

Naming the Child: Entering the Maternal Genealogy in Valeria Parrella's *Lo spazio bianco*

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Naming is usually seen as the first action that inscribes the newborn in a patriarchal genealogy, assigning to the subject a role, a position, and an identity in the symbolic order. However, it is possible to find ruptures that allow for a different signification, shifting the emphasis towards a maternal genealogy. The passage from a paternal to a maternal genealogy offers a perspective for a reading of Valeria Parrella's *Lo spazio bianco* (2008).

Maria, the 42-year-old protagonist of this book, gives birth to a premature baby girl after only six months of pregnancy. The baby is put in an incubator in the hope that she can grow and survive. At one point in the story, Maria decides to name her baby. I suggest that Maria's act of naming her baby girl can be seen as an event which subverts the traditional mother/daughter role assigning Maria and her daughter their new subject-positions according to a maternal genealogy.

Starting with an analysis of a number of feminist theorists' take on naming, I will then examine the process of naming in *Lo spazio bianco* in the light of some of the theories on maternal/feminine subjectivity. I will integrate Luce Irigaray's theory of maternal genealogy with notions derived from object-relations psychology such as Jessica Benjamin's "intersubjective space", Nancy Chodorow's and Jane Flax's different ideas of mother/daughter relationships, and Christopher Bollas' "unknown thought"; Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters* will provide the focus for my analysis, while Bracha L. Ettinger's "matrixial borderlinking trans-subjectivity" will be the final key for the reading of Maria's delayed maternal subjectivity.

Introduction

Naming is usually seen as the first action that inscribes the newborn in a patriarchal genealogy, assigning to the subject a role, a position, and an identity in the symbolic order. However, these are never fixed and the subject will always be in search of a positionality that gives him/her an identity which helps to recompose, albeit momentarily, a self which, according to Jaques Lacan, is always fragmented. For Lacan (1956-57, 1958, 1966), the "Symbolic Order" marks the child's subjection to the father's law as a result of Freud's Oedipus stage. This allows the child to enter the binary system of signification based on the Phallus, and to assume its own subject-position. The pre-Oedipal union with the mother is, therefore, erased and the consequent unconscious desire for this lost union is kept under control by the symbolic order. It follows that the

Phallus does not allow for a representation of the feminine, which is the desired phallus for man who *has* the phallus (Lacan, 1958).

Arguing against both Freud and Lacan, Luce Irigaray (1974, p.133) claims that in patriarchy woman can only assume the role of object "of representation, of discourse, of desire" because the false and apparent neutrality of disembodied philosophical discourse is actually based on male subjectivity; woman is represented as a castrated, or lacking, man (Freud, 1933) or she cannot be represented at all, because "there is not such a thing as Woman" (Lacan, 1972-1973, p.72). The symbolic cannot find a system of representation for femininity, since in its binary signification the feminine is seen as the "other" in support of male subjectivity (Irigaray, 1977). Patriarchy needs the two identities of mother and woman to be conflated, so that the reproductive function of the female body can be debased to the merely natural and be assumed symbolically by the father; the father, then, hands down his name to his son excluding, thus, a female genealogy: "The whole of western culture is based upon the murder of the mother" (Irigaray, 1981, p.47). The patriarchal logos starts with the erasure of the body of the mother, which entails that the relationship between mothers and daughters remains unsymbolised. The restoration of the maternal, which necessitates the definition of a new genealogy of women based on a new language and a new social order, can have a political subversive function. Irigaray believes that relationships between women must be encouraged, so that a new language can be found (Grosz, 1989, pp.122-123).

Irigaray's idea of a female genealogy is further developed by the Italian feminist philosopher Luisa Muraro in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (1991), where she advances a theory called *affidamento* (often translated as "entrustment"), which sees as a universal model the ethics of the maternal function.¹ A female genealogy is a means to distance the maternal from the exclusive association with its biological reproductive function. The maternal is based on exchange, and, for Muraro, exchange is at the basis of feminine desire (Parati and West, 2002, p.21). *Affidamento* is a means of re-inscribing the mother's body into signification: similarly to the pattern found in the mother/daughter relationship, a more "experienced" woman becomes the mediator between another woman and society, according to a maternal ethics that, as I said above, is based on exchange and solidarity. In this way, maternal power becomes an alternative to the patriarchal symbolic order: "As a guiding concept of feminist practice, in the relationship of entrustment, the notion of the symbolic mother permits the exchange between women across generations and the sharing of knowledge and desire across differences" (de Lauretis, 1990, p.11).

