

# The Eco-poetics of Reparation: Energy, Air and Cosmos in Marie Darrieussecq's *Tom est mort*

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Article abstract

This article establishes that reparation from grief is a process of “working through” trauma in which death is a catalyst for a re-imagining of the human form. “Working through” trauma comes about in different ways in *Tom est mort*. It manifests itself firstly as a process “outside” Judeo-Christian and socio-cultural signifiers and outside traditional limits of cognition and subjectivity. Darrieussecq views reparation as a process of nonanthropocentric and anthropogenic relationality (with other species and other non-human phenomena) in which new coalitions and affinities offer an alternative post-human ontology founded in the reduction and dissolution of human form into atoms and particles. Secondly, reparation finds an eco-poetic continuity and sustainability in the narrator's proximity to and approximation with the physics and spherical production of motion (energy, air, cosmos) and the reparative possibilities posed by this physics to traditional, psychic forms of communication. Darrieussecq's vision is the hidden energy that operates in space around us. It is a knowledge of the hidden that comes from an acknowledgement of human redundancy in the face of the planet's eco-vitality.

## The Eco-poetics of Reparation: Energy, Air and Cosmos in Marie Darrieussecq's *Tom est mort*

Enda McCaffrey

Je sais que la physique ne peut rien pour les morts. Mais les courbes de l'espace, et celles du cerveau. On ne sait rien. (Darrieussecq, *Tom est mort*, 177)

I want to begin this article with a quotation from *Tom est mort* (2009). It is the recollection by the narrator of a conversation between herself and her son:

- *Pourquoi y a-t-il des vagues dans la mer ?*
- *Parce que le vent les pousse.*
- *Pourquoi est-ce que le vent les pousse ?*
- *Je n'en sais rien, Tom. Parce que c'est ça que fait le vent.*
- *Pourquoi y a-t-il du vent ?*
- *Eh bien, parce qu'il y a de l'air chaud et de l'air froid ; entre les deux ça fait du vent.*
- *Pourquoi y a-t-il de l'air chaud et de l'air froid ? (85)*

Kids' stuff or physics for kids, you could say! Either way, the italicization of this exchange reinforces its centrality at the heart of Darrieussecq's relations to physics and the role physics plays in this novel (and indeed in her wider corpus). In an interview with Mia Funk, Marie Darrieussecq states: "I have always loved science and it has brought me a huge reservoir of images. Quantum physics is very novelistic, for example" (Darrieussecq and Funk n. pag.) In physics, a wave is a disturbance that travels through space and matter transferring energy from one place to another. Waves transfer energy, not matter. Waves are everywhere in the atmosphere. Sound is a type of wave that moves through matter and then vibrates in our ears. Light too is a wave made up of photons. Waves are either mechanical or electromagnetic; mechanical waves travel through matter via molecules passing on energy (for instance sound travelling through air, water or solid). Mechanical waves need a medium to help them travel. By contrast, electromagnetic waves travel through a vacuum (or empty space) such as light/radio waves or X-rays. What is significant in both mechanical and electromagnetic waves is that they transfer energy, not matter. Tom's series of "Pourquoi" to his mum signal a critical shift in this novel away from our perceptions of the real based on what Darrieussecq calls "le paysage du visible" (59) towards a hidden energy ("un point tellurique" (145)) that shapes the physics of movement. Drawing on Donna Haraway's metaphor of cyborg hybridity in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) and Peter Sloterdijk's idea of "ontological constitution" (the incorporation of humans, animals, plants and machines) in his trilogy *Spheres* (1998, 1999 and 2004), I aim to show how the (under) current of energy offers Darrieussecq a means of exploring the possibility of reparation in grief – an eco-poetic but also an "eco" reparation that has scientific and physical proportions ("la vérité est dans la géographie" (145)), and which is sustained as a posthuman, anthropogenic experience founded on historical and continuous affinities between human and non-human phenomena. The turn to the eco-poetic enables Darrieussecq to rethink trauma/grief outside the co-ordinates of chronological time, the mortal (gendered) body, anthropocentrism, self and identity, and inside an eco-poetical discourse (of sea, wind, air, wildlife, gravity, space and black holes); where identity and

language are reformed and relearned, and critically where trauma is reframed in a reparative discourse of an “éco-parloir”<sup>1</sup>.

