Busy? Can I talk to you?"

"Yes, come in Helen. Good to see you. It’s been a while since we’ve had a chat."

"You haven’t got a sermon to prepare?"

"No, not at all. That can wait till Saturday. How’s the doctoral thesis going?"

"Actually, that’s what I want to talk to you about."

"Me? What can I tell you about ‘heretics’... what’s your thesis called again?"

"Marginalized movements in the history of Australian Churches."

"That’s right. Well, how’s it going?"

"Do you remember your denominational history?"

"Just. Not my best subject, I’m afraid."

"Ah, yes, but that’s because history is seldom taught well."

"So how do you think it should be taught?"

"Well, history is about discourse, politics and rhetoric... it’s about power, gender, ideology, disjunctions, discontinuities, and suppressed anomalies... what we call ‘history’ is usually the winner’s story, but it’s ‘effectively’ only ever half the story."

"Like the absence of indigenous Australian histories, until very recently."
"That's right. Your generation was thoroughly imbued with a winner's perspective."
"And not yours?"
"Everything is under intense reevaluation at the present."
"Hence your interest in 'marginalized movements,' but I'm not aware of any in our denomination."
"Exactly! But there are traces and fragments of alternative stories."
"So how can I help you?"
"Well, there is an aspect of my research about which you may know something."
"I'm all ears."
"I'm researching a freelance journal published within our denomination during the 1890s."
"What was the name of it?"
"Hermes' Conceit."
"Never heard of it. Sounds intriguing. Why Hermes' Conceit?"
"Hermes, messenger of the gods, always interpreted the messages. The gods could never speak without being interpreted."
"Hermes... ah yes, hermeneutics! But tell me about Hermes' Conceit."
"It was produced by a group of women who wanted to take our rootedness in biblical tradition seriously..."
"I thought we did!"
"That's the rhetoric. They were convinced we didn't nearly enough."
"They were fundamentalists then?"
"No. Precisely the opposite. They believed that taking biblical tradition and especially the New Testament seriously forced us to wrestle with issues of Christian theology such as equality, justice, and ecumenical dialogue."
"Sounds reasonably healthy to me."
"Yes. Hermes' Conceit was fascinating really, full of issues that the source texts themselves raise."
"Have you got copies of this journal?"
"No, they are only in the archives of the University history department."
"Not even in the archives of our denominational Historical Society?"
"No. Apparently not. They were expunged from the records. There are archives and archives."
"Why? I thought we valued diversity and freedom of opinion. 'In our essentials, agreement, in things peripheral, diversity, but in all things...'
"Yes I know the rhetoric."
"Rhetoric? Oh yes, your view of history."
“Let me pose a question. What if one of the essentials could never be stated without dissonance, disjunctions, and aporias, even in the New Testament?”

“I guess we’d have a theological crisis on our hands.”

“Not necessarily. According to Hermes’ Conceit, we’d have a normal New Testament issue on our hands.”

“What do you mean?”

“Precisely this. The New Testament tradition is thoroughly diverse in its expressions of faith, and so to adhere to New Testament tradition, any particular Christian tradition must necessarily encompass the abyss of indeterminacy . . . or mystery.”

“Yes, but with a few essentials though, wouldn’t you think?”

“Such as?”

“The resurrection, for example. That’s central to Christian faith.”

“Indeed it is, but even here there is great diversity in the New Testament as to how resurrection is understood.”

“The tradition is basically quite homogeneous, that’s obvious, otherwise we wouldn’t have a New Testament.”

“Not according to the writers of Hermes’ Conceit.”

“So you mean they’re questioning the resurrection?”

“Did I say they questioned the resurrection? Just the opposite. They affirmed the intrinsic diversity of resurrection witness in the New Testament, which leads to diverse theologies of Christian confession and spirituality.”

“What was their evidence?”

“Reverend. I’m surprised! The source texts, of course.”

“You mean the Gospels?”

“Yes, and other source traditions too. I assume you’re preparing your sermons for Easter from these texts?”

“Eventually. So what did these people . . . the writers say?”

“Well, firstly, they demonstrated the diversity and even, well dare I say . . . nonchalant discrepancies of Gospel tradition itself.”

