IMAGININGS, NARRATIVES AND OTHERNESS: ON THE CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS OF RICHARD KEARNEY

Richard Kearney's *The God Who May Be* (Indiana University Press, 2001), *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (Routledge, 2002) and *On Stories* (Routledge, 2002).

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Richard Kearney is a member of the generation of Irish intellectuals who have come to prominence in the wake of Ireland's gradual emergence from its years of national self-enclosure. Ireland's embrace and support for the then European Economic Union in 1973, and its ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, represent its own escape from this legacy, and from its historical subordination to, and dependence on the UK. This orientation towards Europe is part of Ireland's post-imperial and post-national sensibility. Richard Kearney's work embodies this postnational sensibility and European orientation, and is represented especially by his *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997). In his more recent *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2002a), this orientation is given greater critical voice in addressing the forms of demonization towards others, strangers and outsiders that have occurred in the current period.

Accompanying his critical engagement with contemporary Ireland, Kearney has also critically engaged with the French hermeneutic,

phenomenological, and post-structural traditions in order to interrogate the nature of meaning, with particular reference to its relation to the imagination. This interrogation has occurred in such works as *The Poetics of Modernity* (1995b), and *Poetics of Imagining* (1998b). This essay will concentrate on three of his most recent works that are viewed as a trilogy: *On Stories* (2002b), *The God Who May Be* (2001), and *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2002a).

The thematic core that gives compelling unity to this body of work, emanates from three central concerns. Kearney's work revolves around and interrogates the interconnected problems of stories as narratives, the imagination, and otherness. What emerges is a double-sided strategy that aims to account for the way in which relations between self and other take either demonized or ethical forms. Here, for Kearney, the imagination both creates and projects others in ways that are either monstrous or empathetic. And yet, he also sees the imagination as opening the possibility of something ineluctable in terms of human experience, and beyond it. As interpreters of the human condition this power of the imagination brings us to the very edge of understanding.

'THE VERY EDGE OF HERMENEUTIC UNDERSTANDING'

Strangers, Gods and Monsters, when read in conjunction with *The God Who May Be* represents a radicalization of an unfinished series of encounters concerning the problematic of the imagination. In *The Wake of Imagination*, the imagination is interpreted in a genealogical fashion in order to challenge the conventional view that stretches from the Plato of *The Republic* to the Enlightenment, which views it equivalent to fictionalization, phantasization, and thus an essential untruth in relation to reality. It is a sustained attempt to rescue the problematic of the imagination from its critics and detractors, and instead view it, in the wake of Romantic and Heideggerean insights, as a core of the human condition, which our experience of time and ethics towards others cannot do without (Abrams, 1953; Kearney, 1998a, 1998b). In *The Poetics of Imagining*, Kearney defends the problematic of the imagination more centrally from the vantage point of ethics, under his formulation of the hermeneutical or narrative imagination. This is done in the context of philosophical encounters that have viewed the imagination as variously a productive act of consciousness, an original synthesis that precedes the sensible and the intelligible, or an instrument of semantic innovation. Kearney's notion of the narrative imagination can be viewed as a contribution to a more general hermeneutical view that sees 'imagining [as] a mode of being-in-the-world which makes and re-makes our *Lebenswelt* by disclosing new possibilities of meaning' (Kearney, 1998b: 9).

In his later work, Kearney views the imagination in more than just hermeneutical terms. The imagination is posited as an indeterminate and

ineffable timeless quality that even by being named, escapes naming itself. Moreover, this indeterminacy is thought of in spatial terms. It is a timeless space out of which something emerges.

