

ARTICULATE BODIES, OR *ENCORE, EN CORPS*
Sense-ing the body as (re)presentation of women's subjectivities

by

ELAINE JANICE MUUS, B.A.

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Abstract

The body is central to the texts of Daphne Marlatt, Betsy Warland, Louky Bersianik, Marlene Nourbese Philip, and Lillian Allen. These authors question images imposed on women's bodies, and utilize the body and its senses in order to foreground the specificities of their subject positions as feminists, lesbians, and/or women of colour. The body thus becomes a signifier which can (re)present images of women's repressed bodies, such as the sexual and maternal body. Moreover, the authors disrupt the Western patriarchal emphasis on the gaze by focusing on the senses associated with the mouth and ears. Thematic representations of touch, taste, orality, and aurality become a means of grounding the text in the body. In addition, in order to emphasize the senses, the authors also invoke the reader's body through the auditory sense. In short, the body which was once repressed becomes a thematic and performative articulation of women's specific subjectivities.

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*Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et
fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi
violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps."*

—Hélène Cixous, "Le rire de la Méduse"

Introduction

The key element in communication and in self-(re)presentation is language, be it oral, written, sign, or body language. In each instance, the body becomes central to voicing one's subjectivity. In this thesis, I will examine the articulation of the body and its various intersections with language and ideology in works by five contemporary Canadian women writers: Daphne Marlatt, Betsy Warland, Louky Bersianik, Marlene Nourbese Philip, and Lillian Allen. With their differing emphases on sexuality, gender, and race, these writers can all be seen as occupying a space within feminist discourse; the commonality among them is the centrality of the body in their (re)presentation of women's subjectivities. They are conscious of previous appropriations and presentations of the body. Not only do they question and destabilize these images, they actively sense the body, both thematically and performatively in order to re-image themselves.

There is an underlying assumption in contemporary thought that subjectivity is socially constructed and framed within and by language (Weedon 21). Yet language is never neutral; it incorporates a series of ideological associations which are influenced by the specific socio-historical-political environment within which it originates. Within a contemporary Canadian setting, language reflects the Western patriarchal power structure. It is therefore not surprising to find that a number of contemporary Canadian authors, in particular women writers, theorize

their problematic relationship with language. They present and contest the sexist, heterosexist, and racist assumptions in language, then manipulate the language into a (re)presentation of their individual subject positions, which are repressed within Western patriarchal language and ideology.

The most publicly debated problem with language is sexism. However, current discussions around “political correctness” focus on the *usage* of language, and not on the ideology which it represents. In order to illustrate the patriarchal nature of language, Hélène Cixous explains that the patriarchal value system is based on an “endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental ‘couple’ of male/female” (Moi 104). This fundamental male/female binary is used to justify the sexist nature of patriarchy since “female” is associated with subordinate concepts. Monique Wittig goes one step further and argues that the fundamental male/female binary perpetuates the heterosexist nature of society; associating all opposites to either the male or female gender emphasizes the necessity of heterosexual relations within patriarchy. Moreover, the notion of binary opposites can easily be adapted to illustrate the racist history of Western ideology. Take for example the following series of binaries: good/evil, white/black, colonizer/colonized. Writers such as Philip and Allen struggle with patriarchal language to express themselves as women, as well as struggle with the Western language imposed on them historically. Their use of English serves as a reminder of colonialism. As Philip writes:

my father tongue
 is a foreign lan lan lang
 language
 l/anguish
 anguish
 a foreign anguish
 is english. (*She Tries* 58)

In other words, for women writers and writers of colour, representing their individual subjectivities becomes *trying*--both in the sense of the difficulty of, and in the sense of an attempt at, (re)presentation. In addition to being oppressed as women and as blacks, Philip and Allen both face the difficulty of being immigrants to Canada. The importance of race in their works is due in large part to racism within society, but is exacerbated by the lack of a black writing or literary tradition (Philip "writing" 229). Because ideology is perpetuated in language, anyone¹ wishing to express a subjectivity other than those prescribed by patriarchy has first to acknowledge and then to disrupt the underlying oppression of language.

Yet, having questioned the inherent power relations in language, women are still left with the problem of representing themselves in a language that inherently suppresses their subjectivities. Women must therefore create alternative modes of

¹ Although I will be concentrating on women's contentions with language and patriarchy, the same exclusion could be contested from a male perspective. For example, gay men, and men of colour are similarly subordinated and silenced. However, since I have limited the scope of my work to women's writing, I will from now on refer exclusively to women.

expression which better represent them. Canadian women authors, since they must of necessity work with and in Western patriarchal language,² choose to theorize their struggle with the power structure within and outside their works in order to illustrate their precarious position. In short, they choose words that originate from, echo, and mimic Western patriarchal language, yet distort them thematically and textually. They create new structures, new forms, new *genres*, and most importantly, new ways of reading and understanding. Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva are probably the best known proponents of a "new language." Focussing specifically on the suppression of women in patriarchal language and ideology, they argue that patriarchal language is fixed, while women's language is necessarily multiple, transient, and fluid. For both Cixous and Irigaray, the fundamental difference is that women's writing is linked to their sexuality. Irigaray contends that woman's need for non-unitary, non-linear writing is based on her plural sex organs. Although Irigaray's association of language, writing, and genitalia makes her concept of "*écriture féminine*" gender specific, Cixous does not exclude men from female writing. She believes that the origin of "female writing" is the *repressed* body, which could also be male.

² In referring to *Western patriarchal language*, I am referring to the various and distinct authorized discourses that are used in a hierarchical society. For example, Marlatt and Warland contend with the authority of the patriarchal and heterosexist nature of language, while Philip and Allen problematize the colonial authority inherent in language. Although I recognize there exists oppression on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation in social systems other than Western patriarchy, the authors discussed all work within Western patriarchy. Thus, in order to encompass the multiplicity of oppressions imbedded in language which are contested by the various authors, I will refer to Western patriarchal language and Western patriarchy.

In "Le rire de la Méduse," Cixous argues that "en s'écrivant, la femme fera retour à ce corps qu'on lui a plus que confisqué" (43). She urges women: "Écris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre" (43). Cixous associates the silencing of women with the silencing of their bodies. Women's bodies have been defined and inscribed by patriarchal authority, and in the case of women of colour, by colonial authority. Therefore, in order to represent themselves, women must re-appropriate their bodies. The body is essential to their writing, and their writing is essential to their embodiment. They cannot define themselves, their individualities, their subjectivities if they cannot define their bodies.

Within contemporary feminisms, the female body has become a central subject of discussion, and is the site of various power struggles.³ The anatomical body is seen, within contemporary discourse, as the site of various social acculturations, which create a *gendered* body marked by and interpreted within a specific socio-historical-cultural framework. Within the Western patriarchal system, this translates into the basic masculine/feminine dichotomy imposed on the male and female body, respectively. However, if gender is a *social* construct, it does not follow that there are only *two* genders. Judith Butler argues:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way.... When the relevant 'culture' that 'constructs' gender is understood in terms of such a

³ For a sample of discussions presenting women's struggle for the body from a variety of disciplines, see the collection of essays in *Anatomy of Gender*.

law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. (6, 8)

Recognizing only *two* genders creates problems for “categorizing” hermaphrodites and androgynous people, for example. On the other hand, the body cannot be considered a blank slate on which *any* gender could be inscribed. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, “the specific modes of materiality of the ‘page’/body must be taken into account. One and the same message, inscribed on a male or a female body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing or result in the same text” (*Volatile Bodies* 156). To some degree, the physical body mediates attempts at socialization. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge that historically there have been two sexes, and socialization of gender corresponds rather directly to one’s perceived (imposed) sex. Consequently, when Cixous urges women to “write their bodies,” she is urging them to break from the constrictive gender associations that binds those bodies. They must express every aspect that marks and individualizes their bodies, including race, class, and sexuality.

The notion of “writing the body” has often been criticized as being essentialist and self-defeating. Its critics argue that by focussing on the body women are simply perpetuating patriarchy’s association of woman with body (and their subordination to man and mind). Ann Rosalind Jones believes that such concepts of *féminité*, where women focus solely on what is specific to them, simply “reverses the values assigned to each side of the polarity, but still leaves man as the

determining referent, not departing from the opposition male/female, but participating in it" (Jones 255). What Jones is arguing is that even though women focus on representing themselves and their bodies, they do not disrupt the binary power structure at the foundation of patriarchy. However, what she does not recognize, is that, contrary to patriarchal ideology, there is no assumption within poststructuralist feminisms of a basic commonality among women. Cixous is not perpetuating patriarchal representations of woman's body; she is telling women to draw from their *individual* bodies.

It would be detrimental for women to suppress their bodies in response to patriarchy's oppression of them. On the contrary, they must embrace their bodies as *part of* their subjectivities. Since feminist writers are attempting to free themselves from pre-conceived notions of "woman," it is more productive to refrain from universalizing women's writing, and thus "woman," and to embrace all the possibilities of self-expression. Jones does concede, however, that "to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to recreate the world" (252). For Cixous, and her supporters, writing the body is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a starting point for women. Women's bodies are the one thing that they clearly possess and inhabit, and can know intimately. Although "writing the body" has been criticized as essentialist, it is important to recognize

that essentialism is not inherently negative.⁴ Women can utilize essentialist discourse and give it “strategic or interventionary value” (Fuss 20). In other words, what would seem to be essentialist discourse, such as “writing the body” which relies on the body and its specific senses, can be deployed in order to question, subvert, and displace socialized norms. Consequently, women writers’ use of the body allows them the opportunity to present bodies that were heretofore unrepresentable.

In their reappropriation of the body, they emphasize its intersection with the specificities of sexual orientation, gender, and race in order to represent women's personal embodiment. As Diana Fuss observes, it is essential to recognize the difference between “*the* body” and “*my* body”: one “cannot ignore the role social practices play in organizing and imaging ‘the body,’ but nor can it overlook the role ‘my body’ plays in the construction of subjectivity” (52). In this sense, the individual body is as important as the socialized and metaphorical body. When Cixous urges women to: “Write! And your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood” (260), she implores more than a representation of women’s physical bodies; she wants women to present their “spheres,” their socio-political-cultural position (Armbruster 154). In short, the body cannot be separated from its social, historical, cultural site (Gatens 11). For this reason, it is important to

⁴ Here I am drawing on Diana Fuss’ definition of essentialism, where essentialism is “the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (xi). The essentialist argument is that there is a natural essence to a being which is then repressed or socialized. Fuss’ argument about the socialization of an essential being is akin to discussions of gendered subjects.

recognize that, although all the authors discussed are women, writing about women, since their socio-cultural histories are different, their bodies are marked differently. Their representations of the body are influenced by their politics of location, "the places and spaces [they] inherit and occupy, which frame [their] lives in very specific and concrete ways, which are as much a part of [their] psyches as they are a physical or geographical placement" (Borsa 36). For example, Marlatt's and Warland's representation of the body reflects their lesbian sexualities, while Philip's and Allen's representation of the body is marked by race. Bersianik is a Quebec author, but her politics of location are mainly influenced by gender, rather than a specific québécois, nationalist consciousness; nonetheless, because she writes in French, she must negotiate the gender specificity inherent in the French language. This is not to say that these women speak for a certain group within society, only that their writing is influenced by a cross-section of personal and socio-political factors. Also, the fact that their writing is informed by a specific background does not mean that it does not speak to a broader audience. As mentioned, there are commonalities and junctures in presentations of the body even though these authors are from disparate backgrounds. Thus, their consciousness, the body that informs their writing, and their writing is individual, particular, local.⁵

⁵ Emilio Jorge Rodriguez, says texts "are thus not simply receptacles containing the *materia* of culture in static, compilatory, preserved form. They are, rather streams meandering, or urging, across the landscape of history, merging with the diluting flow of other tributaries, and transforming into broader yet more discrete currents of cultural identity. Identity here is not a

Within Marlatt and Warland's *Two Women in a Birth*, Bersianik's *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole*, Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue*, and Allen's *Women do this Every Day*, the body is emphasized as a mode of articulation. Although all the authors discussed are concerned with the body, they do not focus solely on gender. As Butler notes: "If one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive.... As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (3). For each author, woman's subjectivity lies at a nexus between gender, sexual orientation, race, class, history. Consequently their writing reflects the multiplicity of discourses that inform their lives. Although there is a critical "need" to label writing--assigning it to a clear *genre* category, in order to better study or analyse it--the spectrum of women's works discussed here does not fall into one such category, even though they all discuss, represent, and voice the body. In effect, although the body writing described by Cixous is often termed *écriture féminine*, this term seems inadequate in referring to the works in question since it implies that the creation of a feminine mode of writing is the central focus of the work. Other *genre* terms such as fiction/theory, language centred writing, and postmodernism could also be applied--to a limited extent. However, there is no appropriate term (nor should there be) which encapsulates the range of works

past to be evoked, nor an object to be contemplated in tranquillity, but a dynamic quest, as well as the sum of successive encounters and mixings across time" (1). Although Rodriguez is talking about Carribean oral traditions, he offers an ideal method for reading the fluidity of form and subject of Canadian women writers, such as those discussed here.

discussed, all of which transcend reductive definitions.

The commonality of these works lies in their questioning and theorizing of language and representation of the body, and in their presentation of tangible alternatives. In other words, not only do the authors question and discuss the problematics of representing their specific subjectivities, they also present their individual subject positions without compromising the position they present theoretically. I intend to extrapolate the common threads in the presentations of the women's bodies, and examine how these similarities in turn present distinct differences, and specific nuances which traditionally have been glossed over. The examination of existing representations of the body, their individual (re)imaging of the body, and their use of various bodily senses are informed by and reflect their particular socio-cultural position.

In order to illustrate the infinite variety of expressions of women's bodies, I will begin, in Chapter 1, by examining the different representations of body in all of the texts. First I will illustrate the authors' association of the body with articulation, echoing Cixous' representation of the body as a writing tool. Having indicated the importance of the body for self-(re)presentation, I will demonstrate how the women question and re-create images imposed on the body in general. As well, the themes of sexuality and maternity insert a specifically *female* body into the texts. In order to "demythify" the female body and rescue it from the male gaze, these writers draw on several senses to articulate female subjectivities. Chapter 2

will focus on the thematic use of the senses in the women's texts. The eyes, and therefore the male gaze, are displaced, and the focus is placed on other methods of representation through references to touch, speech, and hearing. Finally, in Chapter 3, I will explore the *performative* use of the oral/aural. Not only do the authors discuss and illustrate the body through orality, they engage the reader's aural sense by using poetic language, rhythms, and word sounds. Allen's audience in particular is engaged in aurality since her primary medium is oral. In short, Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen peel away the social markers imposed on the body by Western patriarchy, articulate embodiment, and inscribe various bodily senses to (re)present their specific subjectivities.

Chapter 1

*"Texte, mon corps"*⁶: Body Thematics

"We must acknowledge that a basic common denominator of female experience--in all cultures and in all classes--has been the fact that [women's] bodies have achieved a universal negative significance; bodies which have become palimpsests upon which men have inscribed and reinscribed their texts."

–Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Who's Listening?"

Women's bodies have been defined by those with the authority to speak: patriarchal men. As a group, women have been denied the right to define their own subjectivities, and have been forced to conform to images created by Western patriarchy, images which are not only restrictively, but negatively valued. The body has been marked by gender, race, and class, where gender entails a set sexuality. Women must therefore confront these images and identify the specific body which can (re)present their subject position. They must recognize the body as a site of self-expression, and utilize it. When Cixous argues that, "en s'écrivant, la femme fera retour à ce corps qu'on lui a plus que confisqué.... Écris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre," she is advocating that women shed the passive position of signified, and become signifiers ("Le rire" 43).

⁶ I have drawn this title from Cixous' "Le rire" (44).

Although Marlatt's, Warland's, Bersianik's, Philip's, and Allen's inscriptions of the body into their texts are representative of their individual and personal bodies, there are similarities in the manner in which they thematize the body. For these authors, the body is both a writing tool and a text. In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz presents the philosophical history of the body's role as signifier and signified, a concept which is empowering to women writers. The body becomes a site of protest, questioning, and re-writing at the personal level, which has socio-cultural implications since it disrupts existing images of woman, and woman's body. Bersianik, Marlatt, and Warland, who acknowledge Cixous' influence, theorize the textual elements of women's bodies in their works. While Philip links body and bodily expression through specific references to the tongue, both as an organ and as a language, Allen describes articulation as a heartbeat. After analysing the link between body and representation, I will examine how Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen re-image the body in their writings. In addition, the women re-possess imposed images such as the maternal body in order to illustrate their individual subjectivities. Since the body is acknowledged as a medium for voicing alternate subject positions by the authors, then their (re)presentation of specific bodies can be interpreted as a challenge to the texts that have been imposed by Western patriarchy.

A) Body (of) Writing :

First, and foremost, I will examine the representations of the body as a tool for re-writing and self-expression. The *physical* body is tangibly linked to both political and personal ideology associated with *images* of the body. Cixous, in "Le rire de la Méduse," urges women to write their bodies in order to destabilize accepted ideals of women and their bodies, as well as to create a unique writing, one that will allow women to represent themselves. For Cixous, the body is both writing tool and text; women must draw from their bodily (im)pulses (*pulsions*), write in "white ink" (breast milk), as well as inscribe meaning to their bodies, which have been drowned in patriarchal ideology.⁷ I will begin by examining illustrations of the body as a writing tool, in Bersianik, Marlatt, and Warland, then examine how Philip depicts the problematics of self-expression through references to the physical body and colonial discourse.

The first part of Bersianik's *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* is a reflection on the body's physical connection to writing. She echoes Cixous when she writes: "Écrire est une expression corporelle" (28). She goes on to describe how every body part is essential to writing, beginning with the fingers, the hand, the arm, the shoulder, the trunk, and even "les seins ne [se] gênent pas pour écrire" (32). By listing the physical body parts needed to write, Bersianik extends Cixous' metaphor

⁷ One could add that the body has been (mis)interpreted not only by patriarchal discourse, but by heterosexist and colonial discourse as well. Although Cixous only discusses the body in terms of gender, her attempts to recover the body from oppressive *patriarchal* discourse can and should be applied to *all* oppressive discourses.

of writing the body. Her mention of the breast that writes plays on Cixous' idea of woman, "[qui] écrit à l'encre blanche" (44). The fact that Bersianik invokes the image of the breast illustrates that writing *as a woman* is central to her work. In fact, Bersianik states: "ma lutte se base sur l'oppression spécifique des femmes. Et l'ennemi à renverser, c'est le patriarcat" ("Notre corps" 73). Her presentation of specific and individual female bodies disrupts the hegemonic image of women's bodies which patriarchy uses to suppress women and their individualities. In an interview with Jean Royer, Bersianik echoes Cixous in declaring that women have, up to date, only been presented and interpreted within a patriarchal context. Women need to represent themselves for and by themselves, a process which begins with the body since writing is a physical act.