“Oh yes, such as?”

“Appearances, movements, gender . . .”

“Gender?”

“Yes. Was Peter or Mary Magdalene first to encounter . . .”

“Yes I see the ecclesiastical implications.”

“Even if you do, listen to your quick dismissal . . .”

“My apologies. I can’t begin to explain the difficulties this issue has created for us.”

“Theologically? Or in tenure and appointments?”
"Now you're being cynical. I'm sure there are legitimate changes to be made... but not too quickly."

"Oh, and why not?"

"Think of the legal labyrinths we might get into if we let this issue unravel too far, not to mention the theological difficulties it has already created."

"You seem to be uncomfortable with the unsettling particularities of resurrection tradition."

"Helen, resurrection tradition is permeated with different modes of perception, that much I will concede."

"Paul, for example."

"Paul? He doesn't have a resurrection narrative."

"Paul is the first New Testament witness to interpret resurrection. Although writing of an event that occurred years later, his encounter with the risen Christ is qualitatively the same as others, giving us a clue to his interpretation of resurrection."

"Yes. 'Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?'"

"Paul is the only New Testament apostle and writer to claim such a personal encounter. He has no tomb tradition. There is none until Mark, forty years after Jesus' execution. Even then, there is no appearance, only an enigmatic ending."

"So, you've been doing some research on Paul. What else?"

"According to Hermes' Conceit, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ is also couched in terms of 'revelation,' which he describes in the mode of a prophetic calling."

"Yes, Galatians. Go on."

"Paul's type of encounter was not an issue with Peter, even if commensality between Jewish and Gentile constituents of the Church was."

"Yes, it's Paul's 'your faith is futile if Christ hasn't been raised?"

"Precisely. If you follow his arguments carefully, Paul pointed to confessional communities 'in Christ' as the tangible reality of resurrection."

"Helen, I must admit I'm a bit rusty on all this, but that comes from thirty years in busy parish life... one does lose touch with all that 'seminary jargon,' but let me ask you a simple question, Helen, what about historicity... of the resurrection?"

"Resurrection is a disruption of history..."

"Disruption?"

"Yes, a disruption of continuity, of the possibility of assimilation into categories we can comprehend, by analogy..."

"By analogy?"
"Yes, resurrection as a symbol of transcendence . . ."

"That disrupts assimilation by analogy?"

". . . a disruption that shows the possibility of totally 'other' ways of perceiving reality. It is a reversal of Troeltsch. You did study Troeltsch didn't you?" 12

"Yes, the only thing I can remember is, er . . . ‘history is always being rewritten or renegotiated in the light of new information’ . . . but a ‘reversal of Troeltsch,’ you say? What do you mean? And what ‘other ways of perceiving life’?"

"I’m referring to his belief that any event must have a correlation with other events, so that ‘analogs will be found,’ as it were, for the seemingly unique or anomalous event, even if we have only known such events through symbols."

"That makes sense. Otherwise, how would we understand anything?"

"Perhaps there are aspects of reality we cannot assimilate. Surely there are perspectives on life that will elude our repertoire of analogies?" 13

"So you feel an analogy might violate something unique?"

"It can. You see, we are always faced with the presence or face of ‘the other,’ the nonassimilable that is a lacuna in our tidy ways of propounding and presenting reality, even a confessional Christian reality." 14

"Yes, I see, but let me pose a more tangible issue. Paul does speak of the resurrection of believers. How does Hermes’ Conceit deal with this?"

"Paul used diverse metaphors such as seed and plant, tents and houses, labor and birth . . ." 15

"I’d forgotten that last image."

"Many do. All constructions of theology are expressed in metaphors of some kind . . ." 16

"Yes I’m aware of that."

"Ah, but the problem is that the metaphoricity of some metaphors is forgotten, while other metaphors are eclipsed and never remembered . . . perhaps because they seem incongruous, even dangerous . . ." 17

"Run that one past me again, Helen."

"Some metaphors assume the status and currency of ‘facts’—while others, especially those that privilege the experiences of women, are forgotten." 18

"Now, now Helen . . . you’re not going to try and convince me to pray ‘Our Mother who art in heaven,’ are you?"