In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* Kearney discusses the dimensions of indeterminacy and spatiality under the umbrella of Plato's notion of *khora*. In the *Timaeus*, Plato, as Kearney notes, reflects on the problem of a primordial origin from which all things, especially meaning (and the distinction between it and truth) emanate. At a point in the text – at 48e–53b – Plato is forced to confront the limits of categorisation and rational thinking, and effectively has to 'begin again' (Plato, 1989: 1178). In attempting to elucidate a narrative of integrated cosmology in creative terms, and after exhausting the metaphors of natural creation, maternity, fire, and even the essential carrier into which perfumes are distilled, Plato posits 'an invisible and formless being which receives all things, and in some way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible' (Plato, 1989: at 47e). This invisible, formless and ineffable being is conceived of not only in *autopoietic* or self-generative terms, but also in terms that are spatial in a threefold way. For Plato, the space of ineffability 'holds' all beings and images that are subsequently created. Yet, secondly, these beings, images and thoughts are only a fleeting and grasping sense of what was originally meant, and can only be referred to by other images, beings and thoughts. As he indicates, 'for an image, since the reality after which it is modeled does not belong to it, and it exists ever as a fleeting shadow of some other, must be inferred to be in another [that is, in space], grasping existence in some way or another, or it could not be at all' (Plato, 1989: 1179 at 52e). In other words, there is no direct path to this original creation. Rather, according to Plato, or at least in an interpretation of these passages, there is a permanent space or gap between emanating 'non-reality' and the reality of images, beings and thoughts. There is a space of and for meaning and its creations, and yet meaning itself is never fully grasped or soaked up when it takes concrete form. In other words, space here refers to the gap between meaning and understanding. Moreover, thirdly, the 'where' of this space is equally indeterminate; for Plato it is neither in heaven, nor on earth. One can read his reference to the space of a dream is a desperate attempt to capture, metaphorically, its allusive sense as the space of the creation of meaning itself.

It is this moment of uncertainty in Plato's reflections on cosmology that also represents Kearney's radicalization of his earlier work. This radicalization co-exists with his ongoing critical dialogue with poststructuralism, especially the philosophy of *différence*, and poststructural psychoanalysis. For him, contemporary poststructural interpretations of Plato's reflections on *khora* represent possible, yet problematic avenues for reworking the theme of the ineffably immutable that stands on the edge of understanding.

Derrida and Caputo no longer dwell at the portal of the house of Being, as Heidegger suggests one should do in his 'Letter on Humanism' (Heidegger,

1978). Rather they entered in order to discover an image of *khora* as wholly other – radicalized *différence*. As such it is an abyssal indifference to every determination that falls short of words, and is, hence, non-metaphorisable. It is archaic, formless and nameless. Caputo presents it in spatial terms, at least, 'as desert-like, without properties or genus' (Caputo, 1997; Kearney, 2002a: 197–202, 282–283). There is no possible redemption here either; deconstruction resists a move towards theology because such a move would, for Caputo at least, represent a closure of possibilities. Kearney argues that because deconstruction lands, ultimately, on this abyssal indifference to every determination, its only result is not only a non-committal prevarication, but also and more importantly, a position that remains completely outside the gesture towards and claims of human suffering.

Another unease accompanies this discomfort with deconstruction's indifference to suffering, one that goes to the heart of Kearney's own project. His critique also revolves around their celebration of an endless desert non-place that finally is 'that dark night of waiting in the *il y* without exit and response' (Kearney, 2002a: 204). It is the dark night of absolute formlessness, of absolute aloneness, and where meaning, whilst created, can never take shape and arrive. Kearney develops a threefold response to Derrida's and, especially Caputo's claims regarding *khora*. As implied in the above remarks, for him, there is nothing to be celebrated or quietistically given, because in such a location and condition, one cannot feel or think towards anything, especially towards another or oneself. Moreover, for him, both Derrida and Caputo, in their concealed ontology, establish a caricatured distinction between a phonocentric tradition of God/fusion/union/presence/essence and its deconstructive other of *khora*/difference/writing/*pharmakon* (Kearney, 2002a: 208). Thirdly, and in contrast to this caricatured distinction, *khora* is posited as a space of possibilities.