The passage from a paternal to a maternal genealogy offers a perspective for a reading of Valeria Parrella's *Lo spazio bianco* (2008). Born in Torre del Greco, near Naples in 1974, Parrella is perhaps the most prominent among the young generation of Neapolitan writers. She has written short stories and novels and *Lo spazio bianco* was made into a successful film in 2009. Maria is a 42-year-old unmarried teacher of adults who are studying to obtain school qualifications.

The story starts with Maria, who gives birth to a premature baby girl after only six months of pregnancy. The baby is put in an incubator in the hope that she can grow and survive. At one point in the story, Maria decides to name her baby. I suggest that Maria's act of naming her baby girl can be seen as an event which subverts the traditional mother/daughter role assigning Maria and her daughter their new subject-positions according to a maternal genealogy. Starting with an analysis of a number of feminist theorists' take on naming, I will then examine the process of naming in *Lo spazio bianco* in the light of some of the theories on maternal/feminine subjectivity. I will integrate Irigaray's theory of maternal genealogy with notions derived from object-relations psychology such as Jessica Benjamin's "intersubjective space", Nancy Chodorow's and Jane Flax's different ideas of mother/daughter relationships, and Christopher Bollas' "unknown thought"; Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters* will provide the focus for my analysis, while Bracha L. Ettinger's "matrixial borderlinking trans-subjectivity" will be the final key for the reading of Maria's delayed maternal subjectivity.

The Act of Naming: a Normative or Subversive Action?

Baraitser's anecdotal introduction to her *Maternal Encounters* (2009) provides an enlightening reflection on the act of naming. She recounts how surprised she was to be asked to name her baby immediately after the delivery. She describes humorously her wonder before a name that did not "stick" to her baby: "The child is a stranger to his name" (p.24). She becomes aware that it was a choice arbitrarily made by someone else for the child (herself and her husband in this case) and compares this to the arbitrariness of language itself that was already there before the birth of her son (p.24). Naming a child is for the baby the first move into the name-of-the-father, when culture wins over nature and starts to shape the identity of the newborn according to models already chosen for the child. Baraitser (2009, p.46) refers to Lacan when she states that proper names place subjects in a fixed point within the symbolic - though in constant flux - and that the "*Nom-du-Père*" signifies the final severing of the child from the mother's body and its attainment of Oedipal identity. This act of naming is particularly meaningful for Maria whose daughter is still in the incubator fighting between life and death: she needs the premature baby to become real.

The question of proper names is discussed by Lacan (1964-1965) and Julia Kristeva (1979). In seminar XII (1964-1965, p.52), referring to those who find no meaning in proper names - John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell - Lacan writes: "To say that a proper name [...] is without meaning, is something grossly erroneous. On the contrary it carries with itself much more than meanings, a whole sum of notices". Signification is, in fact, also linked to its foreclosed desires, or "sum of notices". Criticising Bertrand Russell, who compares names to demonstratives,² Lacan affirms that proper names serve to reinforce the fabrication of an identity that would remain formless if it did not enter the name-of-the-father: "It [the proper name] is designed to fill the holes, to be a

shutter, to close it down, to give it a false appearance of suture" (Lacan, p.59). In these words, it is indirectly indicated that the "holes", or the fissures through which the unconscious might emerge, will never be completely "sutured".