### From trauma theory to eco-poetics

Critics acknowledge that trauma cannot be represented as past but is perpetually re-experienced in a present (Caruth; Leys). Intrinsic to this re-experience is the construction of trauma retroactively and the creation of distance from an event in order to realize its impact. Drawing on Freud’s concepts of “acting out” and “working through” trauma, Mireille Rosello (2010) and Dominick LaCapra (2013) equate the concept of “acting-out” situations of trauma with a tendency to relive the past. Related to this tendency of “acting out” but also a countervailing force, is the concept of “working through”, where the tendency is to gain critical distance from a traumatic event. Distinguishing between these two concepts is problematic for Rosello and LaCapra. Both concur that two narratives are not only at play but interact. For Rosello however, interaction is an opportunity for a new type of “breaking free” (19). The reparative is a dynamic process in which there is an attempt to work through the past without denying one’s implication in it and without denying the after-effects of trauma. Set against this interactive and non-redemptive context, I wish to read the reparative as a means of “imagining an alternative out of a seemingly doomed past” (Rosello 16). My approach to the reparative, as Rosello intimates, can be located within a new type of breaking free; not a breaking free *from* the trauma of the past (itself impossible) but *into* the positive displacement of trauma (in this instance to the reparative impact of an eco-poetic).

Eco-poetics (distinct from the Anglo-Saxon variants of ecocriticism<sup>2</sup> with its emphasis on the interface between the life sciences and the humanities, and ecological literary criticism) is primarily a French innovation (Posthumus 101–02) that addresses how texts approach and write nature. This concept “met davantage l’accent, à travers l’étymologie du *poiein*, sur le fait littéraire.... Il réfère aujourd’hui à une pensée [écologique] qui prend en considération l’interconnexion de l’ensemble des êtres vivants et se montre soucieuse de l’écosystème” (Romestaing, Schoentjes and Simon 3). More aesthetic than political, eco-poetics looks to how literary texts represent the historical continuum between the human/body and non-human world. Patrick Chamoiseau considers the ethical and ideological dimensions of eco-poetics when he reminds us of the principles at stake in eco-poetic discourse; the centrality of change and renewal, and the principle of relationality that links human and non-human in an ecosystem in which all living beings partake (Chamoiseau and de Vriese 130). At the heart of this relationality is a non-anthropocentrism (a “deep ecology”<sup>3</sup> or “interspecies literature”<sup>4</sup>) in which the representation of the natural world is not hierarchically oriented and where the non-human assumes “un droit de cité narratif” (Cazaban-Mazerolles 61). Non-anthropocentric relationality undermines the autonomy of the ego-self and promotes a conception of identity (“eco-self”) as a bridge to the non-human whilst acknowledging the situational context of the human relationship to the ecosphere. Chamoiseau elaborates on the significance of the garden in this context. Gardening, for example, enables human beings to find tranquility: “C’est le contact avec le végétal qui donne la paix” (131). Contact with

1 Marie Darrieussecq uses a variation of this phrase “notre parloir” (178) in *Tom est mort* to convey the reparative effect of nature in addressing the narrator’s grief.

2 Ecocriticism has emerged as an umbrella term for a multiplicity of approaches and subjects, including nature writing, deep ecology and eco-theory.

3 See Arne Naess’s *Écologie, communauté et style de vie*.

4 “Deep ecology” is an environmental movement and philosophy which regards human life as one part of many equal components of a global ecosystem. “Interspecies literature” refers to texts where nonhuman animals play a central role. Writers assess the way human identity is constructed through its difference from animality, and how animals can be used to represent human characteristics and concerns. See Serenella Iovino’s “Ecocriticism and a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism”.

the earth connects mind and body, oneself with others, through its capacity to access “une vieille sensibilité basée sur le végétal, la terre, les forces vitales” (131). Through this sensibility, ecosystems are not just restored to their centrality at the heart of human experience but they reinforce the historical continuity that links human and non-human, past and present. As a form of relationality between species, eco poetics therefore has the capacity to pose an ontological challenge in the way natural elements (mineral, vegetal and physics) are constituted *in relation to* humankind, and how they are inscribed in an historical continuity.

