifying or "communicational" mode in question here.[14]

What this investigation has brought to light, therefore, through the literary-theoretical and philosophical examination of selected literary and cinematic explorations of sex or love-making, is that it is erroneous to claim that the breakdown in a sexual relationship between individuals is "caused" by a more fundamental collapse of communication. Instead, as Kristeva's fecund distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic as distinct modes of signification in literature (as in the lifeworld) suggests, sex and love-making are always already part and parcel of a signifying mode – the semiotic – that antedates but eventually imbricates the symbolic, in this way enriching it even as it prevents it from ever attaining "pure" signifying or communicational transparency. In brief, sex and love-making (as argued earlier, these concepts are not synonymous) *are* modes of signifying or communicating. In Dahl's "The Last Act" Anna and Conrad do not "connect" with each other in this register, nor do Jan and the young woman on the train in Kundera's "The Border", while Ada and George do "reach" each other sexually at the level of the semiotic (and apparently of the symbolic, too, in good time) in Campion's *The Piano*. In the course of the investigation it has also become apparent that literature, philosophy as well as literary theory (and, of course, a cinema consonant with these) contribute significantly to an understanding of the complexity of these phenomena.[15]

Notes

1. "The Last Act" narrates the events in the life of Anna Cooper, whose love for her husband, Ed, and vice versa, was such that, instead of gradually cooling over the years, it became more and more intense and passionate – so much so that after more than 20 years' married life they could not wait to rush into each other's arms with an urgency almost beyond endurance after Ed's return from the office every day. It was wonderful. Hence, when two police officers turned up at her house one evening, and awkwardly informed her that Ed had died in the ambulance that afternoon after being involved in a car accident, Anna's world seemed to come to a standstill. After the initial shock had worn off, she seriously contemplated suicide, and even bought razor blades for that purpose. To cut a long story short, it took Anna a long time to get over Ed's death, with the help and support of her children (who eventually all left the house to pursue their own lives) and her friends, particularly one friend, Liz, who ran an adoption agency in New York, and knew that the only thing which could possibly rescue Anna was for her to focus on other things instead of on herself and her love for Ed. Hence, when she bullied Anna into coming to the office with her to "help out", it was the start of what eventually seemed like the road to recovery for Anna. In the course of working at the adoption agency and unavoidably being confronted with other people's problems, Anna gradually started feeling that she was doing something worthwhile, and she forgot about those razor blades in the bathroom cabinet. On a certain occasion she had to take a plane to Dallas, Texas, to sort out a nasty entanglement that had occurred in an adoption case the agency had mediated earlier. After spending an exhausting day with lawyers – and importantly, Dahl (1976: 89) stresses the typical Texan ruthlessness and intransigence on the part of these corpulent, smug, contemptuous, wealthy lawyers – Anna returned to her hotel and, largely as a result of remembering how Ed had explained this trait on the part of Texans to her, suddenly felt very lonely. Then she remembered that the (only) boyfriend she had had before she had met Ed Cooper, Conrad Kreuger, was from Dallas, Texas, and sure enough, when she checked in the telephone directory, she found the name of a Conrad P. Kreuger, M.D., there. She knew that he had always intended to become a medical doctor, and did not waste any time phoning his surgery, leaving a message for him. He phoned back, expressed great surprise at her being in Dallas, exchanged the usual information with her about their respective lives, and arranged to have a drink with her at her hotel later. They met in the bar, and Anna was struck, once again, by how handsome Conrad was. This is where the communication between them, which is pertinent to the present paper, commences. It is dealt with further in the main text of the paper.

2. Recall the pathological tidiness concerning bathroom towels and groceries packed in kitchen cupboards on the part of the psychopathic husband in the movie, *Sleeping With the Enemy* – there seems to be a general opinion that such military precision, obsessively practised, is symptomatic of a psyche worthy of suspicion.

3. Marlene van Niekerk's (1998: 320-329) wonderfully evocative, but also frightening satirical phenomenology of the space of the upmarket yuppie-gym in post-apartheid South Africa accurately shows the extent to which people who frequent these gyms leave their personalities behind when they go there, allowing a reduction to mere, inhuman, uncommunicative physicality to take place when they enter there.

4. It is worth noting what Faludi says in this regard, given the pertinence of "ornamental culture" to the kind of (non-)communication that Habermas calls "strategic action":

   > The old model of masculinity showed men how to be part of a larger social system; it gave them a context and it promised them that their social contributions were the price of admission to the realm of adult manhood. That kind of manhood required a society in order to prove itself. All of the traditional domains in which men pursued authority and power – politics, religion, the military, the community, and the household – were societal.
   >
   > Ornamental culture has no such counterparts. Constructed around celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment, marketing and consumerism, it is a ceremonial gateway to nowhere. Its essence is not just the selling act but the act of selling the self, and in this quest every man is essentially on his own, a lone sales rep marketing his own image ....
   >
   > Ornamental culture has proved the ultimate expression of the American Century, sweeping away institutions in which men felt some sense of belonging and replacing them with visual spectacles that they can only watch and that benefit global commercial forces they cannot fathom.
   >
   > (Faludi 1999: 35)

5. Harries made this observation in a conversation on the hermeneutic differences between Habermas and Gadamer at Yale University in the United States in the course of 1986, during my stay there as Postdoctoral Fellow in Philosophy.