Similarly, demonstratives and proper names are also discussed in "The True-real" by Julia Kristeva (1979, p.216) who sees them as examples of the "instability and ambiguity" of language. The right way to approach them is from the point of view of the "speaking being" (p.235). A proper name helps to give boundaries to a particular sign, so that it can emerge from its indefiniteness: "The proper name therefore surfaces as an indeterminate elaboration on the separation of a particular sign from the general set of signs, but also of a signifier from its signified and its referent" (p.235). In other words, naming is an act that subtracts the subjects from the "unnameable" space of the semiotic chora, that is to say, the repressed pre-verbal union with the mother when the child utters babbles and does not see any borders between itself and the mother. The chora belongs to the unconscious and becomes the site or receptacle of all the mother-oriented energies that, when they re-emerge, challenge the patriarchal language with their subversive power (Kristeva, 1974).

Judith Butler's theories reinforce the idea that the norm always contains that which is able to undermine and resist the Law (1990, p.55). She writes in the introduction to *Bodies that Matter*: "Naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (1993, p.8). Because a subject is constructed through language, her/his identity is reinforced by the reiteration of superimposed practice and consequently a girl, for instance, is "girled" beforehand by the name assigned to her (p.7). For Butler, bodies materialize thanks to the performative repetitions of norms that "over time produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface" (p.9). The norms are meant to repress anything that is likely to disrupt the social rules in order to maintain the subject far from the danger of what Butler calls "the *unsymbolizable*, the *unspeakable*, the *illegible*" (p.190, Butler's emphasis). Proper names as signifiers do not refer to a pre-given object but they shape it "retroactively", unifying elements under the common denominator of the presumed identity (p.210). To become a subject means to undergo a process of "subjection", a word that is also reminiscent of an imposed power; this power is imposed on us, but it is also accepted by us because we depend on it in order to be a "subject" (Butler, 1997, p.2). The subject needs to be recognized through the "interpellation" of an other who, in turn, has already been positioned in her/his performative social role.³ However, even though acts are repeated, they always repeat differently sometimes transforming performativity into parody: subversion lies in "how to repeat" (1990, p.148) because parody can reveal the artificiality and arbitrariness of the norm.

Irigaray (1977) considers the act of naming to be a traumatic event that usurps women of their generative function in order to subjugate them and to ensure men's hold on their offspring, otherwise it would make paternity very

uncertain: "According to this order [symbolic order], when a child is given a proper name, it already replaces the most irreducible mark of birth: the *navel*. [...]. A proper name, even a proper name, is slipped on to the body like coating – an extra-corporeal identity card" (p.39, Irigaray's emphasis). Losing their maternal genealogy, women will not find their subject-position in the symbolic, and their identities remain linked to the role of objects which pass from father to husband, whose possession is ensured by the change of women's surnames: from the father's surname to that of the husband.

It appears, therefore, that female theorists concur that naming a child is the first move away from the mother: it is the beginning of the process of forming boundaries ensured by the surname that binds the baby to a paternal genealogy. On the other hand, we have seen that the name-of-the-father is never able to erase the foreclosed mother, which emerges through desire. For example, Kristeva's bodily experience of maternity and the meeting with another being, her son, inserts her in a lost female genealogy. In *Stabat Mater* (1977, p.172) she writes: "Recovered childhood [...], opaque joy that roots me in her bed, my/ mother's, and projects him, a/ son, a butterfly soaking up/ dew from her hand, there,/ nearby in the night. Alone:/ she, I and he". In the bed that she shares with her son, Kristeva also establishes a connection with her mother by means of her own maternity, an experience that leads to *jouissance* – that is to say, her expression of a maternal bodily pleasure linked to the semiotic chora.

Building up maternal subjectivity

Naming the baby girl is the turning point in *Lo spazio bianco*: here, it is not an action of separation but rather an exchange, the creation of the relation between two subjects. As Irigaray argues in *The Way of Love* (2002, pp.71-75), the "interweaving of relations", where a "whole" being is in connection with another "whole" being, is something that goes back to the "foundation", to the origin, that is to say, to the relation with the mother. It is the Law of the Father that transforms it and cuts it off from its "connection with life" and with other beings. The focus of *Lo spazio bianco* is on the mother, or better, on motherhood as the construction of a new maternal subjectivity, based on "the experience of self-discovery through strangeness" (Baraitser, 2009, p.157). Here, the act of naming becomes the act that starts the building of Jessica Benjamin's "intersubjective space" (1995) for the encounter between two newly forming subjects, still strangers to each other: Irene and Maria as a mother.