The second chapter of Bersianik's novel also discusses the use of the body for writing. However, here she discusses the physical needs of the body, such as breath and food, needs without which the body could not survive, and thus write. She plays with the image of the breath, writing: "À moins d'être géranium et de respirer par la feuille, il faut commencer par dilater ses narines qui sont les bouches d'aération du corps qui écrit. Parfois ouvrir la bouche qui est le premier lieu de parole afin de ne pas l'oublier quand on écrit" (38). The breath is felt as a physical necessity by the body that writes. Moreover, the breath via the mouth becomes representative of speech. The body/text juxtaposition is made even more explicit when Bersianik says that: "il faut ouvrir des bouches d'aération dans son texte" (36).

Therefore the image of the mouth that brings in the breath that is needed in writing, is the same mouth that speaks what is written, and is also the mouth through which the text (the literal text here, not the body) breathes. The breath that (re)presents women's subjectivities is visually illustrated in Bersianik's novel by her insertion of quotes from various sources. The body of the text, much like women's bodies, is influenced by previous interpretations of the body, which she brings into her text through visual "windows," again, returning to the theme of air and breath. Bersianik goes on to argue in *Le Pique-nique* that: "Il faut user de respiration artificielle. Je suis d'accord que c'est un artifice. Mais l'artifice est passager et permet de survivre..." (37-38). The breath that women need to write is represented as an artificial one that is, nonetheless, necessary. Here the artificial breath can be read as the patriarchal language and form that women must use. This artificial breath is necessary to opening up the patriarchal text and presenting women.

Marlatt, in "Musing with mothertongue,"⁸ also looks at the connection between body and articulation. While Bersianik focuses on the physical aspect of self-expression, Marlatt explores the links between body and expression through etymological associations and word play. For example, she states that:

hidden in the etymology and usage of so much of our vocabulary for verbal communication (contact, sharing) is a link with the body's physicality: ... language and tongue; to utter and outer (give birth again); a part of speech

⁸ From here on in, unless otherwise indicated, all poems by Marlatt and Warland shall be listed with a page number from *Two Women in a Birth*.

and a part of the body; pregnant with meaning; to mouth (speak) and the mouth with which we also eat and make love; sense (meaning) and that with which we sense the world; to relate (a story) and to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child); intimate and to intimate; vulva and voluble; even sentence which comes from a verb to feel. (27)

Within this passage, Marlatt plays with words and meanings in order to connect the body and expression, particularly in reference to birth, pregnancy, and the vulva. In other words, she is connecting the ability to communicate and to (re)present oneself with the physical reality of being a woman. Furthermore, she links expression with lesbianism by using the verb "to mouth" and connecting it with the mouth with which lesbians make love. The body becomes a signifier of women's and, particularly, lesbians' subjectivities. The body/text that was once silent is now "pregnant with meaning." It is representative of women's bodies, a text that was repressed within patriarchal discourse. By giving voice to the body, Marlatt and Warland disrupt the body of texts that silence women's bodies, and particularly the lesbian body.

The link between body and representation is manifested quite differently in Philip's text. While Bersianik and Marlatt show the interconnection between the physical body and the necessity of self-expression, the image of the body is used, in *She Tries Her Tongue*, to represent both the ability and the difficulty of

articulation. In "Discourse on the Logic of Language," the tongue becomes the central body part. Philip's use of "tongue" indicates both the physical organ that is needed for speech and language. Depicting English as the father tongue, the colonized subject asks,

What is my mother
 tongue
 my mammy tongue
 my mummy tongue
 my momsy tongue
 my modder tongue
 my ma tongue? (56)

The narrator answers her own question by saying that she has no mother tongue, and adds that she is "dumb-tongued" (56). Philip represents English as a *father* tongue because "it was the White male colonizer bringing [the colonized] language" ("writing a memory" 228).⁹ The link between the mother tongue and the lost pre-colonial language is represented by the mother image, which is in turn associated with the mother land. Philip also illustrates the connection between mother tongue and the lost language through the "regression" of the word "mother" in the poem. Beginning with the "proper" English form "mother," each line symbolically represents an earlier stage in a child's speech development, ending at the

⁹ Philip's connection between men and colonisation in no way absolves women's role in perpetuating colonial structures.

beginning, with a single sound: "ma." Philip has even inserted a demotic version of "mother" ("modder"), yet the narrator is unable to locate a mother tongue. The mother tongue falls into a pre-linguistic past that the speaker cannot remember.¹⁰ The inability to access a mother tongue leaves the speaker "dumb-tongued" (56). Unable to speak in her own language, the narrator is "tongue tied," and to a certain extent, is silenced.

The speaker's inability to express herself in the father tongue becomes representative of her position as a colonized subject, for colonized people lose the fluency for self-representation when a foreign language is imposed. Moreover, the imposition of a colonizing language in itself becomes indicative of colonial violence. For example, within the poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language," Philip reproduces "historical" pieces, such as Edict II, which declares "*Every slave caught speaking his native language shall be severely punished. Where necessary, removal of the tongue is recommended*" (58). Here the mother tongue is associated with the physical tongue that is to be severed if the colonized speaks that mother tongue. The connection between the physical tongue and the mother/father tongue dichotomy is extended in a parody of an academic multiple-choice test where the tongue is associated with taste, speech, oppression and exploitation, and speaking is associated with physical body parts (lips, tongue, jaw) (59).

¹⁰ The empowering possibilities of a pre-linguistic state are also theorized by Kristeva, who locates female writing in the semiotic stage. This idea will be explored further in my second chapter.

Philip similarly connects the body with self-expression in her poem "Universal Grammar." One of the inserts in the poem is an excerpt from "Mother's Recipes on How to Make a Language Yours or How Not to Get Raped." The recipe reads:

Slip mouth over the syllable; moisten with tongue the word.

Suck Slide Play Caress Blow--Love it, but if the word

gags, does not nourish, bite it off--at its source--

Spit it out

Start again. (67)

The African woman's recipe, contextualized by the reference to rape in the title, demonstrates how the colonial imposition of the English language is equal to linguistic rape.¹¹ Nevertheless, the imposition of the colonial language is undermined here by the fact that the woman "has the power to fellate or castrate" (Carr "To Heal" 79). Philip explains her choice of imagery by saying that the whip or gun that was historically used to control the slaves has now been replaced by "more subtle practices of racism," while the penis remains the symbol of control in male-female relations ("Managing" 299). In other words, the penis is equated with the imposed colonial language, as well as the oppression of woman. Yet, on the woman's part, the *mouth* is empowered in terms of self-(re)presentation. The

¹¹ Although I refer to the colonial imposition of English, I must acknowledge that other languages, such as French and Portuguese, have been imposed on various countries during colonisation.

linguistic and physical rape, when contextualized by Philip's "first" title, "How to Make a Language Yours," becomes an opportunity to make love to the language. Even though it is a foreign language/body, she can still "Suck Slide Play Caress Blow--Love it." The connotations of these words are very positive. Therefore, the recipe for avoiding rape is to love the words. Here the power given to the woman is not only the power to castrate, but the power to love, and in so doing, taking control of her body and making the words express her self.

Similarly to the "recipe," Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language" not only presents the problematic relationship between the father tongue and colonialism but the possibility of (re)presentation. In this particular poem however, it is the mother tongue that is empowered. In the margin, running lengthwise down the page and in bold type, Philip describes the birth of a child who learns her mother tongue; the mother is "BLOWING WORDS--HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE-- INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH"(58). This is not to imply that the lost African language is a matriarchal language. The birth poem in the margin can be related to the attempt at "regression" into the mother tongue in the central poem, where the mother tongue is associated with a pre-linguistic stage. Similarly, within the birth poem in the margins, the mother tongue is passed on to the newborn who has not yet acquired language, thereby linking it to the semiotic. In addition, the physical placement of the mother tongue poem in the margins becomes representative of the

marginalization of the colonized, and the colonized's language. Yet the words are in bold type, signalling the importance of the mother tongue and the history it represents. Philip comments that:

when you're reading the edicts and the central texts, the women's story is unreadable. When you turn the book to read the woman's story, the other texts can't be deciphered. It's commenting on how Black women, and all women, have been positioned in society ... to read the woman's story you have to have an effort—a physical effort. ("Secrecy and Silence" 20)

Therefore, the way Philip has created her poem, *reading* becomes a physical act, much like Bersianik's author/narrator who engages the body to write.

Unlike Bersianik, and Marlatt and Warland, Allen does not theorize the body's link to representation in *Women do this Every Day*. Rather, like Philip, she juxtaposes images of body and articulation. For example, she describes how the "people's voice" carries "a universally felt *heartbeat*" (emphasis mine 12). Allen presents the heartbeat as a marker of self-expression. In "Tribute to Miss Lou," Philip describes Miss Lou's (Louise Bennett's) work:

spirit words
 on a riddim fire
 word flame beat
 pumps de heart
 pulses history's heat. (43)

Thematically, then, the poem's beat is likened to the articulation of the colonized's existence. The (heart)beat that leads the poem is indicative of the physical heartbeat, and therefore the specific body of the colonized. "Tribute to Miss Lou" thematically invokes the importance of the body for self-expression. In the "Language" section, she writes:

Get up
dance clap
sweat pon de ground
tambourine
sing a ring ding
sing a ring ding. (44)

In this sense, the language of the colonized is perceived as bodily motion—dancing, clapping, singing. Even though she does not *theorize* the role of the body in (re)presentation as do Bersianik and Marlatt, she describes the central role of the body for articulation. Moreover, Allen's use of a performative form for her work also emphasizes the importance of the body, its movements, and its voice in transmitting a specifically (post)colonial subject.

B) Re-Imaging Body Images

Having recognized that the body is a central element in (re)presentation, women writers often question existing images, recognizing these images as signs imposed on the body. Allen, in "Liberation," aptly describes the reaction to the process of re-imagining when she asks: "does it shake your world when I start to undo / your image of what I should do / the aged myths in which you have hidden me" (56)? The question is rhetorical, since questioning or undoing the images imposed on women undoubtedly destabilizes the structure that imposes such static representations of gender, race and sexuality. Self-imagining on the part of women or of any oppressed subject similarly disrupts the oppressor's ideology. Yet, as Allen observes: "I have the same right / to be myself as you do / colour my own image as you do" (56). As the title of the poem indicates, self-(re)presentation becomes a "liberation." The deconstruction of oppressive images and the "colouring" of individualistic images that Allen calls for is exemplified in the works of all the writers in question. While Bersianik comments on patriarchy's objectification and commodification of women, Allen and Philip question and (re)present the colonial body, and Marlatt and Warland destabilize heterosexual presentations of woman's body and (re)present an alternative, lesbian body. In each case, not only does the presentation of an alternate female body decentre conventions of bodily expression by its audacity and presence, but also because as part of their (re)inscription, the authors question accepted norms.

A response to Plato's *Le Banquet* [*The Symposium*], *Le Pique-nique* articulates women's sexuality. Bersianik inherently questions the concept of an ideal or normative woman in her (re)presentation of a variety of women, of various backgrounds, looks, and sexual orientation. However, the character that stands out the most is Adizetu, the youngest character, who is of African descent. Bersianik's inclusion of Adizetu among the women at the picnic serves first of all to broaden the definition of woman to include girls who are on the verge of "womanhood," and non-European women. The (re)presentation of Adizetu's body is particularly shocking because she has suffered a clitoridectomy. In fact, while reading Adizetu's story the reader is faced with a live photograph of a girl who has just undergone a clitoridectomy (138). As Patricia Smart notes:

L'intrusion du réel dans la fiction a rarement été réalisée avec autant d'éclat; car mue par toute la puissance de l'identification fictive, la lectrice se rend soudainement compte qu'Adizetu est un être humain *réel* qui a déjà subi l'intervention brutale encore pratiquée sur *des MILLIONS de petites filles et d'adolescentes dans vingt-six pays d'Afrique*. ("Rendre visible" 33)

Bersianik's inclusion of the history of clitoridectomy is not meant to be read solely as a criticism of African culture; it is also a comment on the patriarchal excision of female sexuality in all societies. In this sense, Adizetu epitomizes patriarchy's control over women's bodies, and the repression of their sexuality. The physical act of clitoridectomy in African culture is paralleled with the definition of women's

clitoris as a castrated penis. The psychological repression of women's sexuality in Western patriarchal culture, for Bersianik, is equal to the physical excision of the clitoris (157-158).

Having denied/excised women's sexuality, patriarchy portrays women's bodies as an object for men's¹² desire and pleasure. Bersianik identifies patriarchy's appropriation of woman's body throughout *Le Pique-nique*. In an interview with Donald Smith, she says: "le viol a toujours existé, que les hommes ont toujours essayé de posséder les femmes dans leur corps et dans leur volonté, donc de lui enlever [*sic*] toutes ses caractéristiques de sujet" (67). The objectification and rape of women are represented within the context of the mutilated female body in Bersianik's text. Bersianik notes that within Western mythology women transform themselves into animals and birds to escape being appropriated by men. However, these animals and birds become the food that is served at Plato's banquet, as exemplified by "*la sauce Philomèle*" (73). Philomela, who was turned into a nightingale after being raped, becomes part of Plato's repast. In this sense, the woman is again captured and devoured. The consumption of woman is made explicit in one of the "*farces*" (jokes or farcical parables, as well as a side dish). When a woman named Woman visits aristocrats for dinner, where "on sert une espèce de viande blanche en sauce. Tout en se mêlant à la conversation, Femme

¹² From here on in, any references to "men" should be understood as a reference to *patriarchal* men.

apprend que cette étrange table noire est son tombeau et que *c'est elle que l'on sert en sauce blanche aux convives*' (63). Through such metaphorical presentations of woman's body, Bersianik comments on the cannibalistic subsistence of patriarchy, which preys on and lives at the expense of women. While women within a patriarchal system support men, care for them and feed them, their domestic role is taken to the extreme in Bersianik's text, and women literally become the nourishment that sustains men. This *farce* not only represents men as predators, but women as victims dispossessed of their bodies. By contrasting these *farces* and the women's re-embodiment and articulations of their individual bodies, Bersianik is able to rescue women's bodies from patriarchy, usurping the image of women as victim and object.

Smart notes that in the *farce* which ironically presents a patriarchal meal where woman is the main course, the body which is presented is *bloodless* ("The Body Seen" 23). This *farce* is accompanied by a second, where the woman named Woman enters a room where men are dismembering a girl "en prenant soin de ne pas répandre une seule goutte de son sang" (63). These two previous *farces* are followed by one that seems to describe Christian communion. By incorporating references to Christianity, Bersianik illustrates and identifies a discourse that perpetuates the victimization of woman. Institutional Christianity epitomizes the patriarchal structure that oppresses women and denies them their bodies and their sexuality. However, the last *farce* in the chapter takes quite a turn, describing how

the woman named Woman finds herself in a pool that becomes filled with blood. In contrast to the fear that was associated with "*le corps exsangue*" in the previous *farces*, "*Femme se sent merveilleusement bien dans ce bain de sang*" (67). Since this *farce* is titled "*Le sang rouge d'Aphélie*," the association is made with Aphélie's sexual experiences with her husband during which she bleeds. Aphélie's blood is misinterpreted by the patriarchal medical representatives, and she is made to suffer various tests and remedies. Yet, as Smart indicates, Bersianik "seems to be suggesting that women need to recover harmony with this (menstrual?) blood they have been taught to vilify" ("*The Body Seen*" 22). Since Aphélie continues to be sexually active (through masturbation) regardless of her blood, and the woman named Woman literally bathes in her blood, Bersianik is re-imagining female blood as something positive. The blood signifies a distinctly female feature, bringing to mind menstrual blood, birthing blood, and, in the case of women like Aphélie and many virgins, the blood associated with penetration during intercourse. In *Le Pique-nique*, blood becomes symbolic of a specifically female body which needs to be rescued from the bloodless repast of patriarchy.

Whereas Bersianik questions patriarchy's presentation of woman's body, Allen re-images the colonial body. Her description of the limbo dancer in "*Limbo Dancer*" both presents colonial history and (re)presents the black body. The limbo dancer is depicted as a slave with: "shackles on your feet / dance on the slave ship / dance against defeat" (47). Here Allen is drawing on the image of the black

slaves brought on slave ships, which, as Philip describes in *Race, Space and the Poetics of Moving*, confined the African slaves to a very small space where voluntary movement was impossible (4-5). Allen's presentation of the dancing slaves is meant to represent the revolutionary act of the black body in motion. Although the black slaves' motions were limited by shackles and the confined space on the slave ships, there is an "insisting that Africans must be having their freedom to move and move and move out of the nowhere of slavery into history" (Philip *Race, Space* 6). The history which the black limbo dancer is moving towards is one of self-representation and freedom. His/her body, once freed from slavery, becomes a means of self-expression. Yet, Allen, aware of the social intricacies, problematizes the image of the "free" limbo dancer when she writes: "Now tourist pay / see yu make a show / laugh" (48). The limbo dancer now free from slavery becomes the object of commercialism, surviving on the money of (white) tourists. The limbo dancer now does the "limbo in limbo" (48); the freed slave is in a bind in which his/her body is still, to a certain extent, controlled by the colonizer via tourism. Nonetheless, the limbo dancer's body and its motions are still a powerful representation of freedom which are exemplified by the body's range of motion.

Like Allen, Philip uses the black body to problematize colonial images of blacks. The black body has historically been mediated by the colonizer's ideology, but both Allen and Philip displace these images by confronting the assumptions behind the colonial images of blacks. In Philip's poem "Meditations on the

Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones," the reader is asked:

If not in yours

In Whose

In whose language

Am I

If not in yours

Beautiful. (53)

In this poem, Philip is reversing the racist gaze. She asks the colonizer why she is not beautiful in his¹³ language. This idea is reiterated in "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue," where Philip writes that in the colonizer's language, the black woman's hair is kinky, her nose flat, her lips thick (78). Yet Philip, using the same language, inscribes a positive, beautiful, image of a black woman's body. For example, in "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty," the black woman is described as the "[g]irl with the flying cheek-bones / ... / ...[a] woman with a nose broad / As her strength" (53). Attributes that were connoted negatively in colonial discourse are now (re)presented positively. Qualifying the cheek-bones as "flying" signifies freedom, while defining the nose's width as strength associates the black body with terms that refer to power. Therefore, Philip's (re)presentation of the black woman's body offers the opportunity to question colonial images of the black

¹³ I will continue to use the generic masculine when referring to the colonizer since colonial powers have traditionally been male. This is meant in no way to dismiss women's role in perpetuating colonial ideology and racism.

woman, as well as inscribe an alternate body.

Marlatt and Warland similarly contend with ever present negative descriptions of women's bodies, but more specifically, representations of the lesbian body. Like Philip, they inscribe and invert the gaze that has traditionally defined their bodies, and suppressed their subject position. For example, in "Up from under," Warland lists derogatory words that are used to describe lesbianism:

degenerate

destructive

perverted

unnatural

.....

sick

evil. (42)

The inscription of these words becomes subversive since it is the homophobic discourse that is being examined and questioned, not lesbianism. Although Warland is not specifically referring to the body in this poem, the lesbian body she is describing is clearly marked by sexual orientation.

