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A Poetics of Translation in Twentieth-Century Writing

by

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ABSTRACT

"A Poetics of Trans- in Twentieth Century Writing" articulates a mode of composition marked by iteration, or repetition with deviance. My particular focus is on the iterative texts of Nicole Brossard, Lyn Hejinian, bp Nichol and Gertrude Stein. As the title suggests, translation serves as a primary informing figure in this study of text generated out of text by the same author, in the same language. The topoi of translation theory -- among them the notions of fidelity, equivalence, and invisibility -- facilitate an elaboration of this poetics, particularly as the authors themselves declare writing and translation to be shared attentions. Nichol's *Translating Translating Apollinaire* and Brossard's *Le Désert mauve*, for instance, explore translation as a generative model for a compositional process which seeks to engage the inner workings of a single language. In addition to translation, I bring various other critical and theoretical optics to the works under study, among them psychoanalytic and queer theories, in order to address the questions raised by this processual poetics.

My discussion of the kind of subjectivity an iterative text proposes is informed by both Kristeva's formulation of a heterogeneous sujet-en-procès and Judith Butler's notion of the performative constitution of identities. Reconciling

these theorizations, I suggest that a 'subject-in-trans-' can be discerned in, for example, Lyn Hejinian's two versions of the autobiographical *My Life*. The works of both Kristeva and Butler prove key, as well, in my investigation of the trans- poetic's potential for the resignification of phrases, words, letters. This study is occupied, in other words, not only with the ways that repetitive text might represent, but also with the ways it might productively agitate a language sedimented with the values favouring its presumed straight, white, male subject. Stein's iterative poem, "Lifting Belly," for example, deploys language in such a way as to enable its imagination, performance, and representation of a lesbian erotics. It is through a trans- poetic that we might discover a way, as Brossard puts it, "through the very practice of language to conceive of what is inconceivable outside language."

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In the spring of 1994, just as I began to study for this project, I was shaken by two critical and visceral

events; all at once I discovered that I had an ovarian tumour and that I was a dyke. The scar on my stomach healed in time, but for a woman who had treasured ten years of marriage with her best friend, coming out was a slow and often painful process, fraught with the further loss of many friends and family members. During this time two people kept me afloat. One is Nicole Markotic, who has been a great writing and scholarly companion, and also turns out to be the dearest of friends, a faithful champion at all the right moments. And the other is my former partner Kevin Shortt, whose interest and belief in my work has always propelled me. More importantly, however, Kevin gave me the most generous gift I have ever received -- acceptance and love in the face of his own loss. I continue to be astonished by this love which, although shifted in kind, remains unwavering in its strength.

For my mother,

Catherine Holbrook, who blazed

a nature trail in the summer of 96, and each day

brought guiding metaphors to the writing going on

inside the cabin. After days of deliberating

whether to cut a path above or below two Eastern

Hemlocks, she decided to proceed between them.

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INTRODUCTION: A POETICS OF TRANS-

> I claim the right to repeat the word until it becomes dry orange-skin, or until it becomes fragrance. I want to repeat the words "I love you" until they become spirit. (Cixous 128)

This project begins with fragrance, spirit. The material of language so often fugitive, stories clamouring for attention, how do the letters in some books make their presence felt, become visible, noisy, get up my nose? How to explain why these books smell so good, fill the room. Change the room, in fact, angles shifting by degrees. In the fragrant books, I notice, the authors "claim the right to repeat the word."

In my dissertation I articulate a mode of composition marked by iteration, or repetition with deviance. My particular focus is on the iterative texts of Nicole Brossard, Lyn Hejinian, bp Nichol, and Gertrude Stein. I draw on various theoretical discourses, among them psychoanalytic, queer and translation theories, in order to address the questions raised by this processual poetics. What model of subjectivity, for example, is proposed by the two versions of the autobiographical *My Life*? How might the productive shifts of Nichol's *Translating Translating Apollinaire* recast the notorious idea of 'loss' in translation? Further, how might the failure inhering in citationality (a notion central to Judith Butler's work on

performativity) bear on this idea of 'loss,' particularly in the iterative texts of Brossard and Stein, lesbian poets working the horizons of discourse, representation, genre, subjectivity?

I term this compositional mode a *poetics of trans-*, invoking the topoi of translation theory relevant to this project; the notions of fidelity, equivalence, and invisibility elaborated in translation theory inform my analysis of text produced out of earlier text by the same author, in the same language. I take the lead here from the writers themselves, who often highlight the figure of translation in their own work. The first author I take up is Nicole Brossard who, perhaps because of her intensive and sustained relationships with English translators, has deployed this figure most explicitly. On Brossard's use of this generative figure, Susan Knutson notes that she "points clearly to translation not so much as an exploration of the physical frontiers of languages and cultures -- although these are still present as fictions, as metaphors, as incitations -- but rather as the drive to reach the internal horizons of meaning and the consciousness or construction of reality" (12). For Brossard, translation inspires a compositional motive of deviant repetition *within* French. It is around this fascination with the "internal horizons of meaning" that the writers I study coalesce.

While I do discuss translation proper (exchange between languages) in terms of both its theory and practice, I apply trans-, a truncation of the word, to the poetics[1] which primarily occupies me here. I do this in an effort to retain the term as an informing figure while evading the overdeterminedly interlingual, intersubjective sense of 'translation' as I discuss the textual iterations performed by single authors within one language. I also use trans- in order to gesture towards the terminology deployed by writers who have similarly invoked translation while skewing it to suit their particular projects; the creative translations of Brossard and Daphne Marlatt, for instance,

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[1]The term 'poetics' can refer to the practices of both interpretation and composition. In the sense that Northrop Frye or Tzvetan Todorov configure it, for example, poetics is a science of literary discourse; its "raison d'être," claims Peter Brooks, "is to make explicit and rational, and to test the coherence of, the theories that enable interpretation to take place" (ix). For writers, poetics indicates instead the resources for writing practice, the tools and strategies of composition. In my project the term shuttles somewhat between the two; I attend to the statements made by the writers themselves, and attempt to track the mechanics and motives of a compositional approach marked by iteration. Their approach, however, has generated work which might be characterized as Barthesian "writerly" text, which supposes "the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer"(*S/Z* 4). My project, then, traces an interpretive poetics also, as the texts provoke a new kind of reading.

are called 'Transformances,' and Fred Wah speaks of "transcreation" (34) to describe the process of composing his *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* Trans- also allows for the possibility of 'transformation,' the term appearing in both Julia Kristeva's and Brossard's arguments for the interimplication of poetic language and social change. Transliteration, transpoesis, transmutation -- these and other possible incarnations of the prefix trans- do bear on this project here and there. Deploying trans- with an eye to keeping the term as open to possibility as the poetic it names, I risk a certain imprecision. But ironically, in writing this project so concerned with the potential for resignification promised by deviant repetitions, I found the word 'translation' to be one of those words that resists resignification. Stein came across words like this, declaring that "Dirty has an association and is a word that I would not use now. I would not use words that have definite associations. . . . It is an effort and does not come clean" (1971:510). So translation not coming clean, let alone producing "fragrance," I build upon trans-.

Paul de Man differentiates between the poet and the translator:

> . . . the poet has some relationship to meaning, to a statement that is not purely within the realm of language. That is the naiveté of the poet, that he has to say something, that he has to convey a meaning which does not necessarily relate to language. The relationship of the translator to the original is the relationship between

> language and language, wherein the problem of meaning or the desire to say something, the need to make a statement, is entirely absent. (81-82)

De Man's description of the translator as someone engaged in the "relationship between language and language" aptly characterizes the subjects of my study. Yet they all share, too, the poet's "naiveté" in their desire to test the limits of language, enter into the "problem of meaning." They perform both of de Man's contradictory functions; repeating a word, a phrase, a passage, a chapter -- a change registered either through structural shift (phonetic or syntactic) or simply one of context -- alerts readers to the surface traffic of language, yet interrogates, too, the consequent traffic of meanings. Most promising to writers attuned to the biases and power differentials with which language is sedimented are those things, to use DeMan's words, "not purely within the realm of language." It is through the poetics I track that we might discern a way "through the very practice of language to conceive of what is inconceivable outside language" (Brossard, *The Aerial Letter* 98).

In the 1980 version of *My Life*, Lyn Hejinian says, "The dictionary presents a world view, the bilingual dictionary doubles that, presents two" (79). This statement underscores the belief in the constitutive force of language which motivates a poetics bent on linguistic innovation. It also points to translation as a spur, as the practice

bearing proof that words contour reality. The 1987 revision of this sentence is more suggestive, if perplexing: "The dictionary presents a world view, the bilingual dictionary presents a world view, the bilingual dictionary doubles that, presents two" (79). The doubling here, the two 'definitions' of the bilingual dictionary, enacts the intralingual trans- inspired by the thematized notion of interlingual difference. The intertextual shift, also, the unfaithful repetition of the 1980 *My Life*, mobilizes the definitions of the terms in question. Iteration functions as a provocation of linear reading habits, a provocation of English, as the repeated terms oscillate between potentialities.

Pamela Banting has recently published a book entitled, *Body Inc.: a theory of translation poetics* (1995), a work with which my own resonates. Through a close study of texts by Canadian poets Fred Wah, Robert Kroetsch and Daphne Marlatt, Banting theorizes a "poetics radically different from those rooted in mimetic or expressive theories of representation." I concur with her choice of translation, as it involves the exchange *between semiotic systems*, as an informing figure in her articulation of this non-representational poetics. *Body Inc.* is structured around her argument that "the postcolonial Canadian long poem is generated not primarily through representation but rather through various forms of interlingual, intralingual and

intersemiotic translation" (xiii). While such a declarative thesis is vulnerable to unravelling, inviting such questions as 'Why only Canadian?', 'How might translation *represent*?' and 'Why only long poems?' -- indeed, she briefly points to the expansion of this latter category -- her project is by no means undermined by its arguable guiding proposition. In other words, while *Body Inc.* may not prove her thesis, it does offer us, through insightful readings of Wah, Kroetsch and Marlatt and through the continual incitement to consider the relations between writing and translation, a rich investigation into the dynamics of poetic language. In his study of *délire*, a concept I introduce into my own project, Jean-Jacques Lecercle invokes Saussure's obsession with attempting to demonstrate that anagrams were vehicles of composition in Latin verse. Although Saussure could come up with no "proof," and indeed abandoned this work in the end, Lecercle defends the productivity of his trespass over "the border of common sense:"

> . . . he does this because he is impelled by his love of language, and in a direction which language itself indicates, so that it is by no means certain that his discoveries are mere delusions (perhaps this is what he himself decided when he abandoned his research) rather than the unveiling of the deepest workings of language. (6)

This is the outcome of Banting's project and is my pursuit also, to involve myself in "the deepest workings of language." To discern "internal horizons."

I take translation both less and more seriously than Banting. Less, because I do not hope, as she does, to "open that still fairly traditional term to the effects of transposition and thereby to expand its range" (7). Instead I propose a trans- poetic, elaborating it as I proceed not only through translation theory, but also through other discourses which address the dynamic of repetition; Kristeva's work on poetic language, Steve McCaffery's discussions of the paragram, Freud on the "compulsion to repeat," Judith Butler's performativity theory, Stein's "insistence" -- these and other investigations from disparate fields are brought to bear on my study of iterative texts. And taking translation more seriously, I stress the metonymic, rather than metaphoric, relationship between translation and writing / reading through my inclusion of analyses of interlingual transfer. I include in my study of the fictional translator in *Le Désert mauve*, for instance, a discussion of Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's English translation of that novel.

My consideration of how language, subjectivity and desire are reconfigured through the trans- poetic is informed by both Butler's work on performativity and Julia Kristeva's sujet-en-procès model. A theoretical incoherence

might be anticipated here by virtue of the difference between psychoanalytic and philosophical discourses or, more particularly, between Kristeva's developmental and Butler's genealogical elaborations of subject-formation. I have found it both possible and productive, however, to reconcile their theories, which together provide ways to begin answering questions which arise as I study my primary texts: How might authorial desire prove a more generative concept than authorial intention? Indeed, how might desire be seen to mediate between the seemingly contradictory dispositions of the trans- poet -- intention and erring? And what kind of desires are produced, suggested, inspired through the iteration in "Lifting Belly," for example? This is not Lacan's flagging trajectory of desire, an endless series of disappointing substitutions; instead we read the kind of desire intimated by Hélène Cixous when she says, "I don't know if one cathedral would carry me away. Twenty-six cathedrals is a full gallop" (110) or by Elizabeth A. Meese's insistence on "L, L, L, L. Dear L, we need to play it again and again and again, patiently recording the variations in our tunes" (128).

Despite the fact that I am dealing with instances of concentrated recurrence, repetition, variation, a cluster of textual dynamics invoking the realm of 'poetic language,' I investigate several prose works in my study: Brossard's *Le Désert mauve*, Hejinian's *My Life*, Stein's "Melanctha."

Richard A. Lanham rehearses, in *Analyzing Prose*, the prevailing conceptual split between the genres of prose and poetry when he says, "We expect to look *through* prose, to the subject beneath, but *at* poetry where the language forms part of the subject" (79). In the prose works under my consideration here, a trans- mode of composition has compelled me to look *at* rather than *through*, so that language certainly "forms part of the subject." Poetic language, as these works confirm, is not proper only to poetry. I do not mean to collapse the generic distinction between prose and poetry; texts are always replete (whether in an accommodating, resistant or parodic manner) with the values, fantasies, and tropes of genre specific to their socio-historical moments, so that a complete dissolution of the boundary between prose and poetry would be both impossible and unproductive. Part of my interest is in how a trans- poetic is variously refracted through these particular values, fantasies and tropes. How does trans- inflect autobiography, for instance, or novelistic description?

My own compositional process is driven by a desire to stray from normative academic discourse. I include poetic, aphoristic, fictional, speculative incarnations of words and notions appearing in my critical prose so that definition, of the term 'trans-' for instance, is not a function of 'narrowing down' but rather of expansion, a centrifugal

force. "In the regions of academic discourse," Bob Perelman states, "citation is the prime index of power" (11-12). This brand of repetition, which acts as a fulcrum of exchange, is not the one compelling me; in venturing to articulate a trans- poetic, one in which composition is founded on imperfect citation, I choose to transgress a discourse dependent on conservative repetition. I share Diane P. Freedman's enthusiasm for a feminist cross-genre writing that is "associative, non-hierarchical, personal, and open-ended" (3), and from creative/critical practitioners like Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Abigail Child and Elizabeth A. Meese I take the suggestion that projects of knowledge should engage many ways of knowing.

This dissertation begins with an error. I have been trying to dream up a title, considering the words which have emerged as touchstones here: rapture, delirium, deviance, repetition; certainly *trans-* must appear. And now I find I must keep the title approved three years ago along with my proposal: "A Poetics of Translation in Twentieth Century Writing." So after coming to realize that 'translation' was indeed a crucial figure, yet not a term adequate to the poetics I trace, this word still appears on my cover page. The regulation is in place, I am told, "so the title can't be tailored to what worked in the research."

Since I make much of the promise of error in my work, I look for the gift of this little accident. What it does throw into relief is the exploratory trajectory of this project. I do not begin with an answer and set out to prove it in subsequent chapters. I begin with various questions and proceed to ask more questions, construct provisional answers, question those answers through shifts in focus, build upon observations in the manner of the trans- poetic I discuss. Each new stage of inquiry, through generic shift and/or choice of theoretical optic, complicates the 'argument' in progress, supports it and skews it as I seek out buttresses that are truly flying. My hope is that this formal organization affords moments both generative and resonant, that it incites you to read back and forth, to look both ways.

LOOK BOTH WAYS FOR TRANS

this borne of error. the yellow sign at the C-train tracks read with the blear of long-day eyes, dropping the i not because of any ontological fever but because i is skinny. that misread sign, a traffic accident, commands the bivalent, head spinning, at times vertiginous energy of a poetic based on trans-: translation, transformation, transcreation, transformance, transpoesis.

as always when we talk about accidents, we also talk about desire. (Octavio Paz 153)

trans- works with what is already there. an incessant folding of the page, back and forth, makes a hat a boat or a crane.

the proper mode of proceeding is based on intention, not desire. we are asked, when our desires are discovered, 'what are your intentions.'

if translation is often figured as an act of love, so that similar stakes overlap along the arrow shot from source to target in translation diagrams and the arrow shot from Cupid's bow to an object of desire, then what are self-translators up to. is this *a mouth in the form of an arrow. . . closing upon its own satisfaction.* (Lacan 179)

I don't know if one cathedral would carry me away. Twenty-six cathedrals is a full gallop. (Cixous 110) : RAPTURE

she writes with the translator in mind, an aroused lover, a cranky neighbour, either way surrender is imminent.

Language stabilizes around a parish, a bishopric, a capital. It forms a bulb. It evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks. . .

(Deleuze and Guattari 7)

this 'evolving' is thanks to error. the pride of those constructing the tower of babel was the founding mistake. with the tower crumbling and speakers dispersed to build new capitals, the process of forgetting begins in each burgeoning centre. and travelling from one to the next, the journeyer re-enacts the forgetting with every step. faux pas along the way.

language is error

i'm not talking about chopping a lot of wood wrong until you get it right. i'm talking about chopping wood wrong and it comes out in the shape of a duck.

l'étiquette: label

repetition knits the axes of metonymy and metaphor.

a cranky lover, an aroused neighbour

Language is not primarily a means of communication; it is, above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted. (Chambers 22)

error as motility

to induce rapture, worrying away at the same.

whoever said letters were neutral never imagined wearing Hester Prynne's dress.

whoever said Stein gave us the refried beans of Modernism is a wiener.

sujet en procès (Kristeva): subject in process. why call yourself one.

sujet en procès: subject on trial. what do your judges eat and is it good for you.

perhaps the physique of language is rendered transparent because of contempt, as in familiarity breeds. defamiliarization as rekindling.

what if language really were transparent. i would like the bathing suits.

i have a look on my face i imagine you'd see on the faces of the devout, after they have read their nightly passage from the Bible. a book read over and over. i read Cixous' "The Last Painting or the Portrait of God," which i have read over and over. with every reading i am astonished. with every reading the residue of her voice, her translators' voices, inflect my writing, the zealous passion i imagine on nightly faces. the essay

celebrates artists who paint the same thing over and over again, Monet and his 26 cathedrals, Hokusai and his 219 lions, Rembrandt's self-portraits over and over. Cixous astonished at how Monet knows *how to paint the sameness of the sea* (106) and, at the same time, how he is *painting the differences* (111). She regrets she can convey no more than the word 'mimosa.' *If I were a painter!* (107). Yet in her lament for the limitations of her medium, Cixous repeats 'mimosa' over and over until it begins to gallop. Her sad declaration of the performative threshold of language (*I can swear to you that (the) mimosa is a synonym for alleluia* (107)) is undermined by the actual, gathering alleluia of repeated 'mimosas.' Blooming.

a writer's cheek pressed up against wet paint is a familiar melancholy.

you are walking in the street in a foreign country. you accidentally bump into a man's shoulder and say Lo siento. Lo siento -- you say it in a slurred, off-hand way, throw it beyond his shoulder, more for yourself than him. to feel the casualness of fluency. in a store you fire away with a well-rehearsed vernacular request for bread. your hope is to convince the storekeeper, to pass, and you know you have when she fires back at you with a barrage of incomprehensible syllables. your pleasure is acute, but

brief. because she goes on too long, too long for you to nod and smile, hand over the money and slip out the door. her speech is starting to smack of something demanding response, it sounds passionate, like you should nod vehemently in agreement or shake your head in disbelief, but you don't know which. something in the news? did an employee just quit, leaving bread in the oven? is she professing her desire? irritation? she tries to catch your eyes, repeating her last sentence with emphasis. you have no clue. pure sound, yeast throat sweet red sweat long sound, sounds with baguettes in them, sounds slipping out from under her cap, the sound of change clinking in your hand and you become intent suddenly on counting it. silence. after a definitely interrogative lift at the end of her speech. question marks rising in the ovens. you squint, smirk indecisively, look at your watch, aghast, and move hastily to the door, with apologies. Lo siento. Lo siento.

how can a word in your own language rise. *"Spirit, spirit spirit." And in the end, spirit flew.*

¿does pregnancy embarrass you?

translation: *to convey to heaven without death. to enrapture.*

rapture: *the transporting of a person from one place to another, especially to heaven.*

if the writer envies the instantaneity of the visual, perhaps the artist painting something over and over, insisting on series, covets the temporal rush of writing, for *The untruth of a painting or a photograph is that, in spite of its concreteness, it drops the element of natural succession* (Fenollosa 140).

Cixous makes a fetish of the last repetition, the painting executed on the deathbed, suggesting the artist has then *painted painting itself* (126), offering a *portrait of god* (128). inverting our tendency to glorify the original, the first. i would like to quote Cixous' entire essay. by the time i have read it for the last time i will have quoted it to death.

on your way to heaven can you look both ways.

> *why did you turn?*
> *why did you glance back?*
> *why did you hesitate for that moment?*
> *why did you bend your face*
> *caught with the flame of the upper earth,*
> *above my face?* (H.D., "Eurydice" 52)

Eurydice knew rapture as an unwise turning.

in the space between translations there are a thousand

stories.

have you read them.

bp Nichol transes storm, stave, strive, stranglehold, stain into St. Orm, St. Ave, St. Rive, St. Ranglehold, St. Ain, conveying them to heaven. rapture begun: *HA!!!!!!!*
St. Reat (Scraptures: Fourth Sequence).

The head is the organ of exchange, but the heart is the amorous organ of repetition (Deleuze 2).

exchanging organs, the amorous head is the heart of repetition.

But suppose that we let the word 'translation' spread to a fuller semantic range, toward the limit (if such a limit indeed exists) of its semantic potential. Suppose we say, for example, that an author has translated a work from one language to another but that both of those languages are one and the same -- in fact, the author's mother tongue -- and that the work translated was originally written by the translator himself; and that the translated work, indeed, was nothing other than the very same work produced through the act of translation. To speak of translation in this way would invite the reproach of the

field. . . (Rand 82)

this is my project; i suppose.

What kind of subject is supposed by such a *reproach*? By the variant repetition of words, phrases, poems, novels, autobiographies? I suggest that the text Rand imagines (and that I see in Stein, Nichol, Hejinian and Brossard) allows for the configuration of a subject-in-trans-. In order to begin theorizing such a model, I will first move back into the realm of interlingual translation, positioning myself, at the outset, beyond *reproach*. If language "is, above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted" (Chambers 22), then how does such constitution operate in translation, a linguistic practice which, while notoriously associated with notions of identity and equivalence, always also implicates the spectre of difference?

Difference in translation has often been configured as a loss, as evidence of what the target language can't do. Such a negative characterization is epitomized by Frost's declaration that "poetry is what gets lost in translation" (qtd. in Honig 154). So what of the bilingual, or multilingual subject, who, in thinking, speaking, writing between or among languages, translates herself? Is she in

perpetual mourning, composed of proliferating losses, a subjectivity shot through with holes? In *Color of Her Speech*, Lola Lemire Tostevin presents an occasion of the bilingual subject finding herself at a loss:

> standing in line
> at the International Cinema
> a passerby asks
> 'what's playing'
>
> uncertain how to translate
> *Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)*
> which I find later is
> Every Man for Himself
> I just say 'something by Godard'
>
> stranger muttering
> "Jesus you don't even know
> the name of the film' (unpaginated)

The poet's indecision at the threshold of linguistic difference and her consequent refusal to name inspire the irritation of the passerby. Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood shares this experience of insult, remembering, "a guy once called you 'the most non-committal broad' he'd ever met" (83). I find it interesting that Lotbinière-Harwood addresses herself in the second person, "a guy once called *you*," underscoring her double voice, her existence as "so perfectly bi-" (83). *in the second person*, Smaro Kamboureli's autobiographical exploration of identity spoken through Greek and English, articulates similar moments of devaluation and dislocation. Kamboureli restores value, however, to a polylingual knowing: "But living on the edge of two languages, on the edge of two selves named and

constructed by language, liberates the self from a monologic existence" (11). The surety and momentary superiority of Tostevin's passerby is founded on his monologic perception, his mistaking the confusion of tongue-tied abundance for ignorance. This compromised exchange demonstrates the power of unknowing, a force Eve Sedgwick identifies in *Epistemology of the Closet*:

> If M. Mitterand knows English but Mr. Reagan lacks -- as he did lack -- French, it is the urbane M. Mitterand who must negotiate in an acquired tongue, the ignorant Mr. Reagan who may dilate in his native one. (4)

Sedgwick's articulation of an unknowing advantage cautions against the easy dismissal of the passerby's (or Reagan's) ignorance as 'their loss.'

Many writers have celebrated the gains of a multilingual identity. Cixous is grateful for this "Blessing: my writing stems from two languages, at least. In my tongue the 'foreign' languages are my sources, my agitations. 'Foreign': the music in me from elsewhere" ("Coming" 21). As a result she "always wanted to approach every language delicately, never as my own, in order to lick it, to breathe it in, to adore its differences, respect its gifts, its talents, its movements" (22). Cixous's sensual approach to language testifies to the irrepressible materiality of language seen and heard from the vantage

point of another tongue: an edge, if not an outside. In a polylingual matrix, the concordance between signifier and signified emerges as undeniably conventional, open to substitution and to question. Lotbinière-Harwood states, "Allowing myself to switch voices is a liberating political and poetic act that makes me feel less trapped in the structures of language" (92). In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes in a variety of languages, "from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all these," positioning herself at a generative "juncture of cultures, [where] languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized" (ii). Existing at an interlingual juncture affords, these writers argue, a degree of agency; some distance from each language allows for a clearer view of their respective constructive oppressions, and for moments of choosing between them. Both Lotbinière-Harwood and Anzaldúa write polylingual texts which refuse translation proper, a rewriting in another tongue with the ideal of equivalence presiding. Instead their compositional strategy is one of code-switching, translation as a moving between languages, a choosing which constitutes and intimates their subjectivities -- "I am a translation" writes Lotbinière-Harwood (89). These texts privilege an "I" that is "a translation," particularly as they appeal to the

multilingual reader, who is familiar with the heterogeneous field of these texts.

In the introduction to his book, *Disjunctive Poetics*, Peter Quartermain suggests that it was the multicultural milieu of turn-of-the-century America which fostered the burgeoning of a poetic alternative to canonical literature, a line he sees running from Gertrude Stein through to the Language writers. He points not only to the multilingual environment created by immigration, but, particularly, to the personal linguistic genealogies of certain disjunctive writers, noting that "Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff, and Louis Zukofsky either learned English as their second (or third) language or grew up bilingual" (10). We can see as a translation-effect, then, the expansion of referentiality characteristic of this 'group,' their approach to language as shapely, sonorant material, their investment in the multiplicity and ambiguity within English. Such an inspired linguistic disposition might characterize the repetitive practice Rand describes, that of translating within one language, where the author and translator are the same person, where the work at hand is "the very same work produced through the act of translation."

Texts produced through homolinguistic iteration offer examples of the subject-in-trans- similar to the polylingual model thematized and/or enacted in texts by Tostevin,

Kamboureli, Lotbinière-Harwood, Anzaldúa. Theories of subjectivity which might inform my discussion of the subject proposed by, for instance, Lyn Hejinian's two versions of *My Life*, or by Stein's repetition or "insistence" in "Lifting Belly," would have to be founded on a processual dynamic and be concerned with language, not with a subject fully constituted before language. Julia Kristeva's concept of the sujet-en-procès (subject in process / on trial) proves a useful source, particularly as I stretch it in an attempt to discern the unseen matter of across, the black box, the field of 'loss' between source and target in translation. Kristeva's notion of subjectivity is founded on the theoretical contributions of two salient figures in her psychoanalytic lineage, Freud and Lacan. Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious shaped contemporary configurations of the subject, challenging the Cartesian *cogito*, that now faltering notion of the subject as sovereign and self-knowing. Interestingly, in Freud's discussions of the passage between the conscious and the hidden constitutive material of the unconscious, he repeatedly engages the notion of translation; the analyst is seen to 'translate' the cryptic material of the analysand's speech, dream logic. Lacan's work develops and exceeds the linguistic potential of Freud's theories, most notably in his notion that "what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole

structure of language" (739). Bringing the work of de Saussure to bear on psychoanalysis, Lacan illustrates that discourse is not the province of a mastering subject; rather, discourse determines the formation of that very subject.

Carrying these concepts a step further on an axis of textualization, Kristeva theorizes the formation of both text and subject through an investigation of avant-garde poetics, introducing her idea of a sujet-en-procès in her 1974 work, *La révolution du langage poétique* (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, 1984). Working out of Lacan's notion of the symbolic -- law, order, authority, "the logical and syntactic functioning of language" (Kristeva 1976:68) -- Kristeva proposes a dialectic process between the symbolic and what she names the semiotic, a pre-linguistic disposition characterized by the flux of drives, rhythm, music, colour. Positing this dialectic as the engine of subjectivity, Kristeva introduces a model which is far more processual than one built on the momentous break of Freudian 'oedipalization,' for example, or Lacan's entry into the Symbolic. Kristeva recognizes the pre-symbolic dynamics of subject formation, pointing to "the movement of material contradictions that generate the semiotic function;" these "material contradictions" prefigure the negativity operant in the Lacanian emergence of the subject (through the mirror stage). It is important to recognize

that Kristeva's semiotic does not constitute a temporary phase in the genealogy of the subject; as she makes clear in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the semiotic disposition "moves through the symbolic, produces it, and continues to work on it from within" (117). Kristeva proposes a heterogeneous model of the subject that is consequently mutable, in a constant state of becoming. It is in poetic language, she argues here and elsewhere, that this continuing process of subjectivity is made apparent. At other points in her argument, Kristeva suggests that poetic language, in fact, exceeds a revelatory function, performing a catalytic role with respect to the processual subject. She views as a "silence" in psychoanalysis "the way the literary function subverts the symbolic function and puts the subject in process / on trial" (1984:149).

The relative visibility of the semiotic and symbolic dispositions varies according to the discursive mode employed. Scientific discourse, Kristeva notes, "tends to reduce as much as possible the semiotic component" (1980: 134). In poetic language, on the other hand, the semiotic assumes greater reign, "tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness" (1980: 134). Rather than occupy a position of "judging," the subject implied in a poetic text is placed *en procès*, on trial. Poetic language moves beyond logical semantic boundaries which harbour and

promise mastery and arbitration, manifesting the eruption of the semiotic in the form of rhythm, intonation, echolalia, glossalalia. In "The Novel as Polylogue," Kristeva sets up the normative sentence, composed of rule-bound syntax, as a grammatical unit which denies the semiotic aspect of its constitution. She characterizes such a sentence as "a shelter, a finitude in which there huddles an ideational unit, plainly narrow-minded, refusing its infinitization -- the metaphysical, transcendental ego, threatened by the negativity that produced it, denying that negativity and going on to a syntax seen as absolute" (1980: 175-78). (Her discussion of the sentence marks an instance of recuperation in translational exchange; while the legal connotation of Kristeva's *en procès* may be diminished, or even 'lost,' in the English translation 'in process' -- in *Revolution*, Waller translates the term as "in process / on trial," exposing translation as a ramified crossing -- the translation of the French "phrase" into the more suggestive English "sentence" recuperates the original loss elsewhere in Kristeva's theoretical topography, reasserting the role of legal metaphor in her theorization of text and subject.) Although she characterizes the sentence as a symbolic stronghold, Kristeva's reading of Philippe Sollers' *H* in "The Novel as Polylogue" demonstrates that poetic language, driven by the influx of the semiotic, operates in prose. She identifies in *H* "trans-sentence paths" (169) which

disturb the logical, syntactical organization of prose sentences, establishing a network of phonic associations in the order of a musical arrangement. To illustrate this material network, she reproduces a section of *H* within her essay, marking the rhythmic patterns and associative chains. In her diagram, for example, lines are drawn between "filtre," "philtre" in the next phrase, and "phi flottant" a few lines down. She also underlines the phrase "Cata, cata, catalyse" (176-77). These instances of phonic variation / repetition exemplify the semiotic energies motivating Sollers' text, what Kristeva calls its music. "By music," she explains, "I mean intonation and rhythm, which play only a subordinate role in everyday communication but here constitute the essential element of enunciation and lead us directly to the otherwise silent place of its subject" (167). The palpable rupture of music into normative language, then, displays and agitates the dialectical formation of subject and text.