Benjamin's theory shifts the focus from subject-object to subject-subject encounter, thus casting the mother-child relationship in a different light. Psychoanalysis traces the beginning of identity formation back to the splitting from the mother/other, centring on the infant who internalizes the mother as an object. But if the mother is recognized as a subject, the early development of psyche must take into account the mother's autonomy as well, because it is by

experiencing the mother's subjectivity that the infant experiences and develops its own self.⁴ From a feminist perspective, this different approach lays the foundation for the recognition of the mother's subjectivity, in fact "denial of the mother's subjectivity [...] profoundly impedes our ability to see the world as inhabited by equal subjects" (Benjamin, 1995, p.31). In Parrella's novel, the intersubjective space is the *spazio bianco*, the white space or gap, formed through the juxtaposition of two images. The first image is provided by the gap that Maria experiences between her former self and the new motherly self, a process that is slowed down by her daughter being in the incubator. The second image is linked to another aspect of her "relational self": her work as a teacher of Italian for adults. Here, the *spazio bianco* is the double-line spacing that Maria suggests to her student to represent a change in his own life in the essay that he is writing for his final examination. The time of the diegesis is the 40 days during which the baby is in the incubator; the narrator's time is suspended, while humdrum everyday life flows around her on her journey between work and the hospital.

This suspension is immediately felt by the protagonist, who, in the prologue to the novel, says: "Il fatto è che mia figlia Irene stava morendo, o stava nascendo, non ho capito bene".⁵ The narration starts with the unexpected event of the baby's premature birth as an "event-encounter". Following Benjamin's theory of "intersubjective space", but focussing her interest on the formation of the mother's subjectivity when confronted by the child's alterity, Baraitser (2009, p.6) describes the "event-encounter" as the event that marks the beginning of two new subjectivities: "Irene era arrivata".⁶ Irene had arrived unexpectedly when Maria was already forty-two, when she thought she had already become the person she wanted to be, when she had already developed her own self (p.15). Maria describes her identity before the *spazio bianco* by listing the acts and roles she used to perform preceded by the repeated personal pronoun I, and indirectly drawing attention to the fact that they do not conform to the patriarchal norm: "Io al cinema a quattromila lire, io a letto con chi volevo, io chiusa per ore in biblioteca come un'investigatrice a cercare libri [...]. Io con la sigaretta in mano pronta a smettere quando avrei voluto".⁷ With the birth of her daughter, two new subjects are about to form out of herself and she does not know who she is, because her own new subjectivity can be shaped only by sharing Benjamin's "intersubjective space" that implies the co-existence of another subject; but the other subject, the baby, is not fully there yet: "Pensai al mio comodino, su cui si alternano gocce di ansiolitico e tazzine di caffè, [...], allo psicologo che da anni mi restituiva *la stessa immagine di me* che io gli lanciavo, solo deformata in modo diverso".⁸

Maria tries to find meaning in what is happening and she also tries to explain it scientifically: "Un feto sta dentro un utero, un bambino nasce dopo nove mesi di gravidanza".⁹ However, this is not what "nature" is doing in her case, because her daughter is born after only six months and is in a machine now. Her appeal to science makes Maria realize that the baby needs to become real, namely she needs a name and to enter the name-of-the-father: "Allora mi accorsi

dell'*urgenza* del nome. 'Si chiama Irene', - dissi, - 'e scrivetelo'.¹⁰ The male genealogy is soon disrupted and replaced by a matrilineal genealogy that is emphasized by the lack of the baby's father, who had left Maria as soon as he had heard about her pregnancy: "Qualche giorno dopo una burocrazia borbonica che non aveva nessun legame con la vita registrò anche il suo [Irene's] cognome, il mio".¹¹ Even though the baby girl takes her mother's surname only out of bureaucratic exigencies, nevertheless, the baby girl enters into a female genealogy. In this context, naming seems to be the parody of a performative action; mimicking it, although not deliberately (Irigaray, 1977) unmasks the inconsistency of the patriarchal law.¹²