In "17:00 coming into Port Pirie," from "Double Negative," a narrative based on Marlatt and Warland's journey across the Australian desert, they inscribe the symbol (letter) V as representative of woman's body and sexuality. As Brenda Carr notes, "[t]he V shifts the gaze from the phallus as a term of reference in the

Lacanian theory of subject formation to the Venus mound.” The V is “defined by lack because it is minus phallus, [and is a] symbolic (non) marker of a female subject position” (“Collaboration” 118). However, Marlatt and Warland do not support or re-enforce the patriarchal representation of woman as lack; they question it. Earlier in the poem, they recount:

walking into the diner

'are you ladies alone'

'no'

'we're together'

.....

add it up--two negatives make a positive. (87)

They subvert the patriarchal notion of lack by inscribing the cliché “two negatives make a positive.” The cliché refers to the two women as negatives which make a positive within their lesbian relationship, as well as “re-verses the gaze to bring the double cultural negatives ‘lesbian’ and ‘woman’ out into the textual open, to make visible what the Gaze declares invisible” (Carr “Collaboration” 117). In other words, the lesbian woman is doubly negated; once as a woman, the second time because of her sexual orientation. By adding the two up to make a positive, Marlatt and Warland are empowering the specifically lesbian body, even though it is “minus phallus.”

The V symbol, then is used to (re)present and re-map a (lesbian) woman's

body. For example, it is first described geographically as the “soft mound of hill lost / dip or cleft” (84), which then becomes “your Mound of V pulling me” (96). Thus, the V can be seen as the cleavage, between the “soft mounds” of the breasts, or the inverted vagina where the “soft mounds” represent the labia. The link between the V and the sexualized female body is made explicit when Marlatt and Warland write:

off the map

opening up the Subject

hands a manual alphabet

i sign your V

PROHIBITED AREA

CONS: French, cunts. (88)

The V is therefore described as a prohibited area, and is linked with the cunt. Yet the women defy the authoritative prohibition of the sexual female body, and sign (represent and touch) the V. The signing of the V becomes a symbol of victory,¹⁴ and a tactile connection between the hand that is signing and the V of the cunt or cleavage, implying a physical masturbation within the “signing.” In short, Marlatt and Warland’s inscription of the symbolic V becomes an articulation of women’s bodies, as well as a specifically sexual and lesbian body.

¹⁴ Marlatt and Warland take up the idea of the V as a sign of victory within a political context in their poem “There’s nothing there.” In this poem, they juxtapose images of peace marches, “free love,” “flower power,” women’s liberation movements, black power, which all contrast with “the Great White Fathers’ Vietnam” (122).

In effect, sexuality cannot be separated from the body in the works of Marlatt or Warland. In order to (re)present a lesbian body, they search and explore the etymology of patriarchal language, and mould the language into positive images of lesbianism. For example, although the use of “surrender” has degenerated into a descriptor of abandonment or loss of power, Warland explores its etymology and discovers that it also denotes liberation. She then repossesses the word to describe the sensation of two women making love. In part IX of “Open is Broken,” Warland writes that:

the code [of surrender] broken by your fluency

fluent: ‘soft, wet, naked, exposed’

you part the covers

to set free

urged by your *fluency*: ‘to swell, well up, overflow’

our fluids spout out hot gold

rivulets punctuating ecstasy. (56)

In this passage, Warland is also exploring the definition of “fluent” and “fluency.” Although the word “fluency” can indicate ease in writing or speaking a language, Warland explores its other denotations in order to describe lesbianism. Such re-imagining of woman’s body is only possible because of a questioning of patriarchal language and ideology. Having repossessed the body as a mode of expression and challenged Western patriarchy’s imposed images, Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik,

Philip, and Allen are now free to recast and embody distinct sexual and maternal bodies.

C) The Sexual Body

Once they have questioned and subverted specific derogatory and oppressive images present in patriarchal ideology, all the writers subvert patriarchal notions of female sexuality. Warland begins part IX of "Open is Broken" by saying: "you claim me with your tongue / speak my skin's syntax / know my desire's etymologies" (56). There is a *double-entendre* here, in which writing and sexuality are equally relevant. The tongue is both the language that describes the author's lesbian desire, and one of the major organs of lesbian sexuality. As Marlatt explains, the tongue "touches all the different parts of the mouth to make the different sounds--tongue as speech organ. Also, the tongue is a major organ in making love between women. It's an erotic organ and the intertwining of eroticism and speech" ("Speaking In" 28). Although not all of the authors discussed are concerned with the (re)presentation of lesbianism, they, like Marlatt and Warland, disrupt the silent taboo of women's sexuality through their frank descriptions of sexual bodies. They usurp the patriarchal association of women as the passive object of men's desires by embodying their sexualities and by presenting themselves as *subject* of their desires and passions.

In Marlatt's and Warland's writings, lesbianism is presented in an open and

non-judgmental fashion. Marlatt claims that the only way to counter the silence that has surrounded women's bodies and (lesbian) sexuality is "by making it so present that [the reader] can't get around it, [the reader] can't deny it, [the reader] can't euphemize it" ("when we change" 186). In fact, it would be hard to ignore the presence of the lesbian body in *Two Women in a Birth* since words such as "tongue," "lips," "opening," and "coming," are present throughout the text. The presence of the lesbian body is well illustrated for example in Marlatt's poem "Kore," where she writes:

my tongue burrows in, whose wild flesh opens wet, tongue seeks its nest,
 amative and nurturing (here i am you) lips work towards undoing (*dhei*,
 female sucking and suckling, fecund) spurt / spirit opening in the dark of
 earth, *yu!* cry jubilant excess, your fruiting body bloom we issue into the
 light of, sweet, successive flesh.... (13)

This passage vividly describes cunnilingus by referring to the burrowing tongue, the wild and wet flesh, and the "sucking and suckling." The lesbian body, ever present in the poem, can no longer be denied. The reader must admit the presence of lesbianism, as well as women's sexuality in general. The woman's desire and pleasure is clearly inscribed in the poem. The woman's cry, "*yu!*" is included during the description of cunnilingus. As Marlatt describes in a note to the poem (although one might gather simply by the sense of the poem), "yu" denotes both "you" as well as a cry of joy, which, within the context of the poem can be read as

the moment of orgasm. Therefore, inserted in the poem, the cry of “*yu!*” means both (since it does not have to be either/or) that the narrator has come during intercourse, as well as the lover (you) who “[cries] jubilant excess.” The simultaneous orgasm of the two lovers de-centers patriarchal sexuality in several ways; not only is women’s sexuality expressed, but the women are represented as *enjoying* it.

Furthermore, within the descriptions of sexuality in Marlatt and Warland’s work, the sexual act is described as reciprocal, as “we” and “our.” Neither lover is objectified, both are active participants. In fact, as seen in Marlatt’s poem “Kore,” there is no clear demarcation between the two lovers’ bodies, nor their individual pleasures. This is not to say that Marlatt and Warland never present the other as a specific object of desire, but such expressions are always countered by expressions of desire from the other. For instance, both Marlatt’s and Warland’s individual texts are dedicated to the other. Although both express desire for the other in their individual works, the presence of the other’s text becomes, in a sense, an answering call. Moreover, the unsigned poems in “Double Negative” “implies that they do not wish to claim textual or sexual authority over each other” (Carr “Collaboration” 113). Passages such as “touching you / I touch kangaroo / lick my way through / your red fur” (95), in “Double Negative,” cannot be attributed to either Marlatt or Warland specifically, thereby disrupting the patriarchal binary of subject/object. They are both subject *and* object.

While Marlatt and Warland incorporate the body in their texts in order to (re)present lesbian subjectivity specifically, Bersianik presents the female body in a variety of forms and possible sexualities. The women's discussion during the picnic, in *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole*, centers largely around their bodies and sexuality, thus subverting Plato's banquet and the patriarchal ideology it represents. In fact, when the topic is first broached, Ancyl asks which sexuality they will be discussing, to which she is told: "Ben la tienne la mienne la nôtre, celle des femmes de toutes les femmes. Sans oublier celles des petites filles ... Donc on parlera des sexualités plurielles" (97). As André Vanasse points out, the women's dialogue presents "non pas une mais des voix différentes qui expriment des points de vue contradictoires mais pas nécessairement irréconciliables sur le sujet" (22). Rather than hierarchizing the various sexualities, each woman is given a turn to voice her sexual preferences. Such an open presentation of sexualities clearly subverts the heterosexist foundation of patriarchy. Moreover, before "Le dire des sexualités" begins, the women are said to be "*tout oreilles*" (101), thereby implying that they are entering into a true dialogue. Whereas within patriarchy women were generally silenced and were not allowed to express their sexualities, they now have an audience that is prepared to *listen*.

The female body is explicitly presented through graphic descriptions of masturbation, lesbianism, and heterosexuality in Bersianik's novel. These bodily (re)presentations are not masked in metaphorical or scientific language; as Vanasse

explains, “[o]n dit les choses clairement. On évite de se laisser prendre au piège aseptisant du langage scientifique, celui de l’anatomie ou de la physiologie. On parle plutôt en termes de recherche de la jouissance” (22). The women present, discuss, and debate the various pleasures their bodies give them. This open and uncensored presentation of the female body and sexuality disrupts the notion of a unitary sexuality, and epitomizes the plurality of sexualities. Moreover, the women’s knowledge of their bodies and their presentation of them illustrate that women have discarded the veil of silence imposed by patriarchy. They are learning the likes and dislikes specific to their individual bodies, and are *voicing* them. In their articulation of their bodies, the women at the picnic are both literally and figuratively writing their bodies, inscribing both body and sexuality in language.

D) Women as Creators

Another aspect of woman’s body that women writers have been re-contextualizing is the maternal. The ability to bear children is exclusive to women, and while patriarchy has used woman’s reproductive capabilities to subordinate her, women are now asserting the creative force behind child birth. Images of the maternal have been appropriated in the past to describe the creative process. In their introduction to *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe how men have appropriated the concept of maternity and creation to describe their writing process. (4) The image of birth, and the maternal is a

powerful one that feminist writers reclaim as a symbolic and literal expression of women's capacity for self-expression, their sexualities, and their literal position as mothers.

Marlatt and Warland link birth, language, and writing. In "Musing with mothertongue," Marlatt writes: "the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth" (25). Both authors appropriate the images surrounding birth to describe the acquisition of language. Considering language a "living body" echoes Julia Kristeva's argument that

the "semiotic" is a dimension of language occasioned by that primary maternal body ... [and] expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely, within poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail. In effect, poetic language is the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language, one that has the potential to disrupt, subvert, and displace the paternal law. (Butler 79-80)

Since Marlatt and Warland similarly refer to the acquisition of language in terms of the maternal birthing process, they are appropriating the fluidity of language, and inscribing it in relation to women. By incorporating birth imagery, *women* become the point of reference both in theory and in poetry. Marlatt and Warland utilize the birth image as representative of themselves in their writing process; they are "two women in a birth." In "Crossing Loop," from "Double Negative," Marlatt,

referring to the process of writing, says: “we were so absorbed in being present to [the land] [almost as if we were being born again in this very encapsuled and intimate experience, two in a berth/birth/byrth to bear in a certain direction, forwards say—]” (107). Thus, the birthing imagery is used in Marlatt and Warland’s text to illustrate the process of women’s birth, their process of becoming and of self-representation.

Through word play, Marlatt and Warland associate “birth” with “berth,” juxtaposing the birthing imagery to the train that they are travelling on as they write their text, “Travelling backwards through Australia” (113). They inscribe a breech birth, moving backwards physically on the train, but also symbolically through patriarchal ideology.¹⁵ As two women, two lesbians inscribing their bodies and their sexuality, Marlatt and Warland are also “backwards,” in the sense of non-conventional in relation to patriarchal expectations. Moreover, they reverse the patriarchal association between trains and men by appropriating and making the train a specific symbol of female body and sexuality. The train is likened to a “umbilical track,” where the women move “down this birthing canal” (82). As Marlatt explains, in “Crossing Loop”: “We talked about coming but made it female coming and the cyclical nature of female orgasm is really different from the one-

¹⁵ In “Travelling backwards through Australia,” Marlatt and Warland deconstruct the patriarchal language and writing form when they write “backwards back/ words behind my back unable to see what lies ahead (lies are ahead)” (113). Thus they are working backwards, deconstructing the lies that lie ahead. Even the format of their text is a deconstruction of “male” exploration and travel writing *genres*.

track crescendo of male orgasm" (108). Warland, building on Marlatt's comment, explains their use of the train imagery by saying that "the train is constantly starting and stopping, departing and arriving, coming and waiting at crossing loops and in that sense it's cyclical" (108). Thus the train becomes symbolic of their sexuality, and also becomes an image of the women's birth into self-representation. For Marlatt and Warland, the train, birth, and sexuality are all closely connected. "[T]he rocking motion of the train which is very womblike" (108), is representative of the sexual body that Marlatt and Warland wish to illustrate.

Similarly, in *Le Pique-nique*, Bersianik conflates the imagery of birth with sexuality when she describes the birth of the Caryatid, a marble statue of a female figure which upholds (along with five other Caryatids) the structure of the Acropolis. Avertine approaches one of the Caryatids and declares:

Je t'aime. Je t'embrasse. Je te touche. Je te caresse.... Caresse-moi. Touche-moi. Je t'aime ma Géante. Je t'embrasse mon Immense. Je te touche mon Infinie. Je te caresse mon Incommensurable. Je me déverse en toi ma Démesurée. Je t'insuffle mon air, mes gaz, mes vapeurs, mon éther, ma poudre d'hystérie. La chaleur circule, le marbre se fait chair, les veines s'étirent et se gorgent de sang, prends mon sang j'en ai pour deux ... prends mon verbe, prends mon délire, accroche-toi à mon désir, prends mon désir de naître et NAIS, prends mon désir de vivre et VIS. (207-208)

The "birth" of the Caryatid is inextricably linked to the female touch of Avertine.

The touching, caressing, and stroking that revive the Caryatid are sexual in nature. The link to sexuality is made at the beginning of the chapter when Avertine finds a sign on which visitors to the Caryatids are warned "DÉFENSE DE TOUCHER," while the reverse side reads "DÉFENSE DE SE TOUCHER. Ça c'est un message aux Caryatides puisque le public ne peut le voir" (200, 205). The restriction to touch themselves placed on the Caryatids is reminiscent of patriarchy's denial of female sexuality, including masturbation. In this sense, the Caryatids' stiff bodies symbolize the silencing of woman's body by patriarchy. When Avertine defies the injunction and strokes the Caryatid to life, there is a clear inference that Avertine is not only giving the Caryatid life (literally) but is also initiating her into sexuality. Moreover, Avertine's exhaustion once the Caryatid is alive symbolizes both the exhaustion of labour (having given birth), as well as a post-coital state.

Bersianik's inscription of the birth of the Caryatid also serves as a symbol of woman's awakening into self-representation through the connection between mothers and daughters. Avertine, in the novel, represents the author/daughter in search of the mother figure (Gould "Vers une maternité" 41-42). Bersianik, playing on the theme of Demeter and Persephone, reverses the mother/daughter roles, and has the "daughter" create the mother.¹⁶ Avertine's role as both mother and author

¹⁶ Women writers often appropriate the mythical mother-daughter search in their works. Marlatt for example, in her poem "Kore" makes reference to Persephone and Demeter in order to describe her lesbian relationship where Warland and she "each get to play the daughter and [they] each get to play the mother" ("when we change" 26). Similarly, Philip incorporates the mother-daughter search in her poetry section entitled "And Over Every Land and Sea" in order to illustrate colonialism. Therefore, the mother-daughter search that once exemplified

creates a clear link between women's role as creators of body and text. The Caryatids symbolize women's silence within patriarchy, as well as their support of a state that oppresses them. In this sense, "[b]ringing the Caryatids to life is, of course, symbolic of Bersianik's wish to retrieve all the lost female lives from the past and, in doing so, chisel out of the voiceless figures of antiquity a dynamic historical tradition of women speaking to women" (Gould "Québec Feminists" 299-300). For Karen Gould, "the awakening of the statue's cold, colourless marble body and the genesis of Bersianik's woman-centred text are both marked by the woman writer's inscription of her own physical gestures, bodily rhythms, and sexual desire" (*Writing* 182). This is exemplified in Avertine's creation of the Caryatid, to which she gives her heart, her tears, her saliva, but above all her words, her language, and her desire for life. The birth image thus becomes the site of creativity which allows for the expression of women's silenced bodies. Whereas women's self-(re)presentation destabilizes patriarchal ideology, the Caryatid's movements, her self-expression, literally cause the Acropolis (a symbol of patriarchal structure) to crumble.

While Marlatt, Warland, and Bersianik all inscribe maternity as symbolic of creation and writing, Allen and Philip represent it as a real condition of womanhood. For Allen, giving birth becomes revolutionary. Whereas within patriarchy maternity is viewed as a weakness, Allen describes it as a strength. For

patriarchal oppression becomes a symbol of women's subject position: their self-expression, their sexuality, their attempts to redress racial oppression.

example, in "My Momma," she writes that

any woman who can make a dot into a child
 inside of her
 and bring it outside to us
 is a model for a revolution. (30)

Women's ability to create something (a child) out of nothing (a mere "dot") becomes a "model for a revolution." The reference to revolution draws on Allen's socio-cultural history as a black woman within a (post)colonial state.¹⁷ The power of creation is a model for revolution, which is essential to the survival of black culture. Allen's work illustrates the need for revolutionary re-examination, re-reading, and re-contextualization of both black colonial history and questions of womanhood. Through the image of childbirth, women and blacks are empowered, thus creating a link between women's and people of colour's struggle against the Western patriarchal power structure that denies and represses their bodies. It is women who create and bear children who will one day become revolutionaries. Yet, women themselves must become revolutionaries, and have their subject position acknowledged and respected.

Allen also links maternity with revolutionary feminism in her poem "Nellie Belly Swelly." This poem presents the rape of Nellie, a child of thirteen, and her

¹⁷ Although Allen currently resides and writes in Canada, she is conscious of the colonial history of the Caribbean, where she was born. Moreover, as Carr discusses in her forthcoming article, the Canadian immigration regulations are still within a "colonial" framework.

subsequent pregnancy, while “no sentence was passed / on this menacing ass / who plundered Nellie’s childhood” (26). The image of maternity is used in this poem to expose male violence, and the oppression and subjugation of women, including girls.¹⁸ Allen criticizes the domination of men, and the society that condemns Nellie rather than the perpetrator. Instead of confronting the rapist, the townspeople hide Nellie away, blame her, and gossip: “psst psst psst Nellie belly swelly / Nellie belly swelly” (26). Moreover, by confronting such taboo issues in “Nellie belly swelly,” Allen “revolutionizes” images of childbearing. Through the ordeal of rape and childbirth, Nellie herself becomes a revolutionary. The poem ends not by lamenting Nellie’s fate, or picturing her as a victim, rather, in the end, a “feminist [is] born” (27). Nellie’s rape and subsequent pregnancy have made her a feminist who “muster[s] an army within her / [and] strenghten[s] her defense” (26) in order to confront the society that has allowed rape to occur and go unpunished. Therefore, the birth image, in Allen’s work, becomes representative of a revolutionary act, both on the part of the colonized, and on the part of women.

While Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, and Allen all (re)present birth imagery in order to challenge conventional ideas of maternity, thereby illustrating a distinct subject position, Philip refers to the concept of maternity more generally in her text. In the section “And Over Every Land and Sea,” she appropriates the myth of Proserpine and Ceres (Persephone and Demeter), and rewrites it as the separation

¹⁸ The rape presented in “Nellie Belly Swelly” is based on a true story (Carr “Come Mek Wi” 18).

of a mother and daughter due to slavery. Poems titled "Adoption Bureau," "Clues," and "The Search," are contextualized by quotes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The cultural and colonial dimension of this section is evidenced by the inclusion of the Proserpine-Ceres story, where "Ceres, with panic in her heart vainly sought her daughter over all lands and over all the sea" (28). The reference to the lands and sea indicates the displacement of the African people within colonial history. Therefore, Philip uses the maternal mother-daughter relationship to foreground the disruption and separation of the African people. The search to reconnect the broken mother-daughter bond becomes symbolic of an attempt to reconnect with a lost language and culture. For example, the section begins with the mother's plea of "[w]here she, where she, where she / be, where she gone?" (28), while the daughter says: "She whom they call mother, I seek" (29). The contrast between these two statements is glaring. The mother speaks in the demotic English, the daughter in a scholarly English (indicated by the proper use of "whom"). However, the mother-daughter bond is not forever broken. In fact, the daughter says: "She / and I, call and response in tongue and / word that buck up in strange" (31). The call and response in which the mother and daughter engage leads the daughter away from the proper English towards a language that "bucks up in strange." Moreover, the call and response that the mother and daughter engage in is "an African art form" (Philip "Journal Entries" 70), thereby signalling the daughter's dialogue within a language/culture she thought lost.

Yet, as in the Proserpine-Ceres myth, the mother and daughter are not clearly reunited. The last two poems in the section still represent the mother and daughter search, since:

the trail...
 following
 she
 follows.... (36)

However, preceding the declaration of a continual search between mother and daughter, and for the African homeland, there is the “dream-skins dream the dream dreaming / (*in two languages*)” (32). This fantastical poem is metaphorically, grammatically and syntactically distanced from Western poetic forms, and as such exemplifies a commentary from a colonized (post)colonial¹⁹ position. In the “*Afterbirth*,” which represents a (post)colonial state, there is

one breast
 white
 the other black

¹⁹ One of the many on going debates centres around colonialism and post-colonialism. Typically, the term post-colonialism is hyphenated, but I have chosen to bracket the “post” in “post-colonialism” to emphasize the contentious assumptions in referring to *post*-colonialism. Although I realize that the term “post-colonialism” often refers simply to the period that is *after* the historical fact of colonisation, I still wish to recognize the ongoing effects of colonisation, such as neo-colonialism, as well as the ever present changes incurred by colonialism. In this sense, even though there may not be colonial powers oppressing the people directly, they are still affected by their colonial past and the continued hierarchized power relations in a (post)colonial. For an interesting criticism of (post)colonialism see Arun Mukherjee’s article “Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?”

head is separated from her body, perpetuating the colonial ideal of the brute slave whose body is necessary for manual labour, and does not have, nor need, a mind (symbolized by the head). Moreover, the colonial woman "cradles the broken parts," exemplifying exoticism, as well as recent attempts at reparation. Therefore, in this sequence, birth becomes symbolic of the integration of African people into white colonial history. Although birth is indicative of colonialism, birth-blood is used to symbolize the African's own story. For example, in "Adoption Bureau Revisited," the last poem in the series of mother-daughter poems, the mother says: "ours / betrayal and birth-blood / unearthed" (36). Expanding the birthing image in "Dream-skins," the birth-blood becomes representative of the colonized's story. Philip's mother-daughter sequence is a confrontation and criticism of colonialism; the birth image and the presence of birth-blood, is used to mark the gruesome and bloody colonial history. The insertion of the body through various aspects of birth thus become a (re)presentation of a (post)colonial subject.

In short, from birth imagery to birthing to maternity, women writers, unlike their male counterparts, do not simply utilize birth as a symbol of a creative process. For Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen, birth is an integral part of articulating women's subjectivities. Maternity is a figurative and literal expression of women's socio-cultural realities. The body, specifically the woman's body, is inscribed and empowered. In essence, the images patriarchy perpetuates of women are disrupted by women's self-expression. By becoming signifier rather

than signified, these writers reject the passive object position, and create specific and individual texts of their bodies.

Chapter 2

Sense-ing the Body

“ il s’agit de ne pas privilégier le regard aux dépens des autres sens”

–Louky Bersianik, *Le Pique-nique*

Within patriarchy, the sense of sight is often privileged over other bodily senses. It has been directly associated with the power to name and possess. This is exemplified within contemporary society by the use of the expression “I see,” to indicate “I know” or “I understand.” Freud’s concept of sexuality and identity is based on the child’s initial viewing of genitalia. He believed that it was the sight of the penis, or lack thereof, which lay at the heart of the child’s sexual identification, in addition to creating other “character forming” concepts such as fear of castration and penis envy. In essence, Freud’s theories of child development are based on the sense of sight, and on the visibility of male genitalia (Moi 132-135). Foucault also invokes the power of the gaze when he draws on the concept of the panopticon, positing that societal behaviour is influenced by the sense that there is always (if only possibly) someone else observing one’s actions (Foucault 211-213). The fact that someone else is *looking* is only a portion of the panoptic concept. Inherent within the concept of the gaze is *judgement*. Freud and Foucault are

probably the most evident examples of the emphasis placed on sight in current theory. Yet, this focus on sight/gaze is not purely theoretical. The concept of the gaze is aptly represented in popular culture in such phenomena as "Big Brother" from George Orwell's *1984*.

Since the gaze implies an authoritative judgement, within Western society it perpetuates white patriarchal ideology. This emphasis on gazing within patriarchy has served to reinforce woman's place as object. As Laura Mulvey explains, "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19). Thus, the power to gaze rests with the white heterosexual male. According to Mulvey, Freud "associated scopophilia [the pleasure of looking] with taking people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (16). Just as women are subjected to the male gaze, homosexuals, people of colour, and the disabled are also subjected to a controlling gaze. In essence, as a result of a *visually* identifiable difference, the authoritative gaze "others" the different body, denying that subject a voice. The woman, the lesbian, and the person of colour are seen within Western patriarchal society as passive objects to be gazed at, as curiosities.

In order to repossess their bodies, women writers must therefore displace the patriarchal gaze. The gaze is disrupted within Marlatt's, Warland's, Bersianik's, Philip's, and Allen's works since they not only (re)possess the female body and (re)present it as subject, but they move the focus from the eyes towards the mouth

and ears. The body becomes present not as an object that is seen and represented, but as an active subject that touches, tastes, speaks, and hears.²⁰ I will begin this chapter by examining how the authors name and identify the gaze, then illustrate how they create alternate means of “knowing,” using other bodily senses such as touch, taste, orality, and aurality.

A) Gazing Over :

In “Double Negative,” in order to illustrate the patriarchal gaze that “colonizes” women, Marlatt and Warland juxtapose the image of woman’s body with that of the desert. The dips and clefts in the landscape are paralleled to a woman’s curves (84-85), while the “nothing-ness” of the desert is reminiscent of the gaze’s negation of women and lesbians. According to Marlatt, “[t]he patriarchal oppression of women and colonialism are two different faces of the same coin” (“when we change” 191). For Marlatt and Warland, the gaze that “others” them as women and as lesbians works in the same way as the gaze that “others” the colonized. As Sara Suleri points out, although colonialism refers to specific historical periods, it has also become symbolic of various forms of “marginality” (274). Likening the patriarchal gaze to the historical colonial gaze is not meant to detract from the real, historical oppression of a people based on race; rather, it is

²⁰ Interestingly, none of the authors discussed draw on the olfactory sense. I believe they focus on touch, taste, speech, and sound because these are the first connections with the world one establishes.

meant to foreground the oppression of women and lesbians, which does not have a clear historical or geographical point of demarcation.²¹

The female/lesbian body, portrayed as the desert, is subject to “see-vill(ain)-I-say-tion” (86). As Carr points out, “[t]he phonetic word play suggests the way that a civilization based on the mastering gaze and the authoritative word both originate from the capital I/eye, and can be seen as an act of villainy...” (“Collaboration” 115). Yet Marlatt and Warland both invoke and subvert the notion of the gaze that deems the landscape and (lesbian) women “nothing.” In “10:33 Forrest,”

not / thing comes unhinged
 far as the eye can see
 there are birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, scrub trees,
 bushes, grasses
 thriving outside The Gaze
 (can we see what we do not value). (92)

The “nothing-ness” of (lesbian) women and desert is contested by Marlatt and Warland who see and name many things that exist, even though they are not

²¹ Other than the parallels between colonialism and gender relations, and colonialism and heterosexism, Marlatt and Warland also draw on their personal experiences of growing up in “minority” households. Pamela Banting, in “The Phantom Limb” describes how Marlatt grew up in an Anglo-Indian household in Penang (189-191). Warland, who was raised in Canada, grew up in a Norwegian community, where “all important conversations happened in Norwegian” (“a language” 306). In this sense, both Marlatt and Warland grew up with the knowledge of colonial relations and hierarchical power relations.

acknowledged by the gaze. They question the authority of the gaze by presenting what thrives beyond the judgement of patriarchy and colonialism. Moreover, they not only illustrate the colonisation of the gaze, they assert the existence of the (lesbian) woman's body and the desert, regardless of the gaze's attempts to appropriate and lay claim to them. As Marlatt and Warland write, the

red ochre menstrual stain
 (source of earth's life blood)
 over and ochre
 even the horizon
 unable to dam her flowing sand. (92)

Here, the desert sand is likened to woman's menstruation, which cannot be controlled. Even the horizon, which is a fluid and "boundless" boundary, is unable to define women's experiences. Therefore, even though the gaze attempts to name and map the (lesbian) woman's body and the desert, neither can ever be contained or conquered.

Evidence of the gaze, be it patriarchal or colonial, or both, is inscribed in all the texts examined. Although Bersianik, Philip, and Allen do not theorize the gaze, it is present in the assumed patriarchal and (post)colonial frameworks they operate within. For example, by modelling her text on a renowned and thoroughly patriarchal text, Bersianik invokes the ideology of the patriarchal gaze. Even though the patriarchs are not present to gaze upon the women, their ideology seems

to resonate in its absence. The reader is conscious of the framework that these women emerge from and speak out of. Similarly, in Philip's work there are various references to and intrusions by the colonial gaze, for instance her inclusion of textual excerpts that exemplify racist ideology. Contrary to Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, and Philip, who insert the gaze's "voice," Allen's references are less explicit. Nevertheless, there is a clear sense that her writing is subverting an underlying sexist and racist framework.

In order to undermine the authority of the gaze, the authors do not invert the gaze, rather they rely on alternate senses in order to (re)present themselves, drawing on the body as a whole. Women's focus on the body has "enabled [them] to question the primacy given to the visual sense, restoring some credit to the tactile ones, senses which arguably dominate at birth" (Waterhouse 111). While sight is only developed at the later stages of maturation, from the moment a child is born, s/he has the sense of touch, can vocalize, and can hear. Thus, in order to de-centre the sense of sight, and consequently the gaze, Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen draw on these "primary" senses. For Bersianik, Marlatt, and Warland, touch becomes a sensual expression of sexuality. "Speaking up" is quite literally integrated in *She Tries Her Tongue*, *Women do this Every Day*, and *Two Women in a Birth*, through the use of orality. The authors individualize a thematic representation of orality in order to (re)present their subjectivities as women of colour and lesbians, respectively. And, finally, the sound of language and music

is thematized by Philip, Bersianik, and Allen as another alternative to sight, and to the gaze.

B) Touching Senses :

While the gaze has served to objectify women for men's pleasure, women authors trying to recapture their bodies and (re)present themselves as subjects of their own sexuality utilize the sense of touch to describe their sexual experiences, as seen in *Le Pique-nique* and *Two Women in a Birth*. Within *Le Pique-nique*, Bersianik consistently uses the sense of touch to invoke women's identity and sexuality. She empowers the sense of touch as the primary sense which is linked to the maternal, since, within the womb, "elles sont touchées de partout, ce qu'elles n'oublieront jamais—surtout quand leur corps sera soumis à la carence du Toucher et à la surabondance du Voir" (55). Here Bersianik is suggesting that the power of touch, which everyone senses, even before birth, becomes lost within the gaze of cultural reality. The emphasis on the visual sense and pleasures is symptomatic of patriarchy's attempt at control. As Smart indicates, "for Bersianik the fear of touching endemic in our culture is a symptom of a more ancient fear, that of the maternal body, whose power has been envied and stolen by the creators of a symbolic order that glorifies 'male maternity'" ("The Body" 24). Although women are central to the creation of life, men appropriate the power of creation through naming. Within her text, Bersianik repossesses the power of touch, and shows its

centrality in creation when the Caryatid awakens at Avertine's touch (207-208). The importance of touch, and its link to maternity, is re-appropriated into the woman's sphere when Avertine strokes the statue to life.

The patriarchal gaze also serves as a judgement of beauty, which patriarchy associates with sexuality. Xanthippe tells the women a fable, where "il faut que la femme ait quelque chose qui attire l'homme" (164). Yet, as Ancyl points out, "il s'agit aussi de ne pas privilégier le regard aux dépens des autres sens. Car qu'est-ce que la beauté a à voir avec la jouissance?" (170). In effect, Aphélie, who is embarrassed by her "overweight" body, is able to describe in full detail how she pleasures herself through masturbation—thereby valuing touch over sight. Although she feels self-conscious because of her weight (having internalized the patriarchal definition of beauty) the other women assure her that her weight is not a problem, and that she should treasure a body that gives her pleasure. In Bersianik's work, touching is the central element in women's sexuality. For Aphélie, it is the male touch that leads her to bleed, and her own touch that leads her to pleasure. And for Xanthippe, whose husband will not touch her, touching becomes a symbol of her sexuality (or lack thereof). Xanthippe perceives touch as central to an acknowledgment of being, and urges the women to touch, leading their hands onto her body (57-58). As Gould explains, "Xanthippe's intense longing is rooted in her need to rediscover the world of the senses and her love of self. As a result, the collective touching initiated at her request is more sensual than sexual,

more self-affirming than ecstatic" (*Writing* 183). Touch becomes central to Xanthippe's sexuality, as well as to her self-definition. Having the women touch her helps her identify her self, and affirm her body. Xanthippe's body is not defined by what the women *see* but by what they *touch*, in addition to her description of the pleasure of touch.

There are a variety of sexual preferences elaborated within Bersianik's text, but all the women to some degree include touch as a factor in their sexual pleasures. The women's sexual discussion begins with Aphélie's complaint that her husband no longer touches her, and her subsequent description of masturbation. Men are inadequate lovers according to Edith because "ils ne touchent pas" (122), but Epsilon argues in favour of the "touch" of the penis during penetration. Even Adizetu, who discusses clitoridectomy rather than sexuality, invokes the image of touch: once the excision is performed she will be deprived "of the pleasure of a certain touch" (Gould *Writing* 183). It is Ancyl who summarizes the women's various sexual preferences by stating that sexual pleasure is "la jouissance du Toucher. C'est une jouissance ... qui intéresse tout le corps et non un seul organe et qui est la jouissance la plus sensuelle qui soit puisque pas une parcelle de sa peau externe et interne n'y est étrangère--même si celle-ci n'est pas entièrement en contact" (174). Ancyl displaces any specific sexual organ when describing women's sexuality; it is the body in its entirety that becomes the receptacle of sexual pleasure. By drawing on the sexual and sensual qualities of the body, Bersianik

echoes Irigaray's statement that "la femme a des sexes un peu partout" ("Ce sexe" 28). In this sense, Bersianik, like Irigaray, is not only de-centring the gaze, but de-centring the penis as the focal point of sex. There is no central organ for sexuality; every aspect of the body becomes receptive to sexual pleasure.

Touch and taste are directly related in *Le Pique-nique*, since "manger provoque un délicieux toucher intérieur" (54). In fact, Aphélie, who is deprived of her husband's touch, turns to eating to satisfy herself. Just as Xanthippe asks the women to touch her, Aphélie asks them to taste her. The women then "picorent sur son nez, elles grignotent ses oreilles, elles butinent sur ses lèvres, elles pignoquent dans son cou, elles broutent ses cheveux, elles mâchent sa salive, elles croquent ses paupières et ses cils.... On se goûte, on se trouve salées, sucrées, piquantes, assez cuites, assez maigres, assez grasses, assez croustillantes..." (62). Tasting Aphélie becomes a sensual experience, much like touching Xanthippe had been. The experience is sensual in the sense that the women become aware of their bodies and their bodily perceptions. Touching and tasting grounds them in the body. They become conscious of the body as a tactile object, and realize there are other ways of evaluating the world than through sight. Moreover, although the women had obviously eaten prior to this occasion, they had nonetheless never experienced true *tasting*, which relies on the sense. Although eating feeds the body and gives it energy, it is tasting that interprets the food. Once the women are aware of tasting, they become aware of their body and their body's relationship to the world via the

senses.

While Bersianik specifically discusses the sense of taste in her work, Marlatt and Warland only make indirect comments about this sense. In part XVI of "Open is Broken," Warland writes: "this is a place we touch and taste each other" (63). Similarly, in "31/5 8:45 Deakin," Marlatt and Warland write: "your flesh i taste" (90). For these authors, however, the sense of taste is inextricably linked with sexuality. In fact, although they do not often mention the sense of taste, they make numerous references to the mouth as a sensual organ. The mouth, which is not synonymous with taste, still foregrounds the senses that help to illustrate a lesbian identity beyond the patriarchal gaze. In part V of "Open is Broken," Warland describes how

'small hill' becomes sun
 'incline(s)' in my mouth
 smooth burning on my tongue
 south in the mouth of north. (54)

Here Warland is not describing the taste, but rather the sensation of the lover's cunt on her mouth, which creates a "smooth burning." The focus on the mouth as a sensual organ, both giving and receiving sexual satisfaction through the sense of taste and touch, displaces the patriarchal focus on the gaze. Instead of it being the eyes that see and evaluate the lover's body, it is the mouth that senses and gives pleasure. Marlatt similarly focuses the sense of sexual pleasure in the mouth of the

lover. She describes cunnilingus as a “sucking and suckling” (13), where the lover’s “dearly known skin—its smell, its answering touch to my tongue. fondant, font, found, all that melts, pours” (20). Here Marlatt refers to several senses in describing lesbian sexuality; she invokes smell, touch, and indirectly, the taste of the lover’s skin that melts in her mouth. Therefore, the various senses are used to relocate and articulate the lesbian body. Moreover, in lesbian sexuality, the mouth and specifically the tongue play a parallel role to that of the penis in heterosexual sex. Consequently, it is not only the gaze that is being displaced but also the penis. Like Bersianik’s inscription of various sexual erogenous zones, Marlatt and Warland’s focus on the mouth and tongue usurp penis-centred sexuality. Thus, Marlatt and Warland, attuned to their bodily senses, use them to describe a uniquely lesbian identity and sexuality.