"You may well protest, but even in theology, the metaphors you use come to legitimate their own constructed ‘reality’. There are other
metaphors. For example, being ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit’ are interchangeable for Paul. The destiny of creation, ‘in the Spirit,’ and the Spirit in the womb or body of creation, is as conceptually elusive as Paul’s own encounter with Jesus, whom God exalted in the terms of an ancient martyr vindication tradition.”

“You, or should I say, Hermes’ Conceit, seems to suggest that resurrection is a changing tradition.”

“Yes. They proposed that the whole New Testament tradition is a wrestling with the who, what, how, why of the Jesus tradition, including his ignominious death, in an emerging belief in his exaltation, even if expressed mythically after the Jewish eschatological tradition. It was an adventurous scenario in their time.”

“Go on.”

“One script of Easter was barely written when the drama took on a new twist, generating new scripts. These were the earliest Christian theologies of faith in the risen Christ, expressed in hymn, confession, liturgy, and narrative.”

“Phew! But do you really think we can accept an evolving Easter tradition and remain Christian? That’s loaded. It sounds like New Age talk. Besides, if there is something in what you say, what’s the point of unsettling most of the faithful?”

“Resurrection is unsettling. It’s a radical discourse of disruption. Consider the pervasive presence of women in the resurrection traditions.”

“Yes, and the ‘radical’ significance of this?”

“They knew resurrection in their bodies.”

“How, Helen?”

“Resurrection was that experience of discovering they could be socially inscribed, or written up, differently, their bodies no longer a palimpsest of pejorative abuse.”

“Helen, I don’t follow you. Resurrection is something that happens to Jesus’ body, surely. Are you suggesting it happened to their bodies. That’s absurd.”

“That’s where you and I begin from different premises. You believe the site of transcendence is somewhere else . . . somewhere other than bodies.”

“Yes, that does seem obvious, doesn’t it?”

“What if all bodies are sacred sites of transcendence, bodies like mine, but that they become sites of pejorative graffiti, generation after generation . . . until the graffiti, not the bodies, was all that was read.”

“Yes, I think I follow you, but what sort of graffiti?”
"'Bitch,' 'nigger,' 'slut,' 'old bugger,' 'retarded idiot'... anything that is used pejoratively to denigrate or scribble on their human dignity."

"I see what you mean by graffiti."

"Do you know what that graffiti does to people?"

"It might make them angry, passive, or it might destroy them."

"Yes, and if they should really discover their own bodies, their own sensations, pain, or struggle... not as these are described for them... they might discover their own bodies as sacred... sacred sites of transcendence."²⁶

"That would no doubt be liberating."

"So much so, that if it happened in their experience in a context of social change that recognized the body as a site of transcendence, they would be challenged to engage in compelling, poetic explorations of the character of this disclosure."²⁷

"What do you mean?"

"They would be compelled to create new stories, stories with textures of freedom and struggle, but struggle allied with hope in the emergence of alternative realities."²⁸

"Realities plural?"

"Yes, plural. We construct our worlds by wall-papering them with words."

"'Wall-papering with words'? Helen I don't follow you."

"We experience life through bodies. We interpret our sensations through language, in fact we configure our bodily sensations through language..."²⁹

"Are you suggesting there is nothing outside language?"

"The world is wall-papered with language. The world has always been wall-papered with languages. Babel did not happen. Babel always happens."³⁰

"That's an interesting twist on an old story."

"Language configures the flux of life. This process is culturally specific, and through it, we can 'make our way' in the basic demands of life. 'Reality' is linguistically configured, specifically within cultures. This linguistic configuration precedes us and our 'consciousness' of life, let alone 'meaning to life'."

"So you are saying our 'truths' about life are arbitrary?"

"Not so much arbitrary, but culturally specific. We are born into an existing linguistically wall-papered world, which shapes 'reality' in a certain way. We receive this 'reality' tacitly, as being natural, obvious, or self-evident."³¹
So what you are saying is that women create the resurrection narrative from their own experience of transcendence, in their own bodies?"^{12}

"Against a palimpsest of pejorative scribble . . ."