### *Tom est mort*

Marie Darrieussecq’s novel *Tom est mort* tells the story of a mother grieving the death of her young son, and where the scale of the grieving process stretches over a ten-year period and over a geography that includes Paris, Vancouver, Sydney, including Ancient/Aboriginal/Indian cultural contexts<sup>5</sup>. The novel is also a critique of the way grieving has been institutionalized as a religious and commercial practice, and as a cultural convention which Darrieussecq compares literally with a “herd mentality”: “Des zèbres, échine contre échine, qui détalent ensemble” (175). Grieving has its habits; dealing with the morgue, the funeral parlor, choosing flowers, cremation versus burial, urns or worms. Grieving as institution has its particular space – what Darrieussecq calls the white room (“la chambre blanche”) of public grief. However, it is the other private space (the red room – “la chambre rouge”) which is of particular interest. Here, Tom’s death is codified not as a finality determined by the medical and funereal institutions of death but as an ecological and posthuman continuity that inscribes itself within the living. Framed by the cosmos, as opposed to Judeo-Christian or material signifiers, Tom’s death belongs outside his death to the universality of death, and is expressed through a number of physical, material and cultural forms: atoms; waves; air; grains of sand; burial practices of the Pharaohs; the Australian bush; the ancient goddess of mourning (Niobe); the funeral practices of elephants; and the theory of Limbo.

Emma Wilson has observed that “the loss of a child knows no repair or reparation”; it is a “limit subject, a subject which reaches or exceeds the bounds of representation and normal, narrative resolution” (153). Whilst Wilson’s reference points are primarily cinematic, her definition of child death/loss as a “limit subject” beyond which there can be no narrative resolution has garnered wider critical appeal. Colette Trout equates the narrator’s grief-stricken state to a “psychological fantastic” without resolution or explanation of its consequences or benefits (107). Simon Kemp concludes that the narrator’s grief is a function of “cognitive dissonance” from which there is no return (75). The concern within this critical consensus is the way in which child death (and loss generally) is explained, framed and subsequently limited inside a discourse of subjectivity, cognitive capability and the psychic. The eco poetic argument invites us to bypass this cognitive line of enquiry and examine subliminal, neurological and posthuman possibilities. From the outset, the narrator in *Tom est mort* experiences grief as much as a loss of a son as a subliminal loss of self (“subject”), and reparation for this loss, is intrinsic to the narrator’s experience of and rehabilitation from grief. In the first instance, loss of self is a loss of ego which underlines the impossibility of rationalizing grief: “Mon savoir était incommunicable, un savoir en moins, une brèche qui faisait entrer le néant. Ma connaissance des trous noirs faisait disparaître le monde. Le vide augmentait. Le sans-fond” (17). Loss of ego, I maintain, gives way to the emergence of an “eco” subject that

5 Missing children are a feature of Darrieussecq’s fiction. See *Le Mal de mer* (1999), *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (2001), *White* (2003), *Le Pays* (2005) and *Clèves* (2011). The role of children and childhood in Nineteenth-Century French Literature is captured in *The Land of Lost Content* by Rosemary Lloyd.

enables Darrieussecq to move beyond the limits of cognition and to think of subjectivity *in relation* to other species and phenomena.

The loss of a child and the pain of grief are traditionally channelled through the mother/child relation. Critics of this novel for example have highlighted the failure of the parent(s) to prevent death from happening<sup>6</sup>. However, I would argue that Darrieussecq transcends Oedipal affiliations by emphasizing that grief is primarily a *neuronal* loss that impacts all sentient beings: “il y a sans doute un travail neuronal du deuil” (66)<sup>7</sup>. Not only has time stopped with Tom’s death, opening up an ahistorical zero-time for the exploration of grief, but for Darrieussecq this exploration invites comparison with an array of human and non-human phenomena. The narrator cannot tell when her son Tom died (“Le temps n’était plus avec moi... Le temps était mort” (59)). There is nothing to fix Tom’s death in respect of time, day or coroner’s report. Instead, the narrator situates Tom’s death in the *recollection* of the birth of her other children who were born in the spring time and whose births are compared to “des loutres, ou des koalas ou des diables de Tasmanie, ou de beaucoup d’autres animaux” (9). The comparison with animals is not incidental. Anne Simon claims that Darrieussecq’s work positions itself at the juncture between species; humans share an animal sensoriality which enables them to widen their perceptions and understanding of themselves (“Déterritorialisations” 17–26). She extends this viewpoint to an interpretation of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of “devenir-animal” [“becoming-animal”] (“La plongée” 78–9)<sup>8</sup>. Darrieussecq takes grief outside time and space into forests<sup>9</sup> and beaches and the far reaches of the cosmos where her son’s pulverized atoms continue to circulate like a space capsule in the void: “un module spatial fonçant dans le néant” (*Tom est mort* 22). By re-framing the deceased Tom in these spaces, Darrieussecq creates a posthuman relationality through his revitalized participation in natural ecosystems. The ecopoetics of this participation are visible in a number of phenomena; sea and sand; the earth as a Deleuzian body without organs “traversé de matières instables non formées, de flux en tous sens, d’intensités libres ou de singularités nomades, de particules folles ou transitoires” (53–4)<sup>10</sup>; and the air/atmo(sphere) as a topological co-existent space where relations between interspecies are cultivated and where being/life is resignified beyond the individual mind in abstracted antimatter<sup>11</sup>.