Like Marlatt and Warland, Philip juxtaposes the sense of taste and the mouth in order to (re)present a subject position outside the gaze. While Marlatt and Warland use the bodily senses to describe a subject position denied by the heterosexual gaze of patriarchy, Philip inscribes the sense of taste in order to foreground the racist colonial oppression of blacks. For example, in a mock academic test included in her collage-like poem “Discourse on the Logic of Language,” Philip juxtaposes taste and colonial language, stating that the tongue “(d) contains ten thousand taste buds, none of which is sensitive to the taste of foreign words” (59). The tongue in this test question is representative of the

colonizer's tongue, which is non-sensitive to the taste of foreign words. It is the colonizer who never acknowledges, let alone learns, the colonized's language. In this sense, the *taste* of speech and its power to oppress, within colonialism, is reserved for the colonizer. Moreover, the fictional test question is placed side by side with an edict that recommends that the colonized's tongue be removed if the "slave [is] caught speaking his native language" (58). In this sense, the colonized are not only denied the right to speak in their native language but are also being denied the right to speak (taste) the language of the colonizer. For Philip, taste, like the gaze, is a privileged sense that must be disrupted. The sense of taste is used to represent the repression of the colonized people, which is the first step in self-(re)presentation. Even though Philip likens the tongue and sense of taste to colonial oppression, it also illustrates the possibility of articulation. Again, in "Discourse on the Logic of Language," Philip presents the following multiple-choice question:

In man the tongue is

- (a) the principal organ of taste.
- (b) the principal organ of articulate speech.
- (c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation.
- (d) all of the above. (59)

Within colonial ideology this rhetorical question is best answered by (d), but, within Philip's discourse, the focus is placed on the tongue as central to "articulate speech." Although within colonial history speech was the privilege of the colonizer,

within Philip's text, the tongue becomes the principal organ of protest through articulation. Thus, the mouth represents the sense of taste as well as the power of orality.

C) Talking Back :

While the tactile sense is a somewhat less obvious antithesis to the gaze, the oral sense provides a clear opportunity for "talking back." "Talking back," or contending with the history presented by patriarchy and the ideology it perpetuates, is illustrated in Philip's text through thematic representation of attempts at self-expression and silence. In Bersianik's, Allen's, and Marlatt and Warland's works, orality is thematized in order to legitimize conversation. They draw attention to the oral genre per se, as well as dialogue and the sense of community it fosters.

In *She Tries Her Tongue*, the importance of the oral or the spoken is in large part illustrated by its absence. For Philip, the central element in the (re)presentation of a (post)colonial subject is verbalization. She thematizes the colonized's silence throughout her work, calling for a vocalization of the colonial past as well as a (re)presentation of the colonized subject. Her title poem, "She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks," epitomizes the colonized's search for oral self-expression. Having thematized the silencing of the colonized people throughout the text, Philip, in the last poem, illustrates their attempt to express themselves

through

oath moan mutter chant

time grieves the dimension of other

babble curse chortle sing

turns on its axis of silence

praise-song poem ululation utterance

one song would bridge the finite in silence. (90)

The words that Philip uses in the lines beginning on the far left illustrate an attempt at vocalization in order to break the silence that has plagued the colonized people. The indented lines, framed by the expressions of orality, describe how the “othering” of the colonial gaze is now being subverted. The silence begins to voice the oath, babble, praise-song which “bridge” the colonial silence. By interspersing words that define orality within a poem that describes the historical silencing of the colonized, Philip is able to indicate the necessity of the oral sense for expressing a (post)colonial subject position.

In order to reinforce the need for articulation to break the silence that imprisons the colonial and marginalised subject, Philip does not rely merely on orality, per se. In fact, she draws attention to the oral sense by incorporating non-oral articulations. Throughout her text she addresses the non-oral (silent) state of the colonized people, questions the language that silences them, as well as attempts to open up colonial expression. Since the colonizer has historically possessed the

power of speech, Philip does not simply appropriate the oral sense. Throughout her text, she illustrates the difficulty of overcoming silence, yet she incorporates various "silent" articulations that undermine the patriarchal and Western gaze, while sidestepping the polemic relationship the colonized have with the colonizer's language. In her closing poem, "She Tries Her Tongue," Philip converts the body as a whole into an expression of the colonized subject. She writes:

The body should speak

When silence is,

Limbs dance

.....

That body might become tongue

Tempered to speech

And where the latter falters

Paper with its words

The crack of silence;

That skin become

Slur slide susurrations

Polyphony and rhythm--the drum;

.....

When silence is

Abdication of word tongue and lip

Ashes of once in what was

...Silence

Song word speech

Might I...like Philomela...sing

continue

over

into

...pure utterance. (98)

As well as being an indicator of colonial violence and oppression, in Philip's work, the body also becomes a mode of self-expression. The body and its motions become an "oral" articulation of colonial history. This expression exists, and is translated in "She Tries Her Tongue" in terms that are clearly oral: tongue, lips, speech, and song. The body in dance becomes the "tongue," and the skin of the colonized is likened to the skin on the drum. The colonized body and its rhythms exemplify the break with the non-oral state; through dance and music, the body breaks the silence of the colonized people. Furthermore, Philip argues that when the body's (re)presentations fail to be heard, writing must break their silence. Yet the writing must inscribe orality and the history imprinted on the black body. Moreover, by invoking the character of Philomela at the end of the poem, the (post)colonial subjects' plight is likened to that of Philomela, thereby inviting a renegotiation of

forms of expression.²² By presenting self-expression as articulations of the body, through dance, rhythm, song, as well as writing, the dichotomy between silence and orality is disrupted.

The importance of sound and speech is often marginalised by the “authority” of the written text. However, these women authors strategically recover and reinscribe oral traditions in their works. For example, Bersianik, in *Le Pique-nique*, presents a dialogue among women. The discussion that takes place at the picnic is reminiscent of women’s discussions around the kitchen table. Her thematic representation of women’s dialogue foregrounds the fact that women’s discussions or meetings have been largely based on oral dialogue. Not only are women’s discussions subordinate to written texts, they also are not validated through transcription like men’s discussions are, as exemplified by Plato’s symposium. While Bersianik focuses on thematically inserting orality, Allen is best known for the performance versions of her poetry. Creating an oral version of her work allows her to reach an audience that may not have access to (or interest in) the written form.²³ As Carr points out, “[i]n taking dub poetry to the people, [Allen] leaps class, economic, and literacy barriers that might prohibit some folks from access”

²² According to Greek mythology, Philomela, whose tongue is severed by the King, weaves a robe to tell the story of her rape. The gods then turn her into a nightingale, allowing her to express herself through song.

²³ Allen has worked with low-income youth groups in Toronto, encouraging them to create rap music, thereby continuing her focus on oral literature. She teaches the youths “self-determination” and “that there is a different way of being in the world” (“No Rest” 26).

("A Style" 39). Whereas the written versions of Allen's work can reach a literate audience, her oral versions reach a different audience, thereby contesting the social barriers between the literate (white) academic and the illiterate (black) public.²⁴ Moreover, using an oral form foregrounds the colonized's historical emphasis on orality. The colonized passed on their stories, their traditions, their culture, from generation to generation, orally. As Carr explains in her forthcoming article, "[i]n resistance to the plantation slave's double prohibitions against English literacy and maintaining West African languages and practices, people of the diaspora sustained a living cultural archive in their bodies and voices: dance, song, theatre, and story were and continue to be central registers of social memory" ("Come Mek Wi" 4). Therefore, continuing to use and foreground orality becomes a reminder of colonial oppression, as well as an affirmative method of subverting the authority of the written word.

Whereas one of Allen's media is itself oral, Marlatt and Warland integrate their oral conversations into their written text. While the reader of Allen's work is not faced with the oral versions of her work, the reader of *Two Women in a Birth* is confronted with Marlatt's and Warland's dialogue in various forms. For example, in "Crossing Loop," they include a conversation, marking each commentary with either a "D" (Daphne Marlatt) or a "B" (Betsy Warland), much

²⁴ I believe that Allen's disruption of conventions of oral and written form specifically challenges the assumptions of a *white* academic and a *black* illiterate audience. Such associations of race and education are disrupted in her work, where the "black illiterate" audience becomes literate in her style and cultural references.

like an interview transcript. In "Subject to Change," Marlatt and Warland present a dated dialogue. One section of the dialogue relates the inclusion of the oral into the text; Marlatt or Warland (they do not assign authorship within this section) says: "i have his desire to draw a line and write down everything we say," to which the other responds "*let's try it*" (151). These journal entries of their conversations are typographically offset by a line running down the page, indicating that their discussions take place "on the side." However, the visual line is also reminiscent of the line that demarcates the margin on a lined sheet of paper, thus indicating the marginal place oral discussion usually takes in relation to the written text.²⁵ The marginalised conversations are also representative of Marlatt and Warland's position as lesbians within a patriarchal society. They feel the need to incorporate "the talking [they] do between the sheets between the lines between the writing that intertwines" (141). They question the authority of the written text since their conversations are interconnected with their writing. Moreover, not only is their conversation marginal in relation to the written text, their conversation *as lesbians* is marginal within patriarchy. By invoking the talking they do "between the sheets"--invoking both the image of the sheets of paper and the bed sheets--Marlatt and Warland are stressing the importance of their sexuality to their writing.

The discussions Marlatt and Warland have while creating the text have a direct impact on the written version of the text. In fact, they question the authority

²⁵ One can take for example Jacques Derrida's emphasis on the written word, or more generally the weight of a written contract over a verbal one in today's society.

and the authenticity of the written text when they note: "what about the talking we do ... the you of the page i subvert in the unwritten ... the tension necessary between what gets said and what gets written or left ..." (140)? Here Marlatt and Warland are presenting the tension and contradiction between what is presented in the writing and what is said. The written version becomes the authoritative version, but it contrasts with the women's discussions, and what is not written or represented. The conversations that are included in *Two Women in a Birth* become emblematic of the negotiations that were necessary in Marlatt and Warland's collaborative effort. For example, in "Subject to Change," they transcribe part of their dialogue where one believes "*that's the end,*" and the other responds: "no, I don't agree" (153). This small sample of their oral conversation is representative of their innumerable discussions and debates surrounding the creation of the written text. By including such snippets of conversation, Marlatt and Warland are able to foreground the oral component of writing. Although the written text surfaces as a complete and authoritative text, it is conceived, in part, through conversation.

Whereas Marlatt and Warland's conversations clearly describe a personal collaboration between two women, Allen's oral performances are representative of dialogue with a communal voice. In foregrounding orality, the authors do not idealize "lecturing" but rather self-expression and *dialogue*. In fact, Marlatt and Warland, in discussing conversation and collaboration say: "here we acknowledge that all writing is collaboration here we question the delineation between the

collectivity of conversation and the individual's ownership of the written here we affirm our spiralling dominoing wandering she-speech" (141). Marlatt and Warland perceive their work as a product of various "conversations" with various writers. The "wandering she-speech" that births their text includes a collective of female authors, such as Cixous, H.D., Jane Rule, and Nicole Brossard. Allen similarly works within a community of artists. Not only is she influenced by artists whose main form is oral, such as Louise Bennett and Bob Marley, but her own recordings are a testimony to her dialogue with others. She is joined in her recordings by the likes of rappers Ringo Junior and Screecher Nice, lesbian folk singer Lucie Blue Tremblay, the gospel quartet Four the Moment, as well as her daughter, Anta. For Allen, working in collaboration with other artists serves to "underscore that the voice of resistance is finally not a solo voice" (Carr "'Come Mek Wi'" 26). Moreover, Allen includes her audience in her collaborative work through variations of the call and response *genre*. Therefore, the dialogue created by the oral form disrupts the authority of the author, and fosters a sense of community among women, and in Allen's work, among blacks.

D) Sounds Familiar :

In addition to the thematic inclusion of orality, the aural *sounds* also serve to de-emphasize the gaze. Thematizing the oral/aural becomes another way to ground the text in the body. Aurality is thematically illustrated in *She Tries Her*

Tongue by the sound of language, while Bersianik and Allen foreground this sense by invoking musical forms. In both cases, however, the focus is on *hearing*, not seeing. The women perceive reality and explicate their position within society through the use of the aural sense.

The sound of the oral/aural word is invoked in Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue* in order to (re)present the oppression of the colonized. In "The Question of Language is the Answer to Power," Philip integrates "voice lessons" which represent the colonized's acquisition of the colonizer's language through phonetics. The sounds of the new language are equated with colonialism. In text book fashion, Philip, after listing the (colonial) sounds, offers practical pronunciation guides which perpetuate colonial ideology. For example, part of the voice lesson includes:

OO as in how did they 'lose' their word?

.....

AW as in the slaves were valued for their 'brawn'

o as in what am I offered for this 'lot' of slaves? (70)

In Philip's (re)creation of voice lessons, she juxtaposes the colonized's acquisition of language via sound, with colonial oppression. The "need" for the voice lessons serves as a reminder that the English language was imposed on the African slaves. Moreover, the same colonial structure that imposes the sound and ideology of the colonial language also denigrates the sound of the colonized's language, terming it:

chattel language

babu english

slave idiom

nigger vernacular

coolie pidgin

wog pronunciation. (73)

In fact, these derogatory terms for the slaves' native tongue are placed along side an excerpt of the colonial voice lessons. Since the colonizers did not know the colonized's language, it is essentially, and superficially, the *sound* of the language that they contended with. It is not so much what the colonized said, but how, or in what language it was said. Therefore, Philip's thematic incorporation of the *sound* of language illustrates the oppression of black slaves. The sound of the colonizer's language becomes synonymous with colonialism.

Sound is thematized in the works of Bersianik and Allen in their references to music. Bersianik plays with the aural sense when she invokes musical forms when structuring her text. She begins her text with a "Prélude en la mineure sur l'écriture," and ends with a "Fugue en la majeure." Moreover, the key in which Bersianik chooses to write in is the "la" key, signifying the feminine subject.²⁶ This feminine subject is under erasure at the beginning of the text, and is liberated in the major key at the end of the text. As Gould points out, "the feminized musical

²⁶ The "la" is not only the feminine article, but a play on the note "la" in the musical scale "do re mi fa so la ti do."

scheme in *Le Pique-nique* thus moves from minor to major key, giving us a 'progressive' musical movement" (*Writing* 175). Bersianik's use of musical forms goes beyond drawing on major and minor keys. She structures her text according to the form she is mentioning. For example, she begins her text with a prelude, which is often the introductory piece to another musical movement. The first part of the prelude breaks the silence of the concert hall, in this case patriarchy. She opens *Le Pique-nique* with: "Toutes touchantes et de n'être pas touchées. Toutes impliquées. Toutes chantantes et tout et tout un jour ou l'autre où tout chante. L'une et les unes. Toutes sachant toucher" (27). Bersianik, from the beginning, introduces the sense of touch and the oral/aural by mentioning song. The "key" that is given here is not merely the musical note "la," or the feminine subject; rather, the running sentence style indicates the first rush of music, and the rush of the female expression, the fluid style that will represent a woman's version of female subjectivity and sexuality.

Moreover, the first part of the prelude on writing is titled "Le Chant des Statues Vives." The title itself focuses the subject matter of not only the prelude, but the following movements, or the book, in its entirety. The prelude introduces mythological female characters that have been silenced. The patriarchal story of these women is introduced and subverted in the stories of the characters present, who become the instruments in Bersianik's symphony on the body. In effect, the voices and the bodies of these women are what make up the song of the living

statue. By referring to statues in her title, Bersianik is subverting the image of the quiet woman and the Caryatids that support the Erechtheion (a building adjacent to the Acropolis), which is symbolic of the patriarchal structure. The Caryatids' quiet and immobile posture is representative of women's complacent role within patriarchy. In describing these silenced women, Bersianik says that "on lui coupe la langue. Le langage se rétrécit. Les corps se raréfient. Que des signes au lieu du corps.... À mots couverts. Linéaires. En silence" (28-29). Although Bersianik admits that women have historically been silenced, she is introducing the female body as an instrument which can (re)present women. To return again to the title "Le Chants des Statues Vives," Bersianik is clearly disrupting the image of the quiet, passive woman. In fact, within her text, the women at the picnic voice their individual subjectivities. Their stories become the "chants des statues vives."

Within music history, the prelude form evolved from the practice of "checking the tuning of [the] instruments" (Sadie *The New Grove* 210). Bersianik, consistent with the definition of a prelude, begins by "checking" her instrument: the body. In the prelude, the body and the language that is used to represent it is checked by running through an alphabetic scale: "[l]a main produit des mots de langue apprise en pigeant dans l'alphabet des lettres reconnues pour leur capacité de courir vite: ah, bée, thé, hue, eau, air, cas, dé, aime, hache, elle, aine, cul..." (28). This scale is similar to the scale a musician would go through to warm up before a concert; however, Bersianik goes through words that resemble letters, indicating the

importance of language. Her form, her “instrument,” as a writer is language. The concept of the scale to check the tuning of the instrument is expanded upon in the second part of the prelude where Bersianik runs through the various bodily aspects that are needed in writing. The body-instrument is the “corps-producteur-traceur-tracteur-tourneur-de-mots, soit le corps-producteur-lecteur-bêcheur-becqueteur-de-mots” (36). In short, whereas the word is the instrument Bersianik plays with, the body is the instrument the women at the picnic adopt.

The subsequent chapters in *Le Pique-nique* are carefully crafted to mimic the musical form Bersianik invokes in her chapter titles. For example, the first concerto titled “Le Pique-nique,” (re)presents and subverts several historical and literary references. Yet, against all these patriarchal references are juxtaposed the women’s articulations, and their inherent criticism of patriarchal texts and ideologies. Bersianik’s juxtaposition of disparate positions is typical of the musical concerto, which is based on contrast; it is “a form based on the opposition between two dissimilar masses of sound. (The Latin verb *concertare* means ‘to contend with’...)” (Machlis 379). These different *sounds*, within the context of Bersianik’s text, can be read as the patriarchal texts and ideology that she refers to and draws upon, which contrast with the feminist perspective presented by the women at the picnic. *Le Pique-nique* as a whole plays off of Plato’s *Le Banquet*, which describes a meeting of patriarchs. While Bersianik inverts the gender specificity of *Le Banquet*

by including only women at the picnic,²⁷ Jennifer Waelti-Walters points out that Plato's text is only present in the reader's knowledge of it. Bersianik uses the structure of Plato's symposium and the form of his argument to write a gynophile debate of love and sexuality, providing views which, instead of moving from spiritual narcissism to ethereal homosexuality, remain on the physical plane from masturbation to rape and clitoridectomy—the ultimate female lack about which history says not a word. By the implicit contrast we realize clearly that women's sexual suffering is the invisible underside of men's philosophical pleasure. (301)

Therefore, the women's self-expression plays against, and contrasts with, the patriarchal writings and ideology, thereby mimicking the concerto *genre*. As Bersianik points out in her "*Avertissement*," men are not a part of the picnic because they are occupied at Plato's banquet, if not physically, since it ended centuries before, then at least they are still ideologically communing with Plato.

The sound contrasts that define the concerto are exemplified by a passage that refers to Jacques Lacan. Bersianik plays on Lacan's name when the women list authors of works with names

qui commencent tous curieusement de la même manière: Lacantonnade,

²⁷ The difference between the elaborate meal of the banquet which the men feast on and the picnic that the women share mirrors the differences Virginia Woolf observes in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf presents the monetary differences between male and female assemblies, noting the elaborate nature of men's meals, which lead to more productive thoughts due to higher energy levels.