"Filtre," "philtre," "phi flottant," a sequence Kristeva might term an alliterative chain, or an instance of rhythm, typifies the kind of compositional unit I characterize as a trans-. bp Nichol's "speech/ eech / to each" (*The Martyrology* Book 2), Brossard's "le rose, le roux et le gris" (11) and "le rose, le rouge et le bris" (*Le Désert mauve* 181), both Stein's and Hejinian's repetition of roses through space and altered context -- all these are

marked by the compositional mode of trans-, the production of text out of text ("eech" out of "speech"). Considering what kind of subject such a mode proposes (a question begged most urgently, perhaps, by the generic slant of Hejinian's two versions of *My Life*) led me to Kristeva's sujet-en-procès, a model suggestively engaged with the interworkings of poetic language and subjectivity. What notion of subject, then, do we get when we read Stein's "More Grammar for a Sentence," which begins, "Will you be well will you be well" (240)? Inflecting my analysis with Kristeva's formulation, I submit that with a rupture of rapture, the subject is put 'in trans-.'

That Kristeva's notion of the semiotic/symbolic dialectic is consonant with the work of Stein should not surprise; Kristeva is, after all, theorizing the mechanics of (avant-garde) poetic language. In an attempt to articulate the particular mode I discuss, however, I want to stretch her dialectic to accommodate the macropoetic level of intertextual trans-. I invoke Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic, her impressive mapping of the unmappable, in my search to find ways to configure the space between source and target texts. What lies between "le rose, le roux et le gris" and its homolinguistic translation, "le rose, le rouge et le bris"? Furthermore, to venture into the interlingual sense of translation hovering always around my discussion, what lies between these phrases and Marlene Wildeman's

English translations, "the pink, the rust and the grey" (11) and "the pink, the red and the grey" (167)? And again, what between these English phrases? The transfer between "roux" in one novel and "rouge" in its translation is not solely semantic; "rouge" deviates to some degree in both sense and phonic construction. The space between the novels, then, is the space of deviation, an invisible arena which we might begin to imagine in terms of the semiotic. The semiotic is a disposition which undermines the sense of symbolic language; it is the semantically erroneous realm of nonsense. There is an ephemeral quality to Kristeva's characterization of the semiotic as, for example, "flow," "energy transfers" (1984: 40), "rhythm" and "intonation" (1980: 167). But these relatively imprecise terms can throw into relief the semiotic drama staged in the intertextual gap between "roux" and "rouge," words which, considered independently, fit precisely into a symbolic lexicon. Between them, x mutates into ge, [u] into [uʒ], rust and red are bleeding toward each other. Whether homo- or heterolinguistic, the production of translation is contingent on a dynamic 'gap' marked by the contortion/extention of meaning, shifts in shape, the dopplering curve of sound.

Kristeva continually deploys the term "rupture" in her discussions of the manner in which the semiotic makes itself present in language. Normative prose is dependent on the

repression of the semiotic disposition which "threatens" (78) the symbolic. Interlingual translation, too, is founded on various repressions; that there even exists a gap marked by the movement of phonic and graphic material between source and target is denied. The target text, in other words, is habitually read as if it were the original, a practice which renders the translator invisible. Except for my parenthetical reference to Waller's translation of "en procès," for example, this is how I am reading and presenting Kristeva's work. What is eclipsed in this hermeneutic is the momentous "rupture" between source and target, one that is definitively present (as interval between texts or even space between original and translation on facing pages) if one cares to consider it. To return to the dynamics of the subject, then, how does the consideration of this rupture bear on the mechanics of subjectivity? Who is in the gap? Kristeva argues that "textual experience is one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself, one that delves into his constitutive process" (1984: 67). In the context of *Revolution*, the subject she speaks of here is likely the poet, the one who engages the semiotic. The translator is similarly "daring," working between original and translation in what I argue is a profoundly semiotic space. In "From One Identity to an Other," Kristeva includes the *reader's* subjectivity in her discussion of the risks inhering in

poetic language; she suggests that the reader must "shatter his own judging consciousness in order to grant passage through it to this rhythmic drive" (1980: 142). The reader of translations, then, if s/he is looking both ways between source and target, may be subject to this threat of 'shattering.' Using Kristeva's theory of the semiotic to configure translation's gap might allow for an accounting of what I view as an anxiety surrounding translation, an anxiety which is manifested either in enforced invisibilities or heightened critique. I am suggesting that there is a tendency in translation's readers to locate errors, pass sentence, determine losses, that a reader renders translation's gap a site of arbitration in an attempt to evade being compelled to "shatter his own judging consciousness."

the original author writes with the recognition of the losses she performs, the inadequacies to be made visible, to be recuperated, to be supplanted by poetry in translations of her work into any potential language.

your body is corrugated by its tendency to repeat.

a french man and an english woman meet in paris. this is no joke. they meet through a mutual friend, a spanish woman who can speak all three languages. the french man and english woman are both monolingual, taste the world through one tongue. of course they fall in love. from the moment of their introduction their relationship is contingent on the presence of the spanish woman. she is seen with them everywhere, acting as passion's simultaneous interpreter. some days she wants to vomit at the couple's saccharine contentment, and starts a quarrel through wilful mistranslation. accustomed to seeing the three together, with the spanish woman in the middle, some people say it is a ménage-à-trois. some say a threesome. the spanish woman's ears grow larger and fleshier every year, and after hair, then hats, fail to disguise, she decides to flaunt these prodigious organs, festooning them with bells and whistles. eventually the lovers come to understand each other and the affair ends. the spanish woman refuses to take sides, walks alone, ears jangling.

In his book, *The Trouble with Genius*, Bob Perelman identifies in Pound, Joyce, Stein and Zukofsky a "pitch of singularity" (8), that quality of eccentricity and condensation which inspires charges of inaccessibility. Such a pitch, he argues, has resulted in criticism characterized by "translation," a term he chooses here to

convey the distance commonly travelled between the works and a number of critical discourses and strategies. The works of these writers, then, are not being met 'on their own terms,' but rather translated, through "explication" (a spelling out), "appreciation" (a narration of "literary value"), and universalization (where the texts are argued to supply "an authentic essence of language") (9). While my focus in the suggestive field of the term 'translation' is on the motion of carrying, Perelman's emphasis is on the chasm between Stein's work, for example, and critical response, a chasm which Stein criticism is "doomed" to open up. While my project will prove guilty of all three of Perelman's 'translative' modes, I hope that my disjunctive, interruptive structure will be ironically, in Perelman's sense, anti-translative; I write with a translational motive similar to the one I identify in Stein, Brossard, Nichol and Hejinian, a compositional strategy marked by repetition, variation, error, or, in psychological terms, a 'principle of recurrence,' where what's important keeps coming back.

bells mete out recess and whistles blow at broken rules but, in translation, bells and whistles on the phallus may begin to assume a jangling life of their own, outweighing that flagging organ.

rhythm moves through every language but, in the interests of sense, often goes unheard. this is why, oddly, non-speakers can prove the best translators, preserving bells and whistles, what is 'poetic' in poetic language.

Dear Lorca,

When I translate one of your poems and I come across words I do not understand, I always guess at their meanings. I am inevitably right. A really perfect poem (no one yet has written one) could be perfectly translated by a person who did not know one word of the language it was written in. A really perfect poem has an infinitely small vocabulary. (Spicer 25)

language is bells and whistles.

in the gap between your front teeth, between slibido and libidos, whistling

THE INTERIOR OUTSIDE: RECONCILING BUTLER AND KRISTEVA

Judith Butler's theorizations of subject formation, which determine iteration as a crucial principle, bear particularly on my exploration of a subject-in-trans-, the

figure of textual repetition. Bringing Butler's theory of performativity to meet Kristeva's sujet-en-procès model, however, does not prove an easy alchemy. In "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," Butler launches into a critique of both *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language* in order to refute the subversive potential of Kristeva's "semiotic." I contend that Butler's critique wilfully misrepresents Kristeva's arguments in order to subject them to an interrogation already implicit in the texts themselves. To recast this dynamic in a more positive light, the antagonistic posture of Butler's essay ironically brings to the fore the ways in which the two theorists complement, if not overlap, each other.

Butler's choice of the tag 'body politics' in her title signals her alignment of Kristeva with a politics concerned with the visibility of an a priori feminine body[2] rather than with a notion of bodies which accounts for cultural and discursive construction. A theoretical incoherence might be anticipated by virtue of the differing discursive modes of their analyses; Kristeva's is more concerned with a developmental, Butler with a genealogical, elaboration of subject-formation. This split might more generally be

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[2]See Janet Wolff's "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics" for the elaboration of a body politics which, while valuing lived bodily experience, incorporates theories of social and discursive construction.

conceived as one between psychoanalytic and philosophical discourse. Psychoanalytic theory is vulnerable to critiques such as Butler's in part, I would argue, because of the theatricality of its rhetoric; witness Freud's focus on 'scenes,' his employment of dramatic archetypes (most notably Oedipus), his descriptions of familial dynamics cast in the manner of stage directions: "the little boy notices that his father stands in his way with his mother. . ." ("Identification" 105). This theatricality merges easily into scientific, 'objective' discourse detailing things-as-they-are, resulting in a rhetoric of empiricism capable, by virtue of the truth-value attendant on science, of compromising the welfare, status, health of its (pathologized) subjects. The ease with which one can read such discourse as prescriptive accounts for the repudiation of psychoanalytic tenets by some feminists. Those who offer revisionist interrogations of Freud value his work as historically descriptive of sexist social and familial relations and /or they factor in the speculative nature of psychoanalytic theory, unveiling its repressed theatricality. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, paraphrases Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit in order to underscore the speculative nature of Freud's theory, noting that "the only guarantee any theory can give about itself is to expose itself as a passionate fiction" (xiv). Her own "passionate fiction," *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and*

Perverse Desire, entails an emphatically "eccentric reading of Freud" (xiii). Faced with the theatricality of psychoanalytic discourse, feminist recuperative analyses are perhaps necessarily "eccentric," reading against the grain. Unfortunately for Kristeva, while de Lauretis reclaims Freud through an "eccentric" reading, she is relatively unforgiving in her interrogation of Kristevan theory. Kelly Oliver's book *Reading Kristeva*, on the other hand, capitalizes on the feminist potential of Kristeva by occasionally moving "against the grain" (17) of her psychoanalytic rhetoric.

Having said this, much of Kristeva need not be read "against the grain;" I would argue, further, that Butler reads her with an eccentricity designed to repudiate rather than recuperate. The following passage, critiquing Kristeva's notions of maternity, exemplifies Butler's tendency to follow up a reductive paraphrase of Kristeva with the problematization such a simplified version begs:

> Her [Kristeva's] naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability. In asking whether a prediscursive libidinal multiplicity is possible, we will also consider whether what we claim to discover in the prediscursive maternal body is itself a production of a given historical

> discourse, an effect of culture rather than its secret and primary cause. (165)

The two instances of "we" above perform a citational deviation marking the movement across the oppositional topology of Butler's argument. The first "we" stands for Butler while concomitantly inviting the reader to join in critique. The second "we," making "claim[s]," stands for Kristeva yet also implicates the reader. Given Butler's account of Kristeva, "we" the readers, poised by virtue of the plural pronoun at a theoretical intersection, are compelled to lean toward Butler.

Kelly Oliver defends Kristeva against Butler's characterization, stating, "Kristeva argues that maternity calls into question the boundary between culture and nature" (9). Indeed, in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," Kristeva refers to motherhood as "this nature/culture threshold" (242), an event which challenges the matrix of dominant cultural symbolizations, notably that of the unified subject, surrounding it. As her title suggests, Kristeva is keenly aware of motherhood as subject to conceptualization "according to" any number of people, institutions, governing bodies. The first page of "Motherhood" invokes the manner in which maternity is figured in Christian theology, as "a vessel of divinity," and in lay humanism's cult of the mother, as representing "tenderness, love, and seat of social conservation" (237).

I suggest that Kristeva's consideration of the maternal body hardly "preclude[s] an analysis of its cultural construction and variability," that Butler's "we"s might prove more coherent than she intends, performing an alliance between her and Kristeva in projects which take as crucial the "effect of culture."

Another of Butler's grievances is more difficult to refute; "Body Politics" takes Kristeva to task for her pathologization of female homosexual desire, stating that "Kristeva constructs lesbian sexuality as intrinsically unintelligible" (172-73). Kristeva does propose lesbianism, in *Desire and Language* as well as in *Tales of Love*, as a kind of psychosis eluding the social, symbolic contract. There are aspects of Kristeva's theorization which clearly betray heterosexist assumptions; de Lauretis italizices the quotation, taken from *Tales of Love*, claiming that lesbian sexuality is "*devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality*" (179). We must also ask, however, if Kristeva's presentation of lesbian sexuality as "unintelligible" can be useful as a means to a critique of the system determining that unintelligibility. This reading would necessarily entail a consideration of her analyses as descriptive rather than prescriptive. We must acknowledge Kristeva's persistent concern with the promise of what exceeds "social coherence, which is where legislators, grammarians, *and even psychoanalysts* have their seat; which is where every body is

made homologous to a male speaking body. . ." (my emphasis, 1980: 242). I suggest, in other words, and this may take some reading against the grain, that 'psychosis,' as it is determined by dominant, normative psychoanalytic discourse, is not such a bad thing in Kristevan theory. Kristeva, in fact, considers as sites of possibility the realms designated "madness, holiness or poetry" precisely because they disobey the regulatory demands of the symbolic (1976: 64). When Butler asks, "From what cultural perspective is lesbianism constructed as a site of fusion, self-loss, psychosis?" (171), her question resonates with an ethic already present in Kristeva's work.

Butler's greatest concern with Kristeva's "semiotic" lies in its interdependent relation with the symbolic, such that "a full-scale refusal of the symbolic is impossible, and a discourse of 'emancipation,' for Kristeva, is out of the question" (170). In indignant defense of Kristeva, Oliver asks "Is she [Butler] proposing that we can refuse language, even sociality itself?" (9). My response to this question, drawn from the conclusion of "Body Politics" as well as from Butler's 1993 work, *Bodies That Matter*, is no, an answer prompting me to investigate the two theorists' shared fields of concern, a complementarity repressed in Butler's critique. The final two sentences of her essay propose a corrective to Kristeva's theory of semiotic subversion:

> If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, not to its 'natural past' nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (178)

The assertion in the first sentence would seem entirely incoherent with a demand for a "full-scale refusal of the symbolic." It becomes clear that it is Kristeva's positing of anything at all, an otherwhere, beyond the symbolic that incites Butler's complaint. Referencing a "'natural past'" and "original pleasures," Butler betrays her fixation on the developmental aspect of Kristeva's theory, her claim that the semiotic is the dominant disposition available to the pre-oedipal child. In Butler's formulation, the emergence of the semiotic is always regressive, marking a return to an earlier state of being. Not only does this characterization deny Kristeva's important focus on the semiotic as a persistent disposition, attendant on every moment of poetic composition; it obscures, also, Butler's own rhetoric of return in *Bodies That Matter*, where it is "a troubling return" which promises "a radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon" (23). What returns in Butler? Further, where do her proposed mysterious "possibilities" come from?

What lies between one "unexpected permutation" and the next? Would 'the semiotic' be that inappropriate an answer?

Butler's contradictory complaints that Kristeva's "subversion of paternally sanctioned culture" comes "only from within the repressed *interior* of culture itself" (171, my emphasis) and that Kristeva posits the semiotic as "*external* to the cultural norms by which it is repressed" (177, my emphasis) evidence the ambivalencies plaguing Butler's own theorizations of cultural subversion. While "Body Politics" concludes with the perplexing notion of a self-spawning law producing its own erosion through "unexpected permutations," *Bodies That Matter* elaborates this complex notion of 'revolution' which takes as its site of possibility a place oscillating, through Butler's rhetorical unease, within and without the law. What "returns" in her model of the symbolic determination of 'bodies that matter' is "what has been foreclosed or banished from the proper domain of 'sex'" (23). While banishment might suggest exteriority, a phrase deployed repeatedly in this book, "the constitutive outside," indicates the indissoluble contingence of outside and inside. In Butler's schema, that which is intelligible is necessarily bounded, or constituted, by a domain of unintelligibility. I would argue that a "constitutive outside" might have much in common with a "repressed interior."

Both Butler's "outside" and Kristeva's "interior" pose a persistent threat to the realm of the proper (the inside, the symbolic), which denies them and, concomitantly, depends on them for its own delineation. Refuting the subversive potential of the semiotic threat to symbolic integrity, Butler claims that in Kristeva's model, "poetic language and the pleasures of maternity constitute local displacements of the paternal law, temporary subversions which finally submit to that against which they initially rebel" (172). *Revolution in Poetic Language* surely imagines something beyond "local displacements," positing poetic language as "the ultimate means of its [the social order's] transformation or subversion, the precondition for its survival and revolution" (81). Poetic language here, while never overthrowing the symbolic, acts at every turn as a means to its mutation. The resulting instability of the limen, that place where the two dispositions converge, is analagous to the "horizon" of Butler's outside, "one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome." Neither theorist suggests or desires that the law be jettisoned; Kristeva views the semiotic and symbolic as a dynamic interdependence, and Butler insists on the preservation of an outside "where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive

site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability. . . " (53).

Butler's imagining of a site of "linguistic impropriety," a place "where discourse meets its limits" points to a theoretical trajectory which is at the same time profoundly linguistic and concerned always with the thresholds of language. In this respect, Butler joins Kristeva in an engagement with the problematic of the relationship between signification and materiality. Both, in fact, arrive at a notion of the indissolubility of the two, Kristeva through suggesting a developmental continuity between pre-oedipal negativity and oedipal grammar and Butler through determining the logical impossibility of referring to material beyond language without in some way figuring or producing that material through that very linguistic referral. A compositional mode of trans- similarly agitates a material/linguistic, or referent/sign dyad, as it expands the mimetic function of language to incorporate a word's reference to its (earlier) self. Stein's "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," through the citation of both copula and rose, at once engages a material rose in the world, suggests its variegated figurations through language, and makes sensible the phonic and structural material of the word 'rose.' Butler's salient concept of the performativity of cultural norms is founded on the grammatical class of utterances termed 'performative'

and their problematization by Derrida; Derrida reveals, in "Signature Event Context," that a performative utterance such as 'I now pronounce you man and wife' assumes its productive power through accrual, that it would have no effect if it "were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a 'citation'" (qtd. in Butler 13). Butler mobilizes this concept in her theorization of the ways that sex, gender, race, sexuality (terms both subject to hegemonic normativization and functioning as rallying points of identity politics) come to mean performatively. Her model of subjectivity as propelled by citation is as fluid and dynamic as Kristeva's sujet-en-procès; both these configurations of an unfixed, processual subject will be in vibrant attendance as I consider who figures and who is figured through a poetics of trans-.

With citation as the engine of construction comes the possibility of construction impelled by imperfect iterations, the possibility for the improper, the semiotic, the "constitutive outside" to insinuate itself into the realm of the viable, visible, and proper. Butler repeatedly configures this reiterative potential in terms of loss or error, noting the "gaps and fissures" (10) which open up between iterations and viewing as subversive "repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which *fail* to repeat loyally" (124 my emphasis). Since the delineation of the proper is

enacted by the improper, a promising "risk of catachresis" (213), the misuse of a word, is ever present. Butler is, on the whole, cagey about the notion of agency; there is, after all, a logical incompatibility between 'error' and agency. Highlighting an agent, furthermore, might distract her readers from her genealogical critique, where the macro movements of power and social norms are the focus. I believe her primary reason for making subjectless statements like "agency is the hiatus of iterability" (220) is that positing an uncompromised agent would undermine her contention that anyone intending to subvert norms is herself "enabled, if not produced, by such norms" (15). The erring agent, however, does make some appearances in *Bodies That Matter*; Irigaray's citation (what Butler names "insubordination" (45) of Plato, for instance, performs the kind of transgressive function Kristeva attributes to poetic language. A consideration of Butler adds more questions to the heap propelling my project: How might the failure attendant on citationality bear on the notorious idea of 'loss' in translation, particularly in the self-translations of Nicole Brossard, a poet working the horizons of discourse, representation, genre, subjectivity? How might a trans- poetics, a poetics of rapture, be considered performative? Can erroneous repetition, the inauguration of a semiotic rhythm, the romancing of words carry us across to insubordinate meanings?

repetition is a fear, a show of fish, a mode of
maintaining your body could be more strenuous or
hang on for dear falling to signature's slow
deviation a personality scrawl at the edged fear
of fish copy cat! you and your rote and your
chance to do it again heart mewed over and
over for the maintenance of love not fin how can a
spill a lost loonie forgetting your caps find your
footing do it over

with *madness, holiness or poetry* on the agenda who will call in sick.

noting the 'fish and guppies' which open up between iterations

why not do some things again be a virgin have beginner's luck make a big mistake.

if you are constituted through language how does your little dog know you again and again.

if you think gertrude stein was too big for her boots think again.

about the size of the boots and memory.

DESIRE AND DELIRIUM IN *LE DÉSERT MAUVE / MAUVE DESERT*

> <<le ravissement>> dit L. pour saisir le sens
> d'une expérience mentale où fragments et délire
> de l'éclat traduisent une pratique de l'émeute
> en soi comme une théorie de la réalité
>
> . . .
>
> JE N'ARRÊTE PAS DE LIRE (11)
>
> -- Nicole Brossard, *Amantes*

> "the rapture" said L. to grasp the sense
> of a mental experience where fragments and delirium
> from the explosion translate and experiment on riot
> within the self as a theory of reality
>
> . . .
>
> I DON'T STOP READING/DELIRING (16)
>
> -- Barbara Godard, *Lovhers*

Coming home on the C-train, I read Nicole Brossard's *Amantes*. No, actually I am reading Barbara Godard's translation, *Lovhers*. Actually I am reading them both, one book planted on the fingers of my left hand, the other planted on the fingers of my right. Reading means looking back and forth. That phrase tumbling in French, how does Godard spin it in English? What shifts between this and that French word, this English, that French? And more

often, what does that word mean? Sometimes a French-English dictionary triangulates my field of reading, so that interpretation is a juggle: three texts spinning, aerial. Fingers slipping in and out of contiguous pages, head moving back and forth as if in a slow shake of amazement, eyes tracing transformations in shape, sound, sense. French lessons, English lessons. The train stops before I can extricate my hands from *Amantes* and *Lovhers*, and I rise abruptly, fingers in spastic collusion with books, making delirious signals. The yellow sign at the C-train tracks, through my tired vision, reads 'Look Both Ways for Trans.'

The vertiginous act of reading back and forth has skewed my look, absenting the 'i' from Trains. But perhaps my error springs not from fatigue but from a wish -- Octavio Paz tells us, "as always when we talk about accidents, we also talk about desire" (Honig 153) -- for what I am faced with is a bold-face imperative, black on yellow, to embrace the unusual hermeneutic I practiced on the train. Reading a translation does not necessarily entail looking back and forth; many translations are read as if original, as if the original had been borne whole through a field of linguistic equations. But to read trans-, to read the action, the across, you need to look both ways. You may swing your jaw slowly from left to right and back or, as in the apprehension of a pun, there might be a frenzied shake between meanings. Perhaps it is even possible to look both

ways at once, left eyeball going one way, right another. This may be the poet's cross-eyed gift.[3]

Barbara Godard's translation of *Amantes* emerges out of a complex back-and-forth traffic of sounds, signs, nodes of associative potential. Brossard's writing, with its neologisms, polyvalencies, puns, and indeterminacies, demands an attentive, creative translator. In her translator's preface, Godard comments on how her interaction with such an experimental poetic results in the assymetrical distribution of linguistic play across texts. While some associative clusters arise only out of the English incarnation -- Godard cites as an example her spinning out of 'sinks' and 'ink' in "Igneous Woman" -- a pun central to *Amantes*, "délire," appears in English as ramified paraphrase (11). 'Délire' appears in Brossard's text both as a single word and in the recurrent, punning statement, "JE N'ARRÊTE PAS DE LIRE" (11). The pun, a notoriously untranslatable figure, is spelled out in *Lovhers* as "I DON'T STOP READING / DELIRING" (16). In the French, délire (or de lire) signifies variously as 'reading,' 'delirium' and, as Godard

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[3]Peter Quartermain deems it significant that Robert Duncan, a poet who often published several incarnations of a single poem, was cross-eyed:

> How, if you're cross-eyed, can reading not be revision? And how can revision ever stop?
> ("Duncan's Texts" 109)

points out, "dé-lire, to unread or unfix reading" (11). Working in English, unable to accommodate this particular semantic cluster within one word, Godard concretizes the bipolar constitution of the pun by placing 'reading' and 'deliring' on either side of a virgule. This slashed construction (compelling the reader to look both ways) marks the operation of translation, not only in its bifurcation of the pun, but also in its exhibition of what appears to be an anglicized French word resulting in an English neologism. Indeed, 'deliring' is nowhere to be found in dictionaries of contemporary English usage, and thus functions as an instance of foreignicity, a nod both to the linguistic specificity of the first version and to the translator's labour. An etymological dig, however, reveals that the verb 'delire' was once in English circulation, losing ground only at the end of the seventeenth century. Delire meant 'to go astray, go wrong, err,' and was derived, like the French, from the Latin *delirare* which originally meant 'to go out of the furrow, to deviate from the straight.' When Brossard deploys délire in its unbroken form, Godard translates it literally as 'delirium,' a word which is also derived, like the French and English delire, from *delirare* and signifies a 'frenzied rapture' (OED 679).

Brossard invokes délire /de lire in order to convey the momentous stimulation, excitation, and creative response a woman experiences when reading the text of another woman.

The first section of *Amantes*, "(4): AMANTES / ÉCRIRE," includes multiple citations from other women writers; the words of Mary Daly, Monique Wittig, Sande Zeig, Michèle Causse, Adrienne Rich, Louky Bersianik, Djuna Barnes, and others designated by initials, are honoured by the refrain, "JE N'ARRÊTE PAS DE LIRE." The following section, "juin le fièvre," makes explicit the productive response provoked by a lover's text; it is a letter of straying response, a writing, which never abandons the imperative of reading; "si j'écris aujourd'hui, c'est afin de te lire mieux comme une provocation. . ." (18), insists the speaker, "if i am writing today it is so i can read you better provocatively" (24). The process celebrated here is not a progression from reading to writing but an energizing circuit of mutual ignition. In her preface to *Lovhers*, Godard proposes a translation strategy which resonates with Brossard's poetic. Moving away from a model of translation which aligns translation acts with vanishing acts, her strategy "would insist on translation as an act of reading, as an interpretation, one among many possible. Translation here is a practice of reading/writing. . . " (7).

Emergent in the poetic models of both Brossard and Godard is a network of agents -- translator, reader, writer -- all engaged in the production of text. For all, these roles are shared attentions, so that Godard's translating Brossard's book, the poet responding to her lover's letter,

my reading the books and writing this, all these acts entail at some level reading, writing, translation. All entail looking both ways, refusing the single function, exploding the single meaning, stepping out of the straight furrow, deliring. Exploring the generative interconnectedness of these functions has been a lasting passion of Brossard's. In an interview with Janice Williamson, she says:

> Personally, I have always been fascinated by translation, as I am usually writing about acts of passage, whether it is passage from fiction to reality, from reality to fiction, or from one language to another. I wrote *Mauve Desert* because it blows my mind to think that someone can consider a reality in their language while I can't in mine and vice-versa. . . . I like to work with translators because it keeps me alert in my own language. (70-71)

Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert, in fact, represents Brossard's most explicit demonstration of the metonymic, rather than metaphoric, relations among translation, reading, and writing. The deliring figure in this novel is Maude Laures, who comes across Laure Angstelle's novel, Le Désert mauve [4] (comprising the first part of Brossard's book)

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[4]For the sake of clarity, the titles of Brossard's and de Lotbinière-Harwood's books will remain italicized while the

in a second-hand book store; reading it, she is seduced into rewriting it, translating it into Mauve L'Horizon (comprising the last section of Brossard's book). Laures' "act of passage" can be suggestively articulated through the invocation of a mode of interpretation Julia Kristeva names 'delirium' ('délire' in the original French). After contextualizing Kristeva's delirium within the European tradition of thought around *délire* I will introduce her provocative notion into my discussion of the several acts of passage at work in the production of *Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert*. Several bodies, some more textualized than others, participate: Maude Laures translates Laure Angstelle homolinguistically, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood translates Brossard across languages, and I read *Le Désert mauve* and *Mauve Desert* together, in effect reading four novels simultaneously. I opened this section with an account of my encumbered hands, with Brossard's play on de lire / délire, and now proceed to Kristeva's notion of delirium with a wish to highlight, rather than isolate, the function of reading as it joins translation and writing to comprise the cluster of energies propelling *Mauve Desert* and, more generally, the trans- poetic.

Délire, or delirium -- Jean-Jacques Lecercle favours retaining the French in his discussion of this complex term

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novels *within* those novels will be underlined in the remainder of this text.

-- is a prevalent concept in European (particularly French) philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis. Lecercle's *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass* traces the various traditions and incarnations of délire / delirium, arriving at some definitions which are as consistent as such a critical text, which adopts a method informed by its own delirious object, can allow. Focussing on certain disjunctive writers (Roussel, Brisset, Wolfson), case-studies of schizophrenia (notably that of Daniel Paul Schreber) and unconventional critics (Gilles Deleuze), Lecercle characterizes délire / delirium as "a form of discourse . . . where the material side of language, its origin in the human body and *desire*, are no longer eclipsed by its abstract aspect (as an instrument of communication or expression)" (6). Délire / delirium is consistently referred to in Lecercle as "the other side of language" (65), a phrase which suggests this discursive mode's deviations from protocols of syntax, grammar, phonotactics, logic. Attending the uncertain distinction in Lecercle between the poet and the schizophrenic patient is a contradiction through which the issue of agency, or mastery, percolates. On the one hand Lecercle submits that "*délire* is a perversion which consists in interfering, or rather taking risks, with language" (16); he can also assert, however, that "in the case of *délire*, language is master" (9). Perhaps such an uncertainty surrounding the question

of how the subject is disposed to language springs from Lecercle's notion (borrowed from Deleuze) that "*délire* is the linguistic manifestation of desire" (165). Desire can always be imagined, produced, theorized in complex, oblique and contradictory relation with the subject; we speak of desire as an unconscious drive, a conscious motivation and, indeed, a consciousness.[5] Consonant with Lecercle's ambivalence, Kristeva's delirious subject hovers over a distinction between being overwhelmed by the discursive mode of délire /delirium and employing it as a vehicle of transgression. Her important departure within a psychoanalytic tradition, however, lies in her refusal to reserve delirium for certain types of subjects, a refusal to fantasize, in other words, delirium as proper only to schizophrenic patients.

In "Psychoanalysis and the Polis" (1981), Kristeva focusses on interpretation, compensating somewhat for the underplayed role of the reader in *Revolution in Poetic Language* as she differentiates between ways of reading and their implications for both subject and societal formations. Kristeva begins her article with a critique of what she calls "political interpretation" (304). The word

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[5]Lesbian performance artist Holly Hughes recalls discovering her desire as an experience "that the expression 'coming out' doesn't quite cover. In my case, it was more a question of . . . coming to" (191).

"political" here is apparently deployed, as Toril Moi suggests, in "its original Greek sense of 'popular' (*politikos*) discourse, or discourse for and of the citizens (*polites*) of the city-state (*polis*)" (301). Indeed, the hermeneutic designated as "political" in Kristeva's article is that which institutes the irrefutability of singular, delimited meanings; she points to Fascism and Stalinism as totalitarian outcomes of political interpretation. Such an interpretive mode arises, she argues, from "the simple desire to give a meaning, to explain, to provide the answer," and this desire in turn springs from the "subject's need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object" (304). She views the project of psychoanalysis as offering an antidote to such an interpretive mode, as it is founded on the notion of a cloven subject, in whom the presence of an unconscious precludes the possibility of conscious mastery and thus of singular meaning. Also underlining the energy of desire, psychoanalysis becomes both inspiration and privileged example of the interpretive mode Kristeva advocates, a mode characterized by delirium. Her focus on the delirious interpreter (or analyst) can be read as a fruitful response to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's critique, in *Anti-Oedipus*, of a psychoanalytic tradition of imposing reductive, pre-ordained interpretations on the rich, transgressive and fantastical discourse of the delirious

patient. Addressing the problem of subjective insecurity, of the threat semantic incoherence poses to the coherence of the subject, Kristeva emphasizes the "lucidity and ethics" (304) promised in the complex and unpredictable results of the new interpreter's delirium.