Kearney's move to a hermeneutics of possibilities, as against the shortcomings of deconstruction, I will argue below, represents an attempt to thematize, in an often unacknowledged way, the nature of the archaic space and the tension that is constructed between closure and openness when one is confronted by it. This aspect underpins his notion of the narrative imagination. In this formulation spatiality becomes either an enclosing haunting space of fear, or a space of possible open narrative encounters with others. Kearney couples this formulation with a spatially conceived theology in which a hermeneutics of God is portrayed as a *relationship*, and not as a mergence or singularity, that also belongs to this space of possibilities. In what follows, I will concentrate on Kearney's reflections on the this-sided spaces that humans inhabit in either closed or open forms.

THE SPACE OF CLOSING POSSIBILITIES: ONESELF AND THE FEAR OF OTHERS

It is now considered a moot point that social spaces, as well as selves, are constituted in terms of alterity, that is, in terms of distinctions between the same and the other, the familiar and the strange. In the case of an emphasis on sameness, alterity can be absorbed and integrated into the same, for example under the myth of national identity. It can also be pushed away, ignored, or actively excluded. Here alterity becomes invisibilized in acts of social closure. In the case of an emphasis on otherness, sameness can be ruptured in acts of generosity, and decentred entirely in a celebration of difference. Here sameness (even the idea of a common humanity) can become forgotten in acts of joyful openness.

In order to capture the difference between the two sets of emphasis Kearney makes a twofold distinction between *aliens* and *others*. Aliens refer to the experience of strangers associated with discrimination, suspicion and scapegoating when sameness is emphasized at the expense of alterity. Alternatively, his notion of others refers to 'an alterity worthy of reverence and hospitality' when alterity is welcomed beyond the same (Kearney, 2002a: 67; 2002c: 7–36). What interests Kearney in all of this is how the contents that fill the spaces between insider and outsider, the familiar and the strange are created.

As the discussion above suggests, the image of space that the *khora* tradition emits is posited as an enigmatic void, and experienced in a fearful manner – fearful of everything, of otherness, of oneself. Kearney can be interpreted as suggesting *khora* becomes a space for *fearful possibilities* that are projected onto others. Others are made into aliens.

In order to develop this part of his argument Kearney draws on the psychoanalytic theory of Kristeva. In Kristeva's view, Plato's *khora* is the primordial, pre-formal and pre-intelligible, a space that is now identified with the unconscious. In the wake of, as well as in contrast to, Lacan's psychoanalytic ontology of signification, which is identified with the law of the Father (of naming, and of the Law itself), *khora*, for Kristeva, is identified with a primordial pre-symbolic matrix associated with the infant-maternal bond that denotes borderlessness and fusion – a world before ego. According to Kristeva, this world is both constitutive for the subject, and yet has to be repressed in order that the move can be made into the symbolic order, or the social. *Khora* is, then, a 'strange space' where the drives associated with the maternal bond are banished and become subject to disgust and horror. They become abject. This makes *khora* not only the fluid, indeterminate, pre-symbolic realm of the unconscious beyond regulation, but also, and as importantly, a realm that has been abjected and turned into something abominable, which must be turned away from as a function of sociation. This act of banishment also generates a rage where the monstrous is

both created and dwells – in all of us. In other words, according to Kristeva's psychoanalytically derived universalistic claim, we all inhabit a no-man's land (pun intended), but it is not one of the feminine *jouissance* of Iragaray or Cixous. It is an abjected land that is at once turned against the self, sublimely monstrous, perverse and largely unknown (Kristeva, 1991; Kearney, 2002a: 194–6, 89–91; 2002c: 7–36). As Kristeva and Kearney note, the notion of abjection leans on Freud's notion of the uncanny, that secret and most hate-filled part of ourselves that is projected onto others.

From this perspective, alterity is interpreted as nothing but our estranged self that haunts us in the shape of the alien. For Kearney, Kristeva's work ushers in an explanatory model for the very human creation of aliens who are then demonised and vilified. As he suggests, at this fundamental level, Kristeva's work, especially in *Strangers to Ourselves* 'expresses the universal experience of a deep unconscious malaise with 'others' arising from the repressed rapport with the internally housed 'primal scene' that informs our psyche' (Kearney, 2002a: 76).