"What a metaphor! You do have a way with words, Helen."

"They saw the possibility of an alternative world . . ."

"An alternatively wall-papered world?"^{13}

"Yes, and with it, a new palimpsest on their bodies."

"When we talk about resurrection, Helen, we can only return to our written sources, the texts. You now seem to suggest otherwise."

"The point is, and let me read you a quote from Hermes' Conceit . . ."

"At last, some hard data from your mysterious journal!"

"Here we are. These slippery, divergent, evocative texts show us what the textures of resurrection are—the open possibility of life itself. The implicit testimony of these traditions is that 'he is not here . . . ' at least not in the texts."

"Then where, Helen, where?"

"Reverend! He is risen into life, and is in the textures of the world in which you and I can encounter her in others."^{14}

"Helen, are you sure you are talking about God now?"

"One writer says that God, Being, the origin of origins is always under erasure. Neither predicate or subject but copula . . ."

"The verb 'to be' . . . you say?"

"Yes. The verb 'to be' is also under erasure in every combination of words and reality we might make . . . leaving an ancient tear in the quest for the representation of essence or Being, even if we use words and the verb 'to be' in making many such representations in the tactile world."^{15}

"I haven't a clue what you're on about."

"No, I don't suppose you do. Perhaps I could put it like this—do we really know what we are talking about when we talk about God, and if we think we do, by whose criteria?"

"The old Kierkegaard paradox you once reminded me of!"

"Yes. We must commit ourselves to a position without the requisite evidence for our taking a position on life, this being an impossible commitment."^{16}

"Few people can live with that kind of tension, Helen."

"Perhaps we have no choice. Perhaps that is why we must return to tactile bodies, poetry, and the very materiality of the Other . . . which includes women, and respond to their bodies as sites of transcendence—
and write poetry and stories that metonymically affirm the textured mysteries of life. After all, there are only textured mysteries.”

"Textured mysteries?"

"Mysteries are embodied and textured with interpretation, even if indeterminate."

"Ah, until scientific evidence proves such mysteries to be perfectly explicable natural phenomena."

"Transcendence or otherness will always exist, despite our modern empirical attempts . . . ."

"To colonize difference? I’m beginning to read your mind, Helen."

"If you think so. Our neat conceptual systems throw up anomalies—of difference and mystery."

"Such as?"

"Whales!"

"Whales?"

"Yes. Dolphins and whales are not fish, but they swim like fish, and are wet with the same water. They confuse categories. Whales are aquatic divas with sonorous bones, not feathers. If ‘deep calls to deep,’ we should call on Bach as well as Attenborough, fugues as well as facts. Pavarotti not Pavlov might be a better interpreter of the cultural behavior of whales. The cultural mystique of whales cannot be ascertained in an empirical fishbowl, without reduction of their difference or otherness."

"I must say, I don’t know much about Puccini or Verdi, but I’ll remember that the next time I watch a program on whales."

"There is an alterity in whales we cannot assimilate into human perceptions. If there is always a chink of difference and therefore alterity in phenomenological reality—sea, fish, wet, dry, mammals, singing, feathers, culture, divas—how much more in constructed social perspectives!"  

"Yes, quite. Intriguing to say the least, but let’s get back to what we were discussing. You said the New Testament tradition was fundamental to Hermes’ Conceit."

"Yes. The texts provide us with a subtle repertoire of ways in which we may recognize God’s transcendence in our world . . . ."

"Through a prism of Jesus tradition, I take it?"

"Yes, if one is confessionally Christian. Listen, I’ll read you some more of this. Cling to the texts as if we control them, and we will lose the poetry of such “presence” and the capacity to “recognize” the risen One. Allow these narratives to nestle seductively in open minds, rejuvenated bodies, and they will continue to speak and vigorously chal-
lenges us, enabling us to meet the transcendent one in the most sur-
prising ways." 39

"So what exactly happened to this maverick journal and its perpetra-
tors?"

"The journal was declared, through various euphemisms, heretical. It
lapsed through lack of funds, and its advocates were ostracized."

"So why don't we have any record of it, apart from your University
archives?"

"Because alternative, subversive histories are often erased, expunged
within their cradle of nurture. As I said, there are archives, and there
are archives."

