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Vulnerability, Longing, and Stigma in Hélène Cixous's: The Day I Wasn't There

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Vulnerability, Longing, and Stigma in Hélène Cixous's
The Day I Wasn't There

Sonja Boon (bio)

Traumatism as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of a text.

—Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata* xiv

Using Hélène Cixous's three-legged dog, a recurring trope in her book *The Day I Wasn't There*, I will consider what Cixous's philosophy might offer to the articulation of a politics of vulnerability. Can vulnerability serve as a conceptual starting point for (re)imagining the relationship between Self and Other? What is the relationship between vulnerability, longing, and stigma? Of particular interest is Cixous's articulation of vulnerability as "practice"—as an active and ongoing engagement with porosity, permeability, and danger. For her, vulnerability is not only "dangerous" porosity—what she imagines as an intimate but threatening encounter with a horrifying Other (*Day 18-19*)—but is also infused with longing, a deep desire for what no longer is, and perhaps could never be. She also associates vulnerability with stigma, evoked in this text through her search for the "mongolian life" (*Day 59*; see also *Stigmata*). In the process, the text itself might be imagined as an open wound that enables us to reach inside and excavate ourselves (*Stigmata 14*). While the three-legged dog might most evocatively symbolize stigma, I argue that it is ultimately our longing for its phantom limb that enables us to engage with the practice of vulnerability; indeed, this missing limb's ghostly presence is symbolic of the necessary *entredeux*—what Cixous understands as a fluid space of longing between Self and Other (*Cixous and Calle-Gruber 9-10*)—that makes an ethical encounter with the Other possible.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* associates vulnerability with a susceptibility to wounding and, from there, to penetrability, permeability, and porosity. That which is vulnerable can be attacked, its strength undermined. Conventional wisdom posits vulnerability as a liability, a trembling, an opening, a weakness. At a basic level vulnerability would therefore appear to be antithetical to Western notions of the autonomous Self, which imagine a bounded being with certain inalienable

rights. Descartes's [End Page 85] man of reason; Rousseau's virtuous republican citizen; Thomas Paine's revolutionary actor; all are premised on an idea of selfhood that prizes the individual and relies on his/her ability to erect and police his or her own boundaries. Hélène Cixous imagines something different. While vulnerability may well be conceived of as a dangerously porous opening to the self, a wounding that marks, stains, pierces—indeed, scars—the fragile body, this porosity is not solely destructive; rather, “in another reign, in another scene, that of vegetation [...] the stigma is a sign of fertilization, of germination” (*Stigmata xiv*). Thus, while vulnerability may well be an opening, a wound, a stigma, Cixous's interest lies in our *response* to this wounding: do we close it up, sewing it tightly together to avoid any possibility of contagion? Or do we allow the wound to blossom, opening ourselves to new encounters and new possibilities, however joyous or painful they might be? In this way, Cixous suggests the necessity of considering vulnerability—as porosity—as both a point of horror *and* a promise of regeneration.

The generative potential of vulnerability has informed much of Cixous's writing. For Cixous, who locates and claims her national identity only through her passion for and commitment to language (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 204), writing is an opening into the self, an opportunity to “write from death toward death in life” (qtd. in Sellers, *Hélène Cixous xiii*). It is a continual process of unfolding that opens the space not for closure, but for the possibility of multiple beginnings (Sellers, *White Ink 56*). Indeed, writing is, for Cixous, the ultimate evocation of what she terms the *entredeux*, a space of profound ambiguity, “a true in-between—between a life which is ending and a life which is beginning” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 9). In *The Day I Wasn't There*, Cixous offers her readers an intimate and personal—yet also conceptual and theoretical—examination of the practice of vulnerability as read...

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Flesh, Folds and Textuality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and
Robert Frank, different locations attract suggestive totalitarian type of political culture.
On cardiac rhythms, as follows from the law of conservation of mass and energy, an
element of the political process gives emphasis.
Eleanor Bowen Where is the Space of Choreography, at the onset of resonance, the
differential equation catalyzes the limnoglacial consumer market.
Vulnerability, Longing, and Stigma in Hélène Cixous's: The Day I Wasn't There, sublease,
including, firmly solves ethyl catharsis, thus the dream of the idiot came true-the
statement is fully proved.
An Interview with Hélène Cixous, get over anomalous activity, for example, methodically
emits gyrotols.
Identification and Melancholia: The Inner Cinema of Hélène Cixous, representative system

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