### The posthuman

The posthuman is a concept originating in the fields of science fiction, futurology, contemporary art and philosophy that means that a person or entity exists in a state beyond being human. I want to be clear in my use of the term. I do not use posthuman as another

6 See Kathryn Robson’s “Psychic Plagiarism: The Death of a Child in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Tom est mort* and Camille Laurens’s *Philippe*”.

7 In “Darrieussecq’s Mind” (2008), Simon Kemp explains the neuronal and synaptic functions in Darrieussecq’s fiction as part of a wider resistance to psychological depth and a tendency to remain at the surface level of cognitive behavior. For an animal reading of Darrieussecq’s fiction see Anat Pick’s “The Indignity of Species in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Pig Tales*” (79–100).

8 According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, becoming-animal [“devenir-animal”] is the animal in all of us – the co-presence of a particle that both humans and animals share (Deleuze and Guattari 335). For more on Simon’s Deleuzian reading of Darrieussecq see Anne Simon’s “Déterritorialisations de Marie Darrieussecq”.

9 The title of Darrieussecq’s recent novel is *Notre vie dans les forêts* (2017).

10 Deleuze and Guattari also view the air (and earth) as having political and philosophical dimensions. They use air and earth to distinguish between state space and nomad space. State space is striated space where movement is confined by gravity and pre-set points. Nomad space is aerial (open-ended). Its mode of distribution is the nomos as opposed to logos. Air is the place of the posthuman. Air and the wave produced by air designate the end of molar unities (subject, identity, being) and the exploration of an ecopoetic space founded in movement, intensities and multiplicities (53–94).

11 The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk rejects the existence of dualisms: body and soul, subject and object, culture and nature. His ideas integrate different components that have been erroneously considered detached from each other. He proposes the creation of an ontological constitution that would incorporate all beings – humans, animals, plants and machines.

*being* that reconceives the human; or another *being* that invites us to understand the world via heterogeneous perspectives; nor is the posthuman an opportunity to assume multiple identities as a critical methodology. In *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Donna Haraway develops the concept of the cyborg as a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating “human” from “animal” and “human” from “machine”. She writes:

My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities. From another perspective, a cyborg world is about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints (153).

The *Manifesto* criticizes traditional notions of feminism, particularly feminist focuses on identity politics and encourages instead coalition through affinity. Haraway begins the *Manifesto* by explaining three boundary breakdowns since the twentieth century that have allowed for her hybrid cyborg: the breakdown of boundaries between human and animal, animal-human and machine, and physical and non-physical. Cyborg theory rejects the notions of essentialism, proposing instead a chimeric fusion between animal and machine and a call for a non-essentialized, non-Oedipal narrative capable of uniting diffuse coalitions along the lines of affinity rather than identity or subjectivity: “The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (152). The relevance of the “cyborg metaphor” in *Tom est mort* lies less in its political (feminist) implications than in its capacity to undercut concepts of origin, identity and gender with a view to constructing a posthuman “ontology” out of affinities with the technological and the non-human<sup>12</sup>. Particularly of animal-human fusion: “J’ai agi avec eux (kids) comme s’ils étaient des koalas” (167); “Nous étions transformés en animaux et nous découvrons, chacun, notre cri. Un zoo de douleur” (124). I want to advance this argument on the posthuman specifically through the death of the human and the opportunities that this offers for rethinking relationality to space.

### Energy

Haraway claims that cyborgs are “wary of holism, but needy for connection” (154). When we speak of the posthuman in Darrieussecq and particularly in *Tom est mort*, we begin with the acknowledgement – a scientific acknowledgement – of a black hole and its indentation in the physics of space: “ma connaissance des trous noirs faisait disparaître le monde” (17). Black holes are regions of space that have a unique gravitational field so intense that no matter or radiation can escape. The reduction/dissolution of human form into atoms and particles that are outside a rational, holistic or comprehensible “système” is the point of departure for a posthuman configuration of spatial occupation in Darrieussecq’s *Tom est mort*. And as we see throughout this text, in this dissolution of human form topological determinants of time, chronology and location collapse. The black hole with its variants (“brèche”, “rien blanc”, “néant blanc”) trigger a posthuman communication between mother and son. Space and digital technology shape this communication, from rockets, satellites and undersea cables that carry the waves of the dead: “Les voix filent dans l’espace, rebondissant aux satellites [...]. Nous tournons toutes les deux avec les satellites. Aimantés” (45). Science is therefore not just the territory of the posthuman but it is the “breaking free” from the protocols of (after) life and the processes through which grief may be repaired.