Kristeva argues that the interpreter should submit to the undeniable and exciting fact that "the knowing subject is also a *desiring* subject, and the paths of desire ensnarl the paths of knowledge" (307). The desire propelling Maude Laures' reading of Le Désert mauve is made explicit. When that book falls into her hands it "arous[es] the throbbing desire that never quit her" and for two years she "stretche[s] herself through the pages" (51). While Le Désert mauve has "seduced her" (62), it is her own desire which extends the production of that book. The erotics thematized here points to a dynamic of intersubjectivity where the reader makes as many passes as there are passages. 'Ensnarled' with desire, the reader's knowledge is subject to desire's unconscious realms, its changeability, vagaries, idiosyncracies. Knowledge, giving way to delirium, proves neither a passive replica of its object nor the inevitable result of a predetermined interpretive schema which evacuates its object of possibility. What the delirious reader produces instead, Kristeva suggests, is "a fiction, an uncentred discourse, a subjective polytopia" (306). Certainly this is the outcome of Maude Laure's desiring,

deliring interpretation; stretching herself through the pages, sleeping on it often, she finds that it "is not always possible to dream without having to follow through on the images" (55), and she writes her own delirious "fiction," Mauve, L'Horizon.

A useful analogue to Kristevan delirium can be found in *The Pleasure of the Text*, written by Roland Barthes, one of Kristeva's contemporaries in the Tel Qel group[6]. Barthes proposes an "erotics of reading" (Howard v) for which the ideal text to read is clearly a "modern" one (12), one which "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (14)[7]. While privileging such defamiliarizing, polylingual "texts of bliss" (21), Barthes maintains his emphasis on the reader's role, suggesting that even when encountering a traditional narrative, we can transform or de-rail the intended experience by leafing through, jumping

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[6]The *Tel Quel* group, particularly vibrant in the late sixties and seventies, acted as a nucleus for many young structuralists and post-structuralists in France. Among those associated with this group which took the materiality of language as its creative and theoretical focus, were Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Philippe Sollers.

[7]Godard honours his deliring theory in her preface to *Lovhers* when she declares, "Reader, the pleasure of the text is now yours" (12).

around. "Our very avidity for knowledge," he claims, "impels us to skim or to skip certain passages" (11). This "avidity" speaks to the desirous knowledge of delirium, and to the skipping and flipping I do as my fingers work among the four novels which make up *Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert*. Yet I don't flip to get past the expositions, explanations and descriptions of linear narrative prose; *Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert*, foregrounding the problematic of translation, invites flipping back and forth, looking both ways. In her novel, Brossard has presented us with a striking testament to the erotics of reading; Barthes claims that a text of bliss can only be "reached through another text of bliss" (22), and Laures' Mauve l'horizon is that answering "text of bliss." Similarly, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's translations, Mauve Desert and Mauve, the Horizon are themselves further texts of bliss.

Barthes locates textual pleasure in a bustling *entre*:

> Between two onslaughts of words, between two imposing systematic presences, the pleasure of the text is always possible, not as respite, but as the incongruous -- dissociated -- passage from another language . . . (30)

While the disjunctive "modern" text, favouring juxtaposition and interruption over normative syntax, occasions pleasurable readings of between, I note that translation, the "passage from another language," functions here as

privileged template. Translation is the spectral figure haunting Barthes' book from the onset, where he insists that "the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working side by side:* the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel" (4). Indeed the between of translation is exemplary, when visible; (its magnitude can also extend into virtual invisibility, rendering either original or translation a speck in that distance). In *Mauve Desert,* both original and translation appear, constituting and concretizing a between which, dense with the meditations of Maude Laures, occupies more space than both novels put together.

The force of a between is celebrated in Elizabeth Meese's *(Sem)erotics,* a study which inflects Barthes' interleaving of desire, text and reading with the particularity of a lesbian poetics. *(Sem)erotics* posits "the lesbian love letter" (26) as genre and as amorous paradigm through which to consider many of the lesbian experimental works of this century and the relationships, also, among author, text, reader. In choosing the love letter[8] as paradigm, Meese initiates an elaboration of the

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[8]The love letter is especially pertinent to the composition of *Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert;* Laure Angstelle wrote her novel during a time when she was reading and re-reading a lesbian love-letter she found in a geology book (83). In a sense, Le Désert mauve reads that letter, writes back.

interstitial, the "energetics" (123) between sender and receiver, text and reader, and letters both epistolary and alphabetical. The back-and-forth traffic of love letters ensures a certain repetition she deems imperative to the survival of lesbian culture:

> Saying it, over and over, in our own ways helps make it so: L, L, L, L. Dear L, we need to play it again and again and again, patiently recording the variations in our tunes. (128)

The interstices between "the variations in our tunes" and between the variations on Le Désert mauve dilate and contract, enabling Barthesian blissful readings of repetition's stray.

Re-belle et Infidèle / The Body Bilingual is the title of Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's account of her own bilingualism, her particular history as a translator, and her theorizations on translation as feminist practice. The French half of her title, *Re-belle et Infidèle*, reworks the traditional tag 'belles infidèles' (unfaithful beauties), an expression indexing the imperial practice of skewing the sense of foreign language texts to confirm target culture ideologies. Because Lotbinière-Harwood brings to her translations a particularly language-centred feminist ethic, an ethic which assumes that her medium is compromised by the sedimentation of misogynist bias, skewing text can prove an act of renewal and survival. She comments on her title, "My

addition of the prefix re- changes the beauties into rebels and implies repetition with change" (99). This "change" could be seen to result from the desire innervating delirium, a state in which, Kristeva says, "the speaking subject is presumed to have known an object, a relationship, an experience that he is henceforth incapable of reconstituting accurately" (307). The sense of delire as 'err' and the idea of accuracy as casualty of desire raise questions about the role of voluntarism, or conscious rebellion, questions which Brossard engages in *Mauve Desert*. Close to the beginning of Un Livre à traduire, the elaborate 'between' of Brossard's book, appears the phrase, "Elle plonge, est-ce erreur ou stratégie" (57) ("She dives in, is this mistake or strategy. . ." (53)). Further down the page we find a word which might have occasioned that question, "l'auteure." In French 'auteur,' author, is gendered male; Brossard's erroneous addition of an 'e muet,' or silent e, which marks the feminine in French grammar, makes visible the exclusionary function of grammatical structures and mobilizes the e muet with a view to feminist resignification. The author is embodied differently, transgendered, through a mistake in spelling which has been foreshadowed as strategic. The inaccurate reconstitution of 'auteur,' one that has been widely deployed by Quebec feminists, is indeed a grammatical error, yet an intentional one, one that attempts to make sense of "the non-sense

patriarchal reality constitutes for us" (Brossard, *Aerial Letter* 112).

When Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood embarked on the English translation of *Le Désert mauve*, she was faced with the dilemma of how to feminize 'author' in a target language framed by different grammatical schemata. Feminist translators are aware that because of the 'technical difficulties' between the two languages, English translations can neutralize feminist subversions which exploit the gender-marking of French. The force of error in its more delirious guise is evidenced in de Lotbinière-Harwood's anecdote about her translation of "auteure:"

> How it came about: my colleague Marie-Cécile Brasseur and I were drafting a work-related letter on computer. She was inputting as I dictated. Instead of typing 'author' she slipped and wrote 'auther.' "Eureka," I gasped, "that's it!" (131)

This instance of rebellion (which 'repeats with change' both "auteure" and 'author') illustrates the potential of the cleavage in the subject discovered by psychoanalysis. Brasseur's "slip" is apparently unconscious yet consonant with the desires of a feminist poetic to the extent that Brasseur's collaborator, de Lotbinière-Harwood, regards it as a gift and a textual solution, reading into it and holding on to it strategically. Delirium, that state where "the imaginary may join interpretive closure" (Kristeva

307), produces such gifts -- e slips over o to create auther and i slips from trains to make trans. More important than the quest to distinguish between the strategic and the erratic (and their respective value) is perhaps the ability to welcome moments when, in the rapturous state of delirium, the two are productively interlined.

The complex "auteure" / "auther" is the result of collaboration, not only between Brasseur and de Lotbinière-Harwood, but between de Lotbinière-Harwood and Brossard. The reader / translator's desire to find a feminized 'author' is excited by Brossard's subversion, but that subversion is also extended through translation. Pertinent here is a description of the generative bivalence Kristeva observes in delirium:

> . . . the object may reveal to the interpreter the unknown of his theory and permit the constitution of a new theory. Discourse in this case is renewed; it can begin again: it forms a new object and a new interpretation in this reciprocal transference. (306)

"Reciprocal transference" could serve to characterize the acts of passage carried out among the various readers / writers / translators I've been discussing. Replacing a notion of the unidirectional flow of knowledge (from intending author, from source language, from original), delirium's "reciprocal transference" acknowledges the

traffic between readers, languages, versions, words. In Le Désert mauve, Laure Angstelle writes, "Lorna dit qu'elle aimait le moly et la mousse de saumon" (12). Noting the turbine of alliteration here, Maude Laures translates, "Lorna s'émerveilla à propos de la mousse au sommet des montagnes, douce sur les mollets" (182), moving *m*'s off of the kitchen range and onto a mountain range. This is truly 'literal,' letteral translation[9]. "Mousse" has survived the transfer physically intact, yet semantically skewed, or expanded; the second "mousse" whips moss into its antecedent, salmon mousse, conferring on it the pleasure of a homonym. A further instance of reciprocal transference is inaugurated by de Lotbinière-Harwood, when she reads Maude Laures' translation as, "Lorna marveled over the moss on the mountaintops, soft against the shins" (168). Although "douce sur les mollets" means 'soft against the calves,' de Lotbinière-Harwood delires it as "soft against the shins;" in doing so she welcomes the alliteration of the original's *m*'s and *s*'s while moving meaning beyond. Given a

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[9]My use of 'literal' here favours the Oxford dictionary definition, 'expressed by letters of the alphabet;' Louis and Celia Zukofsky's translation of Catullus is founded on this definition, as their preface indicates:

> This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin -- tries, as is said, to breathe the "literal" meaning with him.
>
> (unpag.)

leg up, she twists it around for the sound of it, for a new sense. Here is a moment which demonstrates Lecercle's notion of délire / delirium as exposing "the material side of language, its origin in the human body."

A dynamic of reciprocal transference supposes the active presence of the interpreter. In the world of *Mauve Desert*, where translation is the dominant figure of interpretation, this means making visible an agent traditionally obscured, the translator. The construction of *Mauve Desert* honours the vision de Lotbinière-Harwood articulates in *Re-belle et Infidèle*, that of a "co-authership" (155) between writer and translator. Confronted with Angstelle's compelling book, Laures imagines herself to be a "minimal presence. . . . A marker perhaps between this book and its becoming in another language. This remained precisely to be seen" (51). The deictic, "this," in the last sentence might refer to the eventual translation, that text which remains to be seen. The "perhaps" of the preceding sentence points, however, to another possible antecedent; "this" can refer to "minimal presence" and "A marker," indexing the conventional invisibility of translators and denying it as *a priori*. It is "precisely" the translator and her labour which, historically, remain "to be seen." In this particular context, what remains "precisely to be seen" is whether the translator will indeed only act as "marker." The rest of

the book demonstrates that she moves far beyond that; A Book to Translate, the 116-page narrative and record of Laures' creative process, stages a remarkable translative labour.

Delirious readings, Kristeva suggests, exhibit "a transforming power" (307). Clearly, the syntax, drift and noise shift among versions, but what or who has been radically transformed in *Mauve Desert*? Here I recall the cloven scaffolding of "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," and attempt to unsettle Kristeva's opposition of political interpretation and delirium. Transforming her sense of the "political" into the sense deployed in contemporary feminist and poetic communities, I want to pull it into delirium's realm; delirium, as it is played out through *Mauve Desert*, is crucial to a "political" which, in direct contradiction to Kristeva's use, can inspire Brossard to state, "I don't believe that one becomes a writer to reinforce common values or common perspectives on reality" ("Poetic Politics" 73). Brossard's delired 'auteure' or de Lotbinière-Harwood's answering neologism 'auther,' for example, are motivated by the assumption of an interdependence between linguistic and social structures, and thus gesture toward political transformation. Brossard's ethic of creating a more hospitable, even compelling, language for women is not always marked by neologism. More often, in fact, Brossard chooses to repeat certain words over and over, threading them through various contexts in an effort to resignify.

Any reader familiar with her work will already carry a charge to the words horizon, vertigo, reality.

In Un Livre à Traduire / A Book to Translate, Maude Laures interprets and imagines aspects of the source text, elaborating on settings and characters and composing conversations. She also elaborates on what she calls "Dimensions," and their names prove to be the words which are repeated in this book to the point of shimmering: desert, dawn, light, reality, beauty, fear, civilization. The first appearance of "civilization," for example, is modified by a reference to atom bomb testing, "the civilization of men who came to the desert to watch their equations explode like a humanity" (13). Brossard already begins, then, from the point of negative resignification Adrienne Rich initiated in her article "Disloyal to Civilization" (1978) which interrogates the misogyny and racism implicated in what passes for 'civilized.' Later appearances of the word are inflected, alternatively, as positive or negative, with the leap between often overlapping the translative gap. Laure Angstelle has Melanie describe herself as "civilization in reverse" (19), while Maude Laures translates that self-portrait, "I was speed, civilization, in the distance, city, lost gaze, ruin in reverse" (175). The substitution of "ruin" for "civilization" in the final phrase invites the pessimistic consideration of the mutuality of these terms, while in its

new syntactical position, the second "civilization" assumes a hopeful cast. In another case, a utopic deployment of the word is delired into a use of "civilization" which, again, resonates with Rich's argument:

> Some day I would know the silence and the secret that lives on inside beings so that other civilizations may be born. (36)
>
> . . .
>
> Some day I would experience everything in synchrony, ecstasy, the secrets which from within undermine dear civilization. (192)

There is no simple progression, in *Mauve Desert*, from a negative to a positive inflection of "civilization." Rather, its persistent "repetition with change" compels the reader to perform the defamiliarizing act of looking both ways, and arouses in her, all at once, suspicion, critique, hope.

The "transforming power" of Kristeva's delirious mode of interpretation, then, should not be conceived as one that shapes words into static conclusions. The transformation of language, or "resignification" (to use a Butlerian term), is a process rather than a task, as can be observed in the drama of the word "horizon" in *Mauve Desert*. "Horizon" emerges as a highly-invested term in Brossard's book, as is signalled by the translation of Laure Angstelle's title, Le Désert mauve / Mauve Desert, into Maude Laures' title,

Mauve, l'horizon / Mauve, The Horizon. On a mundane level, the horizon is that evershifting contour of land toward which Mélanie races in her Meteor. Suggestively in flux, shifting with vantage point and atmosphere, a limit to the seen which promises a beyond, the figure of the horizon takes on the rhetorical significance here of a permeable line between reality and fiction, between the sayable and the unsaid, between the imagined and the unimaginable, between the normative and the perverse. Along this line Brossard martials words which resonate with a potential world where a lesbian reality is no longer considered fictional, where patriarchal fictions disperse, where knowledges are 'ensnarled' with a woman-centred desire. The horizon itself, in other words, functions as a figure for the dynamic of resignification operant on language in the novel, including that very word, 'horizon.' Resignification entails the unfaithful citation of 'horizon,' its deployment in varying contexts. Laure Angstelle writes of the "vanishing horizon" (18) while Laures translates that as "the repeated horizon" (174). At times "the horizon is a mirage" (28), while at other times it is something of which you can be "certain" (23). It can be set in threatening language, as in "*crazy cracks horizons horrible zones of laughter*" (28), and also be characterized as "magical" (23), "beautiful" (184) and "immediate" (179). "The horizon is curving," (24) notes Mélanie on her way back to the

Motel; and, indeed, the word "horizon" *is* "curving." Mauve, l'horizon is not a translation into anything so final as a 'target' language, rather it joins Mauve Desert to produce a 'horizon' language, where familiar terms warp and curve.

While Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* proceeds on assumptions that the improper constitutes the proper and the abject constitutes the normative, her 'political' contribution to these deconstructive commonplaces lies in her interrogation of limits, of the surety of distinctions between what counts and what is relegated to an outside. She argues that "the task is to refigure this necessary 'outside' as a future *horizon*, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome" (53, my emphasis). According to Butler, this process of overcoming exclusion, silence and oppression is driven by the engine of citation or, rather, the instability of that engine, which allows for an emancipatory ripple in the horizon. Maude Laures' unstable citation, or "repetition with change" of Angstelle's Mauve Desert, agitates signification in the places, things, characters, scenes and dimensions of Mélanie's desert, Mélanie who has "eyes that seek to get ahead of the horizon" (120). Laures' motivation for reading / translating Mauve Desert is clear; she undertakes it for the "approach and possibility of some transformations" (54). She is like the woman in *Amantes / Lovhers*, who experiences "all her senses . . . working for

her to give her pleasure and to make her think up a version of existence which takes a displacement of the horizon for granted" (80).

The "transforming power" Kristeva attributes to delirious reading is affirmed by Brossard's belief that "it is in the reading that a text has a political aura" ("Poetic Politics" 78). In Barbara Godard's reading of Amantes, in Lotbinière-Harwood's reading of Le Désert mauve, in Maude Laures' reading of Laure Angstelle's novel, the transformative effects of the "two-way passage" (*Mauve Desert* 57) are vital, radical. It is Brossard's radical reading of Brossard, however, that I would also like to acknowledge at this point; perhaps it's time, in other words, to dismantle her fiction (one I have maintained in my discussion) that Le Désert mauve is written by two people. While this novel's pretense of dual authership offers a crucial critique of conventional notions of originality and translative invisibility, as well as dramatizing the energy and erotics made possible through the textual meeting of two women, *Le Désert mauve* is, in fact, written by Brossard. This novel is a more theatrical incarnation of a compositional process Brossard engages in all her writing, a delirous self-reading, a poetics of trans-. Dismantling the fiction of dual authership entails dismantling somewhat the generative fiction of translation which propels the book.

In "Reading Nicole Brossard," Susan Knutson articulates the dynamic function of translation in Brossard's poetic:

> As in L'Aviva, Brossard in Le Désert mauve translates Brossard from French into French, and again, she points clearly to translation not so much as an exploration of the physical frontiers of languages and cultures -- athough these are still present as fictions, as metaphors, as incitations -- but rather as the drive to reach the internal horizons of meaning and the consciousness or construction of reality. (12)

While I would use the term metonym, rather than metaphor, to characterize translation's intimate relation to her poetics -- thus my inclusion of the Godard and Lotbinière-Harwood material -- I take as paramount Knutson's observation that it is the "internal horizons" which are at stake. Internal horizons comprise the field of action in a trans- poetic; one writer reads her own language over, looking behind and ahead of words, looking deliriously both ways, so that language chafes at itself and at the realities it both reflects and envisions.

<==>

The desert is unscriptable. Reality sighs gruffly, rapid light. A deep regard. Self-important morning. Sad young, humanity already raining. Each new novel, a voyage dissolving in spirit and violence. Very young, I would take the Meteor into the desert, my mother praying. Joy passed in an entire journey, nights, auras. Vital rolling then relenting, flying mauve lights line like anyone's vein design a grand life tree in my view.

<==>

Delirium tremens

Luise von Flotow has this to say about feminist writers in Quebec:

> Writers of the early, inebriating waves of feminist theorizing -- the period during which lesbianism was often politically 'correct' -- seem more likely to propogate a lesbian poetics. Younger writers of the late Eighties were more concerned with the problematics of heterosexual desire, less inclined to develop an exclusively female utopia. (110)

Talk about the politics of language. It's amazing the mischief people get up to under the influence of "inebriating waves of feminist theorizing." I guess you'd have to be pretty inebriated to practice a lesbian poetics. Not just practice it, "propogate" it. I guess that means it's propoganda. Drunken propoganda. Sounds like those lesbians were pretty tipsy. Sounds like they weren't thinking straight. They were delirious if you ask me.

Nicole Brossard, according to von Flotow, "undermines her own work" through "the radicality of her experiments with language" (111). While reading Brossard might prove an unsettling, baffling, even intoxicating experience, it's helpful to understand that in Brossard we find a precious case of rhetorical *delirium tremens*. Withdrawing from an

ideological atmosphere structured by a language which "discredits, marginalizes, constitutes the feminine as inferior" demands, argues Brossard, certain "*rituals of presence*" (1992: 123) one of which is the 'ritual with trembling.' It happens something like this:

> . . .the body begins to tremble, the voice trembles, the image itself doubles, is transformed, becomes unrecognizable, while, like an inversion in the heart of emotion, the inner voice becomes suddenly comprehensible. (124)

Doesn't that sound great? You could try this ritual next time you read or write. Don't be afraid to tremble. You might feel a little delirous, the world warping a bit like you've got a case of vertigo. You might feel a little drunk.

hey four eyes
isn't that your civilization
made you look

look both ways
sway in a cool booth
where waiting splits attention

or as a caution
before you cross
don't forget don't get mono on me

delirious reader
I like that story you tell
again and is so many

AURA

"Each word has an aura" (123) declares Brossard in "Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness." This aura, "made of semantic and metaphoric circuits that are deployed around words" (125), manifests itself in a story she relates elsewhere about a composition which gravitated around the words 'star,' 'mirror' and 'speculum':

> I went to look up the word *speculum* in order to be certain of its meaning, and there I found that the speculum was in earlier times a small mirror used to look at the stars. Without knowing, I had reconstituted a memory already at work in the language. (Williamson 71)

Enabling this reconstitution "without knowing" is the intangible "aura" Brossard discusses, that constitutive outside -- connotation, metonymy and etymological sediment -- which has seeped in, or been glimpsed somehow. Aura has mobilized my project too, as I was drawn to rapture without knowing its connection to translation, as I seized upon the word delirium unaware of its affinity with error and rapture. The unknowingness which often characterizes a brush with aura is perhaps most convincingly illustrated by poets who translate from a language they do not understand.

Fred Wah translates Nicole Brossard's poem "Si Sismal" into "If Yes Seismal" (1992: 62) and both are astonished at his unknowing accuracy. Jack Spicer, in a letter to Federico García Lorca, writes "When I translate one of your poems and I come across words I do not understand, I always guess at their meanings. I am inevitably right" (25). Breathing in aura is the unremarkable act of remarkable inspiration.

"To breathe the aura" of things, says Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, is to trace them "until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance" (250). The notion of aura elaborated by Benjamin proves a productive ricochet here, as it is both resonant and suggestively incoherent with Brossard's aura. Benjamin's initial theorization of the aura appears in his 1931 article, "A Small History of Photography." There aura hovers over the seam between knowing and unknowing; though fascinated by photography's revelation of an "optical unconscious" (243), its revolutionary ability to capture realities too fugitive for the naked eye, Benjamin characterizes the aura of early photographs as necessarily elusive. He defines aura as "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be" (250). The apprehension of aura, then, is paradoxically dependent on an impossibility to apprehend, on an unknowing. The aura Benjamin identifies in early photographs arises out of the cult value or ritual investment which lingers in

these works of art, liminal pieces which herald the radical acceleration of mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin's later discussions of aura, specifically in his essay, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), deal with the dispersal of aura after a certain point in the evolution of photographic technology. This is where his and Brossard's notions of aura diverge in an interesting way. While Benjamin observes the evacuation of art's aura and ritual purchase through the easy proliferation of reproductions, Brossard's rituals of writing, outlined in "Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness," are contingent on reproduction. Citing a word, especially one with a positive aura, over and over. Her "ritual with sliding" involves a process of "concentrating sufficiently long on words (their sonority, their orthography, their usual sense, their potential polysemy, their etymology) in order to seize all the nuances and potentiality. . . . Then all the words can become the never-ending theatre of a series of apparitions where she who writes displaces imperceptibly but *radically* the order of the world" (126). The authenticity of an original, around which rites and mystery accrue, is sacrificed to mechanical reproduction, says Benjamin, "the quality of its presence is always depreciated" (223). For Brossard, rituals of reproducing words and phrases are themselves "*rituals of presence*" (123) motivated by a desire to create

a language world which is more 'authentic' to the realities and fictions of lesbians. The presence of 'horizon,' for example, appreciates in *Mauve Desert*.

The divergent conclusions of Benjamin's and Brossard's meditations on aura are not due simply to an incommensurability of media: the iconic photograph versus the symbolic word; indeed, if symbolic codes "represent without in the least resembling what they represent" (Mitchell 14), then the repeated language in Brossard, as it represents and resembles *itself*, exceeds a transparent symbolic function. The more pertinent variable, I would argue, is one of density, or proximity. Benjamin's reproductions are threatening only in that they can pose as singular productions, that they are dispersed to multiple audiences, one per viewer, each photo decontextualized from both its original and its fellow reproductions. Brossard's reproductions are operative as a series. While Benjamin discerns the last vestiges of aura and ritual in the portrait photograph, a cherished remembrance of "the fleeting expression of a human face" (228), Maude Laures in *Mauve Desert* insists of Mélanie, "If this face were to be described, the features would have to be gone over a hundred times" (62). The phrase "*To write* I am a woman *is full of consequences*" is repeated four times in Brossard's short article, offering itself as "a series of apparitions." With each appearance the meaning of these words shifts, inflected

by the semantic atmosphere of surrounding sentences, accruing charge as they agitate earlier instances. What results might be conceived in terms of Benjamin's "strange weave of space and time," as repetition creates both a temporal loop in narrative and spatializes the text through the concrete patterning of resemblance on the page. "We witness," says Brossard of her "ritual with sliding," "the transformation of the aura of words" (126).

Aura, then, is a paradoxical force in Brossard's poetic; her desire is to transform it, yet she locates the momentum of that transformation *within* "the aura of words -- their connotations; it is there that the meaning displays and renews itself." Another work which displays the energy of the aura is Brossard's homolinguistic translation, "L'Aviva." Here she translates ten of her own poems from French into French, relying on homonyms, assonance, rhyme, connotation -- aura -- to create versions both "similar and different" ("Nicole Brossard" 15). The force of aura is evidenced by the fact that, as Susan Knutson notes, "certain words tend to evoke others" ("Reading Nicole Brossard" 11); "lèvres" becomes "livres" for instance. While Brossard reserves her "ritual with shock" mainly for language loaded with misogynist bias, its methodology -- "certain words lose a letter, others see their letters re-form in a different order" (125) -- is operant here. Reading back and forth

between versions we observe a palimpsestic overlay, where variant letters poke out from underneath others.

At a crystal store you might find a book about auras; on the cover is a man's head in silhouette against a blue green glow. Words can get fuzzy around the edges like this. Their ever-attendant yet unremarked "semantic and metaphoric circuits" made visible momentarily. You might begin to see a jazzy orange cloud around the word 'delirium,' pink radiating from 'horizon.'

> Maude Laures went back to her work table, took the book, removed the elastic band holding the pages together. All the pages were annotated, here *polysemy* blue, *sound track* green, *must check* red, *incomprehensible* black, *familiar* yellow, *which gender?* pink, *what verb tense?* mauve. (*Mauve Desert* 53)

A while ago I went to a support group for 'women questioning their sexual orientation.' The first thing we did was make nametags, on which we were each supposed to draw some kind of symbol that held significance in our lives. Mine looked like this:  . After an hour or so of discussion I realized I didn't belong there because for me there was no longer a question. But that doesn't mean I don't constantly look both ways for the ever unfolding sense of the word lesbian. In other words, that doesn't mean there isn't a question.

SHUDDER

You might say the word lesbian with a shudder, like there are cooties crawling up your legs.

You might say the word lesbian like you're reading it out of a science textbook.

You might say lesbian dustily, like it all happened in Greece a long time ago.

You might whisper the word lesbian because it's so naughty.

You might smirk when you say lesbian because it's funny. Ha ha funny. You can't help but laugh even if they're your neighbours and they're just watering the lawn or something.

Maybe you find out your daughter is a lesbian and suddenly you pick up the word lesbian with tweezers.

Some young homos look lesbian up in the dictionary after school.

You might say she's a lesbian, or *she's lesbian* like it's a religion.

You might say lesbian like it's a euphemism for itself.

You might say the word lesbian like it's beyond reproach. Like the word nun.

Maybe you thought you were straight and suddenly find yourself saying the word lesbian like every letter is gravity, like you better wipe that dusty smirk off your face.

You might try to say lesbian and find yourself stuttering for the first time in your life.
You might say the word lesbian like goodbye.
You might say lesbian one day and not the next.
You might say the word lesbian like it's a pain in the ass.
You might say the word lesbian like you're keeping dyke for your friends.
You might drool over the word lesbian.
You might say the word lesbian like salt water taffy.
You might wipe lesbian off your face.
You might say the word lesbian with a shudder and say let's do it again, sweet pea.

MAUVE ARROWS AND THE EROTICS OF TRANSLATION

If "to write **I am a woman** is full of consequences," to *translate* **I am a woman** is full of consequences too.

To say this is perhaps to reassert the very distinction between attentions (writing and translation) this project on trans- seeks to unsettle. But as I stated in my introduction, I take seriously the particularities of interlingual translation, in terms of its theoretical history, its cultural investments, its community of practicioners. The next few pages dwell on Brossard's

practice of "translation proper"[10] which, along with her ongoing and intense interactions with translators such as Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Marlene Wildeman, can supply her writing life with rich organizational "fictions . . . metaphors . . .incitations" (see Knutson above).

Two women exchange poems. Each looks at the other's words, furtive, excited, perhaps they despair at not being 'good enough' for each other. Then the risk of a more intent look, startling, drawing closer. Then they begin to translate, the hands are involved now, one thing leads to another, and before you know it their tongues are in each other's mouths.

In the mid-eighties NBJ and Writing presses in Montréal collaborated on the production of two chapbooks which offer the mutual translations of Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt; *Mauve* and *Character/Jeu de lettres* are instances of feminist creative translation in which transfer occurs not only interlingually, but intralingually also, as each poet works at subverting the androcentrism of her own language. I say 'creative' because these are not literal translations, but rather what the publishers called *Transformances*, the

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10 "Translation proper" (145) is the tag phrase Jakobson applies to translation between languages.

work of writers who celebrate the impossibility of equivalence, acknowledging that each language bears its own particular metonymic and metaphoric relations. When Brossard declares, then, that Marlatt is one of those "people to whom you know that you will always be faithful" (Williamson 71), her allusion to fidelity does not invoke the push to equivalence which dominates traditional translation theory; her fidelity suggests allegiance, romance even, resonating with Sherry Simon and David Homel's emphasis on "the focus of attraction that begins the process" of translation (15). I focus here on the dynamic of exchange operating in *Mauve* and *Character/Jeu de lettres* in order to propose an (improper) erotics of translation.

Both Marlatt and Brossard have been passionately engaged with the problem of how female subjects are projected through language. Learning how language translates women, or 'carries them across,' in other words, prompts them to actively translate language itself. Because they are writers who maintain an experimental, ludic relationship to their medium, their efforts to communicate female desire are manifested not only through language, but also *in* it. I would argue that Marlatt and Brossard, each in their respective linguistic and cultural contexts, have performed some of the most successful traversals of the problematic bridges between body and text, desire and language, through both writing praxis and articulations of

their poetics. Brossard states definitively in *La Lettre aérienne / The Aerial Letter* that "Éros est à l'oeuvre dans toutes les écritures" (62)("Eros is at work in all writing" (83)) speaking elsewhere in this collection more specifically of writing "with a woman's gaze resting on [her]" (43):

> Si je désire une femme, si une femme me désire, c'est qu'il y a du commencement à l'écriture. C'est que le mot s'est mis à sourdre, à jaillir, à nous décaser de notre isolement. (19)
>
> If I desire a woman, if a woman desires me, then there is the beginning of writing. The word sets about to well up, to gush forth; it breaks us out of our isolation. (43)

In "Lesbera," Marlatt identifies her own movement in language as erotic, "surg[ing] beyond the limits of orderly syntax and established meaning" (124). This is a processual poetic, driven by association, a form of thought Marlatt calls "erotic because it works by attraction" ("Musing" 54). Proposals, then, are thrown over in favour of a mobile unravelling of propositions. *One thing leading to another,* intentionality surrenders to desire, which represents far more of a threat. Pressed up against desire, intention speaks a dogged morality; aren't we asked, when our desires are discovered, to declare our intentions?

In her effort to articulate a desirous poetic, Marlatt confronts the tradition of a "heterosexually-based" erotics personified in "images of Cupid with his bow and oh so phallic arrow. Arrow and the object of desire" ("Lesbera" 124). The same kind of arrow is imaged in the most familiar diagrams of the translation process, shooting from Source language to Target language. At stake along the shaft of both these arrows are similar imperatives of agency, of subordination; the love object in Cupid's scene and the translator's target text are expected to remain ever-faithful to the genius of origin. Not surprisingly, translation is inscribed with a gendered metaphorics, where the author is marked male and the translator female. This metaphorics betrays cultural anxieties about paternity, women's creativity and the hierarchizing of productive and reproductive work (Chamberlain 57-58). An ideal of fidelity is predicated on the possibility of equivalence, so that any deviations or differences are lamented as signalling what is 'lost in translation.' Ideally in this scenario the translator makes herself scarce.