In this suspended *spazio bianco* names do not yet constitute identities. A new subjectivity is realised after the event has taken place, retrospectively, as Baraitser suggests (2009, p.158),¹³ but time is suspended and the event, or encounter with another subject, has not fully become an event yet because Irene was still in a state of suspension between life and death: "E Irene non c'era. Lei non era nessuno".¹⁴ Moreover, Maria herself is not a mother yet, because she is also in a state of suspension: "E io non ero sua madre, non ero una madre, io ero un buco vuoto che ogni mattina prendeva una metropolitana".¹⁵ Maria's memory of her own mother does not help her to better understand her newly forming self, because her mother seems not to have a definite self either. Her life was limited to the house; she was so fully dependent on her husband that she was not able to get her driving licence because, during her driving lessons, he kept on saying that driving did not suit her (p.49). In other words, her mother performed the role assigned to her by patriarchy, the same role that Maria is trying to dismiss: "Avevo 16 anni quando mi ero impiegata nello sforzo piú capillare della mia esistenza: rimuovere la corona di spine. Era stata un'eredità di mia madre: lei era una suora in borghese".¹⁶ Her mother had been brought up as a *mater dolorosa* with no desires and no body.

The relationship between Maria and her mother can be understood through theories of object-relations which focus on the familial environment, especially the theories of the feminist psychoanalysts Chodorow and Flax, and those of Bollas. The notion of object-relations idea is based on the study of the infant in its first year of life, during which it experiences the earliest sense of self in relation to the outer object/person that will form the blueprint of its future relationships in adult life. Because at such an early stage of human life the first object is the mother or the mother's breast, the infant internalizes an interaction between itself and the good or bad mother that will shape its adult psyche and connections with the outer world. From a feminist point of view mothering is not biologically determined but rather is the result of socially induced "choices". Names and naming, in fact, remind us that identities are primarily established in the name-of-the-father, even when they can be subverted and shifted towards a maternal genealogy. Social structures, Nancy Chodorow (1978a; 1978b) underlines, are important because subject-formation occurs firstly in the ambit of the family, which is itself a social

structure at the service of patriarchy: "These object-relations grow out of contemporary family structure and are mutually created by parents and child" (1978b, p.139). According to Chodorow's reworking of Freud's theory, boys need to separate themselves from the pre-Oedipal mother and reject her in order to acquire their "masculine" heterosexual gender and recuperate her symbolically: they will try to repossess the mother through their heterosexual relationships. Boys must be more differentiated than girls from their mothers and in differentiating themselves they develop a stronger sense of autonomy and individuality. On the contrary, the girl will never separate enough from the mother in order to retain feminine traits; for this reason, she will become more dependent on others and keen to establish social relationships.

Differently from Chodorow, Jane Flax (1985) sees this lack of separation between mother and daughter as a hindrance for her identity formation: "[T]he development of women's core identity is threatened and impeded by an inability to differentiate from the mother" (p.3). Consequently, women cannot solve their problems if they do not come to terms with their relationship with their own mothers: "Women patients often feel as if they must rescue their mother in order to and before they can work on their own problems" (p.14). Although Flax and Chodorow see the mother/daughter relationship from two different angles, they both offer perspectives for a better understanding of Maria's relationship with her own mother which contributes to delaying the acquisition of her maternal subjectivity: Maria had rejected the patriarchal role that her mother had assumed; nonetheless, her newly forming motherhood has stirred up the memory of her relationship with her own mother. In the *spazio bianco* where Maria meets her daughter, the phantom of her own mother makes it difficult for her to find an identity different from her mother's. In fact, Maria is burdened with her mother's own grief. Her idea of motherhood is contaminated by Bollas' "unthought known" (1987) that has its roots in Maria's early psychic development and has become part of her being. The object-relations theorist Bollas has expanded Donald Winnicott's idea of "transitional phenomena", which are the links between psychic development and the familial environment: these phenomena are neither forgotten nor mourned (Winnicott, 1953, p.7). Consequently, because the transitional object par excellence is the mother, in the adult woman the presence of the mother will haunt her also during her own search for an identity as a mother. According to Bollas, the "unthought known" is the experience of an object at an early stage of life when cognitive skills are not yet developed. This object produces a change in the infant and leaves a trace in its forming ego, a trace that will emerge in adult life especially when she/he is experiencing transformation. Thus, it is necessary for Maria to shape this "unthought known" into an idea before she can start to metabolize it and see herself as a different mother.