Nonetheless, Kearney emits an unease regarding the ability of psycho-analysis to tell the entire story. Kearney's *implicit* point of unease is that concrete histories and vicissitudes of hateful othering are subsumed within this metapsychology. In other words, it projects this unconscious psychological drama onto the screen of society as a whole, and thus makes the assumption that there is a seamless movement between the two. However, at this point, Kearney alerts us to the need for another perspective that encompasses and acknowledges the specificity of the social-historical *sui generis* – of the creation of *social* narratives, and not only of psychically driven ones (Kearney, 2002a: 78).

Although Kearney argues that narratives work at the levels of the individual psyche and the social, there is a suggestion in his work, especially in *Stories*, that narratives have their own 'logic' and are not driven by a universality of the unconscious. He makes an anthropological claim that we are story telling animals when he states that 'without [the] transition from nature to narrative, from time suffered to time enacted and enunciated, it is debatable whether a merely biological life (*zoe*) could ever be considered a truly human one (*bios*) (Kearney, 2002b: 3). As significantly, they also provide the temporal connection between past, present and future and thus constitute our historicity. This is irrespective of what forms (myth, epic, sacred history, legend, saga, folktale, romance, allegory, confession, chronicle, satire, novel) and subgenres (oral and written, poetic and prosaic, historical and fictional) the narrative imperative, as Kearney terms it, take. In this sense, all societies, whether they understand themselves as civilizations, nations or communities, from the most primitive to the most putatively postmodern, create, recreate and draw on narratives in order to make sense of the basic existential questions of origins, identity and history. Narratives, then, fulfill a double function according to Kearney. They are bearers of social-historical meaning that is

understood by those who are part of real or imagined communities, and they are places in which individual needs, desires, secrets and potencies meet and clash with the socially understood and conveyed ones.

In this sense, narratives are a space of intersubjectivity, and not only ineffable intrasubjectivity. As Kearney points out, the stories that we tell constitute social action that makes the human world sharable, intersubjective.

> Every story shares the common function of *someone telling something to someone about something*. In each case there is a teller, a tale, something told about and a recipient of the tale. And it is this crucially intersubjective model of discourse which . . . makes narrative as a quintessentially *communicative* act. (Kearney, 2002b: 5)

As such, narratives open onto the worlds of intrasubjective and intersubjective imaginings, and by so doing give us privileged insights into both their secrets and potencies (Kearney, 2002b: 158).

Kearney points to the theorization of narrative as a genre as the major turning point in its history. For him, the legacy of this theorization, which begins with Aristotle, encompasses formulating narrative in terms of *mythos* (plot), *mimesis* (recreation), *catharsis* (release), *phronesis* (wisdom), and *ethos* (ethics) (Kearney, 2002b: 128). Its legacy remains with us in such contemporary thinkers as Ricouer, Taylor, MacIntyre, and Nussbaum, although for Kearney, Aristotle and Ricouer remain the exemplary figures. In the light of our discussion of *khora* as an ineffability caught between closure and openness, though, we will leave to one side, momentarily, *catharsis*, *phronesis*, and *ethos*.

Following Aristotle's *Poetics*, *mythos-mimesis* is the way of telling a fable in the form of a crafted structure. In this sense, it is not a simple *techne*, but rather a *poiesis*, a way of making individual and social events and dramas into meaningfully conveyed life-histories. Moreover, these imaginative integrating descriptions never remain the same, but undergo constant redescription, reinterpretation and remoulding. The original story and the empirical reality are not only re-counted, but also magnified, changed and topicalized in the activity of mimetic creation. In this sense, and here Kearney follows Ricouer, *mimesis* is never passive, but is indicative of a narrative-hermeneutical circle of a prefiguring context, a configuring of 'textuality' (whether oral or written) in the act of telling, and a refiguring, as the narrative encourages us to turn from the text back to action (Kearney, 2002b: 133; 1995b: 80–91). By so entering this narrative-hermeneutical circle an actual world is recreated that may become a possible one, which both connects *and* distanciates fiction from life in order to possibly confirm and change the latter.