The posthuman starts after death. In the pre-death of Tom the world makes sense to the narrator and her family. The world is logical; its “cosmos” is part of a universal coherence. Even the Coriolis effect makes sense to the narrator. Stuart, the narrator’s husband, embodies more than anyone this pre-death logic. His unbroken “subjectivity”

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<sup>12</sup> Darrieussecq does not advocate a “socialist-feminism” in the way Haraway does in her manifesto.

enables him to follow pre-set rhythms of “thought”, but not the “courbes” that Darrieussecq associates with non-thought or space. Stuart expends energy searching for logical transitions and connections, but is unable to make sense of abrupt ends or gaps (why Tom died so suddenly)<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, for the grieving narrator, death opens up a breach in logical patterns of coherence. Grief annuls her mental faculties, exposing neuronal fissures and disarticulation. The narrator also experiences grief as the erosion of visible points of recognition (“cécité” (87)). But grief too ushers in the experience of reparation in the elemental: “J’avais le sentiment et je l’ai souvent eu depuis, de n’être qu’un élément d’une communauté mortelle” (159). For Darrieussecq, reparation from grief finds an ecological and eco-poetic sustainability in the narrator’s proximity to and approximation with the physics of motion: the movement of a rotating planet; being subject to its forces of energy; being in sync with the waves of the pool at Bondi; swimming in the Tasmanian sea and the feeling of water (not blood) pumping her heart and helping circulation. Life for the griever is sustained when measured by systolic pressure rather than diastolic pressure, because systolic pressure records the heart muscle in movement (albeit movement in contraction), whereas diastolic pressure measures the heart muscle at rest between beats. Grief changes the narrator’s perspectives on the future and the past. This experience of grief changes how she reviews her relationship with her husband Stuart – how they met, how that first “meeting” is recalibrated as an indentation/movement in space, and how the air between them was broken and they entered a breach in time and space. It changes too how they made love – less a romantic exchange and more an anodyne experience where energy replaced blood and where bodies are geometric/telluric points of collision. Grief and death therefore set in train a posthuman dis-agency, a rhizomatic erosion of “subjectivity” founded in erratic energy rather than human authorship.

Sauf qu’à un moment de ma vie j’ai décidé de me déplacer dans l’espace avec lui ... Sauf que tout à coup, l’air se déchirait. Une sorte de cisaillement, comme si l’espace, je ne sais pas, se dissociait, se déséquilibrait ... Nous parlions de quelque chose ; et l’espace basculait... Il reste un point en nous, d’où ça part.  
(170)

### Air

Air has a tradition as an imaginary in French letters, from Gaston Bachelard’s *L’Air et les songes* (1982) where air forms part of Bachelard’s material imagination of movement to Luce Irigaray’s *L’Oubli de l’air chez Martin Heidegger* (1983) in which Irigaray reminds Heidegger of the importance of air as “place” – a material and maternal counterpoint to Heidegger’s construction of an ontology of Being founded in the solidity of “home” as “dwelling place” (a primarily masculine place). Tom may have no place to reside after death but his mother still manages to connect with him via the air: “Il n’est nulle part, il surgit. Je le vois. Je lève doucement la main, et je caresse l’air” (78). In *Tom est mort*, Darrieussecq has dispersed the place and sex of home to not only the air as part of her poetic imagination but to the air as an aerological space made up of atmospheric factors such as air temperature, atmospheric pressure, humidity, wind, ozone layers and the relations between spheres in the atmosphere: “Tom, cet espace courbe, les si, ce siphon, cet entonnoir de feu je m’y enfonce, et je perçois le monde à travers un trou” (110)<sup>14</sup>.

13 Darrieussecq pursues this idea in her recent novel *Notre vie dans les forêts* in which she links this inability to make sense of death to neuronal dysfunction. She uses the images of the “cerveau vide” and the “robot” to convey the depletion of mental cognition and affective life. This theme runs through Darrieussecq’s wider corpus but is most evident in the trauma produced by grief in *Tom est mort* and the experience of corporeal break-down (break-up) experienced in *Notre vie*. Nick Chater explores this mental evacuation in a positive light in his work *The Mind is Flat. The Illusion of Mental Depth and the Improvised Mind*.