Someone faced with translating Marlatt or Brossard soon abandons any notion of equivalence; these writers illustrate the constitutive power of difference in their own languages, embracing wordplay, neologisms, error, slips, and so invite nothing less than an audacious translation, slipping *them* the tongue. Translators of Brossard often speak of the joy

of discovering an opportunity for play in the target language. These are not women making themselves scarce; Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood insists on the creative work of the feminist translator, speaking of her relationship with a writer as a kind of "co-authership" (155). Marlatt and Brossard's *Transformances* project similarly unsettles the direction and singularity of our arrows. Its structure alone, with each author performing both writing and translation, destabilizes the creative hierarchy. While each is attentive to the desires propelling the other's language, they both refuse a passionless repetition, inspired instead to the phonic tug and caress, tease of coming close to meaning then pulling away, that play of friction, making it hard to figure out who's on top.

The conventional invisibility of the translator is hazardous not only in the way it perpetuates Romantic notions of authorial genius, resulting in the translator's disadvantaged status in terms of copyright and artistic or academic promotion; invisibility also cloaks the fact that the arrow often points in the opposite direction. Translation can readily become a powerful implement of imperialism, a process of "domestication" (Venuti 1993, 209) in which the source text is reinscribed to accommodate and bolster target culture values. Sherry Simon has shown how this kind of violence has operated in Canada, where an environment of "internal colonialism" (1992: 166) is indexed

by the anglicization of Quebec texts. This kind of appropriative move, this trajectory of the arrow, resonates with George Steiner's aggressive configuration of the translation process; drawing on what he calls "the cognate acts of erotic and of intellectual possession" (314), he figures a translator who performs an "appropriative 'rapture'" (316). This violence haunts every intercultural translation; the potential for mauve as bruise attends the transformative exchange between one poet from English Canada and one from Quebec. Brossard and Marlatt ameliorate this potential partly through translative visibility, which functions as a declaration of responsibility for losses and gains. More importantly, these poems are unlikely to conform to target culture values, since they thematize the questioning of those very values. Both poets direct their more aggressive subversions, in fact, at the patriarchal freight of their own languages. Considering the give and take of the two women here, I note how Brossard recasts Steiner's "possession" model when she says, "je ne veux d'avoir à posséder qui que ce soit du texte ou des personnes, sinon par un effet commun de plaisir" (*La Lettre Aérienne* 18) ("I don't want to have to possess anything or anyone, text or persons, unless it's by mutual pleasure" (*Aerial Letter* 43)).

The promise of erotic pleasure in translations between women is imaged in Brossard's *Le Désert mauve*, a book which

includes a novel and its homolinguistic translation under the same covers together. Sherry Simon, in *Le Trafic des langues*, identifies the "réseau de désir" (78) (network of desire) which generates this lesbian-centred text, stating, "La justesse de cette traduction est garantie par la rencontre de deux subjectivités . . ." (82) (the soundness of this translation is assured by the meeting of two subjectivities). Indeed, Maude Laures, in her translation of Laure Angstelle's novel, is concomitantly object and subject of desire, both "séduite"(66)("seduced") and actively "[s'allongeant] dans les pages"(55)("stretch[ing] herself through the pages"). Differences attract my attention in *Mauve Desert*, in spite of -- perhaps because of -- the homolinguistic transfer enacted here. Shifts in phrasing, in stress, in mood, gentle and slick, in concert with moments when the translation leans in close to the source, produce a dynamic of fluid exchange. The fluidity here contradicts the popular translation strategy of 'fluency,' in which the target text ideally appears as original. Fluent strategy erases signs of difference, performing a radical acculturation with an end to promoting the concept of universality (Venuti 1992, 5). Feminist translator de Lotbinière-Harwood states that French language writers enjoy the way her works "retain a French 'accent', making the new text foreign and familiar at the same time. This doubleness makes target-language readers aware that

they are reading a translation by constantly putting them in the presence of otherness" (150).

"Mauve" and "Character/ Jeu de Lettres" display such an insistence on fluidity over fluency. Marlatt's poem "Character," in fact, includes a number of words in French or with French etymologies -- "confreres," "personage," "finesse," "indissoluble" -- exhibiting the interlingual exchange always already in motion and also risking initiative, making a first move, delivering the Barthesian fantasy of a text which desires its reader. She performs a resistance to fluency in "Mauve/ A Reading," when she translates Brossard's "au bord de la mer" as "at the seabord." Most commonly, "au bord de la mer" would be interpreted as 'at the seashore,' but Marlatt chooses "seabord" in order to edge a little closer. In a gesture of what Lawrence Venuti would call "ethnodeviant translation" (1993, 210), she drops the 'a' from the English -board; an error in English spelling for the sake of a lingering 'French Kiss.'

Brossard makes a similar move with "come une ride de pluie"; "come" has lost its second 'm' in translation, so while phonetically it signifies the French 'comme' (like) it looks suspiciously like (comme) 'come,' the English word for orgasm. And then there's "brandon," a rare French word Brossard found to resonate with "branding." Carrying over the English 'brand' marks a semantic gap, and an exceptional

gift, as the primary meaning given for "brandon" is 'trouble-maker,' confirming Brossard's declaration in "Poetic Politics" that her "'basic intention' [is] to make trouble, to be a troublemaker in regard to language..." (77). What some would identify as errors, Brossard celebrates as 'trouble-making,' a desire to intervene in a language invested with "male sexual and psychic energies" (75). And why shouldn't error be a place of possibility, horizon, since, as Marlatt suggests, language "misrepresents" us ("Musing" 55). Discussing her own process of translation, Susan Knutson admits "I tend to err in the direction of meanings I desire" (16). (Imagine this transposed for added force: I tend to *desire* in the direction of *errors* I *mean*.) I see an overlap between linguistic errors which constitute proper usage, and Judith Butler's model of abject sexualities which constitute the normative. The persistence of the improper at the edge, at the seabord, admits the potential, Butler tells us, for an "erotic redeployment of prohibitions" (1993: 110). Lost letters, faux pas, indiscrete syllables ensure that the arrows in the Marlatt/ Brossard exchange are not so straight.

If absolute semantic propriety were the ideal, then machine translation could have replaced the body of the translator. In "Mauve" and "Character/ Jeu de Lettres," a kind of visual and aural fidelity moves in, an attentiveness

to the physique of words. A sensual slant is crucial when the source text in question is experimental itself, engaged intently with the materiality of language. Marlatt moves "les liens autour de l'évidence" into "chained leans on the evidence." Nudging the meaning of 'links' over into the word "chained," she is able to respond to "liens" with the assonant "leans." When Brossard translates "liable" as "fiable," she risks semantic error in order to present a couple that look alike. Similarly, she maintains fidelity to play and music when she reads "S does not belong, goes beyond," as "L n'a de dieu, n'a de lieu." These lines arise out of Marlatt's poem around 'S' which returns as Brossard's poem around 'L,' a shift occasioning the translation of the alliterative "signor, sister, son, sire, soprano" into "sibylle si belle elfe ellipse, la lyre." Brossard takes Marlatt's focus on the 'S' as feminine signifier in "s/he: / s plural in excess of he," and carries it into French as "i/lle: / l plurielles dans l'excès de ce qu'il."

The gap between S and L in the above poems points to the dimension of cultural specificity in feminist strategy. For feminist poets, the most significant linguistic difference between French and English is probably that of gender-marking. While entire signifying chains must, in French, be in gendered 'agreement,' English is ostensibly more neutral. De Lotbinière-Harwood has made the provocative suggestion that this difference explains why

"American feminists, whose thinking is couched in the seemingly more egalitarian and democratic English language have been striving for equality, while French feminist thinking has been articulated around sexual *différence*" (114). Brossard translates "character" as "genre" (gender) twice in "Jeu de Lettres," inflecting neutrality with a demand for the particular. Marlatt's section entitled <<a mark>> and Brossard's response, <<signature>>, illustrate the tension between idiom-specific strategies:

<<a mark>>	<<signature>>
born in name, I the undersigned established character, given the references of friends, confreres in	née dans le nom, je soussignée dans le genre établi, compte tenu des références d'amis, confrères
business, credit on tap, sign this personage a person portrayed by himself	en affaire, signe à crédit ce personnage une personne décrite en son portrait à l'écart

Marlatt's version plays on the neutrality of English, invoking terms like "character," "personage," and "person," which are technically inclusive. By ending the poem with "by himself," however, she underscores the fact that English is not so terribly neutral; this is a language where 'he,' 'man' and 'himself' are posited as comprehensive, fostering the assumption that "character," "personage" and "person" are male until proven otherwise. "Confreres," appearing in the middle of the poem, quietly anticipates Marlatt's

cadential revelation of a subsuming "he/man"[11] language. In Brossard's version, on the other hand, "confreres" sticks out, a gender-marked term differing from the speaking subject, who is clearly marked as feminine from the beginning by the 'e muet' in "née" and "soussignée." While <<a mark>> exposes the erasure inhering in neutrality, <<signature>> is propelled through energies of incongruity. It is perhaps the presentation of these French and English poems together which represents the most generative feminist strategy. The visibility of translation, the effect, for example, of the irresolution between marked and unmarked, proposes an environment of linguistic flux, looking both ways, "erotic redeployment."

"Une lesbienne qui ne réinvente pas le monde est une lesbienne en voie de disparition" (*La Lettre Aérienne* 109). ("A lesbian who does not reinvent the word is a lesbian in the process of disappearing" (*Aerial Letter* 122)). Brossard's statement accents the hazard of translation's conventional imperative of invisiblity. The translation diagram I imagine to represent the fluid exchange between Marlatt and Brossard flaunts multiple arrows, and is

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[11]I take this term from Dale Spender's *Man Made Language*. See her chapter "Language and Reality: Who Made the World?" for an analysis of the ways English grammar has been systematically shaped to reinforce notions of male superiority.

painted, of course, in a very loud mauve. Mauve arrows have flexible bodies which insersect, curve, move together and diverge through sites of source, target, horizon, detour. They are ribboning out to readers -- tonguing you, too. This project seduces translative readings, seeks same. By way of a come-hither conclusion which stresses our role as readers in this erotics, I want to end this discussion with a quotation from Barbara Godard's 'translator's preface' to Brossard's *These Our Mothers (L'Amèr)*:

> May the intensity of your involvement as reader be as great as mine and you extend its creation in new directions to make this the text of bliss it works to be. (7)

HOMOEOPATHIC TRANS-

Nicole Markotic / Susan Holbrook / Nicole Markotic / Susan Holbrook

a healthy clitoris lacks lack

The treatment, that man tells us, is to stop writing
love poetry:

language that isn't possible anymore. only longing
reaches from the inside out:

desire as confession. the body
so much more now than what it hides
and less than what cloaks it

to glance an inside knuckle across frosted skin
creates a path of intrusion. or one of foreplay
not yet travelled. I wanted to live inside
your eyes, once, but didn't understand
how brown green blue reflect heaven without
the body's journey

then we drove there for hours. a gesture of slim fingers imaged
on our breasts:

some obsessions can only be shared
more than a mouthful hinted that day, you unravelled
threads of tongue against rolled up windows

my palms wander the landscapes of cure my mind's made up
but:

if there are no borders here why run away from the flight
of desire? bones recognize bones

change the longevity of this word by how you breathe it
interpret the interval your eyelips invent
begin:
looking both ways

lick thy licorice heels

the symptom, who told you, the best poems come
from a planned love
gauge what isn't pissable: one stone

aches for the outside.

desirous confusion. no body
smooches more mouthing watertight
handless hand hat clit soak

glacé, a frosted cake, a hot-crossed medicine
therapeutic in fusion. how many o's in a
row. you're wise, dunce, but didn't understand
how green blew brown without even flexing

then we dove three floors. ages tune limp-finned magic
of our beasts.
so: my lone sissi boy
hintermouth full of chat today, to unveil
tonguing reads again trollops, widows

map small wonders: scrapes of mimicry dam up the
tub
if there are no bodies here, why weigh the gift
of residue? size up bonbons

hang the gravity of this world, unearth it, be
intrepid value your slips in the wind's
bargain:
look bathing pays

click click your heels

these myopic poems cum the best
from a planted love

auge: one eye chips away
arches fissured astride

a serious conflation, nobody
smooches anymore. mouthwatering accent
handles and lips and

double frosting; mad about middles
there are pews tinted fuschia: a ploy of colour
angles and border signs, rows and rows
the way you dance but won't stand under
arrow edges

(what's no longer possible is all we have)

flights and flights of released gravity, of
let-go longing. a tongue against the reed
licks

some lonely sis is a boy
in her wonder flutters a moth
ongoing lollipop design repeats the rows

and rows all won. ignore the pun, cry or clam
up

s'il y a nobody to hear. w x y genders who gives
up residing. public ice swallows

the released "I" sounds better at the end
when we interrupt your lisp. who wins
when we don't argue:
look, two clues one maze

hey chica you're slick

my thesis on pompoms beat the rest
for detailed maps
gloze: o pitch sway
search for star-lured fish
a conscious flirtation. buddies
moochers say no more. towering myths ascend
ladles and spills and

doubtful lusting; and dimples to boot
heat swept in a faint ruse: a play for looks
sins of robbery and slang, is a rose sour
wayward candy buttons to redundant
segue ways

(that loon's posture in lieu of a shave)

sand lights off a sealed grave in fits so
let's go lounging. attuned to guess her
skill
so melancholy is bossy
in she wanders smothering a flute
a pill-popper resigned to the wars going on

and doors all now. i rang, crawl up or
come down
a silly audit of bone. a b c dangers who gives
a ding. slow squalls upon us

Treasures attend the better wounds
delivered in slippery trouble. snowed in
we agree on that.
toqueless on cool days

KAKA, FL, AND THE VALUE OF LESBIAN PARAGRAMS

Mais les hommes ont confondu l'erreur et la souffrance.
(*Le Désert mauve* 83)

But men confused error with suffering. (*Mauve Desert* 127)

In "*The Martyrology* as Paragram," Steve McCaffery subjects bp Nichol's multi-volume long poem to an analysis turning on the paragram, a figure through which the concrete (phonic and spatial) resources of language are mobilized. The paragram, according to McCaffery, is characterized by "meaning's emergence out of a different meaning both of which share common graphic or acoustic components" (69). Paragrammatic moments abound in *The Martyrology*, the exemplar being the generation (or trans-) of saints out of words beginning with the letters 'st': saint ratas, St. Anzas, St. Ein; paragrams drive the composition of this poem to the extent that McCaffery can name them "the flow-producing agents in the poem's syntactic economy" (64). Noting the syntactic economy of McCaffery's essays, "*The Martyrology* as Paragram" and "Writing as a General Economy," I find that subjects, predicates and objects are configured to upset traditional notions of authorial mastery over technique, device and medium. Paragrams "inscribe," ("Paragram" 64) writing "threatens" (61), and the writing subject slips into passivity. In "Writing as a General Economy," McCaffery echoes the language of 'flow' and the

configuration of motive quoted above when he declares that the Subject "is lost, defabricated by the flow-producing agencies of homophony and the detached letter" (73). While McCaffery's discussions of the paragram represent a crucial insistence on the concrete and polysemic potential of language, his model doesn't account for writers who maintain a ludic relationship with language, yet cannot afford to replicate the passive stance of artist-before-the-muse. Lesbian feminist poet Nicole Brossard, for example, could be celebrating a paragrammatic slide when she speaks, in *mécanique jongleuse suivi de masculin grammaticale*[12], about "le trop plein du code déversé" (56) ("the overflow of the code spilled out" (58)), a thematization of the performances which follow, such as the line, "fleuve tel fauve et flore fl" (63) ("flood as fierce and flora fl" (63)). But reading her argument that it was after discovering she was a lesbian that her writing became more "fluid" ("Poetic Politics" 78), I question the opposition McCaffery makes between paragrammatic "sliding and slipping of meaning" ("General Economy" 208) and intention. How does Brossard's "SÉCRÉTION

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[12]In English: *Daydream Mechanics*, Trans. Larry Shouldice. Toronto: Coach House Quebec Translations, 1980. The final e muet of *grammaticale* marks an instance of subversive erroneous feminization; the term being modified is the otherwise unambiguous *masculin*. I use boldface here as a nod to L'Hexagone's cover, on which a black e stands out among the green letters of Brossard's title.

(au bord" (56) (SECRETION (on the edge" (66)) inflect his "secretion. . . out of semantic's ideal structure" ("Paragram" 64)? In other words, in lesbian-feminist poetry, just what (or who) are the 'flow-producing' agents?

In "Writing as a General Economy," McCaffery poses the paragram as a conduit for language into a "general economy," particularizing as scriptive this model of sexual, social and theological dynamics which he adopts from Georges Bataille. Bataille maintains that the general economy "makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without meaning" (qtd. in McCaffery 201). In the case of language, a general economy would be the realm of the disseminated signifier, an illogic into which the paragram spins letters, detached syllables, the phonetic and visual material of words. Bataille's note that the released energy is "without meaning" is confirmed by McCaffery's suggestion that "a general economy can never be counter-valuational nor offer an alternative 'value' to Value for it is precisely the operation of value that it explicitly disavows" (203). Paragrams, apparently, inaugurate this stripping of value, as they "ensure that there will always be a superfluity of signifiers and a degree of waste and unrecouperability of meaning" (209). Certainly the promise of wordplay lies in its decompression of the sign and its

transgression of the hierarchical values of grammar (the monopoly of Noun / Verb). But what is the *value* of this promise? I suggest that the notions of 'value' and 'waste' raised in McCaffery's theorizations beg salient questions which ultimately cohere around the Subject and its crisis as staged by the paragram. First of all, can a function of value (even in the case of a letter) ever be evaded, particularly in the context of Nichol's long poem, where certain themes, indeed values[13], are overdetermined? And doesn't obscuring value constitute a denial of what Fredric Jameson has called a "political unconscious" which is at work in Nichol's reading of his own writing? What is the cost, even -- perhaps particularly -- at this level of the microsyntactic, of claiming a space bereft of value? (Recall the minefields of neutrality and objectivity). These questions pivot around an epistemology of value, underlined by Brossard's assertion that "male psychic energy has fantasized -- constituted -- a *corpus* of 'knowledge' as to what is right and wrong, what is valued and what is not" (86). What is not valued, "waste" in other words, is determined by this epistemology in specifically misogynist ways. Witness Julia Kristeva's observation, in her

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[13] Frank Davey attributes the popularity of Nichol's work partly to its elaboration of contemporary values: "friendship, family, community, ecology, world peace, the distortions of 'official histories' " (39).

philosophical / anthropological study of abjection, *Powers of Horror*[14], that "polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value" (71). Consider also the case of the nineteenth century French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin who was pronounced male by physicians who invested his/her semen (devoid of spermatazoa) with a positive value they refused his/her vaginal secretions[15]. 'Waste' and 'value' are clearly terms which are themselves sedimented in support of a patriarchal value-system delineating the bounds of proper Subjecthood.

McCaffery announces his project at the beginning of "*The Martyrology* as Paragram" as a "focus on the ludic features of *The Martyrology*, those varieties of wordplay [...] which relate writing to the limits of intentionality and the Subject's own relation to meaning" (58). I find it interesting that it is the "ludic" which erodes the security of a determining Subject in Nichol's poem; Brossard has defined the function of the "ludic" in her poetics as one of "intervention and exploration" (76), stressing, "I perform

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[14]This is Leon S. Roudiez's translation of *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Éditions du Seuil, 1980.

[15]See Shirley Neuman's essay "Autobiography, Bodies, Manhood" for an analysis of Barbin's *Memoirs* and the medical discourses constructing his masculinity.

what is necessary to make space for women's subjectivity" (81). While McCaffery suggests that the paragram offers a way for Nichol to disperse himself and erase the speaking subject -- Roy Miki concurs, noting "the martyr gives his 'i' up to the flow of language" (28) -- forays into the general economy afford Nicole Brossard the opposite effect. Pushing at the horizons of the symbolic, Brossard intervenes in the standard deployments of morpheme, word, syntax with a view to shaping a language-world which 'values' women and lesbians.

In order to reinforce intentionality's dissolution in paragrammatic writing, McCaffery engages the notion of error. He argues that "intentional meaning" is continually threatened by the "errant aspects" ("Paragram" 61) inherent in language. He finds this an attractive idea, citing Derrida's articulation of the way that error is constitutive rather than superfluous: ". . . corruption will be 'always possible.' This *possibility* constitutes part of the necessary traits of the purportedly ideal structure" (ctd. in "Paragram" 63). The omnipresence of the risk of catachresis (misuse of a word) prompts me to entertain an intent to err or, more precisely, a desire to err. Desire itself, in fact, in its extension across both the conscious and unconscious, can be seen to mediate between error and intentionality. And desire reflects, and is subject to, values. Some lesbian-feminist poets justify a desire to

seek out the errant through their revaluing of what is considered correct. The language of a restricted economy (to continue with the model of economies adopted by McCaffery from Bataille) is supposed to 'make sense,' posit a unitary meaning through a transparent medium. But this is the language which Daphne Marlatt argues "misrepresents" and "miscarries" her ("Musing with Mothertongue" 55) and Brossard contends is composed of "lies" and "fraud" ("Poetic" 75, 78). If proper, patriarchally-loaded language represents her erroneously, then the poet's corrective gestures necessarily involve breaking into the improper zone of catachresis, performing what Marlatt names "unspeakable breaches of usage" (56). We have seen how error has been revalued and inflected by voluntarism in the context of Brossard's *Transformances* with Daphne Marlatt as well as in the world of *Le Désert mauve*'s 'auteures.' Why should *The Martyrology*'s wordplay depend on the implicit qualifier, 'I didn't mean it'? Can't we trace a drama of value(s) through the losses/gains in the trans- from "speech" to "eech" to "each" (*Martyrology* Book 2)?

A paragrammatic trans- invites us to consider "eech" which, although invested with no morphemic value itself, leads through further trans- to the word "each" in the following figure:

speech

eech to

each

A play which begins with "speech" and terminates with "to each" certainly reflects the value of human communication propelling *The Martyrology* and resonates with the apostrophic mode of address dominating Books 1& 2 ("i want to tell you a story," "saint orm you were a stranger," "father i am sorry"). Such a figure exemplifies the numerous paragrammatic nodes in the poem where value is immediately recuperated, instances McCaffery overlooks in his discussion of the ways Nichol contains paragrammatic waste. McCaffery notes that Nichol gets his 'I' back through the "territorializing forces of reference, investment and value" ("Paragram" 73), by retreating from the paragram into restricted writing. The register he refers to is one of normative syntax, a utilitarian deployment of presumably transparent signs. While this does offset the paragrammatic, I suggest that such recuperation occurs more immanently, within the paragram itself. The following is a passage McCaffery cites from *The Martryology* Book 4:

```
el
   em
        en
      t's
o
   pq
        r

or b d
     bidet
confusion of childhood's 'kaka'
the Egyptian 'KA'
```

soul

"It would be wrong to insist on an intentional message here," argues McCaffery, "for wordplay releases the other text as pre-logical 'emission' from the latent positions within the syntax" ("Paragram" 69). Undoubtedly, there is a compositional dynamic operant here which is processual, incorporating the shapes and sounds of text already written, but in a scramble to differentiate this from a poetics based on the intention of an expressive subject, McCaffery overstates the case for wordplay's self-propulsion. To suggest that "'Kaka' *itself splits* to isolate the phoneme 'ka'" (68, my emphasis) denies Nichol any agency of choice, and this denial in turn ironically collapses the multiplicity of the "latent positions within the syntax." (Perhaps in a poem by Bob Perelman, for instance, Kaka would have split to reveal the abbreviation 'a.k.a.'[16] And 'b d' on someone else's page might have produced 'body' rather than 'bidet.') McCaffery's characterization of the paragram as self-generating colludes with Nichol's passive stance (repeatedly thematized in lines such as "only the words you trust to take you through") to neutralize the passage of Kaka's 'power of horror' into the sanctified KA. Nichol's periphrastic commentating, "the Egyptian . . . soul," consolidates the recuperative trans- from Kaka to KA, to

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[16]In 1984 Bob Perelman published a book of short prose pieces entitled *a.k.a.*

ensure we're not left with, say, half a shit.

This instance of immanent recuperation typifies the manner in which *The Martyrology*'s paragrammatic error is qualified by a revelatory logic. The poem's ethic of submission to language is stated repeatedly; in Book 3, for example, the poet declares "there must be an order in all things / to be discovered not imposed." It is within such a textual climate that KA can emerge as if it were a necessary and inevitable outcome. Nichol's paragrams occur, after all, within a martyrology, a book of saint's lives; as Frank Davey notes, "a reading of a saint's life is customarily *exegetical*, that is it seeks to interpret the text as a sign of revealed truth" (42). Davey identifies as a crisis in the 'play' of the poem this exegetical dynamic, through which the idea of the sign as manipulated by a writer is overwhelmed by a notion of originary truths. I suggest that the recurrent scenario of unmotivated, 'erroneous' fragments being sublimated into revealed truths offers some pretty heady possibilities for that purportedly "defabricated" 'i'. What are the implications, for instance, of truth-value circulating through the following section?:

> he/i/she
>
> (why is the s the feminizer?, makes the i is, births it, gives it its being, carries the he in the body of its word, the men inside women, the me in both of them)
>
> EQUATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: HE/IS/HE

> such minimal movements to seek truth in (steve
> said 'you'll be accused of shallowness'
> (hallowness feminized?))) (Book 4)

In the context of *The Martyrology*'s exegetical logic, supported here by the idea of "seek[ing] truth in" microsyntax, the poet's questions anticipate answers straight from the mouth of God; Davey has noted of Nichol's long poem that "the language theory implied here suggests a bound meaning: that a scrutiny of signifiers will invariably lead back to 'You' or 'Lord'" (49). The effect of this prevailing exegetical mode is to confer, in the above passage, a trumped up truth-value on ideas ('answers') which essentialize the feminine as maternal and equate "i" with "he." With "minimal movements" established as steps toward revelation, the question of whether or not "shallowness" is "hallowness feminized" not only seems reasonable but rhetorical; it implies its own affirmative answer. This 'question' is a performance, not of undecidability, but of exegesis. Wordplay is not framed as a critique of how gender bias is encoded in and by language; it unravels, instead, the truths of sexual difference as revealed by the Word.

If Nichol's paragrammatic ruptures do not demonstrate his fidelity to the syntactical and lexical integrity of language, they do display his *faith* in language. Compare his discovery of how the feminizing 's' "births" 'i' with Marlatt's question in "Musing with Mothertongue," "what

syntax can carry the turning herself inside out in love when she is both sucking mouth and hot gush on her lover's tongue?" (48). While linguistic schemata are challenged by both poets -- in Nichol through mock etymology, in Marlatt through explicit critique -- Marlatt's challenge extends to the value system permeating language, a system which remains unquestioned in Nichol. Alongside Nichol's passage, Marlatt's own meditation on a feminizing 's' in "Character" ("s /he: / s plural in excess of he" [*Salvage* 105]), offered in a context of exploration, rather than exegesis, appears at once strikingly 'intentional' and strikingly provisional. This complex textual effect is characteristic of experimental poets whose bodies do not adequate the white, male, heterosexual Subject that language presumes, who do not, in other words, operate on faith. Brossard does share Nichol's exegetical discourse to some extent; a self-proclaimed "zealot" (CBC interview, June 1995), she hopes "that by playing with language it will reveal unknown dimensions of reality" ("Poetic" 73). Her revelations, however, are consistently guided by her own active ludic disposition, her stance as "trouble-maker." Nichol and Brossard could be said to inhabit, respectively, both contradictory inclinations of *délire* as outlined by Lecercle; Nichol's work bears out Lecercle's notion that "in the case of *délire*, language is master" (9), whereas Brossard affirms a definition of *délire* as "a perversion

which consists in interfering, or rather taking risks, with language" (16).

Risk is a term which I suggest circulates too easily within an experimental poetic which does not take into account the politics and history of its notion of the Subject. McCaffery argues that writing as general economy would require "the absolute degree of risk-taking," explaining in a footnote, "the subject's continuity is no longer guaranteed through language (unlike the subject in restricted writing)" (214). But what if that particular "continuity" of the subject doesn't suit you? Or what if, as a lesbian, you are the presence rendered invisible precisely for your ability to rupture that continuity? Such questions motivate Brossard's transgressions of restricted writing which are aimed at forging "space for women's subjectivity." Acknowledging, then, that the 'risk' of the general economy is a tailored risk, I do not wish to unproblematically align error or paragrammatic play with the liberation of women and lesbians. If Nichol's paragrams are qualified by recuperative exegesis, Marlatt's and Brossard's play is qualified by caution. I argue for a motivated error because inviting the slips and connotations of a language invested with androcentric bias demands an active vigilance. "Digging in that field can be, for a creative woman, a mental health hazard" (75), warns Brossard, who stresses that she consequently maintains a relationship with language

marked by "awareness, concentration, sharpness" (82). Marlatt insists that "there's always that element of doubt -- where did those words come from?" ("Roots" 224). She raises this issue of doubt in a discussion held with her male contemporaries in 1980 (published in *Credences* as "The Roots of Present Writing"). Both Victor Coleman and bp Nichol offer unfortunate characterizations of Marlatt's watchful process; Coleman calls her process "refined," Nichol calls it "genteel," and both oppose it to "risk taking" (226-27). There seems to be a lack of acknowledgement, here, of how risk might figure differently among writers; recall Brossard's line "To write I am a woman is full of consequences" ("Poetic" 81). My discomfort with this discussion points to what I find lacking in McCaffery's essays: an articulation of the particularized sexual politics of experimental writing. Watchfulness and desire are not mutually exclusive in poets such as Brossard, but embrace each other in a complex ambivalent movement which is necessarily operant both in a restricted economy of language and where language is put "en jeu"[17].

In *mécanique jongleuse suivi de masculin grammaticale*, Brossard's field of action is the interface between language

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[17]"En jeu" is a French phrase which recurs in Brossard's poetry (see *mécanique jongleuse* p. 48 and "Jeu de lettres," *Salvage* 110). It signifies doubly as 'at play' and 'at risk.'

and women's desiring bodies, a sexual, textual interlining of surfaces, contours, flow, energies, mechanics. One of her strategies in dealing with such an interface, where the risk of women's devaluation is everpresent, is to write paragrammatically, engaging 'detached letters' and a poetic of trans- through which words, phonemes and letters are reconfigured to produce new meaning. The following lines appear in the first poem of the sequence entitled "Énonciation (sic) Déformation Ludique:"

fleuve moulé dans l'encre calme
fleuve tel fauve et flore fl (63)

The fragment "fl" could be read to suggest a truncation, implying that "l'encre calme" (calm ink) proves incommensurable to the "fauve" (fierce) flow of female desire. That fierce flow, however, is not merely the object of representation in *mécanique jongleuse*; it is the motivating energy. Read in the full context of this book, a textual environment infused with the values of women's passion and of that passion's volcanic effect on language, "fl" opens out. A shocking blossom of potential "fl" words in the audacious space: flageoller (to tremble), flamboyer (to blaze), flirter (to flirt), flotter (to float), fluide (fluid), flux (flow). The fragment "fl" will be neither recuperated through monadic, transparent referentiality nor sublimated to an ancient god (as was kaka). Instead, this

bit of waste, erroneous flotsam on the surface of signs, is left open to resignification.