In this act of mimetic re-creation or 'creative retelling', Kearney argues that a space is opened up, however minimally, between living and recounting, between demarcating the narrated world from the lived one (Kearney, 2002b: 132–3). What is interesting here, if Kearney's analysis of narrative in

On Stories is combined with his analysis of aliens in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, though, is that *mythos* and *mimesis* together function as a narrative that closes over this opening space on the basis of fear and sameness. It is in this context that the critical anthropology of Girard's work becomes important for his analysis because, as he points out, it concentrates on the way hatred is cultivated, not on the basis of unconscious abjection, but as socially located practices of purgation and persecution. Whilst, for Girard, these myths of scapegoating are rooted in real, historical events, for Kearney, the important aspect of Girard's analysis is that they point to a dynamic of social narrativization that grounds the formation of social identity on the basis of an internal relation between scapegoating and solidarity. In other words, for Kearney they dovetail in an act of social enclosing in the way in which historical communities, both past and present, narratively construct their identities on the basis of fixed definitions between sameness and alterity.

Here alterity is not simply pushed away or fought against in an act of war against an external 'other'. It has an internal social function. Myths are socially created narratives that attempt to cement solidarity in shared acts of persecution. Their social function lies in the way that they address and attempt to resolve a social crisis by identifying, scapegoating, and then sacrificing the scapegoated on the altar of social solidarity (Kearney, 1995b; 2002a: 36–45; 2002c). In this sense, myths are creative in that they exemplify, lift historical events out of the mundane, and place them in a timelessly conceived narrative of the 'social sacred', to coin a Durkheimian phrase here. Aliens, to use Kearney's generic category, then, are necessary features of real and imagined communities, for they show us not only where boundaries are, but they also become the representative bearers and the recipients of social violence.

Myths are at their most enclosed when they become subject to sublime and terroristic interpretations – when they become evil. As Kearney notes in *On Stories*, societies or historical communities are at their most vulnerable and dangerous when they actively *forget* their narrativized origins. However, here it is not simply a matter of forgetfulness. These societies congeal themselves through acts of social enclosure that take place at the level of their societal self-creation and understanding – their social imaginaries (Castoriadis) – that altogether obliterate all distinctions between sameness and alterity. They become omnipotent and totalitarian, and by so becoming close over entirely the distanciating space between what is socially created and sharable, and by implication, interpreted from a variety of perspectives (Kearney, 2002b: 80–2). Moreover, these societies attempt to step out of time either by positing an absolute point of origin from which identity stems such as the *gens*, or by disrupting the relation between past and present in the mistaken idea that the world can begin anew. Here, no narratives can save us. There are only the timeless, exterminating imaginaries of the holocaust and the *gulag* – the void of *khora*.

OPEN ENCOUNTERS: ONESELF WITH OTHERS

For Kearney, though, this is not all there is. The exterminating imaginaries are not the end point of meta-narratives, and their experience is not only the void of *khora*. For him, the narrative imagination is always poised to crack this closed space open and to forge *possibilities* beyond it, whether or not these possible encounters are with the past, the present or are simply unknowable. For him, as indicated above, 'the gap is an indispensable and unsurpassable horizon of our infinite hermeneutic horizon' (Kearney, 1995b: 77).