Lacantine, Lacanicule, Lacanelle, Lacanadienne, Lacanaille, etc. De plus en plus bizarre... Lacanasta, Lacane, Lacanapé, Lacanular, Lagangrène... On s'amuse toutes les trois à en trouver d'autres... encore bien plus drôles quand on décide de *barrer* la première syllabe—ce LA mineur trop féminin: Cannibale, Cancan, Candélabre, ou de la doubler: Lalacanonnade, Lalacandeur, Lalacantilène, etc. (81)

The repetition of "Lacan" within the fictive names of artists indicates the patriarchal nature of the society these women live in, which is exemplified by Lacan. However, Bersianik subverts this large patriarchal sound base through the women's discussion. The repetition of the "la" article draws attention to the arbitrary gendering of words and objects in the French language. In addition, the women disrupt patriarchal language and ideology by dismissing the "LA mineur." The women here are not negating the feminine article, they are placing the feminine *minor* under erasure; they subvert patriarchy's devaluation of the feminine. In so doing, they are able to create a new vocabulary that does not perpetuate the "LA mineur" in *LAc*. Once the women have invalidated the negative feminine article, they double it, again creating new words. This time however, the new words are song like in their repetition of "lala." Moreover, this repetition of the feminine article becomes an empowered doubling of the female subject.

Bersianik's second concerto is "Le dire des sexualités," where the women discuss their various sexual preferences. It also follows the musical form, where

“[t]he main interest in a concerto is a select group of soloists, called the *concertino*, or ‘little group,’ who show off their virtuosity and the tricks and colours of their instruments both in opposition to one another and to a larger orchestral group. Usually two to six soloists comprise the concertino” (Levy 110). This technical definition aptly describes the sexual concerto of *Le Pique-nique*, where six “solo” women discuss their bodies, or rather, their instruments. In effect, within “Le dire des sexualités,” each woman, in turn, describes her personal sexual preferences. These speeches can easily be interpreted as showing “the tricks and colours” of their bodies. Moreover, the spectrum of sexualities counterpoint each other, illustrating the various possibilities of women’s sexuality, which is then played against the “larger orchestral group” of Western patriarchal stereotypes of sexuality. Therefore, *Le Pique-nique*, which began as a “Fugue en la mineur,” progressing through the concerto of sexualities, ends with a “Fugue en la majeure.” The feminine article which was negated within patriarchal works (such as Lacan’s) is now a positive key in which the women can describe themselves in.

For music theorists, the fugue is “a contrapuntal composition in which a theme or subject of strongly marked character pervades the entire fabric, entering now in one voice, now in another” (Machlis 387).²⁸ The theme of Bersianik’s “Fugue en la majeur,” like her entire text, is the expression of women’s bodies. The fugue is also the culmination of the mother-daughter search, drawn from the Persephone-

²⁸ “Fugue” also means “flight” in French.

Demeter myth. Within *Le Pique-nique*, Avertine takes over the daughter role and searches for the mother figure. Waelti-Walters theorizes that it is “the loss of contact between mother and daughter if the mother is male-bonded and the daughter female-identified [that] can make possible the physiological and psychological damage inflicted by mothers on daughters in traditional male-dominated cultures” (304-305). Avertine, as the contemporary author/daughter, desperately attempts to bridge this gap. She is certainly “female-identified” in the sense that she is aware of the problematics of patriarchal structure and attempts to define her sexuality, thus herself. On the other hand, the mother figure, the Caryatid, quite literally supports patriarchy. Avertine, having found the “phallic mother”²⁹ who has internalized patriarchal ideology, confronts her complacent support of the patriarchal system, asking: “Vous n’en avez pas assez, Caryatides, de supporter le discours masculin, les institutions males, la jouissance phallique et divine?” (206). The fugue that begins with Avertine’s voice, pleading with the mother figure, ends with the Caryatid’s new found voice; her slow labored movements away from the “Érechthéion” (phallic erection) are her articulation of her break from patriarchy. Although the Caryatid never speaks per se, her bodily movements are the contrapuntal sound to the daughter’s urging, since the Caryatid’s movements can be paralleled to the *expression corporelle* that Bersianik

²⁹ Jane Gallop, in her article “The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis,” provides an analysis of the mother’s role within patriarchy, drawing on both Kristeva’s and Irigaray’s theories. In essence, she posits that the phallic mother is the woman who supports and perpetuates patriarchal ideology, offering no resistance to it (118).

describes in the prelude. Essentially, Bersianik follows the contrapuntal form of a fugue by including the voice of a liberated daughter which contrasts with the patriarchal ideology upheld by the mother figure. Both women represent, albeit from different perspectives, the place of woman within patriarchy, thereby creating a uniform theme within the fugue.

Beyond mimicking musical forms, Bersianik also mentions classical composers, such as Bach and Vivaldi, who were both composers of the forms which Bersianik draws upon to structure her work. Similarly, in *Women do this Every Day*, Allen refers to artists such as Miss Lou and Bob Marley, as well as collaborates with various artists in her recordings. She also draws on various African and Caribbean-influenced forms, such as call and response, reggae, jazz, and rap. Nonetheless, Allen does much more than draw on musical traditions, since her live performances are musical.³⁰ While here I will examine the *thematic* inclusion of music and sound in her works, in the next chapter, I will examine the musicality of her work. In "I Am Africa," Allen links music to the African body, saying:

I feeeeeel music
 my body carries the rhythms
 of A F R I C A. (118)

In short, music becomes an expression of the African body, and vice versa. By

³⁰ Allen has won Juno awards for both her recordings. Yet, in an unpublished interview with Carr, she insists that she does not sing. She says: "I do something musical, I can't sing.... It's a matter of speaking in beats."

linking music, the black body, and Africa, Allen is invoking the essence of Rastafari reggae, where body and music are means of returning (if only spiritually) to the African roots.³¹ Music is centred in the body. Much as the black body invokes the image of Africa and freedom, the music of Africa is grounded in the memory of the body, and serves as a reminder of African identity. Music has become the expression of choice for the black people because it serves “as a way of remembering, a way of enduring, a way of celebrating, a way of protesting and subverting, and ultimately, a way of triumphing” (Cataliotti ix). In *Race, Space and the Poetics of Moving*, Philip describes the importance of music for people of African descent. She describes how, historically, it has served as a reminder of a lost culture. Music and bodily expressions through song and dance were the one thing the colonizer could not take from them. Therefore, music is strongly linked with black identity, and is inextricably linked with the body, which functions as its medium and memory.

Music is not only inscribed in Allen’s poetry as a method for transmitting black heritage, it is also a means of refashioning and dispelling existing stereotypes of black culture. For example, in “Rub a Dub Style Inna Regent Park,” music is

³¹ During the 1920s and 1930s, blacks began to re-appropriate and recreate their image through Rastafarianism. Rasta was based on the belief in a black messiah, Haile Selassie (Ras Tafari), who acceded to the Ethiopian throne. Rastafarianism, which most people agree began with Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement, gained popularity with the advent of reggae, and Bob Marley’s music. Although there are a variety of sources which discuss Rastafarianism specifically, there are concise descriptions of it in Christian Habekost’s *Verbal Riddim* (80-86) and an extensive footnote by Michael Angrosino (87-88).

thematized as a means to revolt against racism in society. Addressing the violence typically associated with black youths, Allen begins her poem with the scene of a young black man being hauled away by the police. As Carr points out in her forthcoming article, many of Allen's poems outline the law enforcement's specific prejudice against black youths (19). However, "Rub a Dub Style" offers an alternative to youth violence, where:

dj rapper hear im chant
 pumps a musical track
 for im platform
 cut it wild
 sey de system vile
 dubbing it inna dance
 frustration pile
 a different style
 inna regent park
 could have been a gun
 but's a mike in his hand
 could've been a gun spilling out the lines
 but is a mike
 is a mike
 is a mike. (82)

The stereotype of the violent black gang member is subverted by the image of the DJ (disk jockey) channelling his frustration against the system “in a different style.”³² The DJ rapper confronts the system that oppresses and labels black youths, attacking with words, forcing consciousness and change, rather than perpetuating the stereotype of violence. The racist gaze that associates violence with the colour of the youth’s skin is subverted, both through direct questioning, as well as by foregrounding the aural sense through the *sound* of the (reggae) beat to indicate that the subject is black. Dub music becomes a method for constructively criticizing racism. Moreover, the dub aesthetic is symbolic of black subjectivity in contemporary society. The revolutionary lyrics dubbed in by the DJ are representative of the individual, self-(re)presented black subject, while the background beat can be read as the beat of society. The DJ is adding new words, a new slant, to the beat.³³ Thus, music, in Allen’s work, is seen as a transformative medium which can subvert and question while presenting a positive, black subject.

By incorporating musicality as a focal point for self-expression, Allen and Bersianik are able to usurp the patriarchal notion of the gaze as the sense central to knowledge. In effect, the body is grounded in Marlatt’s, Warland’s, Bersianik’s,

³² Within the black community, the DJ’s role evolved from introducing music to speaking/singing political lyrics onto the music background. In effect, dub poetry builds out of this musical practice (*Verbal Riddim* 56-58).

³³ It should be noted however, that the DJ’s are usually dubbing their lyrics onto reggae or African type beats.

Philip's, and Allen's texts through their focus on "alternative" senses. The writers all acknowledge the presence of the gaze, but subvert it in their self-(re)presentations. For Marlatt, Warland, and Bersianik, touch is an essential element for describing sexuality. Taste, orality, and auralness are similarly invoked in order to define a subject position outside the limitations perpetuated by the Western patriarchal gaze.

Chapter 3

Music to the Ear

“ the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth ... language is first of all for us a body of sound. ”

–Daphne Marlatt, “Musing with mothertongue”

The aural sense is not only treated thematically in the works of Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen; it is also used as a textual element which helps transmit individual subjectivities. Philip and Allen draw on more formalized musical rhythms and beats in their work, but even in Bersianik’s prose one finds musical forms such as alliteration and assonance. The works of these women not only discuss and articulate the body and its senses, but draw on the auditory senses of the reader/audience. Assonance, alliteration, word play, repetition, and rhythm draw the reader, and therefore the reader’s body, into the representation of these author’s subjectivities. From the lilting sound of Bersianik’s work to the African beat in that of Philip and Allen, the reader cannot help but feel her/his bodily senses being invoked. As well as drawing on symbolism, metaphor, and imagery to evoke their subjectivities, as in traditional writing forms, Bersianik, Marlatt, Warland, Philip, and Allen utilize bodily senses (both their own and that of their

audiences) to represent their subject position, creating music to the reader's ear. By drawing on the reader's senses, the authors initiate and signal a connection with the reader's experience. This nexus signifies an entry point for "dialogue." Moreover, the emphasis on aurality blurs the boundary between oral and written, creating a space that does not fit within Western patriarchal genre distinctions. This newly mediated space becomes a fertile ground for representing subject positions that do not fit within patriarchy. In other words, the authors go beyond the *meaning* of words into the essence and emotional impact of *sound*.

Learning a language is learning to recognize certain sounds, and to associate sounds with meaning. The association between sound, language, and ideology is brought to the fore in the works of Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen. The "naturalized" connections between sound and ideology are questioned by their representation of non-normative sound patterns to represent their individual subject positions. This emphasis on the sound of language corresponds with Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, which exists prior to the symbolic acquisition of language. Kristeva believes that once one has entered the symbolic stage, the semiotic

chora will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as a pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language ... The *chora* is a rhythmic pulsion rather than a new language. It constitutes, in other words, the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be

caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory. (Moi 162)

It is this *chora* that the women are evoking with their emphasis on the sound of language. By foregrounding the sound of language, they tap into the semiotic. The sound associations, to a certain extent, transcend the connotation of the word. Whereas the *connotation* of words is imbued with Western-patriarchal-historical-cultural ideology, by using the emotional value of sound and sound patterns, these authors are able to create distinct images within the reader's imagination. Therefore, it is the *sound* of their words, as well as their meaning, that articulate women's subjectivities.

In "Musing with mothertongue," Marlatt discusses the connection between language and sound. She describes communication as the association of sounds which are given a set meaning by society. However, the concept of language as initially sound-based has potentially empowering possibilities for women writers who can capture the sound of language in order to re-inscribe meaning. Marlatt asks: "how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles [a woman's] body knows?" (28). It is not simply a question of associating sound with word meaning, but rather of recontextualizing the sound of language and language form. Elizabeth Meese argues that "the lesbian writer seeks to intervene in language, reinvent, or better, re-work its *texture*, to produce an exploratory language through which we can find ourselves as subject and (of)

desire" (emphasis mine 80). The disruption of language found in works by authors like Marlatt and Warland is such an attempt to recontextualize language by foregrounding the "texture" or sound of language.

There are various methods for inserting *sound* into written text. First, authors can draw on traditional poetic techniques such as assonance, alliteration, and word play. These methods are most evident in Marlatt's, Warland's, and Bersianik's writing. In addition, sound can be created through the rhythm of writing, which is signified by repetition, punctuation, and the physical layout of the text. Furthermore, the sound of language often serves to indicate a specific social or cultural relation. In *Two Women in a Birth*, Marlatt and Warland use sound associations to draw on lost etymological meanings. For Philip and Allen, however, the sound of language is indicative of the black historical and cultural specificity. Finally, sound is incorporated in Allen's work by her choice of *genre*. Her use of the dub *genre*, and the musical context it entails, evokes the reader's aural sense directly. All in all, the writers incorporate textual elements that place their writing in the oral realm, thereby necessarily drawing on the reader's auditory sensibilities. The sound, or texture, of language emphasizes and illustrates the themes in *Two Women in a Birth*, *Le Pique-nique*, *She Tries Her Tongue*, and *Women do this Every Day*. In each text, the sounds can be interpreted as the *chora*, which (re)presents subjectivities which are denied in Western patriarchal society, be it those of the feminist, the lesbian, and/or the person of colour.

A) Poetics of Language :

All the writers discussed, except for Bersianik, use the poetry *genre*. Yet, all of them utilize *poetics*. For me, "poetics" indicates aesthetic forms, such as assonance, alliteration, word play, rhyme, repetition, and rhythm, traditionally found in poetry. Poetics allow for a certain malleability of language, which, consequently, leads to a play between/with sound and connotation.

The rhythm of Marlatt and Warland's writing leads to questions of *genre*. Although *Two Women in a Birth* is labelled on the cover of the volume as "poetry," many of the pieces seem to cross over into prose, essay, and interview form. Yet, even the prose pieces sound like poetry. Marlatt explains:

I'm concerned with how [a poem] sounds, with how you speak it, and how it can be heard. I think my writing is fairly oral. What most intrigues me is what I think of as the sound body of the work. What kinds of sounds bounce off, echo off, call up other sounds. How the rhythms elongate or slow down, or suddenly pick up and run. All of that is of as much concern to me as the content or meaning. I don't think you can separate them. A word calls up another word as much by its sound as by its meaning.

("Speaking in" 29)

Much of Marlatt and Warland's poetry includes such play with word sounds, which gives it its poetic quality. For example, "Let me slip" includes a play with both texture and meaning, thereby typifying the interconnectedness of sound and

meaning that Marlatt describes. Beginning the poem with the cliché “let me slip into something more comfortable,” they then explore the etymology of “slip” coming up with “lābi” which leads them, through associations of sound, into the following tangent:

(labile; lābilis

labia; labialis)

la la la

‘my labyl mynde...’

lābilis, labour, belabour, collaborate, elaborate

‘The Hebrews names their letters, some guttural ... others dental ... and so they call others, labial, that is letter of the lips’

slip of the tongue

‘the lability of innocence’

labium ‘any of the four folds of tissues of the female external genitalia.’ (135)

The “la” sound in “Let me slip” evokes sexual organs privileged by lesbians, since the “labial” sound can be associated with the tongue and lips, while the “labia” indicates female genitalia. The texture of “la” also evokes images of cunnilingus, of the tongue against the clitoris. Furthermore, the “la” sound can be incorporated into a variety of words, and such fluidity, such slippage, becomes indicative of Marlatt and Warland’s sexuality, and their subjectivities. As lesbians, they have a fluid relationship which slips away from traditional patriarchal sexual roles. They

see their relationship as fluid in the sense that there is often no clear demarcation between the lovers, whose “bodies [are] joined north and south / we are each other’s entrance / ... / not separate but same” (“Open is Broken” VI 53). The slippage is indicative of the unity of the lesbian bodies during lovemaking. In short, the incorporation and repetition of “la” accesses the *chora* of language that is able to describe lesbianism.

Not only does the fluidity of the “la” sound allow Marlatt and Warland to make associations that represent their sexuality, it also allows them to put forward their fluid position as writers who “*labour, belabour, collaborate, elaborate.*” Again, the word play illustrates their fluidity of form and authorship, since they are both author and reader of their joint text. They “labour” and “belabour” not only over their text but also over the body of texts that comes before them and inevitably influences their writing and reading. They “collaborate” and “elaborate” with each other as well as with existing texts which they insert into their work. All of these associations are made possible because of their play with the sound of words. In short, they create a gamut of readings which become as transient as the sound they first began with.

In addition to emphasizing specific sounds, Marlatt and Warland play with the texture of words, breaking them up in order to draw attention to different readings of a specific word. For example, they re-write “imagination” as “imagine-a-nation” (124). And in “17:00 coming into Port Pirie,” they deconstruct

“civilisation” as “see-vill(ain)-I-say-tion.” Although the words, when spoken, sound the same, Marlatt and Warland are incorporating the *pulsions* of language, thereby drawing attention to the history of colonisation. The uniformity of sound intersects a multiplicity of stories, just as the history of colonisation, represented by the sound of the word “civilisation,” has different versions. Marlatt and Warland see similarities in the colonisation of Australian aboriginals and patriarchy’s oppression of women and lesbians. In both situations, there is an exterior power that is undermining the other’s authority (be it the aboriginal’s, the woman’s, and/or the lesbian’s) on the basis of something that is fundamental to her/his identity. In other words, although the specific sites of marginalization are quite distinct, the system that produces and perpetuates their marginalization is similar. As Suleri explains, “[w]here [colonialism] once referred exclusively to the discursive practices produced by the historical fact of prior colonisation in certain geographically specific segments of the world, it is now more of an abstraction available for figurative deployment in any strategic redefinition of marginality” (274). Marlatt and Warland insert themes of colonialism in their work in order to articulate their position as women in a patriarchal society, and lesbians in a heterosexist society. Their play on the sound of words such as “imagination” and “civilisation” draws attention to the different stories present in one event. They confront and question patriarchy and heterosexism, and, by extension, colonialism. While disseminating colonialism into a general symbol of oppression presents the

danger of disregarding its historical and cultural reality, Marlatt and Warland's position as lesbians in a heterosexist society enables them to identify with the colonized aboriginal culture, and use the texture of language to expose underlying racist and colonial ideology. In this sense, it can be understood that they do not intend to undermine the historical colonisation of aboriginal culture, but rather wish to create a sense of community among oppressed people, thereby creating a multi-voiced resistance to Western and patriarchal reality.