From Bracha Ettinger's post-Lacanian psychoanalytical point of view (2006a; 2006b), the "unthought known" belongs to the matrixial feminine, that is to say, to the pre-natal, pre-Oedipal bond with the mother. Because it is pre-linguistic it is not part of the phallic order of signification; therefore, when it surfaces it

appears “mad” or “toxic” (Mulhall, 2011, p.78). That is the reason why Maria’s “buried” mother, that emerges when she herself experiences motherhood, is first perceived as the Oedipal mother, an object to be distanced, even rejected, in order to become a subject. On the contrary, the pre-Oedipal feminine matrixial is exactly what links her to her not yet well-defined maternal genealogy that powerfully emerges through the gaps re-opened by Maria’s delayed event-encounter with her daughter. It is the powerful “link-o” with the matrixial feminine that will be recuperated. The “link-o” is a more positive idea than Lacan’s object (a) - or the fantasy of an unobtainable lost object of desire (Lacan, 1973) - because the desire for it leads not to the death drive but to the pre-natal, pre-life encounter with the maternal. It is formed of “borderlinking strings” which are the traces left by the pre-maternal/pre-natal matrixial event-encounter with the feminine (Ettinger, 2010, p.12). It is provided by the matrixial feminine which “[...] corresponds to a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects, composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not-assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression in borderlines, limits, and thresholds of the ‘I’ and the ‘non-I’ emerging in co-existence” (Ettinger, 1992, p.177). Ettinger’s matrixial model ascribes the maternal to an idea of life free from the fear of being dissolved back in the mother’s womb. Although associated with the idea of origin, the Latin etymology of the word matrix, in fact, does not mean “womb” and it is not Kristeva’s chora. The term “matrix” is used by Ettinger with its modern meaning of generating and originating power (Pollock, 2009a, p.12). In this new light, the object-relations concept of “intersubjectivity” becomes a *trans*-subjective encounter. The shift from the prefix “inter-” to the prefix “trans-” is fundamental because “intersubjectivity” is post-natal, that is to say, when two full subjects encounter each other; “trans-subjectivity”, instead, is pre-natal, that is to say, it occurs during the encounter “between partial subjects, *unknown to each other* as in the primordial case of pre-maternal/pre-natal co-emerging partners-in-difference” (Pollock, 2009b, p.48, Pollock’s emphasis).

The debunking effect deriving from the representation of Maria’s and Irene’s uncertain identities and the difficulty for Maria of finding an alternative construction of her self do not end up in a hopeless bleak future precisely because this process is ascribed to the maternal genealogy. Initially, Maria has to go through the stage of recuperating the lost affective strings that had been severed by the *Nom-du-Père* and this is offered by the strategic value of the maternal, which is – in Baraitser’s words - “generative, surprising and unexpected” (p.7). Then, the final regained *jouissance* which links Maria to both her mother and Irene allows the protagonist to leave her state of suspension: she is now able to go out and buy for little Irene that which Baraitser calls “maternal stuff”, that is to say, those mothering objects which encumber a mother: “‘Ho parlato con la dottoressa. [...] Devo comprare una culla.’ ‘Una culla con le ruote voglio dire: un carrozzino, un fasciatoio, forse lo sterilizza biberon e un sapone neutro, pure, penso. Mi serve un catalogo Chicco e delle lenzuola,

piccole.' 'Quanto tempo hai?' 'Piú o meno quindici giorni.' 'Ce la possiamo fare, persino con i tuoi gusti'".¹⁷ The "surprising and unexpected" Irene – but she is also "generative", because she has "generated" a mother – will finally be able to leave the hospital. It is the beginning of a new embodied subjectivity: Maria is eventually a mother.