In this context, Kearney re-asserts Heidegger's insight in *Being and Time* that for this rupture to occur narratives must exist within the temporal horizons into which humans are thrown and which constitute them. This insight is re-stated in another form by Kearney in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* in response to the horrors of the timeless void. As we have seen, timelessness may become a void as an act of enclosure. However, timelessness can also be viewed as a background condition that sets in motion narrative creations *because* the subject encounters time. For Kearney, melancholia is a condition that accounts paradigmatically for such an encounter. He takes as his cue Heidegger's existential account of the classical myth of Saturn in *Being and Time*, rather than Freud's psychoanalytic version in 'Mourning and Melancholia'. In section 42 of *Being and Time* Heidegger reconstructs the way this classical myth tells the story of the origins of humankind moulded by Care from a piece of clay, but imbued with the spirit of Jupiter. Saturn intervenes in the quarrel between Care and Jupiter who are unable to bestow a name on this newly formed creature. He, however, bestows the name *homo*, which indicates humankind's split existence between heaven and earth, a split that is mediated, but never healed *in* time. More strongly stated, Saturn threw us into time. As Heidegger puts it, '[t]he decision as to wherein 'the primordial' Being of this creature is to be seen, is left to Saturn, 'Time'. Thus the pre-ontological characterization of man's essence expressed in this fable, has brought to view in advance the kind of Being which dominates his *temporal sojourn in the world*, and does so through and through' (Heidegger, 1985: 243). In other words, time envelops us, it is our 'ocean' and the only condition through which we can construct a world, meet with others and ourselves.

This temporal dominance is something, though, from which we wish to turn away and flee – it causes a dissonance, a dread and an anxiety. In this reading, we are caught between two worlds – we can fall towards timelessness, into a nothing, or we can fall towards time. And yet, as Heidegger goes on to say, this dread of confronting our embeddedness in time and thus our finitude, is the very experience that *individualises* us, and casts us towards possibilities and an authentic existence (Heidegger, 1985: 228–35). As Kearney puts it, the Saturnine mood of gloomy melancholia delivers us

from a tranquilized existence and delivers us to ourselves, alone (Kearney, 2002a: 168). However, as he goes on to argue, it is not *only* a capacity for *being alone* that is at issue here; being alone with ourselves, as Winnicott noted in another context, is also a capacity that enables us to be with others as *themselves* (Winnicott, 1990). Kearney's strong claim is that melancholia is *the* background existential condition located at the level of the psyche, which establishes the human possibility for reflexively recognizing that we exist only as temporally residing animals, and implicitly or intuitively at this stage at least, with others.

Importantly, then, the recognition of our temporal condition opens onto the possibility of reflexively recognizing that we exist with others, and that these others are ineffable in terms of their uniqueness. This latter fundamental aspect comes to the fore in Kearney's *The God Who May Be*. For him, ineffable uniqueness is captured under the term *persona*, which he sets in the context of an onto-eschatology. In this sense, he makes a distinction between 'person', which refers to the qualities of sameness shared between people such as biological and psychological characteristics, and their ineffable otherness or unique and inimitable singularity. Moreover, this inimitable singularity is a surprise; it can neither be fully controlled nor fully captured, either categorically or metaphorically. In this way, it is radically open. Yet, this openness is also born of a relation or dialectic of recognition. The *persona* of the other is the limit to my power; moreso it brings home to me that I have no power over him or her. In this way, it is a recognition of the contingent relational existence between persons who are unique, and in their uniqueness are irreducible to one another in terms of their horizons and possibilities. In this way, the other, for Kearney, is 'the quasi-condition of the other remaining other to me even as s/he stands before me at this moment' Kearney, 2001: 13). It is *quasi* in that the person as a whole is both a being in time, a contingent being, who also has a transcendent quality of irreducible alterity. In this sense we are more than roles, more than caught up in the web and constituted as social actions. As he says, '*persona* is the in-finite other in the finite person before me' (Kearney, 2001: 17).

It is on this basis of the other *qua* other or *persona* that critical hermeneutics, or more properly the critical narrative imagination, becomes possible and mobilized. Detachment and reflexivity occur in this space between person and *persona*, which forces open a new space of possibilities. And here narratives, for Kearney, have an open form not as myths, but as *catharsis or working through*, *phronesis and ethics or practical understanding*, and *pardon*. Narratives are the collective spaces in which we take responsibility for past and present actions. Here the diacritical *being- oneself-as-another* (Ricoeur) is given substance as *being oneself-in-relation-to-others*, and is the basis of Kearney's Aristotelian-hermeneutical response to his unease concerning not only deconstruction's indifference to the suffering of others, mentioned above, but also its vacillation on questions of good

judgement. In what follows I will sketch out in an ideal typical way, what Kearney means when he refers to these, to be sure, interconnected narrative forms.