In their poetry, Marlatt and Warland manipulate word choice and word sequence in order to create sound. Marlatt explains that "in poetry, which has evolved out of chant and song, in riming and tone-leading, whether they occur in prose or poetry, sound will initiate thought by a process of association. words call each other up, evoke each other, provoke each other, nudge each other into utterance" (*Two Women* 26). The authors have purposefully chosen a genre that gives them the freedom to play with words. For example, in part II of "Open is Broken," Warland writes:

the roses rise up
 stretch into morning
 each bush a brothel of red and pink orgy of opening
 petals provoke
 the do of desire
 come womb-woeing

tongues bloom blooming. (49)

Here, Warland uses conventional images but juxtaposes them with other seemingly contradictory symbols; the image of the rose, typically associated with women and women's beauty, is linked to a "brothel" and an "orgy." The licentious nature of the latter disrupts the innocence of the initial rose imagery. Equally important, however, is Warland's play with sound in the poem. Harsh sounds are conspicuously absent from the poem. The third line, with its pair of assonant nouns, is quite long, and leaves the slightly breathless reader whispering the words "orgy of opening," thus reproducing the lover's acquiescence. The repetition of round sounds and of the "o" sound becomes representative of the woman's open vulva, an indication of sexual pleasure.

The last three lines of the poem also rely heavily on sound. Each line includes a pair of words that mirror and complement each other. The meaning of the words themselves—"desire," "come," "tongues"—relate to sexual acts. Nevertheless, the sound of these words is as important as their meaning. The alliteration found in each line can be seen as representative of the rhythm of love making. The development of "womb" into "wooing" and "bloom" into "blooming" relates the climactic move towards orgasm. The use of soft sounds and mild stresses becomes representative of the act of cunnilingus itself. In part III of the same group of poems, Warland writes: "on the tip of your tongue you flick / me leaf: 'lift' up / to tip tree top" (50). The assonance of these three lines similarly

seems to invoke the image of cunnilingus. The repetition of the dental sound through the use of “t” and “l” becomes reminiscent of the tongue (f)licking the clitoris. The key is that Warland does not rely on a graphic description of cunnilingus; she uses the *pulsions* of language to create the image she is describing.

Bersianik plays with the sound of words in the names she gives her characters. For example the names of two of her characters, Adizetu (*ah disais-tu*) and Avertine (*avertir* [warn]), both suggest the concept of women’s articulation. These characters, like their names, communicate the importance of women’s self-expression; they symbolize both women’s silence (Adizetu is the silenced African girl who suffers a clitoridectomy), and women’s need to express themselves (Avertine is a writer). Furthermore, Bersianik uses the sound of words to inscribe alternate meanings. For instance, she plays with the mythological name “Agamemnon.” Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia is integrated into Bersianik’s text when the women discuss the murder and silencing of women, at which point Adizetu questions: “*Est-ce qu’Aga m’aime?*” to which the women answer “*non!*” (99-100). Bersianik’s play on the name Agamemnon, turning it into “*Aga m’aime? Non!*” underlines the father’s, or more specifically the *patriarchal* father’s, lack of love and respect for women. Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed argues that Bersianik is “subverting the *nom* (name) *non* (no) of the Father” (209).³⁴ In other words, the women are rejecting the name of the Father, as well as the “no”

³⁴ I will, like Hajdukowski-Ahmed, capitalize “father” to indicate the *patriarchal* Father figure.

of the Father; that is, the “no” that restricts, among other things, their sexualities. In this sense, the murder of Iphigenia is linked to the mutilation of Adizetu, for both are the result of the patriarchal “no.” By inscribing patriarchy’s negation and oppression into her text, Bersianik is able to expose its injustice, and voice women’s rejection of patriarchal roles. In fact, once Agamemnon and his fellow patriarchs have been exposed through the use of word play, the women are able to openly discuss their multiple sexualities.

B) Rhythm and Language :

Often, through the play with the texture of language, sentences and paragraphs begin to exude a rhythmic pulse. The sound of language is no longer simply at the microcosmic level of words or syllables, but rather at the level of the entire text. Repetition within a sentence or paragraph, punctuation, and line spacing help to model Western patriarchal language into a representation of a *chora* that can reflect the subjectivity of feminists, lesbians, and/or persons of colour. In Marlatt’s, Warland’s, Bersianik’s, Philip’s, and Allen’s writings, the sound of the text as a whole begins to reflect the texture or *pulsion* of a position denied by the Western patriarchal order.

In *Le Pique-nique*, Bersianik’s aim is to re-write women’s subjectivities, and in so doing, she often invokes the rhythms of language. Although the text is presented as a novel, certain passages have a poetic rhythm, particularly the

passages dealing with writing and the liberation of women's subjectivities. For example, when Avertine is stroking the Caryatid to life, she says: "Aime-moi. Embrasse-moi. Touche-moi. Je t'aime. Je t'embrasse. Je te touche. Je te caresse. Aime-moi. Console-moi. Caresse-moi. Touche-moi" (207). This chant continues, with mild alterations along the way. The short, direct statements create a mesmerizing rhythm that is reminiscent of a spell. The repetition of "moi" and "je" also emphasizes the female subject. Avertine becomes central, and the text represents her self-expression through the repetition of the subject, as well as through the distinct rhythm pattern.

Like Bersianik, Marlatt and Warland play with auralty in the cadence of their writing. Even the pieces that initially appear to be prose incorporate poetic rhythms. For example, their piece entitled "Travelling backwards through Australia" includes little punctuation. There are no full stops in the piece; rather, slashes and parentheses create rhythm. Reading the piece aloud, the reader can see the subtle musical rhythm created in the following passage: "...it should be familiar--it's how i was born' breech back-wards back / words behind my back unable to see what lies ahead (lies are ahead) spine an antenna for wordless sightless first perception back spine / book spine no title through the factual annotated 'Strip Map' of natural (Mother) & His / torical references distances and their lineal names" (113). Earlier in *Two Women in a Birth*, Marlatt and Warland recount their voyage on the train and describe the motion as a rocking, cyclical

rhythm that “carries you,” and exemplifies the cyclical nature of their orgasm (108-109). Thus, the fluid and soft rhythm in “Travelling backwards” becomes a way of recreating their experience as lesbians on the train. The conspicuous absence of full stops such as commas and periods signifies the writers’ rejection of traditional writing schemes and rhythms. Their writing style becomes symbolic of forging a new form to describe their experience as lesbian women. They acknowledge the historical implications of writing and of desert imagery, but redefine it. The use of slashes rather than periods or commas allows them to build on the previous word, and its meaning. For instance, by writing “back-wards back / words behind my back,” Marlatt and Warland create a fluid sentence where they play with the similar sound of “backwards” and “back words.” The similar sounds and the lack of a clear beginning and end create a spiralling cycle in the rhythm of the writing, linking the shift in focus through sound.

It is apparent that the train imagery in *Two Women in a Birth* is to be read symbolically. In addition to the rhythm’s indication of the women’s physical journey, it also represents their attempt to describe their subjectivities. In fact, Warland acknowledges that there is a trend in lesbian writing towards appropriating desert settings.³⁵ Although the desert has traditionally been associated with men, exploration, and colonisation, according to Warland, women are beginning to say “this is mine too and i relate to it in a different way” (110).

³⁵ For example Nicole Brossard’s *Mauve Desert* and Jane Rule’s *Desert of the Heart*.

Such shifts in perspective are central to Marlatt and Warland's work. For example, the assonance of "backwards" and "back words" links their voyage, their writing style, and their ideological project. The women, travelling backwards on the train, are also travelling backwards through patriarchy, re-examining its ideology. As they travel backwards, they question words and language, thus the reference to "back/words." Their journey becomes a re-writing, as well as a re-examination of history. They re-write the words, playing on sound, a process which leads to a re-writing of ideology. By playing with the texture of language, Marlatt and Warland draw on the *chora* in order to articulate lesbian subjectivities. Again, to recall their free interpretation of punctuation, they do not represent finality but rather an ongoing process. Unlike their patriarchal predecessors, Marlatt and Warland do not appropriate and fix meaning; they do not mark the page with stops that become authoritative and reminiscent of the colonizer's self-named stops along the railroad (92-93). Warland explains in an interview: "I use the punctuation as indications of rhythmic breaks" ("Speaking in" 29). Therefore, punctuation no longer indicates finality or the transition to another idea, but simply a rhythmic pulse. Punctuation becomes an indicator of beat, rather than the end of a thought. The fluidity and freedom that is present in the rhythm of their writing, through the use of punctuation, (re)presents their alternate subjectivities as lesbian women.

Whereas Marlatt and Warland use assonance and alternate forms of punctuation to create rhythms in their text, Philip repeats words as a form of

punctuation, a technique which also creates a unique rhythm. The poetic tradition of repeating a particular word is not new, yet Philip uses this tradition in order to subvert what has historically been accepted as norm. For example, in her section of poems titled "Cyclamen Girl," she identifies colonialism through the religious "conversion" to Catholicism. In "Vows," Philip offsets and repeats the word "White," thereby punctuating the poem and identifying Christian conventions as a white creation and imposition. The

White

Book of Common Prayers

White

satin-cotton confirmation dress

White

Soul

stand in stark opposition to the "triune majesty" the black girl believes in: "sunshine / black skin & / doubt" (41). The sound of "white" repeated in the first part of the poem becomes a condemnation of the imposition of white colonial culture. Philip is not glorifying "whiteness" for its cleanliness, and by extension its purity, but rather foregrounding its ever present "colouration" of white ideology. It also exemplifies how Western society has taken "whiteness" as the norm, even though it contrasts distinctly with the black girl's trinity of "sunshine / black skin & / doubt."

Moreover, the harsh interruption created by the repetition of “white” also serves to illustrate the colonial interruption in black culture. In the same section of poems revolving around Catholicism, Philip repeatedly uses words to punctuate the poem and inscribe a distinctly black subject position. In “Transfiguration,” the confirmation ceremony is displaced by a uniquely African-type ceremony. The names of various goddesses from various sources, but mainly African goddesses, punctuate the poem. Intermittently, the names “*Aphrodite!*,” “*Ave Maria!*,” “*Atabey!*,” “*Oshun!*,” are shouted. The use of italics and exclamation marks inscribe the joyous exclamation of the names. Such interruptions into the poem empower women, even as they displace Western ideology which denies “the drums, the orishas (gods)—Shango, Oshun, Yemoja, and countless others” (Philip “Intro.” 15). The inscription of goddesses’ names disrupts the rhythm of the poem, thus symbolically disrupting the Christian ceremony, and the colonial ideology it represents. In short, punctuating the poem in this manner transforms the ceremony into a celebration of womanhood and African culture.

One of the central themes in Philip’s work is the silencing of the black people. In the poem “She Tries Her Tongue,” she uses line endings and spacing to recreate and exemplify the historical silencing of the African slaves. For example, she describes the

blackened stump of a tongue

torn

out

withered

petrified

burnt

on the pyres of silence. (92)

The violence of colonialism is illustrated not only by the words “torn out” and “burnt,” but also by the presentation on the page. The visual/physical distance between “torn” and “out” forces the reader to pause, thereby reproducing the forced silencing of the African people. Through the “sound” of silence created by the spacing of the poem, Philip is able to draw on the aural sense to illustrate the violence of colonialism, much as in Edict II of “Discourse on the Logic of Language,” where she describes the brutal severing of the colonized’s tongue, which is central to speech. However, Philip is not simply referring to events which include the physical silencing of black slaves, but also representing the cultural silencing of the black people. As she explains in her introductory essay, “The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy,” the imposition of the English language, which entailed the suppression of the African mothertongue, meant that the African slaves lost the power and capacity to represent themselves. This is not to say that the black slaves could not speak, but that the English language and ideology presented the African people as a negative “other.”

In “Nellie Belly Swelly,” Allen uses “thematic repetition,” which Amon Saba

Saakana defines as “the repetition of a musical phrase on theme” (193). The poem, which tells the story of a young girl who is raped and impregnated, is punctuated by the refrain “Nellie belly swelly / Nellie belly swelly Nellie belly swelly” (26). As Carr points out, the repetition of this refrain “strikes an appropriate register for the confusion of this girl’s play-mates who use it as a form of gossip to pass on the mysterious news of their friend’s plight” (“Come Mek Wi” 18). By creating a refrain which is reminiscent of a skipping rope chant, Allen is able to emphasize the youth and innocence which is violated by the rape. Not only is the girl herself physically violated, but her peers, who repeat the refrain, are being initiated into womanhood through Nellie’s story. The girls are crossing the border between their innocent childhood, indicated by the skipping rope rhythm, and adulthood, indicated by the violence of the rape, and the girl’s pregnancy. Moreover, relegating Nellie’s story to a children’s chant also becomes indicative of the harsh social reality that incidences of rape often go untold. In fact, Allen admits in an unpublished interview with Carr that she has been criticized by men in her community for “airing dirty laundry.” Through the girls’ incessant repetition of Nellie’s story, Allen reinforces the link between the girls and their future plight: labour. In short, by using thematic repetition, Allen is able to tell the story of rape and labour, thereby articulating woman’s body.

Not only do Philip and Allen emphasize sound by their use of rhythm, but they utilize it as a vehicle to (re)present a traditionally absent body. Although it is

standard in poetry to have rhythm, traditionally this has been limited to an equal and consistent number of strong and weak stresses. Philip breaks with this tradition, and with word order and spacing creates a beat representative of her self, of black people. The most obvious example of this beat formation is in "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones," where she writes:

If not If not If

Not

If not in yours

In whose

In whose language

Am I I am

If not in yours

In whose

.....

In whose language

Am I

Am I not

Am I I am yours

Am I not I am yours

Am I I am.... (52-53)

The repetitions of “if not,” “am I,” and “I am” create a beat, a sound, that breaks the standard Western rhythm. After a long sequence of beats, exemplified in the excerpt above, the reader is asked in whose language is the black woman beautiful. The beat of the poem—reminiscent of an African drum beat—drives home the racism of Western colonial society, thereby not only disrupting the Western poetic rhythm, but also its ideology. As Dick Hebbidge points out, for people of African descent, “drumming was particularly important. By preserving African drumming tradition, by remembering African rhythms, the slaves could keep alive the memory of the freedom they had lost” (26). Philip’s inscription of a drumming rhythm in her poem becomes a way of challenging Western homogeneity and (re)presenting African tradition and culture. Not only does she (re)present African rhythms and thematically question colonial racist views of beauty, she also asserts the black subject through the repetition of “I.” The questioning and insecurity of “am I”?, which serves to represent the colonial opinion, is countered by an assertive “I am.” The assertion on the part of the black woman that, in fact, “she is,” challenges the colonial subjugation of the black subject. Thus, within Philip’s poem, rhythm becomes a key factor in disrupting racist, colonial assumptions, as well as in articulating a black female subject.

C) History of Language :

The sound of words can often conjure up the history of language, hence

culture and ideology. While it might seem that by referring to “history” I am returning to the symbolic order, I want to focus instead on the semiotic quality of language. The sound of words and language evokes *pulsions* of meaning repressed by patriarchal and colonial ideology. The sound of language is emphasized in order to reinscribe alternate historical versions. The authors rely on representations of language that exist within Western patriarchal history, although it has attempted to suppress them. Marlatt and Warland revive, through etymological explorations via sound associations, historical definitions that allow them to express a positive lesbian subject. Philip and Allen focus on the auditory distinctions between various forms and dialects of the English language. They incorporate the demotic in their work, thereby disrupting “proper” (read Western) patriarchal form, in addition to inserting the sound of spoken language into the written form.

Marlatt and Warland, whose project is partly to re-inscribe lost meanings of words, often play with the sound of words in order to foreground etymology. They use etymology as a form of word play, weaving it into the poem as “a way of calling up an absolutely departed from or an ignored and forgotten meaning, which after all still stands, though it’s now no longer dominant. It’s a form of polysemy” (Carr “Between Continuity” 104). The intent is not to reverse the definition of the words by substituting the lost meaning for the dominant one, but rather to destabilize the centrality of the dominant definition. In other words, through their disruptions of patriarchal language, and their re-presentation of variant meanings,

Marlatt and Warland aim for example at defining lesbian love, which is traditionally “unmentionable in any positive or helpful context” (Wolfe & Penelope 23).

In “17:00 coming into Port Pirie,” Marlatt and Warland play on the sound of words to describe the dichotomous nature of heterosexist gender relationships.

They write:

PROhibit (whose CONscience)

PRO inhabit (whose CONtrol)

.....

let's face it

the PROS (he's a real...) are the CONS (what a...)

.....

PRO: 'before, in front of, according to'

(Adam before...the Gospel according to...)

&

CONS: 'conjunx,

wife'

women as CONS: "contrā, against, opposite'

to

PROS

that is

behind, after, without a version

negative female space.... (87)

To begin with, Marlatt and Warland dichotomize the PROs and the CONs, but reverse their values, relating the CONs to the potentially positive “conscience” and “control,” while PRO is made into “prohibit.” In this way, they show that “the PROS ... are the CONS,” in the sense that what is positively valued in patriarchy can also be constrictive. The association of PROs and CONs as positive and negative, respectively, is debunked as a patriarchal construct. Marlatt and Warland develop this point and associate the terms “PRO” and “CON” with gender, in true Cixoudian fashion.³⁶ In the latter part of the poem, they no longer simply play with the sounds of “PRO” and “CON,” but use these prefixes in order to explore etymological roots. These explorations lead to a realization that the etymology of “PRO” and “CON” corresponds to the traditional gender roles where the male PRO is “first,” and as such is central, whereas the female CON is simply associated to, and the binary opposite of, the male PRO. Thus the play with the prefixes PRO and CON, and the etymological exploration of their roots becomes a questioning of women’s traditional place in patriarchal society, the “negative female space.” Further, the writers trope the association of women with the passive “CON,” inscribing the subject that is “off the map” (88), and making the association with the French definition: cunt. The play with the sound of the prefixes and the subsequent

³⁶ In “Sorties,” Cixous argues that all binary opposites can be associated to the gender binary of male/female, where female is undervalued.

etymological exploration thus creates the ground for a feminist and lesbian re-writing of the dichotomies associated with them.

When discussing the sound of language, one of the first things that might come to mind is people's accents, or the sound of different languages. In fact, the sonority and rhythm of language helps to identify specific historical and cultural relations. In several of her poems, Philip juxtaposes the sound of various versions of English. The most blatant use of the sound of different writings is in "She Tries Her Tongue," where she inserts excerpts from various sources, such as a gardening text, children's stories, the Bible, and a dictionary. She goes beyond the usual poetic play with word sound, word order, repetition or rhythm, using the sound of the text, but more specifically its language use, to reflect different ideologies. Although Philip does not use the demotic in "She Tries Her Tongue," the presentation of the sounds of these various colonial writings helps to contextualize the linguistic forces that confront the black subject, a theme which is central to the poem. By presenting a number of authoritative versions of English, the poem undermines the authority of "standard" English, since each *genre* presents different usages of the English language. For example, at one point in the poem, Philip juxtaposes old English and contemporary usage of English:

forgive her me this foreignness

I am not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table

forgive me this dumbness

but thou art the same Lord, whose property

this lack of tongue forgive

is always to have mercy. (94)

The contrast of *sound* of the two parallel prayers allows Philip to identify distinct sound patterns, even within accepted forms of English. Therefore, if the accepted versions of English are different amongst themselves, then there is no reason that the demotic should not be accepted as well.