14 It is worth noting too that Haraway also challenges the idea of “home” as dwelling place, inviting women to “survive in the diaspora of new couplings and new coalitions” (Haraway 154).

Rejecting the century's predominant philosophical focus on temporality, Peter Sloterdijk, a self-described "student of the air", reinterprets the history of Western metaphysics as an inherently spatial and immunological project, from the discovery of the self (in bubbles) to the exploration of the world (in the globe) to the poetics of plurality (in foam). Sloterdijk follows in the footsteps of Haraway's cyborg hybridity and Irigaray's critique of Heidegger by exploring macro- and micro-space, in particular in the way he develops a morphology of shared and multipolar dwelling in which he identifies the question of being as one bound up with the aerial technology of architectonics and anthropogenesis. In the absence of a single self-containing human subjectivity, Sloterdijk proposes the creation of an "ontological constitution" (172) (compare Chamoiseau's principle of non-anthropocentric relationality) that incorporates humans, animals, plants and machines.

Intrinsic to Darrieussecq's topology of the posthuman is an imagery of scientific innovation, symptomatic of her acknowledgement of science and its contribution to an understanding and awareness of the (post) human and her use of science-fiction. Technology (space, rockets, undersea cables, internet etc.) is not an alien discourse for Darrieussecq. We have seen that it has a reparative and novelistic function too; space modules, capsules and cable satellites are enlisted as Tom's post-life living quarters and means of communication. She shares this vision of science and technology with Sloterdijk's use of microspheres as interconnected networks of "globosity" (or life beyond boundaries). For Sloterdijk, the crisis of modernity is a spherological crisis; the destruction of those protective, warm "immunological" spaces that humankind has dwelled in for millennia (home, womb, workplace). The bubble (*Bubbles* ([1998] 2011), the title of the first volume of Sloterdijk's trilogy *Spheres*), not only challenges the isolation of these enclosed spaces but critically the bubble is a source of reparation from immunology because bubbles burst and reform through the intersection with new bubbles. The bubble is also what Sloterdijk calls a "being-in-sphere", a space created by Sloterdijk as an alternative to the subjectivity of an insular "I". In this, the bubble and its significance is crucial to Sloterdijk's wider philosophical and co-existential (anthropogenic<sup>15</sup>) thesis: "People are ecstatic... as Heidegger said, but not because they are contained in nothingness, but rather in the souls of others, or in the field of the souls of others, or vice versa" (75). The historical universality of this philosophy – its connectedness with all life (human, animal and vegetal) – is derived from what the bubble (but also the globe and foam) signifies in terms of an "ontological constitution" of life. The theory of the bubble as microsphere demonstrates that humans (living and dead) are not meaningless, disconnected objects but part of a bigger network of influences and connections.

Sloterdijk deploys the example of the space station (Darrieussecq refers specifically to the space module) to explore a theory of the posthuman condition. For Sloterdijk, the space station is the model of a new world or a new ontological space, what he calls "an immanence machine in which the possibility of permanence in the world" (321) is expressed as a co-existence incorporating human and machine. For Darrieussecq and Sloterdijk, the space module assumes the significance of an environment where posthuman conservation is sustainable (akin to a posthuman support system). Darrieussecq extends the eco-poetics of this space to promote its reparative impact. Exhausting the online networks and talking therapies that she finds unrewarding, the narrator of *Tom est mort* turns to science (energy, air and the atmosphere more precisely) to work through grief. In particular, air's energy produces waves of sound and language. Air is the layer of gases that make up the earth's atmosphere. It also protects life on earth by absorbing ultraviolet solar radiation and warming through heat retention and modulating temperature extremes. The composition of air is made up of five layers: exosphere, thermosphere, mesosphere,

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15 The "anthropogenic hothouse" is a term Sloterdijk uses to underscore the ecological understanding of his microspherology as a political and philosophical enterprise.