6. See in this regard my essay (Olivier 2003) on the "figural" in the work of Lyotard and Heidegger, employed for the purpose of arriving at an understanding of the functioning of power-relations in a specific art installation.

7. For an extended discussion of the function of these three registers in Lacan's theory of the subject, see Olivier (2004).

8. I should immediately add, however, as Andrea Hurst has reminded me, that Lacan recognises the phenomenon of the "real" having "effects" in the symbolic.

9. Small wonder that Schopenhauer, the great (pessimistic) philosopher of the will and precursor of Freud, singled music out among the arts as being the *immediate* embodiment of the irrational, blindly self-assertive will-to-live. While all the other arts, according to Schopenhauer, elaborate on and hence mediate the will

in the form of some or other Platonic Idea, one is confronted directly by the will in music (1969: 257) – which is why it "moves" one so readily.

10. It should be abundantly evident from these words that Kristeva belongs to that line of thinkers, including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida, who have persuasively demonstrated the illusory character of the traditional ("Cartesian") philosophical subject conceived as self-transparent and autonomous.

11. See in this regard Andrea Hurst's illuminating essay on "The Quasi-transcendental Logic of Derrida's Thinking" (2004).

12. Buber puts it as follows in a section appropriately titled "Eros":

> That inclination of the head over there – you feel how the soul enjoins it on the neck, you feel it not on your neck but on that one over there, on the beloved one…and you receive the inclination of the head, its injunction, as the answer to the word of your own silence. In contemporaneity at rest you make and you experience dialogue. The two who are loyal to the Eros of dialogue, who love one another, receive the common event from the other's side as well, that is, they receive it from the two sides, and thus for the first time understand in a bodily way what an event is.
>
> (Buber 1968: 48)

13. Possibilities of elaboration on the present theme abound in fiction. Here I can focus on only a few instances. In addition to those dealt with in the body of this essay, I would like to mention two more. In Kurt Vonnegut's postmodern science-fictional novel, *Cat's Cradle* (1965; see, for example, pp. 7-9, 37, 57-59, 61), a further dimension of the kind of interhuman "communication" that surpasses verbal exchanges is highlighted. Through the "sayings" of the fictional sage, Bokonon, Vonnegut draws attention to the (illusory) unity of a "granfalloon" like a school, a family, a university or a nation, all of which are totalities that provide the individual person with a context of identification where all alienation among individuals may supposedly be overcome, but which, of course, as experience confirms, cannot give any such guarantee. A "granfalloon" is thus "empty" to the degree that one could experience the members of one's family or one's fellow students to be virtual strangers. On the other hand, and in contrast to a "granfalloon", says Bokonon, there is one's "karass" – all those individuals (scattered across the world and some of whom are never known to anyone in his or her lifetime) with whom one has something fundamental in common and who are immediately recognisable when one chances to meet them. It may be at a party, on a bus, on a boat or an aeroplane, and if one is lucky, you may marry one of them. The point is that you *know* when you find yourself in the company of a member of your "karass" – something you can express in various ways, such as saying that you are "on the same wavelength" as someone else, or that there is a "rapport" between you and someone else, or that somehow you "click". All those

people who are not members of your "karass", however, are people with whom you can exchange information, but who are out of your reach as far as genuine communication is concerned. They live in a different communicational universe, in a different neck of the cosmic woods. What Vonnegut is telling us with this little fiction, is precisely that true "communication" exceeds – or infra-ceeds – information-provision concerning the time the next train arrives, and so on. And I would be inclined to claim that what Kristeva says regarding the intertwinement of the semiotic and the symbolic is related to the communicational incompatibility between a person and those individuals who are not members of your "karass", and inversely, to the compatibility between oneself and those who are such "members". That is, the combined communicational effect of a linguistic-symbolic and bodily-semiotic encounter between individuals is either one of "connecting", or one of not doing so.