Yet, certain variations of a language are often criticized for being “improper.” In “The Question of Language is the Answer to Power,” Philip lists derogatory terms for the African demotic: “chattel language / babu english / slave idiom / nigger vernacular” (73). This list indicates the deviation from the “authoritative” colonial English. For people of African descent, representing themselves requires a negotiation with language, since the English language was imposed upon them during colonialism. By extension, “the English language merely served to articulate the non-being of the African.” Philip goes on to argue “that it is impossible for any language that inherently denies the essential humanity of any group or people to be truly capable of giving voice to the i-mages of experiences of that group without tremendous and fundamental changes within the language itself” (*She Tries* 16). According to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, only the African language can represent African culture; however, the paradox is that for many people of African descent, English is the only language they know. Thus, many

authors, bound by English and the history of colonisation it entails, begin to use a demotic variant of English. Using a demotic version of English becomes a method of troping traditional views of "proper" English imposed by colonizers, in addition to disrupting Western ideology and inserting an identifiably black subject into language and history. As Philip argues, "[t]he havoc that the African wreaked upon the English language is, in fact, the metaphorical equivalent of the havoc that coming to the New World represented for the African" (*She Tries* 18). Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of using the demotic is that it pulls the rug from under the traditional English scholar. As Carolyn Cooper points out, people who are literate in English must suspend their traditional reading habits. Such "loss of status does level new and old illiterates, narrowing the social distance between 'privileged' and 'non-privileged' groups" (13).

In her poem "And Over Every Land and Sea," Philip represents the difference between a mother's and her daughter's speech, thereby illustrating the dichotomy between the history of the African people and the new generation of (post)colonial blacks. The distinct difference between the mother's demotic "Where she be," and the daughter's schooled (read: colonized) "She whom they call mother, I seek" (29), indicates the language's inherent association with culture, since the daughter, who uses "standard" English, is not only separated from her mother, but from her culture. As Myriam Chancy points out, Philip "alternately deconstructs standard English and reconstructs the Caribbean demotic by unveiling the points

of intersection between the violence of imperialism and colonialism and the efforts on the part of the enslaved to maintain cultural and linguistic integrity despite that devastation" (279). In other words, Philip's project of inserting demotic language into her texts helps her articulate a black subject position. By working with the English language, questioning, and usurping it, as well as (re)presenting a demotic version of English, she is able to expose the history of colonialism through sound, as well as thematically.

The use of the demotic, then, helps to (re)present the colonial subject, and place the narrator within the historical context of (post)colonialism. Like Philip, Allen also inserts traces of the demotic into her work to help identify her subjects' history. For example, in "Tribute to Miss Lou," Allen uses a demotic version of English, saying:

Pred out yusef Miss Lou
 Lawd, yu mek wi heart pound soh
 yu mek wi just love up wiself
 and talk wi talk soh

 hear dis;
 dem sey we sey she sey he sey hear sey
 raw rim of soul. (43-44)

As a tribute to Miss Lou like the title suggests, it is appropriate that Allen use the

demotic, since Miss Lou wrote in the demotic, essentially mimicking the spoken dialect, in order to reach the Jamaican people that she was speaking about in her work.³⁷ However, again like Philip, Allen does not always use the demotic in her work. In fact, often it is only a word or a phrase that suggests a demotic background. The poems that are largely written in the demotic generally revolve around themes of slavery, resistance, and self-expression. Inserting the texture of the demotic language into poems about (re)presentation of the black subject, as is exemplified by the excerpt of "Tribute to Miss Lou," allows Allen to play with the reader's aural sense; just as the sound of the poem is black, so are its subject and theme.

D) Musicality and Language :

Another aspect of sound that helps identify cultural specificity is the *genre* in which language and themes are presented. Earlier, I mentioned Marlatt and Warland's use of prose/fiction to create a new form intended to articulate their lesbian subjectivities. At this point, I want to discuss a form that evokes specific cultural referents and centres strongly on musicality: dub poetry. Just as Western writing and *genres* build on an extensive body of texts, and should be read within this context, "[d]ub should be seen in a continuum with a rich history of diasporic

³⁷ In the introduction to *Women do this Every Day*, Allen discusses the project, and success, of Miss Lou. She points out that although Miss Lou did write, her medium was primarily performance, and that her written work has become "a *major* document of Jamaican social history and culture" (13).

oral, musical, and popular culture performance practices including (but not exhausting) gospel, jazz, blues, r&b, ska, calypso, rapso, reggae, rap, and hip-hop" (Carr "'Come Mek Wi'" 5). While Western writing traditions have grown out of a variety of written genres, dub poetry is rooted in an oral and musical tradition. Although much (Western) poetry is musical because of its use of various poetic techniques, the dub form takes "its name and aesthetic from the dance-hall dj method of dubbing out the lead vocal tracks on pre-recorded instrumental reggae, and producing a re-mixed version with sound effects, along with witty political, social, or sexual commentary" (Carr "'Come Mek Wi'" 7).³⁸ In its very essence, then, dub poetry is music and consciousness. The key difference between the musicality of Western poetry and dub poetry is that Western poetry is based on aesthetics, while dub poetry focuses on the message, the musicality is secondary, and is only used to help transmit the message.

Dub poets use musicality in order to help transmit "loaded" messages. That is, people listen to, sing and dance to, and therefore are more receptive of political and social commentaries communicated through music. As Carr argues in a forthcoming article on Allen, dub poetry disrupts Western tradition by transcending the poetic emphasis on form. Rather, Allen, like other dub poets, situates dub poetry at the junction of aesthetics and political and social consciousness (6). "Rub A Dub Style Inna Regent Park" is perhaps Allen's strongest

³⁸ For an extensive history of dub poetry, refer to Hebbidge's *Cut 'N' Mix*, which traces the roots and variations of black oral traditions.

mixture of musicality, political, social, and historical consciousness. From the beginning, Allen was set on using “a dance-hall style track, a celebration of the cutting edge of the Regent Park DJ-rap culture” in this poem (Walker 87). The musical style represents the current musical style associated with black youths, while the lyrical content refers to black experiences. In the poem, Allen argues that resistance to racism lies within the word: it “could’ve been a gun spilling out the lines / but is a mike” (82). In addition to foregrounding a decidedly black musical beat, Allen also inscribes part of Bob Marley’s lyrics, “forget yu troubles and dance.” This serves to create a live dialogue with other black music traditions, consequently creating a distinct body of reference—one that is music based, but more significantly, non-Western. Thus both the sound of the poem and the musical references it contains help locate a black subject position.

Although dub poetry is often set against a musical background, the “musical accompaniment is not as important to dub poetry as hearing the reggae rhythm in the poem” (Chamberlin 236). A wonderful example of this is Allen’s poem “Rasta in Court.” Hearing Allen perform this piece, one clearly gets a sense of the rhythm of the demotic language. It is no longer a question of spacing or line endings, as in traditional poetry, but rather of the inflection of the speaker. As Edward Kamu Brathwaite explains in *History of the Voice*, the demotic language rises and falls in intonation, drastically and often, whereas the Western language tends to be uniform

and horizontal in pitch.³⁹ Moreover,

[t]he poetry of [dub poets] is not fashioned for passive enjoyment through reading. The language is vital in terms of its sonority, its rhythm, the auditory impact it can produce. That is to say: the violence with which these poets manipulate the distortion of the instrument of the voice—in forms originating in the street cry, popular oral story-telling, etc—until it turns into screams, noises, sounds, or eloquent silences....” (5)

The textual quality of language in dub poetry that Emilio Jorge Rodriguez is describing relies on the auditory sense of the reader/audience. The sound of the demotic language allows the presence of a subject denied within colonial language and ideology. In “Rasta in Court,” Allen’s inflection peaks on, and emphasizes, the “i” sound in words such as “night,” “right,” “fright,” “sight,” “light,” “revive,” and “bicycle.” This emphasis on the “i” is reminiscent of Rastafarianism’s focus on “I and I,” which, incidentally, Allen also incorporates into the poem.⁴⁰ “Even the dub poets who are not Rastas like to use the Rasta style,” Michael Angrosino argues, “because it is such an effective form of antiestablishmentarianism, ... and it

³⁹ Although I feel that I would be remiss if I did not point out the distinct sound of dub poetry and the demotic since I am trying to argue that the reader’s aural senses are invoked by the authors’ writing I will not attempt to describe the musicality of the demotic language. It would take an extensive linguistic analysis to define how the specific intonations and inflections of the demotic language create a distinct sound pattern. In fact, the musicality of the demotic language seems to be taken for granted by black writers, who all admit to the power and rhythm of language (see for example “Ideas: Black on black” or *Dub Poetry*).

⁴⁰ The Rasta “I an I” symbolizes God’s presence within one, solidarity among blacks, and the importance of the black subject. In an extensive footnote, Michael Angrosino discusses the importance of the “I” for Rastas (88).

symbolically thumbs its nose at 'standard English'" (83). Therefore, Allen's use of "I an I" and her focus on the "i" sound, not only creates a musical dimension to her work, but also aids in the articulation of a black subject. The sound of the "i" is ever present, and, like the presence of the black people, should not be erased or dismissed, but rather emphasized and celebrated. In short, regardless of the *theme* of the poem, the demotic *pulsions* of the language evoke images of black culture and history.

Even though the rhythm and musicality of dub poetry is to be found in its language, and every dub poet would argue that it is the *word* that is central to their work, these poets more often than not include a musical background of drums and various percussion instruments to create a bass rhythm that is distinctly representative of black culture. In fact, music, song, and dance have all been central elements to resistance within black history.⁴¹ It is in this sense that incorporating musicality into the written works allows authors such as Allen to (re)present a distinct subject position. Although some might question the intentions of dub poetry, considering the paradox of "translating" an oral language and form into a written one, the written form becomes part of a legitimization project (Cooper 40). Moreover, in a culture that gives priority to the written word, dub poetry helps

⁴¹ In *Race, Space and the Poetics of Moving*, Philip traces the history of Caribana, and explains: "They [slaves] living on plantations where massa [white owners] watching and trying to control all their moving, the moving of their thinking, their speaking and their singing, the moving of their hands on the drum skin giving praise to their gods, even the moving of their feelings" (4). Consequently, the black slaves' refusal to be "quiet" illustrates the empowering role of sound. Speaking, singing, and dancing all present a disruption of colonial authority.

make demotic English and black culture accessible to a larger audience, one that might not attend oral performances.

In *Noises in the Blood*, Cooper contends that, "like a musical score, the poem pressed to the page encodes performance" (68). In other words, just as the musical score is susceptible to interpretation, the written poem is also versatile and fluid. The poem is not only a reflection of the author's subject position, but of the reader's. The reader interprets the pauses, inflections, emphases, word choices, line endings, and so on, based on her/his individual background. As Philip explains in her essay "Who's Listening?," her audience is varied. In fact, I would argue that there is no one typical reader for any of the texts discussed here. Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, as well as Allen, address a virtual audience which includes their peers, as well as an open-minded "other." All of these authors incorporate poetic elements that help to situate their specific site of (re)presentation, be it that of the woman, the lesbian, and/or the person of colour. The body is no longer simply to be labelled "other." It has been repossessed and articulated by these writers. It has been presented as a sensual tool, capable of knowledge through a variety of senses. In effect, in order to emphasize the importance of the bodily senses they engage the reader's body through the auditory sense. They exemplify what they are trying to illustrate not only thematically, but also sensually.

Conclusion

The body has become, over the years, more than a vessel that contains the soul. For women, the struggle to gain power of choice with regard to what happens to the physical body is far from over; they must still contend with the patriarchal social structure about medical choices, such as abortion, mastectomy, general health care, as well as euthanasia. For theoreticians and literary authors, it is this contentious relationship that makes the body such a powerful site for change. In "Le rire de la Méduse," Cixous presents the urgency for women to re-possess their bodies and their subjectivities. Within patriarchy, women's lack of power over their bodies and how their bodies are represented is indicative of their subordinate position.

The body is the one thing that one can truly possess. For this reason, women must dislocate themselves from the imposed silence and embody themselves. Grounding themselves in the one aspect that is truly their own, women can then begin to define the subtleties of their subjectivities. For Marlatt, Warland, and Bersianik, inserting the body into the text becomes primarily a representation of sexuality, while Philip and Allen present a body marked by colonialism. For all these authors, the body is both signified and signifier. As signified, it had been inscribed with various Western patriarchal signs, all of which deny their position

as subject. As signifier, the body is capable of expressing subjectivities that are repressed within patriarchal discourse.

Going from the general to the specific, then, women begin by acknowledging and confronting the signs imposed on the body, they re-image their individual bodies, then use the bodily senses to describe their specific socio-cultural positions as women, lesbians, and/or person of colour. Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen do not simply dismiss patriarchal associations of woman and body, or traditional images of "woman-ness;" rather, they re-contextualize the body into specific articulations of their individual subjectivities. The most obvious example of this is maternal imagery, which the authors utilize to describe self-expression, sexuality, and colonialism.

Once the authors have demonstrated the potential inherent within re-imagining the body, they draw on various bodily senses in order to (re)present themselves. They identify the Western patriarchal gaze which possessed, repressed, and objectified women, and usurp it by relying on the sense of touch, as well as on orality and aurality. The body as signifier, as subject, interacts with the world on a tangible level. The reality of the world can be touched, and, for this reason, the tactile sense becomes a strong mode for communicating sexual pleasures for Marlatt, Warland, and Bersianik, as well as the silencing of black slaves in Philip's text. The power of oral communication as resistance is often evidenced in contemporary Western society by the emphasis on protest gatherings. Within the

written text, orality becomes representative of a marginalised medium, which, by its insertion into the text, disrupts the hierarchy of forms of representation. However, talking has often been favoured by people in authority. In their texts, Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen, create a figurative dialogue by also inserting the auditory sense. They not only speak and signify their bodily senses, they also listen.

Two Women in a Birth, Le Pique-nique, She Tries Her Tongue, and Women do this Every Day not only theorize and thematize the importance of embodiment, but also draw on the reader's sensibilities. The authors' use of poetic form, rhythm, intonations, and musicality help signify the women's specific subjectivities. In addition to their rejection of the visual, their texts focus on the reader's aural sense, thereby displacing the emphasis on gazing which is perpetuated in contemporary Western culture through the incessant use of visual media. Consequently, Marlatt, Warland, Bersianik, Philip, and Allen, incorporate woman's body into the text to the fullest extent, thematizing embodiment as well as textually inscribing the bodily senses, both the characters' and the reader's. Yet, the body is never essentialized; it represents the specific and individual subjectivities of the various women, and their socio-cultural-historical sphere. In this sense, by appropriating the position of subject for women and by presenting multiple bodies, these authors all present the potential inherent in each one of us. All one needs is a body to speak of and from.

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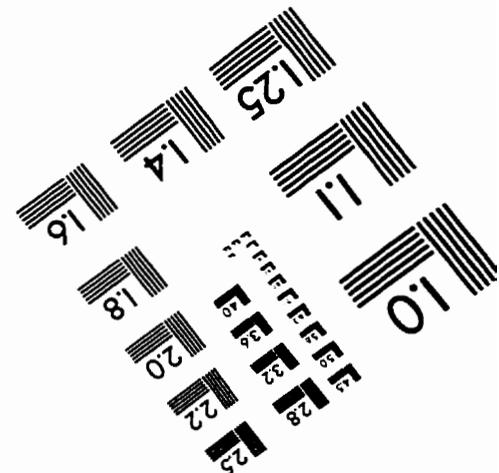
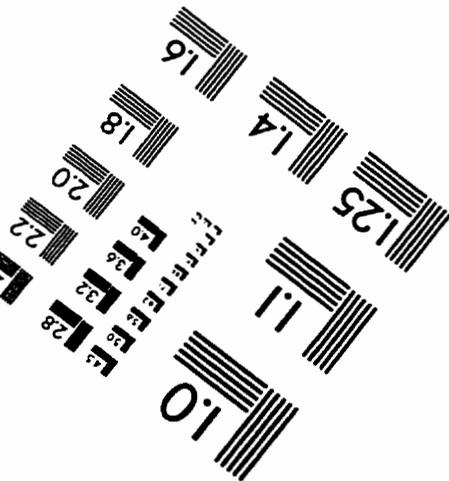
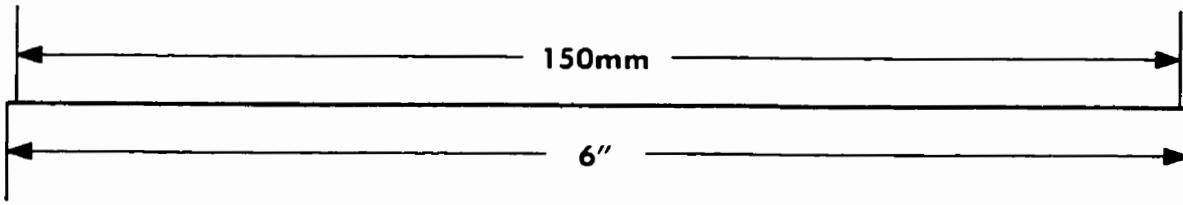
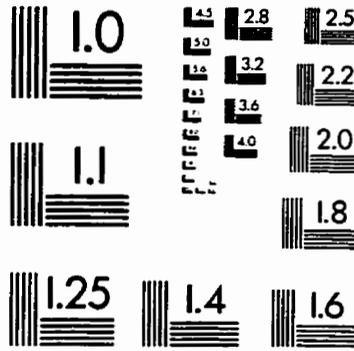
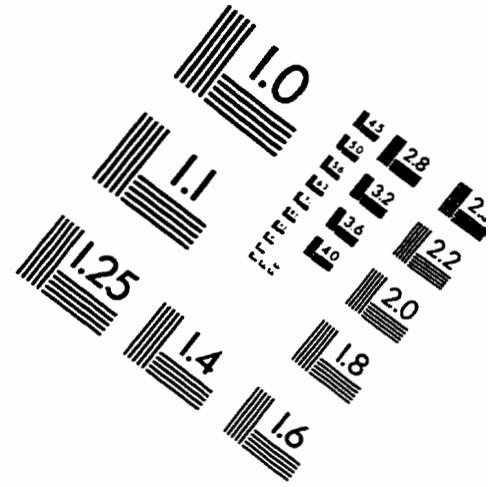
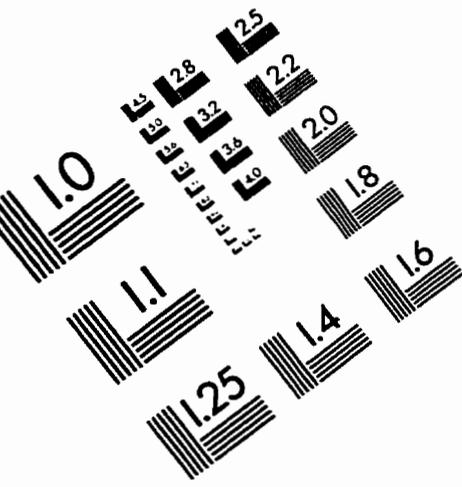
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