Catharsis or working through means, for Kearney, that in the wake of monstrous and horrific crimes and actions the dead do not die. They are remembered. Narratives that are cathartic encourage us to sympathize with those who have undergone fate-filled, unexpected or inexplicable deaths and to be simultaneously unsettled by them. Cathartic narratives increase the range of sympathy beyond our immediate world, as well as its depth by amplifying its emotional economy beyond that expressed in everyday life. Moreover, we do not stand in the victims' shoes in acts of over-identification. Rather, a gap is opened in the cathartic narrative between the literal and the figural, which creates both awe and sufficient distance to grasp its meaning (Kearney, 1998b: 243; 2002a: 103–5; 2002b: 137–42).

Kearney's point is that in the act of telling and re-telling traumatic events, either in biographical or fictional-dramatic forms a failure of the narrative imagination is averted. Cathartic narratives are acts of ethical sensibility whereby persons and events made absent or forgotten are made present again, even momentarily to teach us. In *Poetics of Imagining* this capacity of ethical sensibility is termed the 'testimonial imagination', which is the capacity to bear witness, even if this witnessing comes from exemplary narratives which are part of our cultural legacy and tradition (Kearney, 1998b: 228).

And yet a cathartic narrative may not be enough to make judgements, and to discern between good and evil actions, good or evil persons. According to Kearney narratives of practical understanding do just that. As he points out, narratives that involve practical understanding comprise 'thought experiments which may help us see connections between ethical aspects of human conduct and fortune/misfortune' (Kearney, 2002a: 101). These thought experiments transfer the realities of evil, from the most banal to the most radical from the sphere of theory to the realm of 'the practical art of understanding', as Aristotle would say. In this sense, judgements are approximate; universals are nascently present in the sense that they are enacted in particular, often exemplary narratives, rather than being transcendentally constituted. By being so enacted, ethical narratives evoke a never realizable horizon of history, a *sensus communis*, which provides the capacity for discernment. As he points out, the utopian horizons of ethically oriented narratives are 'open-ended goals which motivate a free variation of possible worlds. They are not pre-established or pre-determined. They are tentative, provisional, fragile. The universality of the *u-topos* derives from the fact that it is the possession of no-one and the possibility of everyone' (Kearney, 1998b: 227). Ethics is the narrative space of the open-ended possible.

This tentative and provisional nature of ethical narratives makes them, for Kearney, capable of a generosity denied in closed narrative forms. It is possible to forgive and pardon in an open narrative. And in the spirit of

persona forgiveness is a surprise because it comes out of the space of the possible, which was, prior to this act, impossible. For Kearney, it is almost a pure imaginary – '. . . pardon has its reasons that reason cannot comprehend' (Kearney, 2002a: 106).

IMAGINING SPACES: SOME CLOSING REMARKS – BY WAY OF AN OPEN INVITATION

Nonetheless, there is a tension in Kearney's recent work between the two Heideggers represented by either deconstruction or critical hermeneutics. As we have seen, deconstruction, following Plato's footprints, privileges an image of the imagination as the timeless, indeterminate and radical other of signification, of world-forming activity – that which cannot be named. And in this sense, they continue Plato's allusiveness regarding the nature of the space of the creation of meaning itself. Moreover, and if we follow Kearney's unease regarding deconstruction's strategy of radical difference, there is a shift of emphasis by him concerning the meaning of the imagination to that of a space, not of creation, but of encounters, in both closed and open forms. Closed encounters create aliens, in open encounters we meet others. This places the weight of the meaning of the imagination on the idea of the encounter in the first instance, and also makes it immanent in ethically oriented reflection.

In this context, Kearney follows Heidegger's construction of *Dasein*, where imaginings and especially open ones, are inseparable from it. In his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* Heidegger acknowledges that the timeless and transcendentally conceived power of the faculty of understanding (Kant) ultimately rests on the power of productive imagination to create schematic and temporal representations. In this sense, for Heidegger at least, the productive imagination is a creative surplus 'outside' the faculty of understanding, and more importantly a surplus that is oriented to worlding activity. It possibilizes the world (Heidegger, 1962; Kearney, 1995b: 14–17).