The second fictional instance I want to turn to regarding its relevance for the present theme is Michel Gondry's film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), where the audience witnesses a science-fictional narrative – jumbled in postmodernist fashion – about the relationship between Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet), which breaks down at a certain point, as evidenced by the fact that Clementine deliberately has her memories of Joel "erased" through advanced cerebral engineering technology offered by a company appropriately called Lacuna. By chance Joel, who is nonplussed by her strange behaviour (not recognising him) finds out about this "service", and to avoid further suffering in the face of Clementine's apparent show of lack of affection for himself, decides to follow suit. But then a strange thing happens: the memory-erasure engineering process encounters resistance on the part of the sleeping Joel (a kind of reversal – as Andrea Hurst was quick to point out – of the resistance that a psychoanalyst encounters on the part of an analysand when the latter "resists" the former's attempts to elicit repressed materials in the analytical situation). To cut a long story short – eventually Joel and Clementine, after both had gone through the erasure-procedure, converge on the beach (incongruously, because it is winter) where they originally met each other, and end up not only talking to each other on the train back home, but with Joel (despite his own aloof nature asserting itself all along) offering Clementine a lift home and accepting her invitation to join her in her apartment. They discover the truth about their respective attempts to erase the other from their memory, including the tapes on which their respective accounts of their feelings towards each other were recorded – accounts patently full of amorphous resentment and blame; so much so that when they have listened to the other's tape, they have great difficulty facing their mutual, but incongruous, inclination to be with each other. But – and this is the crux of the matter – even *after* deciding that they should finally part, they find themselves unable to do so, and end up deciding to stay together anyway. The question is: Why? Why, if both Clementine and Joel seem to have tried their utmost to remove each other from their respective lives? The answer is, I think, that at a level that is irreducible to that of linguistic-symbolic exchange – as instantiated in their post-memory-erasure conversations as well as in their taped

accounts of each other – they never ceased desiring the other. That is, at a level which would be consonant with Kristeva's semiotic mode of signification – which is, it must be remembered, closely tied to the instincts or drives, and therefore to the body – they still wanted each other, despite having disavowed it in language. From this one may infer that (as far as the director of the film is concerned) there is a mode of relating to, or "communicating" with each other which is more fundamental than what is usually regarded as the most important mode of communicating, namely language. It is the argument of this paper that the mode of signification in question enacts itself in the realm of Kristeva's "semiotic", and that human sexuality is intimately intertwined with it.

14. I am tempted to surmise that, when sex has become fully merged with communication, when it has *become* communication, it is no longer merely sex, but love-making, where the "strategic action" practised by Conrad in "The Last Act" has no place. Marilyn French's remark on sex and power – with its obvious implications for sex as a form of communication – is noteworthy in this regard:

> The form of sex that has been given least emphasis in patriarchal societies is mutual sex. This is not for lack of examples. There exist many love poems of delight and joy in mutual sex; novels in which sexual love is integrated into families, communities; paintings and sculptures which express mutuality. Mutual sex exists in a different dimension from sex as a form of domination; it exists in the realm of pleasure, to which power is irrelevant.
>
> (French 1986: 576)

15. There is one upshot of this investigation which is therefore thoroughly paradoxical – in case this has escaped anyone's attention. It can be stated as follows: The ambivalent condition of the possibility of communication is to be found in the drives, for instance the Freudian death drive in so far as it manifests itself in the repetition-compulsion. This becomes apparent from Kristeva's observation (referred to earlier), that the semiotic mode of signification, with its rhythms of motility and stasis – exemplified in literature as one of its signifying modes – is founded on the drives, and it is not difficult to notice that the death drive as described by Freud (1957: 157-161), provides a paradigmatic instantiation of the restless, repetitive structural dynamic characteristic of the drives in general. Strikingly, Schopenhauer (1969, I: 257, 264) seems to have anticipated this where he identifies the blindly self-asserting will-to-live with music, even singling out the *da capo* convention of musical repetition as exemplary in this regard. (See in this connection Olivier 1996, for a sustained investigation of the relationship between Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, music, and a literature of the sublime.) If this seems incongruous, given his emphasis on the will-to-live instead of death, recall that for Freud the death drive or *thanatos* and the life-impulse or *eros* are equiprimordial and manifest themselves in a kind of primary embrace not dissimilar to that of lovers. Small wonder that Kaja Silverman (1983: 57; see also Freud 1957: 166) remarks on the fact that pleasure, for Freud, is akin to death in so far as it instantiates the

complete absence of pain, or need, or striving of any kind. The Dionysian principle of ancient Greece, too, casts light on the problematic at hand in so far as it consists in a recognition of the rhythmic alternation between dying and resurrection (Shlain 1998: 142). Moreover, this further enables one to grasp the curious fact that, in those cases where, analogically speaking, a kind of relative stasis is posited as the goal of communication – for instance Habermas's (Brand 1990: 20) ideal of *consensus* or agreement among interlocutors – it represents a valorisation, not of the death drive or instinct with its repetitive structure, but of death itself, which is the end of all communication. This is why one has to complement Habermas's communicative *telos*, consensus, with Lyotard's (1984: 60-67) paralogy or dissent, because only when taken together do they constitute the thanatic structure of the condition of communication. In fact, the one presupposes the other.

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