"So what did you want clarified? You seem to know all there is to
know."

"It's not my thesis. It's my faith in the church."

"I'm not surprised. One shouldn't pursue religious concerns at sec-
cular universities!"

"You're teasing, but I suspect you really do think that... you see, I
have grown up in the church... it's part of me, but I'm not sure
whether..."

"You've outgrown it... isn't that a little presumptuous!"

"No, that's not what I feel. No, what I really want to know is whether
the Church..."

"Which means the people who lead it... like myself, isn't that what
you mean by 'the Church'?

"I want to know if the Church... is really prepared to wrestle with
the implications of New Testament Christianity, which is grounded in the
elusive confession, 'Christ is Risen'."

"Wrestle? Isn't that what we've been doing? And look, I really must
get back to work now. I'm afraid you..." 40

Notes

1. Foucault's "effective history" is disruptive to the quest for continui-
ities in history, introducing discontinuities, disjunctions, and anomalies, in con-
trast to historians who want to "confirm our belief that the present rests
upon profound intentions and immutable necessities." "Effective history"
also seeks to demonstrate that all history is perspective-contingent (1984:
86–90). "Not only is history written by the winners, it is also made by them"

2. This is a play on Foucault's concept of archives.

3. Galilee represents the future: "go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee;
there they will see me." (Matthew, Mark [John: "Jesus showed himself again
to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias"]) while in Luke, Galilee represents
the past (Luke: “Remember how he told you while in Galilee”). There are appearances to “the eleven” only in Galilee (Matthew [Mark?]), while in Luke there are appearances to “the eleven” only in Jerusalem; John has an appearance to the disciples and Thomas a week after the first, yet in Luke the ascension occurs on “Easter day,” and forty days later in Acts; women encounter the risen Jesus (Matthew, John), while women do not encounter the risen Jesus (Mark, Luke); men are responsible for the preburial anointing (John), while women undertake the postburial anointing (2, 3, many women?) (Mark, Luke).

4. Compare Luke 24.34 and Mark 16.7 with Matthew 28.9–10 and John 20.11–8. In Luke the women remember (24.8), and interpret this memory to the disciples (9), who disbelieve them (24.11), and two of these disbelievers are later rebuked for not heeding (remembering) the Word (24.25–6). For Luke, witness is interpretation, and the women are pivotal to this witness. The writer endorses the trustworthiness of the women’s report or message, even if some of the disciples do not. Indeed, Luke portrays the men as tardy in belief, but the women are ready interpreters as witnesses of resurrection (Seim 1994:154–7; Plevnik 1987:90–103; Karras 1994:14–9).


6. 1 Corinthians 15.5–8; Galatians 1.15–16. Appearance (1 Cor. 15.8 “made to see”; ophthē passive) and revelation (Gal. 1.15, 16, apokalypsa... en enemoi, “to reveal [his son] in me) speak of the same experience. In his Corinthian account, Paul speaks of being “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8, NRSV ektrōmati). Romans 16:7 would suggest that Paul’s Christophany experience occurred some time after the “first apostolic experiences of Christopathany,” with apostles Andronicus and Junia being “in Christ” before Paul. Was Paul’s reference to ophthē visual, mystical, metaphorical or numinous? The usage of ophthē (made to “see”) indicates a variety of religious experiences that are nuanced heavily toward epiphanies of divine presence: in the Septuagint; the appearance of Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration scene (Mark 9:4); the appearance of tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2.3), Carnley 1987:227–9). These occurrences of ophthē in the Transfiguration and Pentecost stories indicate postresurrection Christophanies, the first read back into the ministry of Jesus, and the second depicting the birth of a multicultural community.

7. 1 Corinthians 9:1.

8. Mark 16:8. The alternative endings are later attempts to ameliorate the abrupt ending.

9. Galatians 1:15–16 “to reveal his Son in me.” The same phrase is used in Galatians 2:20: “it is Christ who lives in me” (en enemoi), indicating an inner revelatory experience. Compare 2 Corinthians 4.6 “For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (NRSV).