"Masculin grammaticale," the poem sequence preceding "L'Énonciation," also deploys free letters, particularly in the third section. I present both stanzas in order to better demonstrate some of its intralinear play:

> verte vague sur le ventre sur l'échine
> fauche et frôle et somme le sexe d'
> entame le souffle
> sur-le-champ tout le parcours
> jusqu'en la poitrine vague
> flottante
>
> la conséquence d'essouff d's
> l'x du exe l'axe de plaisir
> force la forme et le poids de l'ongle
> sur l'épine de chair qui convient
> sur la peau pour
> un renversement d'allures vives vers
> les herbes y rouler d'inclinaison (49)

The first fragment we encounter is the "d'" at the end of line 2, a letter at large which is all the more scandalous because the substitution of "d'" for 'de,' the grammatical function of *élision*, is motivated by an inducement to collapse, rather than isolate, words. The next time "d'" appears, it introduces line 7's "essouff," a fragment implying the verb 'essoufler' which means 'to make breathless.' Line 7 whimsically demonstrates that losing letters is indeed "la conséquence" of getting short of breath, thus concretizing the thematic flow of breathless erotics in this poem. The truncation of "essouff" is underscored by the complete word "souffle" in line 3 (though

the appearance of the verb "essouffle" minus its end does beg the question of whether the earlier "souffle" is in fact the same verb freed of its beginning. The e in line 3's "le" appears suddenly vulnerable to annexation). The "d'" appears a third time -- is "d'" the shapely ideogram of "la poitrine vague / flottante" (the vague floating breast?) -- at the end of line 7, preceding the solo letter 's' in "d's." "d's" repeats the first syllable of "d'essouff" phonetically and is followed by a structural analogue, "l'x"; both "d's" and "l'x" are composed of individual letters sutured by an elisional apostrophe. That cluster running over into line 8, "d's l'x du," is a resonant paragrammatical recombination of "le sexe d'" from line 2. "l'x" itself undergoes a trans- through "exe" to "l'axe." The fragment "exe" must have broken off of "sexe," a connection which would explain the appearance of that errant "s" from line 7, and would also bolster the proposition that the x in "exe" is "l'axe de plaisir" (the axis of pleasure). Such a proposition is well supported within the charged graphic-thematic matrix of *mécanique jongleuse*. 'X' clearly works well as an ideogram here; suggesting we view it as an axis inaugurates a fairly unproblematic transit into the undeniable materiality which, as this book attempts to show, is the common ground of the linguistic and the corporeal[18].

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[18]In his translation, Larry Shouldice highlights this shared materiality through a resource pertinent to this poem, yet

But why, particularly, the 'x' in "exe"? If 'x' is an axis of pleasure in this figure, what or who are being pleasurably conjoined? Finding two 'e's straddling the x, my reading is necessarily inspired by the operation of the 'e' in Brossard's corpus. Her work has illuminated the already fetishized condition of 'e' as feminizer, shaken the grammatical regulation of its use, and spun 'e' into transgressive action. Such a transgression of grammatical gender is enacted in the title of this poem, "masculin grammaticale." If there is to be an axis of pleasure anywhere in language, it is not surprising that Brossard would choose to stage a hot time between two letter e's, two marks of the feminine, constructing a decidedly lesbian paragram.

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particular to English. His version of lines 6 and 7 runs "breast / result of getting short of brea th's" (51). His trans- from "breast" into "brea th's" submits an affiliation between breast and breath, indexed by the shared 'brea,' which is etymologically errant, but somatically sound (breasts and breath originate from around the same neighbourhood of your body). An isolated 'brea' (or 'th's' or 'fl' for that matter) on the page does not signify morphemically. This fragmentation effects a paragrammatic highlighting of materiality, which proposes a partial answer to the thorny problem of how language and female desire can get along. Rather than language standing for the body, the two can lie down and be contiguous.

Brossard's prose poem sequence, "Sous La langue," published in a bilingual edition which offers French and English on facing pages, is driven in part by the energy of words within words and the flow of syllables repeated with change. The third stanzagraph concludes:

> Fricatelle ruisselle essentielle aime-t-elle le long de son corps la morsure, le bruit des vagues, aime-t-elle l'état du monde dans la flambée des chairs pendant que les secondes s'écoulent cyprine, lutines, marines. (unpag.)

Readers familiar with Brossard's work will notice the repeated feminizing word-end '-elle' gendering the first three words here, and will note too those letters' constitution of the pronoun 'elle' ('she'). The appearance of a fourth polysyllabic unit, "aime-t-elle," confirms this pronomial presence, as 'elle' is set off through hyphenation. The last few words here are also generated out of a process of syllabic repetition with change. The "s'éc" of "s'écoulent" is a trans- of the "sec" of "secondes." "Cyprine" is the hinge of this sequence; its first syllable carries over the unit of sibilant + vowel from the first two words, and initiates a run of homophonic end-syllables: cyp*rine*, lut*ines*, mar*ines*. "Cyprine," a word denoting female sexual secretions, does not appear in standard French dictionaries, although lesbian feminist writers have propelled it into literary circulation. Cyprine is met, in de Lotbinière-Harwood's translation, "Undertongue," by the

even more scandalous term, "cyprin." The translator recalls her invention:

> Over coffee with an Anglophone friend shortly before my deadline for the bilingual edition, I was talking about my on-going search for an English word for cyprine. "We have no word," she said, "no word but wet." Later, determined, I sat at my typewriter to stream-of-consciousness on it. Lo and behold, my unconscious yielded, and wrote: "...silken salty cyprin." There it was! So obvious, too obvious. (147)

What I find instructive in her account is an easy gathering together of seemingly contradictory motivations; she was "determined" to be receptive to what her "unconscious yielded." Here is the alchemy of intention and error which I read as desire. "Cyprin" is a complete innovation, an error in English which will not be left to waste, for it serves as corrective to a glaring 'error in English,' which is that there is "no word." "Too obvious," she says above, suggesting the force of grammatical discipline and the layers of misogynist bias which keep the obvious from view.

In his *Martyrology*, bp Nichol persistently transgresses a restricted economy of writing through his playful mobilization of the concrete resources of language. What I have tried to show here is that his equally persistent recuperations back into that economy, as well as McCaffery's characterizations of this retreat as a "territorializing force," mark a particular interest in the integrity of a restricted economy, a realm lesbian paragrams unmask as one of devaluation and official feminine hygiene.

Footnoting her neologism, de Lotbinière-Harwood states, "We are proposing *cyprin* for English usage." Her statement announces the value invested in this 'error' and the value invested, concomitantly, in the secretion itself. Letters and syllables which do not signify, fluids without a name, are rallied into a presence which can figure into the imagined contours and mechanics of female bodies. e and e. The paragram in a lesbian feminist text may indeed threaten the continuity of a normative model of subjectivity, but at the same time it functions as a "territorializing force," a ludic operation through which female desire opens language to female desire.

SECRET

In grade 6 she was introduced to the scandalous books of Judy Blume. All about secretions, the great secrets you discovered when puberty hit. So precious such secrets were, what currency, that Josie used to confide in her, pride seeping through mock shame, that she had to go to the office to get some 'feminine hygiene.' The girls performed horror when Laura's bloody pad fell out of her pyjama pants at a sleepover. How unhygienic. Really they were envious. What fell out of her pants was gold.

For girls Judy Blume wrote *Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret,* it was all about periods. For boys there was *Then again, maybe I won't* and the important secretion in this book was Tony's 'wet dream.' Funny, boys didn't read about Tony, but girls did. She did. The wet dream was mysterious and shameful and spectacular, reason to cringe when John Lennon sang "I've got a Feeling" and her parents were in the kitchen with her. *Everybody had a good year, everybody let their hair down. . .* It was coming. *Everybody pulled their socks up.* She and her parents and *Everybody had a wet dream* and all that explosive desire spurting out of the radio, dripping off the light fixture and spangling her father's glasses.

The next year in Life Skills the secretions were written on the board, although the girls already knew about them from Judy Blume. She heard again about her bleeding and boys' nocturnal emissions and began to have the peculiar feeling that while the boys were surging and urging, she and her friends were being moulded into wary little mothers. Apparently, Lennon's *Everybody* didn't include her. She was onto it. The teacher never connected the wet dream to her own countless wakings, a pleasurable pulse between clenched thighs, a slippery patch on her nightie. There was no term for girl wet dreams, no word for her sexual secretions. She was sure of them though, and she was onto that teacher, onto those Beatles. She was onto that Tony. She was going to

write her own book. Call it *Hey Tony, my Dreams are Wetter than Yours*.

LETTERAL SENSE

Do you please m.

-- Gertrude Stein, "Lifting Belly"

Because a poetics of trans- involves the recapitulation of text from a previous line, a previous stanza, a previous chapter, a previous book, it confounds any assumption of the transparency of language, highlighting instead its materiality through the concrete aural and visual patterns produced by repetition. Noting this effect of trans-, I would like to consider for a moment that irreducible material of writing, the letter, and how it figures in the poetry and theorizing of some of the writers I've been discussing. A letter could be deemed the ideal candidate to campaign for the materiality of language; it is the smallest building block, the lowest common denominator of linguistic structures, an ostensibly neutral figure subject to the infusion of both referentiality and ideological inflections attending the combinatory processes of orthography and syntax. Letters, so over-familiar, are generally overlooked -- "unless of course the writer makes a spelling mistake," notes bp Nichol, "in which case the writer is suddenly very

aware of the letters" (81). Nichol's complaint appears in the context of his "pataphysical apology for the alphabet, "The "Pata of Letter Feet, or, The English Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," an essay which takes as its intertext Ernest Fenollosa's influential treatise, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry." Nichol's eagerness to invigorate writing in English through the excavation of its material, constituent parts recalls his Modernist predecessor's aim, which was to inspire the English poetic method through his analysis of the Chinese ideogram, the Chinese character as pictorial enactment, rather than arbitrary phonetic index.[19] What both writers are after is a stimulated awareness of the concrete characters that constitute syntax, grammar, poetry. Celebrating the non-referential quality of the alphabet, Nichol claims, "The letter does not stand for something else. . . . A letter is itself" (81). To illustrate this self-absorption he invokes the Saussurian semiotic dyad, opposing the relationships of the signifier 'tree' to the signified  and the signifier 'A' to the signified A. But is 'A' neutral? Is it not, like the word 'tree,' a

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[19]Fenollosa was, as is often noted, misguided in his research; 90% of Chinese characters are not pictographic at all but phonetic, like the Phoenician alphabet on which English is founded. Ironically, Nichol's parodic title points to the very linguistic kinship Fenollosa would deny.

repository and courier of cultural meaning? What if you were Hester Prynne, and 'A' was emblazoned on your dress? What if your lover's name began with 'A'? And what about the fact that there is a word, 'A'? Can 'B' hope to compete?

If letters cannot be considered bereft of semantic freight, they can be seen to occupy a shifting position between neutrality (a state which foregrounds the material) and motivation. It is precisely this ambivalence which renders the letter a productive locus over which to entertain the question of materiality's relationship to materialism. In an interview with Flavio Multineddu, Nichol declares his belief that an engagement with the material letter does bear on material, lived reality:

> I think it's very dangerous that people treat language as transparent and received: when they don't understand something they don't worry about it too much. Whatever the system of language, it controls the world thru politics, thru law, and so on. I'm concerned in a work ... in a certain sense: not to make my writing simpler, 'cause I think there's lots of simple writing out there. I'm concerned with this one: to get people using language, to using the power of language and reality of language, and hopefully expand their alertness. (1993, 16)

Nichol focuses here on the discursive as a field in which power is both operant and open to negotiation. Such a focus aligns him with writers and theorists who consider linguistic interventions to be potentially liberatory or transformative practices. Paying particular attention to

the letter in the works of Nichol, Nicole Brossard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Elizabeth Meese, I want to consider both the alphabetic circulation of semantic value and the relationships these writers propose between the materiality of letters and lives.

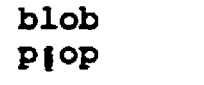
To trace the letter 'i' through Nichol's *Martyrology*, as well as through his other poetic and theoretical works, is to question the notion that "the letter does not stand for something else." For 'i' is also a word, the first person pronoun, and Nichol makes a lot of hay out of this convergence. In "The "Pata of Letter Feet," he finds 'i' in an instance of paragrammatic reading:

> Let's take another little "pataphysical step to one side and look at that last word 'significance'. if i really read that word (i.e if i actually *look* at it) i can see that it says 'sign if i can' & then adds 'ce'. (82)

The pronomial quality the 'i' assumes here will be short-lived according to the ephemeral turns of ""pataphysical logic where each step coheres only for the length of the transition and then disintegrates, disappears behind you even as a new, unexpected step appears in front of you" (80). Theoretically, the subjective 'i' should shift into the letteral 'i' as often as the letteral 'i' becomes a pronoun. The agitation of the familiar authorial 'i', however, is not performed through this shuttle in *The*

Martyrology. Instead the 'i' moves between the authorial 'i' (Nichol) and the unspecified pronomial 'i'. This latter 'i' appears in passages such as, "we's a long way away some days / there's so much i" (Book 3, V), where both 'we' and 'i' are displaced out of a referential schema and into a grammatical one. These lines both thematize the urgency to buck the traditional lyric ego (and thus make way for a collective mode of being) and perform it, by unsettling the usual syntactic position of 'i'. One might caution that such play is still bound in the sphere of this lyrical 'i', that doing away with this letter altogether would prove the best corrective to "there's so much i." Certainly McCaffery's claim that in *The Martyrology* "the Subject is lost, defabricated by the flow-producing agencies of homophony and the detached letter" ("General Economy" 73) is not borne out. While the "detached letter" 'i' shifts into the non-specific 'i' (and thus an object of critique) and the homophonic 'eye,' the Subject is never lost; 'i' just as often signals the reinstatement of the authorial speaker, frequently through the kind of exegetical logic visited upon the word 'significance' above. Still, Nichol's engagement opens up this character as an active site of contestation, a place to begin considering the ways that the lyric 'i,' the autobiographical 'i', the grammatical 'i' and the letter 'i' are shaped and shape us.

'b', 'p' and 'n' are three more letters which recur in *The Martyrology*. All are particularly attractive to the concrete poet as their physical manipulation engenders other letters. Not only can 'p' and 'b' be flipped laterally to produce 'd' and 'q', they also mirror one another, as Nichol's poem from *Still Water* illustrates:



'b', 'p' and 'n' are also dear to this particular poet because they constitute the author's monogram. A section from "CODA: Mid-Initial Sequence," which concludes Book 3, typifies Nichol's deployment of these letters:

> the late P
> destroyed
> leaving only b
> & n
>
> beginning again
>
> b n a
>
> all history there
>
> t here

(Book 3, VIII)

This passage exemplifies the exceptional purchase held by 'p','b' and 'n' in Nichol's work. There is apparently no need to supply a textual precursor to support the paragrammatic logic that destroying 'P' will result in "leaving only b / & n"; the reader's apprehension is contingent on her awareness of the authorial monogram. Roy Miki has suggested that this sequence is one in which "the

authority of 'father' . . . is subsumed by the signifying practice" and that here we see "the demise of the poet's transcendent or capitalized self." Alluding to the construction, "t here," he notes the effect of ideogrammatic investment, "'t' becomes the cross to bear, the necessary martyrology of the 'i' to language itself" (26). While Miki seems to be gesturing toward a claim analagous to McCaffery's 'lost Subject' theory, it is through the hagiographic discourse of his reading that he approaches the more precise effect of Nichol's initial play. The 'i' is not lost but, indeed, martyred like Christ; and sacrifice here leads similarly to the cultivation of memory rather than to a slip into oblivion. As Jacques Derrida has pointed out, playing with the components of a proper name leads to something other than deauthorization:

> By disseminating or losing my own name, I make it more and more intrusive; I occupy the whole site, and as a result my name gains more ground. The more I lose, the more I gain, by conceiving my proper name as the common noun. . . (1985:76-77)

Derrida's observation contradicts the notion that the decomposition of Nichol's name puts the poet's authority at risk. As Derrida sees it, a lost name pervades not only the site it evacuated, but every other space as well, "the whole site" of the text. This osmotic movement extends to "the whole site" of Nichol's corpus, I note, as I read another

poem from *Still Water* which, published in 1970, predates the publication of *The Martyrology Books 1& 2*:

em ty

This concrete poem plays on the irrelevance of 'p' to the aural coherence of the word 'empty.' The resulting sign references its own hollowness through the loss of its 'p,' thus paradoxically rendering the 'p' central. That this poem demonstrates microtextually Derrida's paradoxical argument is partly due to the particular character in 'view,' a letter in bp Nichol's name. Familiar with pieces such as "Mid-Initial Sequence" and "Middle Initial Event" (a "pataphysical diagram printed in *gifts: The Martyrology Book[s] 7&*), I read this poem as an 'm' and a 't', missing their mid-initial.

'H' is the only letter in Nichol's work which is not referentially bound to the author and yet carries the "intrusive" residual effect of proper names. Both within his writing and within the discourse of his critical community the 'H' has served as a short-hand reference to Nichol's overall project, his resistance to the commodification of language through making visible its production. The centrality of this letter (and the notion of materiality it represents) is evidenced by its appearance in the cover designs for books by and about the author: the

'H'-shaped tree on *As Elected*, the 'H'-shaped photoframe on *An H in the Heart*, the 'H'-shaped bridge tower on *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing The Martyrology*. Nichol locates the genesis of this obsession in his childhood experience of living in the 'H-section' of Winnipeg (1994:28). His 'H's appear in an entire H alphabet, as large drawn characters among smaller typeface letters, and as props in an otherwise referential narrative, as in "saint ranglehold stood / holding the letter H within his hand" (Book 3, II). Significantly, Nichol's 'H' is capitalized, and thus invested with the cachet of a proper name, a value played upon in his address to the poet H.D., his reference to HE (Christ) and his epistolary opening "dear H" (Book 4, VIII). In "A Study of Context: H" a cartoon capital 'H' is rotated to reveal a capital 'I'. A similar concrete trans- occurs in "Probable Systems 18" where H is perceived ideogrammatically as imaging the linking of two capital 'I's:

H

crude symbol of the bridging

a re-perception of what was once unitas

I

(1994:28)

Here 'H' is mobilized in the service of a Modernist preoccupation with the alienation of the individual, specifically 'I'. Arriving at this ideogrammatic conclusion

is coherent both with the thematic attentions of the poem and with the regimen of the letters 'i', 'b', 'p' and 'n' above. In other words, while the detached 'H' does disturb normative syntax and inspire an awareness of the smaller units of composition, it also tends to function as a node of authorial recuperation. Through its capitalization, its explicit autobiographical association, and its recurrent trans- into 'I', 'H' assumes the quality of a signature; it becomes known, more than anything else, as 'bp's favourite letter.'

In my exploration of the paragram in Brossard's poem sequence "Masculin grammaticale," I found that detached letters assumed a new, provisional value in the context of that poem; the 'x', for example, became an ideogram for an axis, and 'd' imaged the 'vague floating breast.' My ideogrammatic reading of the fragment "exe" as two marks of the feminine meeting along the axis of pleasure, however, is more telling; unlike 'x', the 'e's here are not explicated or overtly framed in any thematic way. Instead their value has accrued through Brossard's persistent repetition of the 'e' throughout her work. The 'e's in the title *Amantes* or the word "auteure," for example, are fused to the normative male-gendered nouns 'amant' and 'auteur' -- we are in the realm here, not of detached proper initials, but of improper attachments. Brossard attaches 'e's to words in an effort to both alert readers to the sexual politics underlying the

gendered grammar of French, and to exploit those very politics, imposing the feminine wherever she sees fit. In her article entitled "E muet mutant" (the mutating mute E) Brossard elucidates the dynamic connection she perceives between language and women's lives, between letters and bodies. The silent 'e' which marks the gender of French feminine nouns serves as a suggestive index to the historical silencing of women's voices, both spoken and written. "On ne l'écoute pas," she declares (no one hears her). Characterizing the status of women's speech, she insists, "Sa parole marche derrière le Discours comme une femme qui suit son homme" (12) (Her speech walks behind Discourse like a wife follows her man). This motivated simile underscores Brossard's conviction that the materialities of language and lived experience are intertwined. In another article, "Lesbians of Lore" (originally "Lesbiennes d'écriture," trans. Marlene Wildeman), Brossard makes explicit the role of the letter in transforming the lives of women:

> Only through literally creating ourselves in the world do we declare our existence and from there make our presence known in the order of the real and the symbolic. When I say literally give birth to ourselves in the world, I really do mean that literally. *Literal* means "that which is represented by letters." Taken literally. Taken to the letter. For we do take our bodies, our skin, our sweat, pleasure, sensuality, sexual bliss to the letter. (134-35)

This essay appears in Brossard's collection of articles, *La Lettre aérienne / The Aerial Letter*, the title of which speaks to its sustained focus on the transformative power of a compositional process which attends to the materials at hand.

'E' emerges as a politicized letter through the practice of other Québec feminist writers as well. As Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood points out, Michèle Causse translated Mary Daly's term "be-ing" through the feminized present participle of *être*, "etante" (128). I find it significant that many radical deployments of the 'e' are occasioned by translation, by the exigency to translate feminist subversions between English and French. de Lotbinière-Harwood herself has discussed the particular challenge of translating French feminist texts which exploit the 'e' into English, since English nouns are ungendered. One of her strategies is "to use typography to make the feminine visible" (124). She uses boldface in her translation of Causse's "nulle" into "one" (115), for example, and takes 'bp's favourite letter' to one of the politicized ends I believe it promises, when translating her "destinatrices" into address(h)ers. The intervention of typography, inviting attention to the material of print, seems a fitting way to "make the feminine visible." The boldface 'e' in "one" might serve as a convincing example to counter those who would deny experimental poetry's material

consequences; because "one" is produced through the grafting of a French grammatical construct onto English, it has the immediate effect of rendering the translator visible.

In "The "Pata of Letter Feet," Nichol comments on the Phoenician character's role in an interlingual dynamic of poetry, "So at a certain point when i bring my poems down to the level of the letter i also begin to move freely between languages, or certain languages . . ." (93). He goes on to suggest that this common material afforded the international accessibility of concrete poetry, because "it did not require the usual kind of translative activity" (93). I would underline that word "usual" since what letteral traffic does is not so much evade translation as pose unusual and complex translation problems and possibilities. At one point in *(Sem)erotics*, Elizabeth Meese addresses Nicole Brossard: "Lesbian. Lover. Lust. Letter. Does 'L' mean something different to you? Langage. Langueur. Lire. Livre" (91). Such a gesture reflects Meese's desire to consider the specificity of Brossard's linguistic project while celebrating their mutual understanding of the indissolubility of language and material bodies. (Necessarily, Meese makes clear this complex position in her first chapter through rhetorically unclear, poetic language. Text is variously proposed here as a precursor to, an effect of, and a simile for, somatic experience.) Her conviction fuels a passion to investigate experimental writers such as

Brossard, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf, who labour under the strain of a language which threatens to ensure lesbian invisibility. Their experimental poetics inspires Meese's own genre-crossing criticism; she is "searching for the words, syntax and grammar that can articulate the body, my body, and perhaps yours" (3). In *(Sem)erotics*, familiar critical discourse is interrupted repeatedly by letters -- both epistolary and alphabetical -- so that her invitation to consider lesbian writing as a lesbian love letter is a persuasively 'formal' one. Many of the epistolary interventions are addressed to and signed by 'L', which stands for lover, lesbian, and letter, among other things. Meese takes 'L' beyond the status of proper initial or phonetic index, however, investing it with ideogrammatic value in her declaration that it "contains its own shadow, makes and is made up of shadow, so that I cannot de-cipher the thing from its reflection" (2). This construction points to questions crucial to the book, questions about the lesbian as "shadow with/in woman, with/in writing" (1) and, perhaps most significantly, about the undecidability of the relation between textuality and materiality: which is the "thing" and which is the "reflection"? The letter 'V' is also re-imagined as an ideogram in *(Sem)erotics*:

> Even the letter V -- one side an obverse mirroring of the other, only connected at that precise swelling point. There must be a name for

this effect -- V. In any case, it reads like a lesbian effect; a lesbian can claim it as her own. (Y)ours is, after all, "a captivating image,"

V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V V

Taking flight,

Love,

L

(41-42)

This passage comes from a letter Meese directs to Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. The 'V' in fact, which is imaged here as a concrete lesbian sign and repeated in a row of pictographed birds "Taking flight," arises out of the proper names of these two Modernist lesbians. While Nichol's tendency is to discover the proper name in his letters, Meese mines the proper name for the letteral which she then proceeds to figure as a lesbian pictographic seme.

Reflecting on the grammatical function of performatives, those speech acts which effect rather than reflect, Meese proposes that "'I desire' might be one." Not among the usual requisite examples of performatives -- she cites three of them: "'I promise,' 'I swear,' 'I apologize'" -- the performative declaration of desire suggests the innervating force of Meese's lesbian love letter. The (sem)erotics she theorizes, in other words, is profoundly material: "When I write 'I love you,' I perform my passion in the letter. 'I want you': the letters materialize my

desire . . ." (86). The iterative foundation of performatives (Derrida, Butler) is recalled in Meese's frequent repetitive sequences, such as "Saying it, over and over, in our own ways helps make it so: L, L, L, L. Dear L, we need to play it again and again and again, patiently recording the variations in our tunes" (128). The "variations" or, as Butler would name them, "failures," are the potential ruptures which are ever-attendant on an iterative course. The fourth 'L' above cannot properly repeat the first, as its connotative value has mutated through a shift in context. Instances of typographical innovation and cartoons demonstrate that even the shape of letters can shift through trans-. Butler declares the political promise of the citational dynamic, where what is considered 'improper' can infiltrate the proper at every turn, in her claim that her own book, *Bodies That Matter*, is "assisting a radical resignification of the symbolic domain, deviating the citational chain toward a more possible future to expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world" (21). Her belief that the transgression of the official bounds of Subjecthood is occasioned by the failure to cite *to the letter* is shared by Meese, who writes, "But one thing I know: *we are dangerous*. Imperfections in the letter demand caution" (23). The various mobilizations of the letter performed by bp Nichol, Nicole Brossard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Elizabeth

Meese posit writing's relevance to lived materiality; their literal work bears the "social consequence and social responsibility" Fred Wah has attributed to a "molecular poetics," which attends to the fragment, the letter, the space, the little word ("Loose Change" 7). And if it is possible to intervene in the seemingly inscrutible, irreducible characters of the alphabet, then we can surely manipulate the gross constructions of those words, sentences, and narratives designed to delimit our knowledge and experience.

<==>

Dear N:

To me, the connection between language and my body, the materiality of language and the materiality of my flesh and nerves and daily existence, is obvious, known, felt. Impossible for me to understand debating it. Looking at the translation project I did with you, in which the visual and aural material of words was our explicit focus (meaning being left to chance, whim, error) I find these passages:

> double frosting; mad about middles
> there are pews tinted fuschia: a ploy of
> colour angles and border signs, rows and rows
> the way you dance but won't stand under
> arrow edges (Nicole)
>
> doubtful lusting; and dimples to boot
> heat swept in a faint ruse: a play for looks
> sins of robbery and slang, is a rose sour

wayward candy buttons to redundant
segue ways (Susan)

And this written before I realized I was in love with a woman. Written before I admitted the love that would shift the materialities of my daily life, the way people talked or didn't talk to me, touched or didn't touch me, the way I walked, what I saw, the contours of my body. Engaged with the material of "rows and rows," I heard the question, "is a rose sour." Found "candy buttons" in "you dance but won't." Clearly, a Steinian lexicon shaped my lesbian unconscious. Desire found a way to tell me about itself in the undisciplined semantic atmosphere of homolinguistic trans-.

Love,

S

TRANSLATING TRANSLATING THE PROPER NAME

Should I marry W.? Not if she won't tell me the other letters in her name. (Woody Allen, "Selections from the Allen Notebooks" p.8)

The question of what constitutes 'proper' translation has always been attended by notions of property, ownership, the relations of power dictated by and circulating through the proper name. Traditionally, translation has been posed

as one of the ways that an author's 'name' can live on, an effect predicated on the minimalization of the translator's efforts, marked by her name's obscurity and institutionalized through copyright law and academic neglect. The virtue of the proper translation has often been articulated in terms of fidelity, a value which recalls the familiar constructions of the faithful wife, servant, and dog, all of whom are property of, and named or renamed by, the father.[20] Translators who betray an infidelity to the 'original,' making their own signature more visible, are met with diverse reactions; Willis Barnstone calls such translators "usurpers," complaining that "W.S. Merwin and Robert Bly tend to make all their poems in translation resemble poems by W.S. Merwin and Robert Bly" (50), whereas bp Nichol and Steve McCaffery celebrate the fact that "in a very real way we may speak of Pound's translations as being *Pound's* translations" (29). Nichol and McCaffery are interested in exploring the translation process themselves, offering dialogues on the subject as part of their Toronto Research Group reports and also producing individual works

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[20]In "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," Lori Chamberlain details the overlapping metaphoric fields imaging relations of translation and gender. The French saying about *les belles infidèles* exemplifies this overlap; "like women, the adage goes, translations should be either beautiful or faithful" (Chamberlain 58).

such as McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions* (which translates Sappho) and Nichol's Catullus translations in *Zygal*. More notable, for its expansiveness, obsessiveness and catchy title, is Nichol's *Translating Translating Apollinaire*, a work spun out of his 1963 translation of Apollinaire's "Zone." My particular interest here lies in how the proper name circulates throughout his project. Considering Theo Hermans' suggestion that "the translational norms underlying a target text as a whole can in essence be inferred from an examination of the proper names in that text" (15), I want to look at how *TTA* functions as a translation, but always with an eye to the proper name: who or what is the translated 'Apollinaire,' how does 'bp Nichol' move through the text, how do the several proper names in the poem fare from version to version, and what are the effects of carrying across a name proper to another culture?

TTA poses many challenges to conventional, source-oriented models of translation. *Translating Translating Apollinaire: a Preliminary Report* kicks origins off the starting block, beginning with neither Apollinaire's "Zone" nor with Nichol's initial translation, but rather with memory translations, the durable traces of the 1963 version which appears later, as TTA 4. This evasion of beginnings is typical of Nichol; The Toronto Research Group manifesto, for example, refuses the inaugral atmosphere of such documents when it declares the "first manifesto lost" (23),

and *Scraptures*, begun in 1965 and reappearing in *gifts: Book[s] 7&*, unsettles book 1's pretense to initiating *The Martyrology*. The title itself, *Translating Translating Apollinaire*, displaces source as it determines Nichol's translation, rather than Apollinaire's 'original' as the object of translation. While the work 'begins' sometime after the fact of original source, it also, being a 'preliminary report', always anticipates it. Terms are destabilized at the two ends of the translational arrow, as targets and sources both proliferate and overlap. TTA 8, for instance, translates TTA 6, which translates TTA 4, which translates "Zone."

TTA extends far beyond the 1979 *Preliminary Report*, in both unpublished and published incarnations. (Published versions include Membrane Press's TTA 26 and *Gronk Flash* #1, a collection of TTAs by writers at David Thompson University). The multiplicity here disavows any notion of equivalence, since we are not shown any one poem which boasts the perfect word to match each word in the original. A belief in equivalence has historically underpinned discussions of translation, perhaps most emphatically in structuralist discourse. The possibility of equivalence hinges upon the existence of linguistic universals. Translators who proceed with trust in these universals often adhere to the model of transformational-generative grammar proposed by Noam Chomsky in the mid-1950s. They search for

the "deep structure" in a source text, aiming to find a structural kernel that is shared by the target language. Even a quick glance at the TTAs reveals Nichol's preference for a translational practice of swimming on the surface. Many TTAs in the series insist, in fact, on a radical focus on the surface structure of language, as in TTA 7, which rearranges letters alphabetically, or TTA 13, which, like Celia and Louis Zukofsky's *Catullus*, fixes on a transfer that, although producing surprising instances of semantic resonance, motivates the phonetic surface.

Moving away from the concept of linguistic universals means shifting focus from equivalence to difference. While poets like Pound and the Zukofskys maintained a concerted attention to the differences in translation, theorists of translation really only began to embrace this messier model of transfer with the introduction of poststructuralist theories of language. Barbara Johnson, one of Derrida's translators, argues for the pertinence of his writings to evolving concepts of translation:

> Derrida's entire philosophic enterprise, indeed, can be seen as an analysis of the translation process at work in every text. In studying the *différance* of signification, Derrida follows the misfires, losses, and infelicities that prevent any given language from being *one*. Language, in fact, can only exist in the space of its own foreignness to itself. (146)

Recognizing the differential constitution of signification in any one language opens up the complexity of an

interlingual exchange and opens up, also, the possibility of *intra*lingual exchange. D. Seleskovitch has noted that most interpreters, at least once in their career, make the error of passing on information in the same language as they heard it, changing the phrasing but retaining the original idiom (110). I take this phenomenon as evidence of intralingual translatability, exemplifying an instance of 'rewording,' one of the three modes of translation outlined by Jakobson.[21] The TTAs, growing out of Nichol's English translation of Apollinaire, are a project of intralinguistic, or homolinguistic, translation; only the phrase "soleil cou coupé" remains from "Zone" and, as Derrida remarks of the untranslated Mallarmé in Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," "soleil cou coupé" is left "shining in his text like the medallion of a proper name" (177).