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¹ For more about the theory of *affidamento* in English, see Muraro (1994) and (2002). The theory is also mentioned by Irigaray (1985).

² Bertrand Russell deals with proper names in "On Denoting" (1905). Discussing proper names in "The True-Real" (Kristeva, 1979, p.237, note 20), Kristeva cites Bertrand Russell's: "The philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918).

³ For Althusser, "interpellation" is what changes individuals into subjects. See Butler (1997, chapter 4).

⁴ For Benjamin (1995), the "subject-subject encounter" is a mutual recognition based on an attunement between the two parts which subverts the binary system of identification made of subject/object and man/woman. The encounter occurs in the "intersubjective space"; borrowing from Winnicott the term "transitional space", Benjamin maintains that the "intersubjective space" is where the two contrasting forces, intrapsychic and intersubjective, meet and create a tension that she calls the *Ideal*. Here, the infant learns that the mother is not only the "good" mother, the object to be internalized, or the "bad" to be destroyed; their relationship is based on a love bond, a shared *jouissance*, where the mother's smile, for example, is returned to the child's joyous experience. The mother-child dyad is, thereby, demystified: the repudiated mother, who is either denied or idealized, is recuperated in the symbolic intersubjective space that creates "a sustained tension" (1995: 23), that is to say, a common ground for conflicts and negotiation, recognition and repudiation, recuperation and love. A love object can be recognized as such after it has been recognized as "an outside differentiated being" (Benjamin, 1995: 18), a discovery that brings pleasure to the subject (Benjamin, 1995: 32).

⁵ "The point is that I couldn't really understand whether my daughter Irene was dying or she was being born" (Parrella, 2008, p.9). All translations from *Lo spazio bianco* are mine.

⁶ "Irene had arrived" (p.15).

⁷ "Me [in Italian "I"] in four-thousand-lire cinemas [that is, cinemas screening quality films], me in bed with whom I wanted, me hidden away in the library like a detective in search of books [...]. Me holding a cigarette ready to stop [smoking] when I decided to" (p.15).

⁸ "I thought of my bedside table, on which tranquilizers alternate with cups of coffee [...], of my psychologist who, for years, has been returning to me the same image of myself that I threw to him, only deformed differently" (p.21, my emphasis).

⁹ "A foetus is inside a uterus, a baby is born after nine months of pregnancy" (p.25).

¹⁰ "Then, I realised the urgency of a name. 'Her name is Irene,' - I said, - 'and write it down'" (p.25, my emphasis).

¹¹ "A few days later, a heavy and slow bureaucracy which didn't have any connection with life, also recorded her [Irene's] surname, mine" (p.25).

¹² Irigaray (1977, p.76) introduces the idea of "mimicry" in order to encourage women to deliberately assume the role assigned to them by patriarchy. In this way, the symbolic order is destabilized and subverted.

¹³ For Baraitser, an event is an encounter after which one emerges changed, retaining something of the other. In Baraitser's words: "Subjectivity is understood as the remainder, of what is returned to the self through the encounter with the Other, a self necessarily different than before" (Baraitser, 2009: 35).

¹⁴ "And Irene was not there. She was nobody" (Parrella, 2008, p.28).

¹⁵ "And I was not her mother, I was not a mother, I was an empty hole that got on an underground train every day" (p.28).

¹⁶ "I was sixteen when I did the most difficult thing of my existence: to remove the crown of thorns [symbolizing the Virgin mater dolorosa]. I had inherited it from my mother who behaved like a nun but in civilian clothes" (p.88).

¹⁷ "I spoke to the doctor. [...] I must buy a cot.' 'A wheeled cot, I mean: a buggy, a changing-mat, perhaps a sterilizer and a baby bodywash as well, I think. I need a Mothercare catalogue and some little bed sheets.' 'When is the deadline?' 'About a fortnight.' 'We can make it, even with your taste'" (Parrella, p.105).