11. 1 Corinthians 15:12–19.
12. Troellisch advocated the relativity of social and cultural phenomena, which, he noted, is always historically contingent, with values relative to
time, place, circumstances within cultural matrices. He advocated relativism in faith—Christianity being a faith relative to our cultural context (albeit for Troeltsch, the quintessential expression of religion in Western culture), while other religious traditions are phenomena relative to different cultures. Troeltsch's historicism also included understanding history by analogy, in which not all events can be known but all events can be incorporated analogously to what is known. Claims outside analogy are to be rejected, for any event has some correlation with other events; therefore, history is continuity. See Macquarrie 1981:141–4.

13. Against Troeltsch, Moltmann argues that the "fallacy of analogy" is an eclipse of aberration, the different and strange. Analogy is a form of conceptual colonialism, integrating only what is analogous with a particular horizon of experience and perception and suppressing, rejecting, what is "other" or outside this horizon. Analogical colonialism is a form of historical homogenization that destroys the diverse, polymorphous textures of history and closes off genuine perception of diversity and difference (Moltmann 1990:227–45). Eschatology, in this instance, resurrection, is the language of discontinuity, disruption, and otherness and is resistant to analogical colonialism (Winquist 1995:62–83).

14. According to Emmanuel Levinas, a response to the "face" of the Other is a response to the singular experience of the Other in the Other's difference. This response is not an assimilation of otherness but an opening to the otherness of the Other. The face of "the other" demands our response (1979:187–219).

15. 1 Corinthians 15:35–41; 2 Corinthians 5:1–5; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3 is used in the apocalyptic context of resurrection and parousia.


18. Nietzsche pointed out that language is permeated with metaphors, even if we do not recognize or have forgotten this: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymics, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding: truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors that have become powerless to affect the senses; [die abgebützt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind], coins which have their obverse [Bild] effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal: Derrida 1982:217, quoting Nietzsche, F., "On Truth and Falsity in their Ultra moral Sense," in Levy, D. (ed.), Collected Works, vol. 2 (London T. N. Foulis, 1911), 180.


21. This is a perennial issue of epistemology, even in the late New Testament era. That is, what do Christians mean when they claim to know the risen Christ? How do they know that what they experience spiritually and claim theologically relates to Jesus of Nazareth? Peter Carnley deals extensively with this issue (1987)

22. Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" (either the mother of James and Joseph or the mother of James and John: Matt. 27:56, 28:1–10); Mary
Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome (Mark 16:1–8); Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna (Luke 24:1–11); Mary Magdalene (John 20:1–18).


26. Kasper notes that the human person is characterized by “individuality, in the sense of uniqueness” and “spirituality” and therefore “infinity” or transcedence (1989:27).

27. The vocative, prophetic summons to just relationships with neighbor is a pervasive and primary site of revelation in biblical narrative and poetics. That is, I am addressed, vocatively, from beyond myself (transcendence/otherness), through the prism of neighbor at the limit of human dignity. A profound endorsement of human dignity occurs in the Judeo-Christian tradition, through the Hebrew scriptures, the Jesus tradition, and the genuine Pauline epistles. Each endorses a paradoxical theology of God’s embodiment in the lives and narratives of people, while proclaiming a God of mystery and transcendence, whether through a burning bush or eschatological resurrection. Indeed, transcendence (Yahweh) siding with fragile, often oppressed embodiment (widow, orphan, stranger) takes precedence over cultic “truth-telling.” The “truth” of religion, according to Isaiah, is abominable when it denies human dignity to the embodied other.

28. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, biblical narratives can be recreated through “historical imagination, artistic recreation, and liturgical ritualization... from a feminist perspective, to reformulate biblical visions and injunctions in the perspective of the discipleship of equals” (1984:20–1).

29. See Kerr 1986, [1997].

30. This is a variation of Crossan’s statement: “Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens” (1994:197).

31. Wittgenstein proposed that language is culture and culture is language, with no one language able to provide the benchmark for ostensive meaning in human discourses. Literal correlations between words and referents are conventional, not essential (1967 [1953]: no.26, 12 no.28, 14e, no.371, 116e, no.496, 497, 138e, no.355, 113e). We are generally unaware of this until we encounter a “different world” in another language. Conventional meanings exist within the context of particular language use: “The meaning of a word is its use in the language.” (no.43, 20e).