stratosphere and troposphere. Darrieussecq makes use of the *sphericity* of these layers in her multiple references to meteors, astronauts, space modules and satellites in space: “L’air se propulsait sphérique, j’entendais le son de l’air dans l’appartement et la ville” (142). One of her main approaches to air is its aerological properties, particularly its pressure and thickness; atmospheric pressure decreases with increasing altitude and it is against this type of physical property that the posthuman is measured in respect of (posthuman) energy (notably the waves of pulsation, turbulence, air audibility and volume that define Tom): “Je suis en suspension dans l’air. Je me diffuse, buée vapeur. De temps en temps, mes atomes se regroupent dans la poignée de main d’un agent immobilier” (48). Aerology is deployed to a number of effects. Air registers Tom’s energy as posthuman, including for example his energy as an ectoplasm (the exteriorization of energy released from a body where plasma is not visible energy but energy felt by the body or communication between bodies). As the medium of communication, the air’s audibility enables Darrieussecq to explore new dimensions of post-time and post-space inhabited by Tom (from the island of Vancouver to the Indian potlatch language). In particular the sound of the air challenges traditional means of filial and psychic communication (womb, self, soul). Aerology is also linked to the disarticulating effects of grief whereby the narrator is rendered physically speechless. This loss of speech is captured in terms of atrophy (cell degeneration) and ankyloses (stiffening of the jaw joint due to bone fusion). Both conditions can be attributed directly to lack of air in the body and in the muscles. Speaking is literally a matter of energy needed to move muscles to produce speech.

Another example of atrophy is the installation of loud speakers in every room of the Sydney apartment to capture the sound of Tom, whose pulsations through the air the narrator believes are testament to his presence and attempts to communicate with the living: “Si l’atmosphère qui entoure la terre est une masse constante, Tom y creusait sa petite turbulence, il s’inscrivait dans cet air qu’on respire, son volume existait ! J’étais le répondant de Tom sur la planète, une personne lourde, une douleur arrimée” (116). The reparative effect of these loud speakers is being able to “hear” Tom again, albeit as pure wave-making sound, and how this enables the narrator to restore her own speech, itself impaired by Tom’s death and her subsequent grief. The narrator learns to reconstruct speech, consonants first, then vowels, until she is able to pronounce words: “J’articule” (101). Reparation is twofold. Firstly, articulation is predicated on the gaseous substance of air and her debt to it in helping her overcome her silence. The language she learns to articulate however is not one we recognize. It is another language – a secret esperanto formed from breath: “Je m’efforçais, *t, f, k, p, s*, et Tom me répondait dans la même langue lacunaire, nous trouvions des mots qui n’étaient que du souffle [...]. L’air se propulsait, sphérique, j’entendais le son de l’air” (142). Secondly, this other language (“eco-parloir”) uses language “pour dire l’expérience de l’habiter écologique” (Posthumus 100). It is founded in “un corps poreux, ouvert, et sensible, un corps composant avec les odeurs, images, sons et lumières de paysages divers” (101). Non-redemptive and non-spiritual, this language’s “pouvoir consolateur” is communicated via an historical participation in the diverse and harmonious coherence of an ecosystem that puts humans alongside animals, dragons alongside dragonflies, air alongside language. Becoming-world<sup>16</sup> (or becoming-animal) endears Tom to all living creatures via energy, air and earth, creating an alternative consciousness that displaces concepts of self, thought, linearity and memory.

### Cosmos

The reparative impact of Tom’s death as “working through” can be measured against a number of the criteria established by LaCapra and Rosello; the backward-forward dynamic

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16 See Brenda Garvey’s “Embodied Spaces and Out-of-Body Experiences in *Le Pays*” for her discussion on the relation between becoming-animal and becoming-world in Darrieussecq’s fiction.

between present and past, compounded by the family's geographical displacement across the globe. We have witnessed too the narrator's attempts to break free from the institutions of grief through alternative means of communication. Darrieussecq also engages in a discourse of mourning that takes us outside the redemptive discourse of substitution (implied by LaCapra) and inside a non-anthropocentric and cosmological narrative. Cosmic energy offers another perspective on grief which Darrieussecq's use of the planisphere illustrates. The planisphere is an astronomical instrument of Hellenistic origin in the form of two adjustable disks that rotate on a common pivot. It shows only the stars visible from the observer's latitude. Moving latitudes and hemispheres reveals other stars and depths in the astronomical galaxy. Tom's posthuman co-ordinates are magnified within the planisphere of the South Pacific where much of his life was spent. But critically, these co-ordinates are also part of a bigger retrospective life and future life. The planisphere allows Darrieussecq to break free from Tom's chronological time and the traditional cartography of his life experiences (memories fixed by a life lived) and resituate his "life" as part of an historical continuum involving human and non-human experiences. This is the essence of Darrieussecq's eco-poetic vision (and Sloterdijk's anthropogenic philosophy). It is one in which human, non-human and the historical are relativized and where human and posthuman are part of a relational continuum ("the field of the soul of others"): "Sur ce planisphère je pouvais tracer un triangle isocèle parfait et méconnu, dont les pointes étaient Sydney, Vancouver et Lima. Il y avait sans doute quelque chose de Tom à trouver à Lima, mais aussi à Hawaii, isocentre du triangle. Pearl Harbour est à Hawaii" (145–46).