In the TRG reports, McCaffery and Nichol affirm the value of making the translative process visible; this is an ethic of translation which accounts for losses and gains, foregrounds the shifts of difference, declares responsibility. In *TTA*, most of the poems' titles announce methodology, making clear the terms of transfer, so that

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[21]Jakobson proposes three types of translation: "intralingual translation or *rewording*," "interlingual translation or *translation proper*," and "intersemiotic translation or *transmutation*" (145).

what results in this homolinguistic work is an explicit study of language, a 'preliminary report' on English. "TTA 7: re-arranging letters alphabetically," for example, offers us not only a clue to any alliterative tendencies specific to Nichol's poem, but also furnishes a more general demographics of English -- the excessive frequency of e's, a paucity of p's. A line like "imnoS eht aacgiiMn fmor adeJu ghhi in a eert," from "TTA 12: re-arranging letters in each word alphabetically," unsettles our phonotactic habits, and points to a combinatory potential of the alphabet far exceeding its application in English. The selections from TTA 18, like "walking west along the southern boundary looking north" and "labyrinthine view beginning in the interior & walking out," attempt to disperse semantic freight and employ letters, instead, in an architectural capacity, purely as the shapely units of physical structures.

These translative strategies have a democratizing effect; the subject or verb of a sentence, for example, can become just another brick under "the" or "an." And "the," common to the point of invisibility, is brought to our attention when it appears as "the the the," inhabiting the quotation marks of "soleil cou coupé" in "TTA 5: re-arranging words in the poem in alphabetical order." Moving down to the letteral level, individual letters are set loose from the semantic units of sentence, word, morpheme to

become free agents, bound to appear anywhere and unbound to their former positions in TTA 4. There are nodes of resistance to democratization and amnesia, however, in the figures of the proper names. In the line "oooo oo ooooo ooPpp pp rrr rrrrr" (TTA 7), the row of o's forget their function in TTA 4's signification, but the visible capital P remembers its Macchu Piccu. The proper name, indexed by capital letters, haunts every poem in *TTA*, even those which promise a horizon of desemanticized shapes. In the memory translations, whether by Nichol or others, proper names consistently survive the selective process of forgetting. They also survive the substitutional translations which employ writers' aids like Roget's INTERNATIONAL THESAURUS and Webster's DICTIONARY FOR EVERYDAY USE. There is no antonym for Icharrus, no synonym for Aztecs, no definition for Macchu Piccu.

The data of Nichol's *Preliminary Report* highlights for me, then, the exceptional status of the proper name. Tom Conley speaks of the defamiliarizing effect the proper name has on the words in any sentence, interrupting the flow of transparent meaning with its shape, status, "medallion." He explains:

> The proper name appears to be a node both within and independent of the narrative; it conveys the latter as it also forms a network of hidden and

> ever-expansive suggestions that do not yield to the control of prosody. (122)

The network of the proper name surfaces even in the unlikely territory of "TTA 13: sound translation," where in the midst of nonsensical aural plays we read the line "beacon Inca wary fit," the translation of the original line "becoming aware of it." I would argue that "Inca" was 'heard' in the resonant echoes of Aztec and Macchu Piccu. The proper name occupies a charged place in memory, as Freud has illustrated in his discussions of the common tendency to forget names in times of stress. Freud notes that his migraines are heralded by the slipping away of names, remarking that "at the height of these attacks, during which I am not forced to abandon my work, it frequently happens that all proper names go out of my head" (1960: 21). While you may get a migraine trying to read a poem like "TTA 18: 10 views: view 6: walking north along the eastern boundary looking west," these poems do not ache themselves -- names abound and persist.

Derrida, too, has remarked on the unusual position of the name, viewing it as a liminal sememe which, although making language possible (as it enables address), "does not strictly belong . . . to the system of the language" (171). One feature of the proper name which distinguishes it from the proper body of language is its celebrated untranslatibility. The pun and the proper name share the

honour of posing the thorniest problems for translators, one because it carries two meanings, the other because it carries none. Theo Hermans speaks of the range of translative possibility in the arena of names, stating that "the translatability of proper names is a function of their 'semanticization'"(12-13). Names which have connotative meaning, acquiring the character of common nouns, in other words, enter the language and can therefore be translated. Hermans divides names into two groups, the "conventional" and the "loaded" or "motivated," with the latter populating literary more than other kinds of texts. The "loaded" name can be more easily translated; 'Captain Poetry,' for example, translates more directly than, say, 'Fred.' Herman's argument is helpful, but I choose to cite him mostly for the way that his proposed plan resonates with Nichol's *The Martyrology*: he promises a study of the translations of Ernest Claes's novel *De Witte*, including "a discussion of the treatment of all the proper names (*excepting the names of dogs and saints*)" (14, my emphasis). While he places saints on the periphery with dogs, Nichol embarks on a conversion opposite to the one discussed here (of proper nouns entering the realm of the common); Nichol's *Martyrology* carries common nouns into the proper realm of saint's names: St. And, St. Orm, St. Ain.[22]

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[22]Interestingly, once the saints are found, they are resistant to translation, acting as relatively sclerotic

Andrey Bantas writes on the problem of translating the proper name, focussing primarily on English-language canonical authors like Shakespeare, Swift, Dickens and Hardy. His single reference to Eastern languages consists of his observation that "Japanese or Chinese names . . . remain a closed book to 99% of Europeans" (47), a statement he leaves unexplored with a promise to then return to the "higher plane" of Dickens. This kind of discussion betrays the role of translation in maintaining relations of cultural hegemony. Bantas, himself writing out of a Romanian university, contributes his scholarship to a dominant Anglo-American investment in properly 'carrying across' its own source-culture values. What I do take from his study are the useful and suggestive terms, 'marked' and 'unmarked,' which correspond roughly with Hermans' 'loaded' and 'conventional.' The marked names, then, which Bantas identifies as primarily nicknames and 'label' names[23], are the most translatable (52).

Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of the "transculturation" of the Aztec symbol, 'La Malinche,' represents a complicated instance of the translatable marked. 'La Malinche' was a young Aztec woman who served as

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pockets in the paragrammatic *Martyrology*.

[23]Bantas cites, for example, 'Ivan the Terrible' as a translated nickname -- note that "Ivan" remains untranslated -- and Shakespeare's 'Proteus' as a translated label name.

translator and lover to the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés. Her name became associated with notions of treason, and this inflection persists in present day Mexican vernacular. Chicana poets in the States have been challenging and resuscitating the character of this name, through a feminist translation process which involves transferring La Malinche into their particular cultural context, in which the linguistic praxis is one of code-switching. This process involves, for example, exposing the oppressive force of the name as it has traditionally been deployed in the language; responding to the practice of calling Chicanas who marry white men "malinchistas" (175), Adaljiza Sosa Riddell begins a poem, "My name was changed, por la ley [by the law]," revealing that it is the patriarchal anxiety to maintain the patronym (shared by Anglo and Chicano men) which marks women as more traitorous (176).

These Chicana poets illustrate the very generative potential of translating heavily semanticized, or marked, names; they create targets veering radically from oppressive source text meanings with which they and their immediate reading communities are intimately familiar. Radical investments of meaning certainly occasion the transformation of the unmarked name as well, though not necessarily with the liberatory motives and effects attending the Chicana enterprise. Peggy Phelan outlines the unmarked's susceptibility to inscription in her discussion of the

binaries constituting Western metaphysics; "He is the norm and therefore unremarkable," she states, "as the Other, it is she whom he marks" (5). I argue that when a proposed translator does not respect, or cannot read, the 'marks' that shape a foreign name, constructing it as "a closed book," the marked and the unmarked begin to blur. The marked becomes unmarked where translators are more interested in organizing foreign texts to conform to and confirm their own ideological frameworks, than in considering possible semantic associations in the source language. I suggest that *TTA* exhibits a typically colonial investment in the unmarked/marked name in the original version's second stanza:

> great towers of stone
> built by the Aztecs, tearing their hearts out
> to offer them, wet and beating (2)

This suture of the violent image of torn-out, beating hearts to the proper name "Aztecs" (*aztecatl* indicating 'men of the north' in Nahuatl) points to the ways that Nichol's poem translates Apollinaire. TTA 4 does re-enact, as it sifts through world mythologies for the heliolithic, Apollinaire's fascination for alternative theisms and aesthetics and concomitant expression of a Western Modernist condition of lost faith. Close to the end of "Zone" come the following lines:

> And stride home to Auteuil

To sleep among your fetishes from Oceania or Guinea
Other forms of Christ and other faiths
Lesser Christs of dim aspirations
(trans. Anne Hyde Greet 13)

The names "Oceania" and "Guinea" become fetishes themselves here, as Apollinaire effects an oppressive "transculturation," investing them with an ideological vista which at the same time exoticizes them and proclaims them more primitive, "lesser," than the lost. A curious slipping between property and the proper name occurs in one critic's comment on these lines. Warren Ramsey says, "fetishes from Africa and the Pacific islands appearing toward the end of the poem have considerable aesthetic interest, because Apollinaire's enthusiasm for such works helped shape twentieth-century taste" (xvii). Stating that it was "Apollinaire's enthusiasm," rather than the producers of the objects themselves, who served to "shape [whose?] twentieth-century taste," reveals and perpetuates Western Modernism's failure to give proper credit to the cultures whose stolen property inspired its aesthetic revolutions.[24]

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[24]Marlene Nourbese Philip identifies, with the advent of 'primitivism,' "a double erasure, in fact: erasure of the *context* within which these objects existed, and erasure of the [violent] *circumstances* of their removal from the places where they belonged" (97).

How Apollinaire's name carries or is carried is an issue here, despite the fact that *TTA* is most intently concerned with the intralinguistic practice of translating *Translating*. Certainly Apollinaire's signature, in that sense of his 'style,'[25] is translated in Nichol. *TTA*'s concrete experiments recall Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, and Nichol's frequent bemoaning of the debasement of language (particularly in *The Martyrology*) echo Apollinaire's lament in "Zone" that "Handbills catalogues advertisements that sing overhead/ Furnish your morning's poetry" (3). The fact that the name 'Apollinaire' in Nichol's title can signify all of the *works* of Apollinaire indicates the exceptional properties of the (celebrated) name. Both the accent within and the quotation marks around "soleil cou coupé" function as the capital letters do in *TTA*, as mnemonic traces that refuse to abandon TTA 4. Given that quotation marks signify ownership, there persists throughout the poems an indebtedness to Apollinaire, a mark of respect for linguistic difference, for the text of "Zone," for the 'property' of that poet.

Indebtedness and respect for difference and property are gestures I find lacking in "TTA 29: VOCABULARY FOR B.P. NICHOL by Karl Young." Young's methodology, quite a

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[25]As Stephen Scobie points out, 'style' is one of the three "'modalities of the signature'" that Derrida outlines in *Signéponge/Signsponge* (115).

convoluted one, is not stated in the poem's title, although it appears in the explanatory notes at the beginning of *TTA*. Young takes as source D. G. Brinton's *Rig Veda Americanus*, a 19th century edition of Aztec hymns which includes a glossary of Nahuatl words. The process is described:

> The base was created by selecting words from B.P.'s text that began or ended with the letters b, p, n, i, c, h, o, & l -- leaving them in the position they were in on the page in the original poem. Each word in the base was then used to generate a new section by selecting words from Brinton's vocabulary that began with each letter of each word.

What I find disturbing here is the effacement of the layers of translation which contribute to the production of this poem. We are not given words from a "vocabulary," rather, we read English translations informed by the transcriptions of Father Bernardino de Sahugun, an early Spanish missionary to Mexico. Interestingly, Brinton converts to English these sacred hymns which Sahugun, who was actually very familiar with Nahuatl, found untranslatable, appending to his transcription a warning, "they sing what they please, war or peace, praise to the Devil or contempt for Christ, and they cannot in the least be understood by other men" (qtd. in Brinton xi). There is a momentous translative shift represented in Sahugun's version however, that of conforming Nahuatl to foreign linguistic paradigms, particularly Spanish grammar and alphabetization. Missionaries in Mexico followed a colonial injunction to standardize Nahuatl in

order to facilitate acculturation and domination (Klor de Alva 150). Ironically, Young uses the alphabet to organize his translation using a language alphabetized through conquest.

The other organizing device employed by Young is, of course, the name of bp Nichol. How does 'bp Nichol,' then, operate as translator or authorial presence here -- or does his name become just a dispersed, unmarked series of letters? Young's strategy is, in fact, typical of the ways that Nichol plays with his own name throughout his work (one site being the "Mid-Initial Sequence" concluding Book 3 of *The Martyrology*). Recall Derrida's observation of the paradoxical effects of such dispersal:

> By disseminating or losing my own name, I make it more and more intrusive; I occupy the whole site, and as a result my name gains more ground. The more I lose, the more I gain, by conceiving my proper name as the common noun. . .

While Nichol's name permeates TTA 29, authorial visibility is poor here. This poem is "by Karl Young," though structured around b,p,n,i,c,h,o, and l, and appearing in a book "By" B. P. Nichol. The deflections are multiple; through Nichol, Young, Brinton, Sahugun, and the original Nahuatl speakers runs a chain of authority claimed through

successive abdications, obscuring the slips made along the way.

Reading *Translating Translating Apollinaire* occasioned for me a complication of the issues attending a poetics which embraces translation as its engine. *TTA* convincingly exhibits the generative potential of homolinguistic translation, at the same time laying bare the intertextual energy of all writing and provoking in readers a questioning of translation proper. A complex ethics arises here, particularly in the realm of interlingual movement. Nodes of anxiety can appear where overlaps occur between liberal translation and erasure, faithful translation and self-subordination, meticulous translation and sclerosis, creative translation and appropriation, foreignicity and exoticization. Paradoxically, visibility proves a viable strategy for addressing seemingly polarized concerns in translation ethics. Contingent on crossing the threshold from the invisibility to the visibility of the translator is a challenge to Romantic notions of authorial genius and an acknowledgement of the creative agency of translators. But since linguistic transfer often involves politically charged losses, or reflects inequitable relations of cultural exchange, visibility also acts as a gesture of responsibility, as a proper naming of the changes in linguistic properties and the circulation of property.

Guillaume Apollinaire Group Portrait

Leave eye lessons I.
Laissons well enough lonely.
Unveil ay.
Recognition is the most erotic thing.

Leave I.
Rush for jeans for gold cuts.
Myosotis.
He quite forgot himself.

Lessons.
Lecture on s and surroundings.
Less a portrait.
Than assigned to seats.

I.
Always likes a couple around.
Seen from without sons.
Mind you.

Leave I lessons, I
Mon Dieu, did it hold your coat.

Did he leave.

Did I with chose.

PORTRAITS, LAUGHTER AND REPETITION: QUESTIONING THE COMIC IN "MELANCTHA"

In my investigation of the trans- poetic, a compositional mode characterized by repetition with change, Stein's importance will have been implicit from the outset. Keen lines of influence run among my subjects of study; the appearance of Nichol's figure 'St. Ein,' of Stein quotations in Brossard's *La lettre aerienne,* of Hejinian's article entitled "Two Stein Talks," are only a few of the explicit references to the Steinian poetic which has motivated the works of these three later poets. Stein's polylingual history -- she had Hungarian and German governesses, a Czech tutor, a childhood spent in the U.S., Vienna, and Paris, and chose to spend the greater part of her writing life in France -- exemplifies the rich matrix of idiom peculiar to turn-of-the-century America which, as Peter Quartermain suggests, spawned the new relationships to language we associate with avant-garde Modernism. And Stein's innovations have in turn inspired much of the experimental work I have been discussing, so that with every page of my

study, she becomes more deeply implicit and my delayed discussion of her work, therefore, promises to tend more and more to excess. But I suppose it is fitting, this sense of excess attendant on my choosing to begin with Stein after several chapters of a project which presumes her from its beginning. I have chosen, then, (to use her phrase) "Now to begin again with it as telling" (1966: 299).

A growing number of Stein apologists have responded to charges that Stein's writing is non-representational or devoid of reference through persuasive demonstrations of the *expanded* referentiality of her work; not only does language itself become a concomitant object of study, but her work can be seen to deploy disparate and innovative representational strategies characterized by, for example, metonymy (*Tender Buttons*), concrete dispositions (*Portraits and Prayers*), a double-voiced narrative (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*). I find the attribution of a purported non-referentiality to her notoriously 'repetitive' style the most puzzling gesture on the part of her detractors. In an effort to locate the beginnings of this Steinian compositional strategy, I become necessarily engaged with that genre which so occupied the author during the first prolific years of her career and which is so undeniably concerned with representation -- the portrait. My discussion here will take up the role of a trans- poetic in

Steinian portraiture, with particular attention paid to the story "Melanctha" from *Three Lives*.

I choose to focus on "Melanctha" not only because it marks the beginning of Stein's signature practice of repetition, but also because my first inclination was to steer clear of this contentious story. (Such an impulse invariably indicates a closer look). "Melanctha," a portrait of a black girl and her entanglements with various friends and lovers, has elicited polarized critical responses. Sonia Salvídar-Hull locates in "Melanctha" the vicious strain of racism often overlooked by those critics (an overwhelmingly white group) who carry the most weight in the feminist project to recuperate a literary canon. Critiquing an essay in which Shari Benstock discusses Stein's introduction into a revised, feminist canon, Salvídar-Hull protests, "In theory, Benstock can call for sensitivity toward women of color, but in practice she includes the white supremacist Gertrude Stein in her feminist pantheon of great writers" (185). Against Salvídar-Hull's apparent inclination to steer clear of Stein altogether flourishes a disturbing tendency in Stein criticism to disregard the issue of racism altogether. When the story "Melanctha" is considered at all, it is most frequently interpreted through the frame of Jamesian psychology, so that a pychological, rather than racial, typology becomes the object of analysis. While race is

generally side-stepped in this way by white critics, what does crop up with incredible frequency in analyses of "Melanctha" is a particular citation of Richard Wright, who tested Stein's story out for its alleged "spirit of counter-revolution:"

> I gathered a group of semi-literate Negro stockyard workers -- 'basic proletarians with the instinct for revolution' (am I quoting right?) -- into a Black Belt basement and read MELANCTHA aloud to them. They understood every word. Enthralled, they slapped their thighs, howled, laughed, stomped, and interrupted me constantly to comment upon the characters.
>
> (qtd. in Stein 1962: 338)

Clearly, this quotation has become obligatory in a mad rush to exonerate Stein. Salvídar-Hull casts doubt on Wright's credibility when she questions Catharine Stimpson's invocation of this quotation from "a misogynistic writer" (189). My purpose in calling up these lines is not to exonerate Stein, Wright, or the various critics who employ the quotation. I want, instead, to look a little more closely at one element of Wright's recollection, an element which has begun to compel me, possibly due to 'insistence,' the repetitive appearance of this citation in Stein criticism. That element is laughter. How is it that the stockyard workers' laughter proves Stein free of "the spirit

of counter-revolution"? How is it that laughter can suggest, as Wright implies, comprehension, identification, value? In other words, what were those men laughing at?

In "Postmodern Automatons," Rey Chow draws on Freud's notion of the comic and Chaplin's film *Modern Times* in her discussion about the "compulsive and repetitive 'others' which confront Modern Man" (108). It is modernism itself, she argues, which renders women and the lower classes the "automatons," or repetitive objects, of its scopophilic economy. Chaplin's assembly line worker, whose interminable automatic movements are produced by the new technology, is "seen in a way that was not possible before mass production, including the mass production that is the filmic moment" (107). Chow finds Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* instructive to her investigation into the comic effect of Chaplin's automaton. She quotes his central thesis that "the comic apparently depends . . . on the difference [Differenz] between the two cathectic expenditures -- one's own and the other person's -- as estimated by 'empathy'" (ctd. in Chow 106). There is then, a kind of imaginary mimesis at work in the person of the spectator; as Freud would have it, we watch the grotesque worker, conceive for a moment our own embodiment of his gestures, sense instantly the kinetic disparity between our two bodies, and release the differential tension through convulsive laughter. Left unexamined by Chow is the paradox

of the filmic effect arising out of her discussion. If technology contributes to the spectacularization and automation of abjected subjects, it can also, as in the case of *Modern Times*, make visible that very process of Modernism. Through the new mechanics of film, Chaplin's worker can perform a hyperbolized mimesis of real workers on the production line. That is to say, he can perform parody, a genre in which humour is generated out of two kinetic differentials: the one between spectator and actor and the one between excessive performance and referent. The effect is one of social satire; the spectacle of Chaplin's fictional worker, an exaggerated automation, alerts audiences to the, in fact, accelerated automation of real workers' bodies. How might the comic, like the filmic, function as both oppressive and liberatory? Do we laugh *at* the worker, *with* the worker, *at* the regulatory mechanics of mass production? And is Richard Wright's audience laughing at or with Melanctha? Has Stein, through the repetitive mechanics of her prose, made Melanctha into an automaton?

This last question is complicated by Stein's own status as 'great Modernist' which, in her time, was provisional and contested. Although there was contemporary fascination with the figure of Gertrude Stein, much of this interest was focussed on her self-definition as great Modernist, as if this arrogance on the part of a woman were somehow grotesque, marking a comic differential between a literary

great and the modest rank of poetess. Her gender and lesbian sexuality, the very identities which make her self-promotion laughable to some, and forgivable, even strategic, to others, also obscured her route to canonization. Stein aligns the repercussions of sexual and stylistic deviance in *The Making of Americans*, suggesting you are at risk when "you like something that is a dirty thing and no one can really like that thing or you write a book and while you write it you are ashamed for every one must think you are a silly or a crazy one and yet you write it and you are ashamed, you know you will be *laughed at* or pitied by every one" (485, my emphasis). The fact that one of the most parodied lines from twentieth century literature is "Rose is a rose is a rose" demonstrates that Stein's repetitive compositional process itself makes her an irresistable target of parody. It is rare to find, among popular press articles covering her 1935 visit to the States, a piece which does not invoke her style through parodic mimesis. When I opened *The Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* in the Rare Books Room of the library, a clipping slipped out; it was entitled "Oh Gertrude Oh Stein Here to Talk Talk" and the accompanying photo was captioned "Greeted Greeted at Airport." Such titles, motivated by a will to ridicule, have functioned to shape popular notions of what constitutes Stein's experimental practice. The gracelessness of their construction reveals the reporter's misrecognition of

repetition's deviant engine, his confusing a lively repetition with redundancy. In "Portraits and Repetition," one of the lectures addressed to her American audience, Stein reflects on being the butt of a journalistic joke:

> . . . every time out of the hundreds of times a newspaper man makes fun of my writing and of my repetition he always has the same theme, always having the same theme, that is, if you like, repetition, that is if you like the repeating that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence . . . (1985: 167)

In a sense the newspaper men make Stein herself into a "repetitive 'other'" through a kind of flattening out of her stylistic motive.

What the newspaper men have missed, as she argues above, is the dynamic of "insistence," her term for the productive energy of repetition. "Portraits and Repetition" (in *Lectures in America*) is concerned with articulating this energy and the bearing it has on portraiture; Stein illustrates the impossibility of anything repeated being exactly the same, invoking the examples of witness testimony in a crime story, a bird's singing, and "a frog hopping he cannot ever hop exactly the same distance or the same way of hopping at every hop" (167). In the context of this

lecture, "insistence" emerges as the preferred term, pointing to a mobility of repeated words and phrases which can a produce a more dynamic portrait of subjectivity. The word 'repetition' here comes to stand for a lifeless referential process of "description." Stein calls for "portraits and not description" (166), where "description" indicates the compositional mode underpinning the nineteenth century novelistic prose she is attempting to move beyond. The descriptive mode of novels, she argues, is founded on "remembering" rather than the active and immediate apprehension that can figure a subject-in-trans-. Recalling her development of a portraiture driven by insistence, Stein notes that she realized "the existence of living being actually existing did not have in it any element of remembering and so the time of existing was not the same as in the novels that were soothing" (181). Her sustained interest in "the existence of living being" led to the psychological portraiture of her first few works, notably *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*.[26] Three hundred

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[26]Wendy Steiner, tracing the various phases of literary portraiture in Stein's career, calls this prolific period from 1908 to 1911 Stein's "typologizing" period. The two other major phases Steiner identifies are the "visually-oriented period" (1913 -1925, epitomized by *Tender Buttons*) and a period marked by "the portrait of 'self-contained movement'" (1926 - 1946) (*Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance* 65)..

pages into the latter book, which is an extended portrait of American families, Stein launches into a meditation on the poetics at play, offering "a history of getting completed understanding by loving repeating in every one the repeating that always is coming out of them as a complete history of them" (294). Her repeating is a profoundly representational gesture here; not only does it offer a more elaborate figuration than that which traditional generic and grammatical constraints would allow, but it imitates a function she observes in the subjects themselves, "the repeating that always is coming out of them." [27] Stein's strategy in the early portraits is aimed at creating the most comprehensive, kinetic renderings possible. Decades later, a similar desire is expressed in Brossard's *Mauve Desert*, where Maude Laures says of Mélanie, "If this face were to be described, the features would have to be gone over a hundred times . . ." (62).

Whereas for Brossard it is the hologram which inspires innovative compositional strategies for the depiction of

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[27]The layers of insistence in *The Making of Americans* are varied and many. The phrase, "As I was saying" (126), for instance, a rhetorical marker of textual repetition rather than an instance of characterization, is itself repeated; the effect is to invite a hyper-alertness to Stein's methodology.

subjectivity[28], Stein responds to the technological advances of her own time, notably series production and film. Stein's fascination with the mass-produced Ford car locates her in the Modernist moment Rey Chow has detailed; her ambitions for portraiture, however, move beyond the scenario of a car factory emitting identical products. The search for a methodology which can accommodate a shifting model of subjectivity is answered more effectively by filmic technology. Stein casts the processual mechanics of film against a logic of memory: "By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing, it is in a way if you like one portrait of anything not a number of them" (176). The film reel, comprised of a series of stills which proceed through a dynamic of 'repetition with change,' helped Stein conceive of a new mechanics of writing. Not that this technological influence was direct; she recalls, "I doubt whether at the time I had ever seen a cinema but, and I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production" (177).

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[28]In an interview with Lynne Huffner, Brossard explains her affinity for holographic construction: "For me, the hologram became the perfect metaphor to project the intuitive synthesis that I had in mind of a woman who could be real, virtual, and symbolic" (117).

There were other influences as well, arising out of the upheavals occurring across a wide range of epistemologies, aesthetic practices, technological fields and social arrangements at the turn of the century. The influence of Cubism on Stein's poetics, for example, has been well-documented.[29] And Quartermain's argument about the effect of a polylingual milieu adds to the confluence of new energies shaping American Modernism. Stein acknowledges two influences when she declares in her notebooks, "I believe in reality as Cezanne or Caliban believe in it. I believe in repetition" (qtd. in Ruddick 99). This statement performs an interesting alignment of alternative aesthetics with the figure of colonized slave from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who articulates (with much insistence of first person pronouns) the brutality of colonial takeover, protesting "This island's mine" (I.ii.331). But Caliban's 'belief,' as Stein frames it, would be more properly understood as a fictional construction; Caliban is a character, rather than an artist, formulated out of Shakespeare's beliefs about native peoples as inspired by European invasions in the 'New World.' While practicing as a health worker in the Black neighbourhoods of Baltimore, Stein developed an affinity for the English she heard there, a language which displayed an

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[29]See for example Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*, Bridgeman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, Walker, *The Making of a Modernist*.

iterative reorganization of syntax (notably through multiple negatives) potentially resisting the presumptions of Standard English, including that of a white male heterosexual Subject. (Mainstream publishers, of course, unlike the stockyard workers, had much trouble with Steinian style; Grafton Press's response to *Three Lives* was to suggest that Stein had "not had much experience in writing" (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* 76)). Still, as a case-worker, she was hardly of the community she visited, remaining an outsider. Her invocation of the fictional Caliban rather than, for instance, the real orator Sojourner Truth, who used repetition to great effect in "Ain't I a Woman?" (253),[30] betrays further the cultural distance which might account for certain failures in "Melanctha."

The racist potential of Stein's story arises, I would argue, out of a failure of parody. There are two major deployments of iterative technique at work in the story; one functions to produce the most comprehensive and vital representation possible, while the other functions to defamiliarize and undermine, in the manner of parody, the

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[30]"Ain't I A Woman?" predates *Three Lives* by a quarter of a century. While there were many cultural forces contributing to the development of Stein's poetics, the salience of Black English has been underplayed. Here we might have another example of a Modernist aesthetic 'discovery' which had been actively practiced by colonized communities prior to the Modernist moment.

representational language of stereotype. This coincidence of contradictory motives anticipates one of the major paradoxes at play in late twentieth century politicized cultural production, that involving the crucial assumptions of inherited notions of form, the Subject, language, and the equally imperative refutation of those same assumptions. Lisa Ruddick, in *Reading Gertrude Stein*, identifies the story's contradictory tension along the axis of Jamesian psychology, noting that the characters of Jeff and Melanctha embody the two main dispositions of character in William James's psychological typology. Jeff remains relatively unchanged in the story, adept at the "selective attention" (Ruddick 18) Ruddick identifies as James's privileged facility; James argues that mastery of the world is attained through the conservative adherence to the labels (language) assigned to it, suggesting, "If we lost our stock of labels we should be intellectually lost in the midst of the world" (James 245). Melanctha, on the other hand, is far less predictable in her speech and actions, embodying that more inconsistent state of perception disparaged by James in his description of children who "let their wits go wool-gathering" (245). Rather than focus on this conservative-fluid opposition through characterology, I submit that a stylistic duality produces the tension in "Melanctha." Whereas the repetitive portrait of Melanctha, occupying the bulk of this story, succeeds as a dynamic representation of

character, "Melanctha"'s brief framing, which I read as an attempt to parody both racial stereotype and nineteenth century novelistic conventions (specifically, set descriptions and the death of the tragic heroine), ends up repeating *without* change its objects of critique.

The successfully complex and mobile portrait of Melanctha comprises the greater part of this story. Both the discourse of the narrator, engaged with rendering Melanctha's gestures and appearance, and the speech of Melanctha herself are inflected by "insistence." The effect of sustained iteration on this portrait is that of the "continuously moving picture" Stein identifies as the promise of filmic technology. Well on into the story, a despairing Jeff addresses his lover, "Can't you understand Melanctha, ever, how no man certainly ever really can hold your love for long times together," and, theorizing the reason for her elusiveness, declares, "You certainly Melanctha, never can remember right, when it comes to what you have done and what you think happens to you" (414). Ruddick has suggested that memory here is not only that function lacking in a "wool-gathering" Jamesian type, but a "euphemism," too, "for romantic fidelity" (19). The failed fidelity in "Melanctha" is the mark also of a trans- poetic, where each word or phrase is transformed through a shift in context or syntactical reorganization. The imperfect memory qualifying the compositional strategy of this story

necessarily generates the mutation of perception, speech, gesture.

The beginning and end of "Melanctha," which escape the repetitive rigour driving the central portrait, remain entrenched in James's realm of the "stock of labels." While Stein will become celebrated as a writer who can carry words into new realms of signification, she is insensitive here to the effort needed to recuperate the "labels" of racial stereotype. Stein, who determines adjectives to be "not really and truly interesting" and "the first thing that anybody takes out of anybody's writing" (LIA 211) martials them out in the first two pages of "Melanctha;" Melanctha's friend Rose Johnson is described as "sullen, childish, cowardly, black . . . real black, tall, well built, sullen, stupid, childlike, good looking . . . careless . . . lazy . . . coarse, decent, sullen, ordinary, black, childish . . . unmoral, promiscuous, shiftless" (339-40). While it could be argued that Stein here parodies the adjective, that mainstay of novelistic "description," and that the subsequent 100-page complex portrait of Melanctha serves to undercut that grammatical function, the racism charging these particular adjectives renders them static and prominent. Restricted novelistic language returns, at the close of the story, to herald the concluding sentence, "They sent her where she would be taken care of, a home for poor consumptives, and there Melanctha stayed until she died"

(457). Here again, a parodic jab at the Victorian novel's convention of killing off the heroine is left uncomplicated by the compromised health and shortened life expectancy of real black people in turn-of-the-century America. Stein attempts, it would appear, to undermine the racist stereotype of the ever-happy black person (a notion buttressing the maintenance of oppressive conditions) as she repeats a similar phrase with reference to three different characters. Of Rose she says "she had not the wide, abandoned laughter that makes the warm broad glow of negro sunshine" (340). James Herbert, Melanctha's father, "had never had the wide abandoned laughter that gives the broad glow to negro sunshine" (344). As for Jeff Campbell, "his was the free abandoned laughter that gives the warm broad glow to negro sunshine" (359). The repetition of this stereotyping phrase carries the potential to reveal its inanity. The fact that two of the instances cited are actually negations of stereotype -- Rose "had not" and James Herbert "never had" the abandoned laughter purportedly characteristic of blacks -- might also serve to undermine its currency. Yet an undermining of racist language is effected neither by these parodic attempts, nor by the corrective of the extended Melanctha portrait, nor by the story's anti-racist critique implicit in, for example, the story of the porter who was called "damned nigger" (350) and received death threats for asking a white man to get off a

train. Many readers have rightly been offended by the racism left intact in Stein's story. Clearly, for Salvídar-Hull, a contemporary woman of colour, "Melanctha" serves to reinforce racist discourse. Although Stein attempts, in her portrait of one black woman, to move beyond the depiction of automaton, much of her story ends up producing "repetitive 'others,'" the predictable comic objects so dear to racist memory.