32. According to Sawicki, Gospel narratives are the poetic production of Church communities seeking to delineate modes and practices for “seeing the Lord” in the face of the epistemological issue of correlating the claim to encounter the risen Lord with Jesus of Nazareth. This occurs in the texts and praxes of bodies as much as written texts. Indeed, marginalized bodies contesting cultural texts become sites of poetic production of Gospel texts. For Sawicki, the combination of body language and the epistemological
issue of recognition provides the central impetus for the production of Gospel narrative, as the poetics of "seeing the Lord" (1994).

33. This raises a significant contemporary question: "How do we gain ethical and political traction while allowing for both difference and perspective-contingent values or wall-papered worlds?" An important recognition needs to be made here: the demand of the Other pressed to the limits of human dignity—is not linguistically constructed but an embodied reality. The Other can be taunted or tortured, go hungry and cold, become sick, or die. The empirical experiences of hunger or homelessness and their impact on human bodies are not linguistically constructed, even if the "social realities" precipitating such conditions often are. It seems that the body and its need for dignity is where we touch a striking consensus of values, whatever the culture, language, or wall-papered worldview. Hence a place of dialogue between different perspectives with their contingent ethical values is possible, even if this dialogue presupposes hard work in highly particular situations.

34. Schüssler Fiorenza points out that "Christhood," being a theological confession, is not gender specific (1995:50).
36. Existence carries with it the need to decide and act on truth claims, and therefore a paradox: one cannot know the truth, yet one must live the truth. One must live with "objective uncertainty" as an "existential paradox" regarding truth. For Kierkegaard, objective uncertainty combined with subjective passion and commitment is made through "risk" or a "leap of faith." This is an "absolute paradox." God is unknown, nonanalogue, infinite. Yet faith in God is "an existential leap of faith." This is not nonsense. However, to prove it is not nonsense is impossible. Existential commitments and passions are not assimilable to rational judgment, yet they consist in making contingent judgments (Sikes 1968:111, 117).
37. In contrast to metaphorical theories designating two modes of discourse—literal and nonliteral, ordinary and quasi-transcendental—language is always grounded in sensual materiality, from which its metaphors are derived. While a trope designates an unanticipated turn or change from one mode of reception to another, this need not create a dichotomy between "literal" and "nonliteral" language. Rather, language is metonymic, always oscillating between literal and nonliteral reference, depending on context. This metonymic character of language can intensify images metaphorically, while affirming that language still has its reference in the opaque, embodied complexities of life. If metonymy, according to Derrida, is turning a sensible part of a metaphorical image (signified) into yet another metaphor (signifier) signifying something else (1982:227n. 32), it has not erased the sensuality of metaphor but expanded its possible reference (signification) further. A recognition of the metonymic nature of metaphor enables us to recognize the material effects of language by plotting the effects of "natural" metaphors in human behavior and relationships. Such metaphors are not so "dead" as is often assumed. "[S]ublimation" of the "literal" or sensual into nonliteral metaphorical images, even if the metaphoricity of these images has been forgotten, is a repression of the material (usually marginal).
Hence for Bal, "metaphors...carry the traces of what they have repressed" (1993:185, 204–6).

38. In contemporary parlance, alterity refers to difference, otherness (i.e., alternative), and can include paradox, mystery, and even transcendence. Mark Taylor provides extensive discussion on alterity in Altarity (1987).

39. Theological exploration of the resurrection through metaphor, story, and confession in epistles and Gospels is evocative, not prescriptive, for integral belief in the Easter event and its ongoing effects in human life. The confession is simple, even if the primary data are subtly complex and diverse and authenticated only by life-giving and liberating practices in the human community. Thankfully, the Gospels compound this mystery with irreconcilable accounts of postresurrection appearances or Christophanies. They resist both crass fundamentalist and smug reductionist interpretations by generating diverse readings of resurrection that point to the mystery of alterity, or "otherness," embodied in life.

40. This replicates the enigmatic ending of the Gospel of Mark.

References