Kearney interprets this possibilization to mean that the 'schematising power of the productive imagination transforms the manifold of experience into certain spatial/ temporal unity' through which persons, things and events can be identified (Kearney, 1998b: 226). He goes on to argue that without this capacity for imagining to provide temporal difference by synthesizing past, present and future, there would be no moral or ethical agency, and no *sensus communis* of commonly shared goals. As we have seen, for Kearney, empathy, moral sentiment and practical reasoning are made possible by the narrative imagination. For him, the stakes are high; the postmodern imagination has reduced imaginings to an empty shell of imitation and repetition, and deconstruction has, in entering the 'house of Being' left mundane and wordly concerns behind in its embrace of *khora*.

In working within this dichotomy between the two Heideggers,

however, Kearney's insight the nature of the imagination itself is occluded. This insight, though, can be pursued from a position other than deconstruction's renewed metaphysics, one that is posited in terms of a philosophical anthropology, which like Kearney's notion of the narrative imagination, makes imagining an activity of human self-responsibility, but at a primary ontological level. In order to pursue this insight in a register of philosophical anthropology, I will briefly turn to the work of Castoriadis as an invitation to another critical dialogue.

Castoriadis' work can be viewed as a response to both Heideggers on the question of the imagination. In Castoriadis' view, the creative dimension of the imagination is the constitutive and defining characteristic of the human animal. More specifically, the subject is constituted through two imaginaries which, in terms of their deployment, co-exist and compete within any social subject, and yet are irreducible to one another. These imaginaries are the radical imaginary of the psyche, and the social instituting and instituted imaginary of society that attempts to make/fabricate a social individual who inhabits a particular place, time, and social formation.

Castoriadis takes as his cue, Kant's often quoted sentence on the productive imagination from *Critique of Pure Reason* – 'The imagination is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present' (Kant, 1978: 165 at B152). He reads this to mean that the imagination has the power to create what would otherwise not be present. Moreover, this indicates the imagination's irreducibility to a category of either functional schematization (in Kant's cognitive scheme), or a schematization that is oriented in the first instance towards time (Heidegger). For Castoriadis, there is a constitutive gap between the dysfunctionality of the imagination and the forms through which it is represented, as well as the ways through which it takes institutional shape. It is in this space between the imaginings and their (unstable and re-interpretable) symbolic and institutional forms that new forms emerge and take shape (Castoriadis, 1997: 392–3).

Thus, these creations are other than what was there before, separate and undetermined by them, yet leaning on but not reducible to a pre-existing context. Castoriadis' reworking of the imaginary dimension entails that it is simultaneously one that concerns both the creation and the multiplicity of, and relations between, these imaginary creations. According to Castoriadis, there is 'a heterogeneous multiplicity of co-existing alterities' which emerge from or in poetic imaginary space, 'space unfolding with and through the emergence of forms' (Castoriadis, 1997: 396). In Castoriadis' view, the emergence of new forms and constellations is an activity of the permanent 'othering' of any self of its self, as well as of others. Moreover, they may or may not be closed and autistic, or open to the world and capable of reflexivity. Moreover, for Castoriadis reflexivity is a second order activity, which itself emerges from the dysfunctionality of the radical imaginary.

From this vantage point, the implicit tension that is emitted in Kearney's

work between *khora* and the narrative imagination can be viewed as the creation of imaginary forms in which relations between self and other always occur in the context of a struggle between a possible closure and self-absorption of meaning, and an openness towards world-relations and others (Rundell, 1998, 2001). This tension can be viewed as one that exists between new forms of localism, nationalism, and international dependencies, which throw relations between insiders and outsiders into relief. As Kearney's work implies, the narrative imagination provides a framework for living with and addressing relations between insiders and outsiders, and whether these outsiders will be hospitably greeted as others, in his use of the term, or demonized as aliens.

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