Ruddick's observation that "Melanctha" reflects an understanding of subjectivity on the cusp between Jamesian typologies and Freud's new psychoanalytic project might further account for the uneven effect of the story. Ruddick has rightly identified the emergence of a Freudian sensibility in the central portrait of "Melanctha." She locates the most resonant affinity, of course, in Stein's development of "motivated repetition, a logic of the unconscious" (44). She also notes that the language of "repression" and the "not-conscious" arising in *The Making of Americans* echoes Freudian theories. Ruddick even reads Stein's paragraphs through the psychoanalytic notion of anal eroticism, observing that "her manner of reusing -- and adding -- material from paragraph to paragraph strongly suggests the pleasure of retention" (78). Not that Ruddick claims any concerted effort on Stein's part to familiarize herself with psychoanalysis. Rather, Freud, like the unseen cinema, comes into play because "one is of one's period;"

Ruddick calls Freud "a friendly intellectual presence rather than an influence" (4). The aspect of Freudian theory interesting me here is that outlined in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, as Wright's laughing audience inspires my choice to consider "Melanctha" through the optic of the comic. Not only can we consider the comic effect of Stein's often parodied style, but humour is also thematized in the story in interesting ways. Stein portrays a complex economy of the comic here, and thus begins to offset the stereotype of "the wide abandoned laughter that gives the broad glow to negro sunshine."

Freud's treatise on jokes and the comic unwittingly reveals the abject status of women in a comic economy. In Freud's first chapter, he details a range of joking techniques, focusing on "non-tendentious" (90) verbal and conceptual jokes. Reading for the women in his wealth of examples, I find this typical specimen from an abundance of marriage-broker jokes:

> The bridegroom was most disagreeably surprised when the bride was introduced to him, and drew the broker on one side and whispered his remonstrances: "Why have you brought me here?" he asked reproachfully. "She's ugly and old, she squints and has bad teeth and bleary eyes . . ." -- "You needn't lower your voice", interrupted the broker, "she's deaf as well." (64)

Freud's analysis of this joke yields the conclusion that its funniness lies in the portrait of "psychical automatism" in the broker; this figure loses sight of his purpose by being "fascinated by the enumeration of the bride's defects" and the resulting act of "faulty reasoning" (65) elicits our laughter. While the broker's surprising response certainly contributes to the joke's effect, I also wonder about the function of the undesirable woman here. I notice that women, in these jokes, never get to engage in "faulty reasoning," appearing only in the context of the sexual and often under scrutiny for physical imperfections. The broker isn't the only butt here; he is joined by a female figure, whose presence, however, escapes Freud's exegesis, suggesting her entrenched position in a repertoire of objects -- she is a butt until proven otherwise.

The marriage-broker anecdotes anticipate Freud's study of the one joking dynamic in which he designates a place for women: smut. Obscene jokes (in other words, jokes featuring women) are generated, he says, out of smut.

> . . . smut is directed to a particular person, by whom one is sexually excited and who, on hearing it, is expected to become aware of the speaker's excitement and as a result to become sexually excited in turn. Instead of this excitement the other person may be led to feel shame or embarrassment, which is only a reaction against

> the excitement and, in a roundabout way, is an admission of it. Smut is thus originally directed towards women . . . (97)

This passage exemplifies the kind of minefield Freud's configuration of smut proves to be for female subjects. A resisting woman is always, apparently, displaying "in a roundabout way" her sexual interest. There is no room here for real, variable women's desire, an agency which would include the desire to refuse. The object exists in a convenient state of permanent, accessible excitement.

Smut circulates through a dynamic of homosocial exchange. The third position in the smut triangle is occupied by a male listener, a person who has interfered with the (assumed) inevitable sexual conquest, and yet becomes an "ally" for the first person. Freud explains that "a person who laughs at smut that he hears is laughing as though he were the spectator of an act of sexual aggression" (97). The beginnings of smut, Freud argues, demand the presence of the "ashamed" female sexual object. With social ascendancy, however, smut becomes more joke-like; the women disappear and the obscene is delivered to an appreciative male listener. Two 'gentlemen' can share an imaginary exposed woman, circumventing the dangers posed by a present, real body, which could potentially disobey, necessitating creative Freudian explanations of the disobedience as "only a reaction against the excitement."

Freud makes a clear distinction between "a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence)" and "an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure)" (97). The smut-based jokes comprise the latter category. This segregation performs two profoundly misogynist functions. First, it asserts the non-hostile nature of smut, so that sexual aggression is understood as non-aggressive. Secondly, the claim that the hostile is 'made,' whereas the obscene is 'found' or *exposed* implies that a woman's always sexual body is inherently ridiculous; there is no need to make her comic, because she *is* comic.

In Stein's story, Melanctha's association with the male workers at the railyard is spiked with the repeated scenario of seduction attempts marked by laughter, dramatizations of Freud's theory of smut. The sexual advance is performed through joking; "the man," for example, "would sometimes come a little nearer, would detain her, would hold her arm or make his jokes a little clearer . . ." (351). The following two passages reveal the aggression coded in these sexual jokes:

> "Just look at that Melanctha there a running. Don't she just go like a bird when she is flying. Hey Melanctha there, I come and catch you, hey Melanctha, I put salt on your tail to catch you," and then the man would try to catch her and he

> would fall full on the earth and roll in an agony of wide-mouthed shouting laughter. (437)

> "Hey, Sis, look out or that rock will fall on you and smash you all up into little pieces. Do you think you would make a nice jelly?" And then they would all laugh and feel that their jokes were very funny. (352-53)

In both these instances, a third male party, or audience, is present to share the joke at the woman's expense. The narrator's comment that the men would "feel that their jokes were very funny" suggests that they were not funny to everyone, particularly their object. Yet Melanctha laughs during these exchanges; her laughter, however, does not signify appreciation of the joke but, instead, consistently heralds her escape. Sometimes she banters with the men, and sometimes she simply laughs and slips away. The likelihood of her escape is markedly improved when she is accompanied by another woman: "Sometimes Melanctha would be with another girl and then it was much easier to stay or to escape . . . by throwing words and laughter to each other [they] could keep a man from getting too strong in his attention" (351). Her intense friendship with Jane Harden leads to their wandering among the men together, "and Jane and she would talk and walk and laugh and escape from them all very often" (354). The women's laughter points to a comic function

moving beyond Freud's explication of the objectification of women, and their shaming, through smut. One major component of the lesbian subtext running through "Melanctha" involves this connection with Jane Harden, who "was very much attracted by Melanctha" (354). How does this subtext inflect the laughter and concomitant escape of the women? Might there be an alternative exchange occurring here, where the male pursuers become the butt of a female homosocial transaction? Perhaps Jane and Melanctha are laughing at the repetitive, predictable advances of the men, exposing them as automatons.

"Every joke calls for a public of its own" (151), Freud declares in *Jokes*. His own examples, as well as the traditionally androcentric, racist and homophobic repertoire of mainstream sitcoms and stand-up comedy, illustrate this claim; the jokes which have comprised the backbone of popular routines function as an exchange between male teller and public (implied white, male, audience) at the expense of "repetitive others." Considering this material, I would agree with Susan Purdie's argument that joking is politically conservative, that it serves to "reinforce existing structures of exaltation and abjection" (8). But Melanctha's laughter directs us to a different public (her female companion) and a shift, perhaps, in these "existing structures." The humour generated by Stein's own style (leaving aside the weak parodies of it) might be said to

work along these more subversive comic lines. Ruddick observes Stein's public reception:

> Laughter inevitably greets any public reading of Stein's novel, and this humor bespeaks at once a disorientation and a reorientation. The reinflections given to common language through repetition force a series of reconsiderations and turns upon established meanings. (129)

This carnivalesque association of laughter with transgression, with "turns upon established meanings," can be observed in William Carlos Williams's take on Stein as well. In his essay, "As I Pound Stein," he reflects on the liberatory effect of her work:

> The tremendous cultural revolution implied by this interior revolution of technique tickles the very heart and liver of a man, makes him feel good. . . . Good, that is, if he isn't too damned tied to his favourite stupidities. That's why he laughs. His laugh is the first acknowledgement of liberation. (163)

Williams's presumption of a male audience heightens, in fact, his claims for Stein's repetitive style. Moving beyond the dynamic of a sympathetic public, Williams proposes that the very dominant audience being challenged might be induced to take leave of its "favourite stupidities."

And now to return to the question of what Richard Wright's audience was laughing at. My investigation into theories of the comic and the manner in which humour is produced through Steinian composition has led me to multiply, rather than narrow down, possible answers. The stockyard workers might have been joining Wright in a homosocial comic exchange which figures the character Melanctha as its butt; or perhaps Stein's style was an object of humour -- recall the charge that Wright is a "misogynistic writer." Their pleasure may have arisen out of an identification with the characters, and out of this new realism which ruptures the restrictive scaffolding of proper syntax. Possibly, the men appreciated the parodies of racial stereotype attempted in the story. If these were successful there, perhaps it was due to the particular teller-audience dyad created in that moment when the black author, rather than Stein, performed "Melanctha." The specificities of performer, audience, time and place clearly all bear on the comic and /or liberatory efficacy of this experimental text. It is crucial to keep in mind that for many contemporary readers, "Melanctha" is a story which does "reinforce existing structures of exaltation and abjection."

Having introduced Freud's comic theory into a discussion of Stein's repetition, I cannot conclude without recalling his influential work on repetitive behaviours in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There he outlines his notion

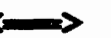
that we have a "compulsion to repeat" (20) moments of trauma, offering as an example the *fort-da* (German for 'gone' / 'there') game exhibited by a child who reenacts the traumatic departure and return of his mother through the toss and retrieval of a reel. Considering this figuration of repetitive desire, how might we locate the trauma in Stein's portrait "Melanctha?" There are several references in the story to Melanctha's childhood abuse; her friend Rose says "once Melanctha broke her arm bad and she was so sick and it hurt her awful and he [her father] never would let no doctor come near to her and he do some things so awful to her, she don't never want to tell nobody how bad he hurt her" (440). One recurring description of Melanctha reads, "Melanctha Herbert was always seeking rest and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to be in trouble" (343). Such a tendency towards the disturbance of a peaceful life suggests a possible "compulsion to repeat" the trauma of her childhood. Freud identifies one possible motivation for this repetition as our "instinct for mastery" (16), so that a trauma can be mitigated through the victim's controlled reenactment of its drama. Judith Butler offers an observation which is pertinent to this issue of reproducing abuse in order to control or deflect it: "The compulsion to repeat an injury is not necessarily the compulsion to repeat the injury in the same way or to stay fully within the traumatic orbit of that injury" (124). Melanctha's

recurrent associations with the men in the railyard, which conclude always with her laughter and escape, might be seen as recuperations of the abuse at the hands of her father.

On a stylistic level, I would argue, the trauma of "Melanctha" and the rest of Stein's work originates in language. The great gift of her corpus lies in its persistent trans- of received language, practiced through a studied, playful, skewed repetition of the micro and macro structures of Standard English. The joy of the child with the reel who repeats with change a troubling experience is analogous to the subversive laughter running through Stein's experimental writing. As I have discussed here however, this early story betrays an insensitivity to the social trauma of the racist bias in English. Although the compositional strategies developed by Stein can be usefully deployed in an anti-racist project, Stein herself is never as rigorous with racist language as she is with the discursive forces of sexism and homophobia weighing directly on her own life. The "liberation" Williams sees in Stein's works should be viewed as circumscribed for many readers. At this stage in her career, even the lesbian subtext of "Melanctha" is foreclosed, continually subsumed by the intact trope of heterosexual romance. Later work, such as the poems "Lifting Belly" and "Patriarchal Poetry," which move away from the characterological impulse driving Stein's early writings, are significantly more exacting in their

comic subversions of the trauma of language. Resonant with the Steinian project is Brossard's notion that writers are motivated by a recurrent "three-dimensional question caused by a synergetic moment, this moment being either traumatic or ecstatic." Unfortunately, as Brossard notes, writing affords only a "two-dimensional answer -- that is, a partial answer that obliges us to repeat the question and to try other answers" ("Poetic Politics" 24-25).

The desert is indiscreet babel. Reality a ruse in it, tepid right. Stem the gaze. Yet mourning this. Ready very young, I was humane crying all over it. With new ears veering I could see solving this with hope inviolate. Very young, I would take her Meteor and drive it further into the desert. I spent entire days there, dawns, nights. Fast driving and slowly then, lighting out the mauve spin and all smiles grappled with vines and a great fight in my eyes.



LIFTING BELLIES, FILLING PETUNIAS, AND MAKING MEANINGS THROUGH THE TRANS- POETIC

Custard does not want to be a hard fact.

-- Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence*

What we know of the word 'yellow' trembles

-- Erin Mouré, *Search Procedures*

Gertrude Stein's long poem "Lifting Belly," begun during her visit to Mallorca with Alice B. Toklas in 1915, has been met with oddly contradictory critical responses. While it is frequently recognized as one of Stein's most erotic, "explicit" (Engelbrecht 98) works, much attention is also payed to its veiled or coded nature. How is it that Richard Bridgeman, in his study *Gertrude Stein in Pieces,* can refer both to the "luridly" portrayed lesbian relationship of "Lifting Belly" and to its abundance of "code words" (148-49)? It is Bridgeman's own intensive practice of decoding words such as 'cow' and 'Caesar' into "parts of the body, physical acts, and character traits" (152) which leads him to suggest that a certain indiscretion characterizes Stein's erotic works; I detect a note of horror in his observation that "Even as she approached her fifties, Gertrude Stein's need to record her passions remained unquenchable" (152). It is predictable that a literary criticism operating out of a liberal heterosexist politic would take as its purported focus the degree of disclosure (content is either too veiled or too explicit) rather than that which is disclosed (lesbian sexuality). A homophobic interest is served, in other words, by replacing the clearly oppressive condemnation of an identity with the more subtle surveillance of that identity's visibility.[31] Lesbian

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[31]Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick details, in *The Epistemology of the Closet,* the court cases of Acanfora, a science instructor in

readers have, of course, also engaged in the act of decoding so fervently practiced by the more ambivalent Bridgeman.[32] The motivation of these critics might be cast as one of emotional and political necessity rather than surveillance. Whether in the name of regulation or affirmation, however, the decoding of Stein's work seems to me to miss the mark; the one-to-one equivalence that encryption presumes enacts the condensation of the polysemic, indeterminate trajectories of Stein's vocabulary. I concur with Peter Quartermain here, who sees the knowledge of a code as limiting "for it narrows the multiplicity of transformations" (32).[33] Furthermore, the privileging of

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Maryland suspended from teaching in 1973, first for making his sexuality too public, then for having failed to reveal his involvement in a student homophile group. Sedgwick notes that while a charge of homosexuality is theoretically untenable as grounds for dismissal, "the space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayonetted through and through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (70).

[32]Elizabeth Fifer speaks, for example, of Stein's "secret code" (160) and Catharine Stimpson suggests that the author's "literary encoding . . . transmits messages in a different form which initiates may translate back into the original" (1977: 499).

[33]Where I depart from Quartermain is in his suggestion that the lesbianism is "incidental and even insignificant" here, that "the power of the text is in the unabashed quality"

the referent which inspires a drive to break code is ill-conceived in "Lifting Belly," a poem in which a textual eroticism is in play at the level of the signifier. In particular, there is a trans- movement operant here, as words and phrases are repeated and mutated through shifts of phonetics or context.

How is this textual eroticism manifested? Setting aside erotic content (explicit or not) for the moment, how is it that we can consider, for example, the repetition of the titular phrase "Lifting Belly" erotic? Catharine Stimpson suggests that the phrase becomes "a repetitive synecdoche for a repeated, repeatable sexual act" (647). Even further removed from the signified than Stimpson's reading, which through a synecdochal logic still refers to the sexual act, is Roland Barthes theory of textual pleasure:

> In short, the word can be erotic on two opposing conditions, both excessive: if it is extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness (in certain

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(31). I think it important to keep in mind that, considering the relative risk of public censure, unabashed lesbianism is a far cry from unabashed heterosexuality. Quartermain's claim denies the influence this poem has had on lesbian readers and writers; it is, in fact, the significance, and the signification, of lesbianism which hangs in the balance of "Lifting Belly."

> texts, words *glisten*, they are distracting, incongruous apparitions . . . (1975: 42)

By this account, Stein's poem offers a lush erotics, with its interplay of "extravagantly repeated" phrases and its unpredictable lexicon. (How the end of this sentence surprises and glistens: "Lifting belly can change to filling petunia").[34] Excessive repetition draws our attention to the material of language, which is generally rendered a silent ferry to the signified. Alerting us to the signifiers on the page, repetition invites us to engage with sound and shape in a more intimate way. To enjoy close reading.

My reading of "Lifting Belly" will be concerned neither solely with its referents nor solely with the erotic movement of its textual units. The brilliance of this poem lies in its intricate deployments of meaning, as produced through a considered and playful orchestration of the connotations, juxtapositions, and concrete resources of signifiers. There is a complex layering here, involving

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[34]The success of this line lies in its underlying grammatical logic as much as in its seeming incongruity. It 'makes sense' that "Lifting belly" could become "filling petunia," since both are comprised of a gerund + a sensual noun. Such a grammatical resonance is not coincidental, I would argue, since the particular construction of the word-pair "lifting belly" is integral to the poetics / erotics of Stein's poem, as I demonstrate elsewhere in this chapter.

things referred to, things presumed, things evaded, and commentary on that very injunction to evade, both in terms of external censorship and personal political strategy. Such polyvalence is enabled by the trans- poetic, which is positioned to roll meanings over and beyond 'first impressions.' Stein argues that her imperative to adopt a new and rigorous linguistic stance arose out of a Modernist crisis; in "A Transatlantic Interview 1946," she explains, "You had tc recognize words had lost their value in the Nineteenth Century, particularly towards the end, they had lost much of their variety, and I felt that I could not go on, that I had to recapture the value of the individual word, find out what it meant and act within it" (504). Her identification of the nineteenth century as the moment when a centripetal movement of signification depleted language of value resonates with the thesis of Ron Silliman's *The New Sentence*. Silliman contends that the increasing transparency of language has been effected over four centuries through "the subjection of writing (and, through writing, language) to the social dynamics of capitalism" (8). Likening the erosion of the material word to the dynamics of the commodity fetish, Silliman looks to experimental writers for a corrective to the "breakdown of gestural poetic form" (11). He numbers Stein among those whose poetics engages the signifier in an intimate and productive way. Important to my argument here is his

observation that "It is only through the signifier that the cultural limits of the self become visible" (146). I underscore this notion because it is my view that "Lifting Belly" does not simply represent a lesbian relationship, although it does that; neither does it simply veil or encode sexuality, although veiling is performed. What I read in the puzzling repetitions, indeterminacies and incongruent registers of speech is a kind of textual meddling that functions as critique by making visible the "cultural limits" of lesbian subjectivity. Stein's poetic interrogates the very surveillance of visibility running through the critical reception of her work.

A cue to the return of a "gestural poetic form" in "Lifting Belly" can be read in the following lines:

> Lifting belly is so near.
> Lifting belly is so dear.
> Lifting belly all around.
> Lifting belly makes a sound.
>
> (14)

This quatrain (along with others in the poem) recalls the medieval ballad form predating the accelerating shift in social relations and consequent evacuation of the signifier critiqued by Silliman. The repetition, simple rhyme scheme and tetrameter point to the ballad and its structuring of language with an eye and ear to material characteristics. The proliferation of lines beginning "Lifting belly . . ."

generates a sustained allusion to the tetrameter verse length typical of ballads; a sampling: "Lifting belly is so strong" (6), "Lifting belly is no joke" (8), "Lifting belly merry Christmas" (41), "Lifting belly is my love" (49).

The rhyming pairs "near" / "dear" and "around" / "a sound," alert us through the most recognized form of repetition with change to other instances of concrete mutation. "Rest" becomes "Arrest" (9-10). "A door" turns, through homophonic and anagrammatic propulsion, into "odor" (31). The recurring name "Caesar" is trans-ed at one point into "seize her" (22). The lines "But to lift. / Not light" (7) perform a shift which playfully invokes the idiosyncrasies of English, namely here the odd phonetic rule that 'gh' is sometimes silent and sometimes pronounced as a fricative like the 'f' in "lift." Note the trans- straddling the period in the following line: "Do you believe in singling. Singing do you mean" (15). This line offers not only an instance of concrete play, but raises a few of the key thematics of "Lifting Belly." The notion of "Singing," of course, directly thematizes a desire to revive the more gestural, embodied poetic form exemplified by the ballad.[35] The question of what "you mean" here coheres with

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[35]References to singing abound in the poem. To cite just a few: "Sing to me I say" (20); "What do you do to sing" (22); "Now I collect songs" (24);"Lifting belly enormously and with song. / Can you sing about a cow" (54).

Stein's persistent investigations into the notion of meaning. "Lifting Belly," which frequently approaches ideas, questions, and knowledges through the coincident strategies of thematization and performance, invites plural meanings of 'meaning.' The verb 'to mean' is deployed in the service of intention: "I don't mean to be reasonable" (10), identification: "I know what you mean" (15), love: "I want you to mean a great deal to me" (35), corrective: "I correct blushes. You mean wishes. / I collect pearls" (24). The role of error in meaning is invoked by the corrective function of "You mean wishes" or, considering my earlier example, "Singing do you mean." But if "blushes" or "singling" had really not been meant, they would have been edited out. "Singling" is meant, as is "Singing". And more importantly, the juxtaposition of "singling" and "Singing" signifies. That is to say, meaning is figured by this pair not as resident in some real beyond language; rather, meaning is shown to be mediated by and / or situated in the material field of language. The resonance of "singling" and "Singing" means. The fact that "singling" is repeated erroneously, the 'l' disappearing, means. Error holds the promise in a language which would correct deviance, a language which, in Stein's time, offered very little in the way of a lexicon for lesbian partnership. "Lifting belly is so erroneous," Stein tells us, and then a couple of lines later, "Lifting belly is so accurate. / Yes indeed" (7-8).

"Correct" and "blushes" generate "collect" and "wishes," indeed all pearls to collect in a search for, and interrogation of, meaning. By the time we have read close to fifty pages of this poem, a line such as "Lifting belly so meaningly" (51) makes extravagant and promising sense.

What about "Lifting belly means me" (17)? This line is a bit of a tease, tempting us with the definitive answer to the question so insistently posed in this work, and often so assiduously tackled by critics: what is lifting belly? Yet because every term in this equation has been warped, torqued, and complicated in the context of the poem, the 'definition' is not to be believed for a second. "Lifting belly" does "mean" her (by her *I* mean one or many of the following: Stein, the lover, the speaker, the lesbian), in that this poem and, particularly, these two words help her to mean, or signify. But the meanings produced are variable, multiple and provisional. The most frequent trans- in Stein's poem is effected through contextual variety. The words "Lifting belly" are hinged to over four hundred different phrases, definitions, and qualifiers. Sometimes these words appear to identify a person, as in "Lifting belly knows this" (52) or "Lifting belly is kind and good and beautiful" (14). In other instances they clearly denote an act, generally a sexual one, as in "Lifting belly is a special pleasure" (15), "Lifting belly was very fatiguing" (15), or the pornographic "A magazine of

lifting belly. Excitement sisters" (18). Repeatedly tagged to a copula, "Lifting belly" simultaneously resists and insists on definition: "Lifting belly is a way of sitting" (16), "Lifting belly is a miracle" (46), "Lifting belly is sugar" (52).

What drives this persistent variability is a radically paradoxical representational stance. While Stein has an interest in representing lesbian eroticism, she repeatedly overturns moments of clear referentiality, and thus complicates the very notion of representation. The title itself, and its pivotal reiterations, defies singular interpretation; you could be lifting your belly, or lifting someone else's belly, or she could be lifting yours, or it could all be happening at once: "I lift belly naturally together" (39). Such a titular construction anticipates the intersubjective, conversational element of the poem, another quality aligning it with communal poetic forms preceding the more privatized discourse of the Renaissance.[36] The phrase

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[36]Harriet Chessman's book *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* takes as its focus these dialogic aspects of Stein, noting the dynamics between "characters," "the narrator and the characters," "the reader and the words," "the words themselves," "the writer and the words," and "the words and the objects they 'caress'" (3). For a detailed argument outlining the discursive differences between ballad form and

"Lifting belly" also signifies queerly through its liminal position between noun and verb. The gerund "lifting" could fall into Stein's preferred category of verbs, venerated in her "Poetry and Grammar" because "It is wonderful the number of mistakes a verb can make" (211). Yet syntactically, "lifting belly" functions as a noun as well, often equated with another noun (eg. "sugar") through a copula. Stein has some reservations about nouns:

> As I say a noun is a name of a thing, and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known. Everybody knows that by the way they do when they are in love and a writer should always have that intensity of emotion about whatever is the object about which he writes. And therefore and I say it again more and more one does not use nouns. ("Poetry" 210)

To suggest that an object, like a lover, should never be called by its necessarily inadequate name proposes the interlining of poetics and eroticism so keenly felt in "Lifting Belly." Indeed, in that poem we never see the name of Alice B. Toklas, though she is made lovingly present not only through conversational moments, the statements beginning "we," and anecdotal evidence, but also through

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Renaissance poetry, see Antony Easthope's *Poetry as Discourse* (Methuen, 1983).

references to "Pussy" (17), "my baby" (24), "my wife" (24), "Susie" (28), "my oney" (41), "Sweet little bun" (41), "Dear little bun" (41), "my bunny" (41) and, of course, "Lifting belly."

In his discussion of *Tender Buttons*, Peter Nicholls stresses the representational potential of this kind of periphrastic movement. Opposing Stein's poetic to Pound's Imagist dictum concerning the "direct treatment of the 'thing'" ("A Retrospect" 619), Nicholls finds that in her work, "it is only by a sort of *indirect* treatment that we can hope to grasp the object -- 'indirect,' because as soon as we name it, call it a 'carafe,' our sense of a vital particularity is eclipsed in the generic blankness of the noun" (118). To get at the "vital particularity" of lesbian sexuality is certainly one of the impulses operant in "Lifting Belly." The very brief 'Part I' of this poem undertakes a critique of traditional novelistic description, calling up overdetermined scenic commonplaces, "Sometimes we readily decide upon wind we decide that there will be stars and perhaps thunder and perhaps rain and perhaps no moon." Stein's most damning comment on direct treatment follows, "When we read about a boat we know that it has been sunk" (4). The object, a boat, is disappeared, or "sunk," by its own familiar name. The phenomenon of Stein decoders attests to the indirectness of reference in "Lifting Belly." The title itself is less than direct, a somewhat periphrastic

index to both sexual acts and erogenous zones. We might interpret Stein's indirect appellation as preventing her sexual identity from being "sunk." Judith Butler contends that, because the unconscious shapes desire, a direct naming of sexuality is in fact impossible: "Can sexuality even remain sexuality once it submits to a criterion of transparency and disclosure, or does it perhaps cease to be sexuality precisely when the semblance of full explicitness is achieved?" ("Imitation" 309). Any final word on what Stein means might evacuate rather than reveal sexuality.

While the phrase "lifting belly" is not an entirely direct appellation, it is nevertheless put into play as a naming. "Lifting belly names it" (34), where "it" is always more or less identifiable as lesbian eroticism. Stein's repetitive treatment of "lifting belly" as a noun-function produces a linguistic scape which differs substantively from the extended vocabularies of *Tender Buttons*. According to Stein nouns are redeemable, even desirable, as long as they appear in the context of poetry rather than prose. The noun-ish "lifting belly," then, can flourish in that genre which "is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns." When Stein wrote her famous series of roses, she says, "I made poetry and what did I do I caressed completely caressed and addressed a noun" (231). Stein's distinction between poetry and prose is, in fact, founded on a measure of the relative

treatment of nouns in these two genres. She insists that "if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently more persistently more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves. And so that is poetry really loving the name of anything and that is not prose" (232). This pronouncement, although maintaining the notion of erotic / poetic mutuality, would seem to contradict directly Stein's earlier statement about refusing the banal noun in the name of passion. The contradictory strategies of repetition and refusal comprise the paradoxical attitude towards representation in "Lifting Belly," a poem which can both declare "Lifting belly is a permanent caress" (37) and still ask "And has it a name" (53).

Stein's ambivalence about naming resonates with more contemporary concerns about the limitations of identity politics and, more particularly, queer theorizations about the simultaneous exigency and liability of naming abjected sexualities. If a taxonomy is felt to be crucial for gays and lesbians as a means to facilitate community-building and identification, it can certainly also serve the interests of state control, easing the regulatory mechanisms of, for example, homophobic legislation and medical pathologization. It is for these reasons that Judith Butler says of the word 'lesbian,': "I would like to have it permanently unclear

what precisely that sign signifies" ("Imitation" 308). Understanding identity as performative, Butler notes the promise of this iterative construction: "it is through the repeated play of this sexuality that the "I" is insistently reconstituted as a lesbian "I"; paradoxically, it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category that it constitutes" (311). Stein's insistently deviating definitions of "lifting belly" bear out such a notion of the instability attendant on iteration; they also generate the consequent eroticism Butler invokes when she says, "it is precisely the *pleasure* produced by the instability of those categories which sustains the various erotic practices that make me a candidate for the category to begin with" (308). Here we have the celebration of an erotic economy based on the energy of what lies *between* stable categories; such a model of pleasure is reminiscent of Barthes, who likens the erotic textual gap to "skin flashing between two articles of clothing" (10). For Butler, promise (both erotic and political) resides in the between of repetitions, "an interval between the acts, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted" (317). Stein emphasizes the primacy of the gap between namings in her suggestion that "A sentence is an interval in which there is finally forward and back" (*How To Write* 133). To decide that it is the sentence which is an "interval"

locates the poem's energy outside that text which can be directly apprehended. Kristeva's notion of a semiotic exerting force on the Symbolic might be recalled here, particularly as she holds poetic language up as an exceptionally active site of this pressure. Stein's "Lifting Belly" can be seen as accelerating, almost to the point of spatialization, Butler's temporal, genealogical rendering of iterative identity formation. The dynamic repetition of the poem contributes to a startling figuration of lesbian romance and sexuality, while at the same time throwing into relief the vectors of surveillance and prohibition which limit that figuration.

Amidst Stein's subjection of naming to the troubling effects of indirect treatment, error, and the proliferation of definitions, we find the recurrent thematization of the trouble with names. The complexity of the poet's stance can be attributed to the fact that both the declaration and the obfuscation of names can contribute to both liberatory and regulatory ideals. The silencing of lesbian reality is suggested in the following passage:

> Can you mention her brother.
>
> Yes.
>
> Her father.
>
> Yes.
>
> A married couple.
>
> Yes.

Lifting belly names it. (34)

In this conversational piece, acceptable family relationships are juxtaposed with the unmentionable "it," that involvement for which the speaker offers a name. There are several passages which pursue this tack of interrogating propriety; "Lifting belly careful don't say anything about lifting belly" (18), cautions the speaker, her repetition of "Lifting belly" subverting her apparently prohibitive message. The beauty of prohibitions, as this line demonstrates, is that once they are declared, they are also ripe for usage. (The dangers of articulation, in other words, cut both ways). Melancholic passages, such as "This is so natural. Birds do it. We do not know their name" (19), are met with the contrapuntal celebrations of "Lifting belly is alright. / Is it a name. / Yes it's a name" (7) and "Lifting belly for me. / I can not forget the name. / Lifting belly for me. / Lifting belly again" (46). Complicating these polarized characterizations of the name as either absent or abundant are lines which simply raise naming as a question: "Have you a new title" (26), "You mean what do you call it" (27). The evasion performed here guards against the cooptation of the name, a threat haunting names as they "continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their authors' most precious intentions" (Butler, 1993: 241). The function of naming is set in motion and spins out beyond this poem, which refuses

to settle on any disposition towards the name, whether it be searching, declarative or evasive.