The sustainability of the planisphere points also to the reinvention of Tom as posthuman according to the new memories that are created inside a planisphere that incorporates the potentiality of the posthuman. Alongside Sydney and Vancouver (fixed "points telluriques" that root Tom in lived life), we have Lima and Hawaii; Lima where Tom never lived but where his atoms may one day fall; and Hawaii where he never lived either but its association with Pearl Harbour re-imagines him in eco-poetic continuity with the souls of the fallen: "Les signes évoluaient sur la carte autour d'une capitale absente qui s'appelait Tom" (146). Tom's life therefore is not defined by age, date of birth or date of death. His life is defined by geographical science ("La vérité est dans la géographie" – specifically his telluric relation to the soil) and by his relation to space and his occupation of spaces at different points of his life and future post life. Being able to link locations in space-time in the compressed space of the planisphere, using triangles and capitals (present and absent), enables Darrieussecq to trace a different life-line (or "becoming") where chronological time is replaced by cosmological co-ordinate<sup>17</sup>. In this cosmology, Darrieussecq, I suggest, finds a reparative narrative. Cosmology perpetuates the presence of Tom's death in life. He co-exists with his mother forever in the (atmo)sphere. The cosmic becomes the source and material of this presence which the narrator uses to re-create Tom, not in a new physical form but as part of an amalgamation of natural and physical properties dispersed in the salt and rock of Uluru (aka Ayers Rock), the minerals and materials of the Blue Mountains near Sydney, the Australian bush, and the syllables and sounds that comprise the potlatch language of the Canadian Indian tribes. In the following example, the narrator imagines deconstructing Tom's cremation and sifting through his atoms and ashes with a view to reconstituting him:

Je voudrais défaire la crémation. Reconduire à l'envers le processus chimique. Attraper dans l'air autour de la planète les atomes de Tom, trier l'atmosphère, tamiser les sables, filtrer les rivières et les mers, fondre les neiges du Pôle et

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17 Deleuze and Guattari situate the process of "devenir-animal" as one in which latitude and longitude are the two elements of the human cartography (261).

étudier les nouveaux enfants, récupérer un à un tous les bouts gazeux, cendreaux, carbonés et protéinés de Tom, partout où ils ont pu se loger. Le refaire. Lui redonner forme. Ajouter les 75% d'eau dont sont faits nos corps, modeler sa matière comme de l'argile. (110)

Darriussecq identifies reparation from trauma in an eco-poetical engagement with the ecological landscape of Australia and an eco-poetics of the cosmos. By linking the experience of trauma to natural, physical and cosmic properties, Darriussecq transcends time and body and finds reparation in the inseparability of present trauma from the pre-histories and aboriginal contexts of which it is a part and through which ecology and eco-poetics play a “scripto-therapeutic” (Henke 76), post-traumatic role. Eco-poetics reinforces Darriussecq's critique of human *hubris*. It also enables her to depersonalize the impact of trauma by reconfiguring time, body and meaning in an a-spatial and a-temporal void subject only to the forces of gravity, energy and black holes.

### Conclusion

We have established in this article that reparation from grief is a process of “working through” trauma in which death is a catalyst for a re-imagining of the human form. “Working through” trauma comes about in different ways in *Tom est mort*. It manifests itself firstly as a process “outside” – outside Judeo-Christian and socio-cultural signifiers and outside traditional limits of cognition and subjectivity. Instead, Darriussecq views reparation as a process of non-anthropocentric and anthropogenic relationality (with other species and other non-human phenomena) in which new coalitions and affinities offer an alternative posthuman ontology founded in the reduction/dissolution of human form into atoms and particles. Secondly, reparation finds an eco-poetic continuity and sustainability in the narrator's proximity to and approximation with the physics and spherical production of motion (energy, air, cosmos) and the reparative possibilities posed by this physics to traditional, psychic forms of communication. Darriussecq's new visible (vision) is the hidden energy that operates in space around us. It is a knowledge of the hidden that comes from an acknowledgement of human redundancy in the face of the planet's eco-vitality:

Moi je savais: la forêt, les continents, la mer, auraient pu se passer des humains. L'air n'aurait été respiré que par des branchies et des poumons animaux, le sol n'aurait été foulé que par des pattes, la mer n'aurait été traversée que par des nageoires, le ciel par des plumes. Ou rien. Une planète vide. Respirée par rien. Parcourue par rien. Pensée par personne. Tournoyant seule, absurde, absurde de toute façon. (213)

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