Stein throws yet another spanner into the works through her mobilization of proper names in "Lifting Belly." The appearance of a proper name is startling, often comic, in a poem which unsettles referentiality. Why, in the midst of the almost incantatory repetition of phrases beginning "Lifting belly . . .," are we met with lines such as "Jack Johnson Henry" (18) or "The Honorable Graham Murray" (34) or "How do you like your Aunt Pauline" (43). Some of the proper nouns contribute to the autobiographical portraiture here; Aunt Pauline, for instance, was both a real aunt of Stein's and the name Stein and Toklas gave their car. The most striking effect arises out of the way the provisional, elusive naming of eroticism in this poem is played off against the 'permanence' of proper nouns. "Perpignan" (52) or "The Louvre" (50) can act as static markers offsetting the active semantic trajectories of the more indeterminate, 'improper' nouns. Yet there are also moments when the integrity of proper names is eroded; not only does "Caesar" submit to the phonetic trans- into "seize her," but he / it is delightfully tagged to the female speaker, "You have addressed me as Caesar" (28), and then impossibly multiplied: "There are two Caesars and there are four Caesars" (43). The force of trans- is also felt in a line such as "Fredericks or Frederica" (38). The agitation of

proper names, a purportedly immovable part of speech, testifies to the momentous force of resignification at work in "Lifting Belly."

The motif of proper nouns extends into a thematics of propriety, where the notion of titles serves to further an interrogation into heterosexist convention and "the cultural limits" of lesbian subjectivity. "Lifting belly is courteous" (10) claims the speaker and, indeed, much is made of both courtly and courtesy titles. The regulations of kinship as institutionalized through monarchic structures are invoked in lines such as "The king and the prince of Montenegro" (21) or "The king and the queen and the mistress. / Nobody has a mistress" (21). This positing and quick denial of a "mistress" serves as a comment on the hypocrisy attendant on this exemplary family structure. Courtesy titles which mark gender and marital status abound: "Yes Misses" (25), "Do not mention Mr. Louis" (23), "Lifting belly yes Miss" (27), "Yes Sir" (32), "Mrs. the Mrs. indeed yes" (52). The proliferation of these titles in "Lifting Belly" inspires my reading of the following passage:

> Sing.
>
> Do you hear.
>
> Yes I hear.
>
> Lifting belly is amiss.
>
> (7)

Stein's attention to the aural in the first three lines, followed by the familiar phrasing of the trochaic "Lifting belly is a . . .' invites us to read our own trans- into the line: lifting belly is *a miss*. A mobilization of titles raises the notions of propriety and entitlement suggested in the statement, "I congratulate you in being respectable and respectably married" (29). Such a measure of respectiblity is ironized by the lesbian content of the poem, and by passages like "Lifting belly marches. / There is no song. / Lifting belly marry" (42). Here the bounds of propriety are interrogated, as Stein laments the fact that there is "no song" -- the words "marches" and "marry" suggesting a wedding march -- for those who are "lifting belly."

An investigation into titles bears on Stein's disruption of normative gender figurations. Stein demonstrates her cognizance of the ways gender and sexuality have been deployed in tandem to bolster a heterosexual matrix where attraction to the 'opposite' gender constitutes 'natural' sexuality, where sexuality is figured into definitions of ideal masculinity and femininity:

> What is a man.
>
> What is a woman.
>
> What is a bird.
>
> Lifting belly must please me.
>
> Yes can you think so.
>
> Lifting belly cherished and flattered.

Lifting belly naturally. (32)

This passage exemplifies Stein's radical questioning of the very categories of gender and of what happens "naturally," an interrogation overlooked by many of her critics. There has been a tendency in Stein criticism to make reductive pronouncements on her ontological identifications, on how she conceived of herself and her intimate relationship. Bridgeman, for instance, cites "Lifting Belly" in support of his claim that "Gertrude Stein thought of her relationship with Alice Toklas in heterosexual terms. . . . the request 'Please be the man' is answered directly, 'I am the man'" (150). I find Bridgeman's assumption of a clear dialogic structure a little facile; it is impossible to know who the two speakers are, or even if there are indeed two different speakers here. But more importantly, I would contend that heterosexuality acts not as some sort of essential touchstone here, but is instead set in productive motion by these lines. A poem containing the order "Husband obey your wife" does not bespeak an unreflective identification with marital respectibility. In answer to those critics who view Stein's relationship to Alice as one of a 'husband,' Elizabeth Meese says, "It's funny that she never sounds or looks like one to me" (72).

What arises out of Stein's rigorous defamiliarization of terms like "wife" or "the man" is the sense that, in fact, no one can ever do a perfect job of 'looking like

one.' In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler recalls the very formative intellectual experience of reading Esther Newton's book about drag, which posited that "drag is not an imitation or a copy of some prior and true gender; according to Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed. . . . There is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property" (312). Such an understanding of gender performativity might serve as a useful corrective to simplistic readings of Stein's identifications. Marianne de Koven, who wrote the influential study of Stein called *A Different Language*, contributes to the body of literature which presumes to know how the poet saw herself:

> Throughout her radically experimental period, therefore, she essentially thought of herself as a man (there is direct evidence of this identification in the notebooks, where Stein says 'Pablo and Matisse have a maleness that belongs to genius. Moi aussi, perhaps'). (36)

I would argue that this notebook entry does not demonstrate that Stein "essentially thought of herself as a man;" I suggest that it produces the effects Newton and Butler identify as arising out of drag. In making a point of declaring that Picasso and Matisse "have a maleness," Stein concomitantly implies that "maleness" is not an a priori

attribute of men. And if "maleness" can alight on some men and not others, why not on Gertrude Stein? Stein deploys gendered names, titles, pronouns, and proper kinship relations in such a way as to unsettle the notion of 'natural,' interimplicated sexualities and genders.

Yet it is this same deployment of inherited terms which has led some critics to the conclusion that Stein identifies unproblematically with, for example, the role of a man, or a husband. Cooptation or, in this case, the perception of cooptation is a risk attendant on a foray into the performative arena of naming. Butler characterizes the fraught position of working within normative terms:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (1993: 241)

Stein, working within "resources inevitably impure," writes a poem which is at once insistent and evasive, offering a 'portrait' of a lesbian relationship while concomitantly tracking the thresholds, dangers, possibilities of such a representation. "Lifting Belly" is not, as de Koven would

have it, a 'different language.' De Koven draws on Kristeva's Symbolic / semiotic model to support her argument that Stein's work exemplifies an anti-patriarchal poetic; stating her preference for the term 'presymbolic' over 'semiotic,' de Koven notes that "In this presymbolic state, language reaches us as repetition, sound association, intonation: the signifier" (20). Electing to focus on the 'presymbolic,' de Koven betrays her desire to imagine a space free of the Symbolic; this reading amounts, I would argue, to a misrecognition of both Stein's work and Kristeva's important dialectical figuration of poetic language.[37] Stein's praxis and Kristeva's theory propose a textual economy which does spin linguistic resources into unforeseen dimensions but, importantly, these resources are familiar. It is the play between Symbolic and semiotic, fixity and indeterminacy, sense and sound, "If you please" and "Pleasing me" ("Lifting Belly" 11) that generates a vibrant, potentially "anti-patriarchal" erotics of resignification. Barbara Godard's conception of both feminist discourse and translation serves as an apt figuration of the linguistic dispositions in "Lifting Belly:"

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[37]De Koven's celebration of the presymbolic is undermined by her own argument, which deems "unsuccessful" (11) those works of Stein which stray furthest from standard grammar.

> Feminist discourse is translation in two ways: as notation of 'gestural' and other codes from what has been hitherto 'unheard of,' a muted discourse, and as repetition and consequent displacement of the dominant discourse. (46)

The two textual movements outlined by Godard can be traced in Stein. The lines "Lifting belly needs to speak" (37) and "Lifting belly visibly" (40) point to both a politics of visibility and a gestural poetics of the concrete. The interdependence of these politics and poetics is, in fact, revealed through Stein's manipulation of signifiers. And whether a word is trans-ed through phonic play or through the accrual of variant definitions, what results is a "displacement of the dominant discourse." Stein takes up words in order to "act within" them (1990: 504), generating the moments of portraiture, the evasions, the commentary, the glimpses of the new, the productive deviance of "Lifting Belly."

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I only have the 1987 Sun & Moon edition of Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, so I bring that and a green pencil to Special Collections, where I find Burning Deck's 1980 *My Life*, begin the back-and-forth reading. So that I can recreate this experience at home I underline all the differences, making a

palimpsest of my copy. Finding the eight new sentences interspersed with the old, drawing green -- a pleasure to run the blunting pencil under "Greenery, insects - the rain as well" -- counting, counting, this mechanical activity consistent somehow with the schematic of Hejinian's project. It is taking hours. You could say, get a life. Watching for periods, pivotal; the sentence insists. Charles Watts says I can stay till five and then at five he says why not borrow my *My Life*. Later that evening I walk up to his door and there it is with him. This one says $3.50 on the back whereas the one in the library was $4.00 and had a rip. How to account for this. I say I'll get it back to you . . . . Whenever, he says though one does not really mean that.

THE SUBJECT-IN-TRANS- OF LYN HEJINIAN'S *MY LIFES*

> There are always more leaves than flowers. In the breeze they occupy the eyes with the wobble of the rough circles of a self.
>
> -- Lyn Hejinian, *My Life* (1987) 42

> Now let's go and have a drink. I'm really fed up with this autobiography where the years follow all

in a row like at a funeral.

-- Nicole Brossard, "Nicole Brossard" 54

The back cover blurb of the 1987 edition of Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* positions this book firmly in the context of an experimental poetic, particularly that of Language writing:

> The emphasis [in *My Life*] is on writing itself, on the 'life' lived by words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, endowed with the possibility of entering upon new relationships. At the same time, *My Life* conveys what the archetypal life of a young American girl is like: 'Even rain didn't spoil the barbeque, in the backyard behind the polished traffic, through a landscape along a shore.'

The paragraph in Marjorie Perloff's *The Dance of the Intellect* from which this passage is taken begins, "Hejinian's strategy is to create a language field that could be anybody's autobiography, a kind of collective unconscious whose language we all recognize" (225). Approaching *My Life* through a poetics which tends to construe the Subject as an effect of the confluence of diverse speech registers, discourses, and idioms, Perloff downplays the specificity of person here. Even the particularity of "a young American girl" is generalized as

"archetypal." Yet specificity resides in the very sentence she cites; not just 'any' girl has a backyard, a barbeque, and lives on the kind of street where the traffic might be characterized as "polished."[38] I suggest that because Hejinian enters into autobiography, a genre so thoroughly concerned with engaging (whether by promoting or questioning) various notions of the 'self,' *My Life* offers a more complex examination of subjectivity than can be summed up in the tag "collective unconscious." My intention here is to bring to bear on Hejinian's work the interests of a Language poetic while attending also to the conventions, tropes, and issues pertinent to autobiography, a genre which, as Leigh Gilmore notes, is "an identity-constructing form" (1991: 63). The engine of deviant repetition, what I have called the trans- poetic, runs along several levels in *My Life*: words, phrases, sentences and, indeed, the entire autobiography reappear. What is the effect of reading two editions of a 'Life,' the first composed of 37 sections (each comprised of 37 sentences) to coincide with the author's 37 years, the second (written 8 years later) adding

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[38]Hejinian herself points to this specific positioning of class when she asks, in the second version, "Are we likely to find ourselves later pondering such suchness amid all the bourgeois memorabilia" (22). This question follows on the 1980 observation that "There was too much carpeting in the house" (22).

8 new sections and 8 new sentences to each existing section? What model of autobiography, and what concomitant model of subjectivity, does this trans- propose?

The two versions of *My Life* appear during a decade which saw a great burgeoning of theorization around autobiography, a critical boom reflecting a contemporary preoccupation with the problematic of the Subject. In particular, autobiography criticism of the past two decades, responding to postructuralist investigations into the nature of language and the workings of subjectivity, inaugurated a rigorous revision of earlier, typologizing approaches to the genre. In her 1987 work, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith outlines this difference between autobiography critics whose codification of the genre is underwritten by their assumption of a coherent speaker (exercising mastery over language) and those who posit an *autos* as "a convention of time and space where symbolic systems, existing as infinite yet always structured possibility, speak themselves in the utterance of a *parole*" (5). This latter figuration of an "I" interpellated by the discursive fields surrounding it resonates with Perloff's description of Language poets, who "take poetic discourse to be, not the expression in words of an individual speaking subject, but the creation of that subject by the particular set of discourses (cultural, social, historical) in which he or she functions" (219). Out of Smith's *Poetics*, inspired

by the autobiographical texts it explores, emerges a model of the female writing "I" who is neither unified and fixed nor eviscerated. Such an articulation, which acknowledges the exigencies of both agency and an alertness to the forces of social construction, is offered in several recent studies of women's life-writing, including Jeanne Perreault's *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography*. A study of *My Life* is well served by theorizations which posit the productive interimplications of intention / constructedness and experience / inscription. Perreault elaborates on this complex positioning:

> Most often in feminist texts the "self" is provisional, an exploration of possibility and a tentative grammar of transformations. Rather than treating "self" as a fixed notion, clearly conceptualized and needing only to be "expressed," the feminist writer of self engages in a (community of) discourse of which she is both product and producer. (7)

The dynamic of being "both product and producer" is keenly played out in *My Life*, and explicated in Hejinian's essay "The Rejection of Closure," where the poet states both that "Language itself is never in a state of rest" and that "It makes us restless" (278-79).[39] This coincident restlessness

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[39]In section 30 of *My Life*, the author locates restlessness more firmly in herself rather than in the "vehicle" of

of the writer and the written allows for the figuring of self as a subject-in-trans-, a "grammar of transformations" organized largely through iteration.

Kristeva's postulation of the dialectic between the semiotic and Symbolic which forms both textuality and subjectivity might prove one way to diagram this restlessness. Theorizing beyond her colleagues in semiology, who focussed on systems of signs at the expense of their speakers (and who thus, ironically, presumed a transcendental ego), Kristeva insists on meaning as enacted by a person who is both subject to change through language and proves the agent of its transformation, binding these events together in her discussions of "signifying practice" (1986:29). Asserting that Subjects are shaped and compelled by signifying systems, her aim is also

> to postulate the *heterogeneity* of biological operations in respect of signifying operations, and to study the dialectics of the former (that is, the fact that, though invariably subject to the signifying and / or social codes, they infringe the code in the direction of allowing the

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language, suggesting "On occasion I've transferred my restlessness, the sense of necessity, to the vehicle itself" (76). The site of restlessness in Hejinian's work is itself restless.

> subject to get pleasure from it, renew it, even endanger it . . . (1986:30)

I quote here from Kristeva's essay "The System and the Speaking Subject," which concludes its argument for an emphasis on signifying practice with the suggestion that the force "which rends and renews the social code" is not only "drive-governed, but also social, political and historical" (33). Such a statement figures ruptures in the Symbolic as stemming not only from the potentialities of an unconscious but also from an emancipatory 'drive' to revise linguistic and social codes.

Kristeva's formulations of subjectivity and language which cast them as heterogeneous and mutable make her popular with many feminists working towards complex theorizations of female identity. Allison Weir's *Sacrificial Logics*, for instance, credits Kristeva with proposing models in which identity and difference coincide, differentiating her from theorists of the Subject who would cast these terms as mutually exclusive. The sacrificial logics of Weir's title refer to both relational feminism's claim that self-identity represses intersubjective connection and postructuralist notions of a discursively constituted subject bound by a "system predicated on a logic of exclusion of nonidentity or difference" (184). Kristeva's Subject and her system, both characterized simultaneously by identity and non-identity, resonate with

my reading of Hejinian's autobiography, where the interlined energies of self and language are continually reinstated and shifted. Complementing my invocation of Kristeva is the performativity theory of Judith Butler, as my earlier attempt to reconcile the two thinkers indicates. Yet Butler is one of the theorists against whom Weir casts Kristeva and Perreault, too, finds Butler's work inimical to a positive rendering of feminist subjectivity. If, as Weir points out, Butler suggests that "language imposes identities upon nonidentity, freezing the multiplicity of possible experience" (118), she also submits the ever-present potential for linguistic renovation, for the emergence of nonidentical definitions of a term over time through the process of unstable repetition; she imagines the term "queer," for example, "redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (228). Both Weir and Perreault find fault with the elusiveness of agency in Butler's theory. I concur that this passivity irks, but I see it as a function of Butler's focus on a genealogical critique. Downplayed agency, in other words, might be seen as a casualty of her rhetorical bravado. She does ultimately assume active positions of identity, but maintains that their promise lies in their instability; recall her statement, "I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign [lesbian] signifies." There is a sense in which Butler is

akin to Kristeva in her figuration of a paradoxical and productive nonidentical identity. Furthermore, Butler's location of agency in the performative trajectory ("agency is the hiatus of iterability") is oddly resonant with lines in Hejinian's repetitive text such as "I was eventually to become one person, gathered up maybe, during a pause, at a comma" (25) and "A person is a bit of space that has gotten itself in moments" (114).

Sidonie Smith's recent essay on autobiography, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," incorporates Butlerian theory. Bringing Butler's elaboration of gender performativity to bear on her own project, Smith proposes an "autobiographical performativity" wherein "the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling" (18). Smith proceeds, in her essay, to analyze several diverse texts (Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* among them) which lay bare the performative aspect of autobiographies, as well as interrogate various performativities of identity mediated through that genre. *My Life*, as I will show, reveals and critiques the norms inflecting gender performativity through improper citation of, for example, the cliché. But it is also the textual repetition within the work itself, and between the two versions, that I find to be a striking display of performativity's mechanism. I consider this

alongside Kristeva's statement that the "compulsion to repetition" is a salient component of "signifying *practice*, where practice is taken as meaning the acceptance of a symbolic law together with the transgression of that law for the purpose of renovating it" (1986: 29). Hejinian's deployment of trans- contributes to an autobiographical project marked by the sustained agitation of symbolic system, of any fixed notion of identity, and of the relationships (now secure, now tenuous) between language and subjectivity.

The iterative text makes autobiographical practice visible; rather than witness a recounted life (from birth to old age) through a transparent narrative screen, the reader is presented with text which is generated out of text: a language event evincing the writing process. There is a sense here that writing produces, rather than records, what is recollected of the life and, indeed, what constitutes life in the present. As Perreault articulates this dynamic in the texts she studies, readers are shown "the process of being a self contiguous with the inscription of selfhood" (2). The first section of *My Life* includes the line, "The better things were gathered in a pen," similarly suggesting the productive aspect of the compositional moment. As the title of Hejinian's book of poetry *Writing Is An Aid to Memory* declares, her practice can drive the retrospection, mnemonics, speculation, and fictionalizations of an

autobiographical project. As memory is continuously submitted to, and constructed through, the writer's present compositional process, the linear chronology characteristic of formal autobiography is undermined. At the macro level, the second *My Life* reiterates the first, interspersing new sentences so that it reads not as a sequel, or second volume, but as parcelled with the 1980 work, inviting us to read back and forth, registering the charge, change. The years of a life already inscribed are thus reshaped by present engagements with the written. Indeed, we never recount an event or a year exactly the same way twice; the *My Lifes*, in other words, register an acute awareness of the drama of self-representation. This 'realistic' aspect of a foiled chronology is addressed in section fifteen: "The synchronous keeps its reversible logic, and in this it resembles psychology, or the logic of a person" (44). At the micro level too, phrases reappear within the texts, each time inflected differently so as to effect the vibrant synchrony reflecting and constructing "the logic of a person."

As Stein did in "Lifting Belly," Hejinian pursues several textual tracks at once; she is representing a life, representing the psychology of the life-writer, displaying the plural discursive interpellations of the Subject (as we get fragments of, for example, nursery rhymes, sayings, quoted relatives, aphorisms, idiomatic expressions, etc.),

critiquing the generic contract of autobiography, critiquing normative gender roles as articulated through various discursive registers. In her simultaneous enactment and critique of self-representation, Hejinian intervenes in the very performativity of autobiography.

As is the case with most poetic 'schools,' 'Language writing' can seem a somewhat artificial rubric bounding a large group of people with diverse, often antithetical, formal and thematic concerns. One tenet that could be seen as the assumption around which these disparate writers coalesce, however, is that language organizes reality. In "Thought's Measure," Charles Bernstein states:

> Our learning language is learning the terms by which a world gets seen. Language is the means of our socialization, our means of initiation into a (our) culture. I do not suggest that there is nothing beyond, or outside of, human language, but that there is meaning only in terms of language, that the givenness of language is the givenness of the world. (7)

This guiding proposition of the contouring function of language is explicitly declared at certain points in Hejinian's *My Life*, as in the line "Language is the history that gave me shape and hypochondria" (47). The invocation of "hypochondria," the belief that one has an illness which is, in truth, conjured through suggestion, points to the

visceral extent of linguistic purview. Hejinian also conveys the power of naming through autobiographical anecdote; in the section which takes as its focus her life as a 6-year-old, she recalls:

> The first grade teacher, Miss Sly, was young and she might have been kind, but all the years that she had been named Sly so had made her. (20)

Both the hypochondriac's statement and this whimsical illustration contribute to the assumption underwriting *My Life* that language is productive of the world.

Hejinian's attitude toward language, however, is not one of passivity in the face of its totalizing hold on reality. At certain points in her work, we get a sense of the writer attempting to represent something unnamed in the world, straining to find the language which might adequate the things around her. "The refrigerator makes a sound I can't spell" (37) she complains, and elsewhere remembers, "The sea said shoorash, but irregularly -- I want to be very precise although it is impossible to spell these sounds -- and occasionally it boomed" (62). Such a complex relationship with language, implicating both its force and its gaps, produces the notion in *My Life* that "language is an order of reality itself and not a mere mediating medium" ("Two Stein Talks" 129). This was Stein's "discovery" according to Hejinian, who imagines that with this realization Stein would have seen that "her writing was

potentially as social and as useful as doctoring might be" (129). The linguistic interventions running through Hejinian's work manifest language as an "order of reality" and reflect an ethic of "doctoring;" we learn that if "Language makes tracks" (60), it pays to get in on that making.

Attention to sound (as suggested by the poet's "shoorash") motivates instances of trans- at the micro level. *My Life* is "ear-marked, sound-bound" (109). Appearing in Hejinian's recollection of her second year, a stage of life when we still "think of words as things" (*Jokes* 120), is the sentence "I sat on the windowsill singing sunny lunny tina, ding dang dong" (10). This privileging of sound over sense is a translation-effect; we recognize the 'Sonnez les matines' of the French song "Frère Jacques." This kind of defamiliarization, effected through interlingual exchange, is repeatedly enacted within English here. In the same section, for example, Hejinian writes "Where is my honey running," which recalls "sunny lunny" as well as, not incidentally, the similarly driven "Every little bun is of honey / . . . Dear little bun I'm her sunny" of Stein's "Lifting Belly." "The front rhyme of harmless with harmony" (11) precedes this "honey running" line, making explicit the kind of concrete resonance which is one of the compositional motives driving the progress of the autobiography.

I think of "Lifting Belly" again when I read "Did you mean gutter or guitar. Like cabbage or collage" (22), so reminiscent of the phonetic trans- and heightened sense of what it means to "mean" in "I correct blushes. You mean wishes. / I collect pearls" ("Lifting Belly" 24). And Stein's emphasis on 'singing' is incarnated in Hejinian's recurrent phrase "The obvious analogy is with music" (22), which announces the question about "gutter or guitar." The music referred to is undoubtedly jazz, "collage" an improvisation on "cabbage," "guitar" an improvisation on "gutter."[40] The musical aspect of this latter trans- is playfully thematized, as it is later in section 31: "Is that violence or violins" (79). Examples of concrete trans- are numerous: "mischief" becomes "Miss Chief" (29), "tocking" reappears as "talking" (110), a "smile" is a "simile" (26). In his study of the musicality in *Language Is an Aid to Memory*, Peter Quartermain argues that the proliferation of fragmented words in Hejinian's poems skews our reading of the words left intact, that she "encourages us to *mis*read her text" (1992:26). The same reading lesson arises, I would argue, out of her persistent use of trans-. So when we see ". . . whither. Writer solstice. Let's listen for the last of the autumn frogs" (67), we impose the word

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[40]Lyn Hejinian's husband, to invoke a relevant fact from her *bios*, is Larry Ochs, a jazz saxophonist associated with the ROVA Saxophone Quartet and the Glenn Spearman Double Trio.

'winter' into the sequence. This imposition is begged by a number of different factors: the common word-pair 'Winter solstice' ghosted by "Writer solstice," the thematic hint of "autumn frogs," and the trans- already at work between "whither" and "Writer." Another instance of misreading (or desire to err) is occasioned by the line "I've heard that it once was a napron" (77). There is no clue in the surrounding sentences as to what this "it" might be, yet the larger context of *My Life*'s trans- poetics facilitates our discovery of the referent 'apron,' the 'n' sliding easily between "a napron" and 'an apron.' Again, a thematic prompt is also present, as the initial phrase "I've heard that . . ." invites us to attend to what we *hear* here. "Soon dogs and sun are bugs and moon," writes Hejinian, and then comments, "Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good" (109). This statement outlines the political motive behind these deviant repetitions, that performing alterations of linguistic material can "alter illusions," alter perceptions of both self and reality.

Another form of trans- involves the recurrence of a phrase, its concrete integrity intact, in altered contexts. Hejinian elaborates on the semantic effect:

> Since context is never the same and never stops, this device says that meaning is always in flux, always in the process of being created. Repetition, and the rewriting that repetition

> becomes, make a perpetual beginning, like Stein's beginning again and again; they postpone completion indefinitely. (1985: 273)

The phrase with which the book does indeed begin is "*A pause, a rose, / something on paper*" (7). This phrase appears as the first of the 37 (or, later, 45) headings organizing *My Life*, framed in a space indented into the page of type. The "pause" is made concrete, spatial, by this indentation, just as in the following phrase, "A moment yellow," time is spatialized by a concrete adjective. "Rose" is a colour, anticipating "yellow," as well as a figure on wallpaper, as suggested by the nearby phrase "rooms share a pattern of small roses" (7). It also indexes the Steinian rose, heralding the repetition that will make it a caressable "something on paper." As they appear over and over in *My Life*, the terms in this short catalogue are set afloat in a continuous trans-. In the third section, the phrase recurs in the sentence, "A pause, a rose, something on paper, in a nature scrapbook" (13), evoking the image of a "rose . . . on paper," pressed in a book. In section five the phrase is preceded by a reference to music: "You could tell that it was improvisational because at that point they closed their eyes. A pause, a rose, something on paper" (16). Here the "pause" can be read as a fermata, and the "something on paper" as musical notation.

The context of the next appearance furnishes a number of new inflections:

> I have been spoiled with privacy, permitted the luxury of solitude. A pause, a rose, something on paper. I didn't want a party for my tenth birthday, I wanted my mother, who was there, of course, at the party, but from whom I was separated by my friends and because she was busy with the cake and the balloons. She kept a diary, but she never read it. (31)

The first sentence introduces the privilege of a middle-class child, who has a 'room of one's own,' with time, "a pause," to read or write "something on paper." The birthday memory casts "something on paper" as a birthday card or, perhaps, wrapping paper. This paper might, of course, "share a pattern of small roses," and we might imagine a sugar rose on the cake which occupies the girl's mother. The final sentence above posits "something on paper" as a diary, never read -- did her mother not have time to "pause" for this?

Section fourteen interrogates the "pause" through critiques of temporal organization:

> But because we have only seven days, the light seems to be orderly, even predictable. A pause, a rose, something on paper implicit in the

> fragmentary text. The Mayan calendar has more days. (41)

This passage points to the normative force of calendars ("something on paper"), and implies that a different way of figuring time (the "pause") would change even the light, perhaps render things unpredictable. Tagging the modifying "implicit in the fragmentary text" to "A pause, a rose, something on paper," Hejinian highlights the potential for misreading, our insertion here and there of the phrase which has, by this point in the text, proven itself bound to reappear. Section fifteen offers us an opportunity for misreading within the phrase itself, as it is prefaced by the sentence, "Before a busy day, one wants to 'get' a lot of sleep" (43). This new context invites the reader to read "a rose" as 'arose,' to perform the kind of swift swap of letters and spaces inspired by "a napron."

One of the later incarnations of *My Life*'s signature phrase is set in a passage which tells us much about the poetics of this book:

> Through the windows of Chartres, with no view, the light transmits color as a scene. What then is a window. Between plow and prow. A pause, a rose, something on paper, of true organic spirals we have no lack. In the morning it is mauve, close to puce. The symbolism of the rose depends on its purity of color. (65)

How language exists as material (textured, coloured) rather than an unremarked vehicle is one of the concerns in this sequence. The stained glass windows -- perhaps she is even thinking of the "rose" window -- of the gothic cathedral at Chartres serve to complicate the metaphor of language as a transparent 'window' on the world. The last line quoted above recalls Stein's claim about her string of roses, that "in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years" (1985: xiii); here Stein articulates the paradox that it is through broadening our perception of language beyond an intrument of representation that words begin, in fact, to represent with the greatest lucidity and vigour. "True organic spirals" image the compositional strategy of repetition with change, a moving forward that is also a perpetual revisitation. Nestled among these suggestive statements is the sentence fragment "Between plow and prow," which both reflects on and enacts an instance of trans-. The writer's presentation of "plow" and its alteration "prow" energizes the space "between," attunes us to the semiotic roll between l and r, incites a reading that looks both ways.

If a person is that "bit of space" between, as Hejinian has suggested, or that Butlerian "hiatus," then *My Life* offers a rich autobiographical portrait of betweens. "I in my chronic ideas return" (114), states Hejinian, articulating the iterative formation of her "I." The ever-

shifting meanings of words and phrases, of all the pauses, roses, and somethings on paper, generate a dynamic model of the subject, positing a subject-in-trans- marked by the persistent interplay of identity and difference. The performativity of identity construction is dramatized through this repetitive self-portraiture.

Hejinian's refusal to let language lie resonates with the poetics of Language writing which, according to the editors of the collection *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, "takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter" (ix). To expose the performative constitution of any of these systems is to refuse a 'taking for granted.' To her strategy of presenting multiple alternative versions of unusual phrases such as "A pause, a rose, something on paper," Hejinian adds the practice of repeating *unfaithfully* more common word strings and notions. These phrases are not reiterated in her text yet, as commonplaces, they come densely sedimented with their history of constitutive iterations. In some instances, Hejinian will defamiliarize some aspect of an idiomatic expression through the use of quotation marks, as in "I had 'hit upon' an idea" (20) or the above cited "one wants to 'get' a lot of sleep." Sometimes she alerts us to the illogic of the idiomatic by supplying a logical corrective: "The dog was lying in the sunlight not the sun" (66). The most striking instances of redeployment engage

sayings with gendered content. Reading "Pretty is as pretty does" (7), we measure this deviation from the cliché (that figure of speech which, by definition, is predicated on repetition) 'Handsome is as handsome does.' "Pretty does" does not function quite the same as 'handsome does;' this substitution underscores the cultural regulation of female appearance, casts the female object of beauty against the man of 'handsome' action.

The performativity of identity construction is laid bare in this autobiography. *My Life* is full of common wisdom which contributes to the formation of a viable female self; taking up this gendered identity is dependent on the proper citation of certain norms. In the section portraying the writer's fifteenth year, we get the details of hygiene which will discipline the potentially grotesque female: "She trimmed first her nails and then the split ends of her hair" (44). Later we hear the familiar admonition, "If I was unmarried after college, I would be single all my life and lonely in old age" (53), designed to encourage women to view college as a place to get a husband, rather than an education. Section thirty-one is titled with the phrase "*I laugh as if my pots were clean*" (78), invoking the model woman of television commercials who informs us that the measure of our happiness is determined by how successfully we adequate the perfectionist homemaker. In *Gender Trouble*

Butler outlines the plethora of discursive pressures determining female identity:

> . . . the very injunction to be a given [subject] takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands at once. The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment.
>
> (qtd. in Smith 20)

Smith finds this notion liberatory; since the various interpellations must fail to overlap or coincide exactly, they "create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions, limits and their transgressions" (20). This incoherence does impair the authority of any one of these calls in *My Life*. Another way that Hejinian interrogates these pressures is to frame them explicitly as injunctions, as regulatory demands that are *heard* by the growing girl / woman. Remembering the year she was thirteen, she writes, "Women, I heard, should speak softly without mumbling" (39). The next year is marked by the resistance to this order: "Often gruff and bellowing, always female, but not always feminine" (41). Such deportment is unacceptable, indeed, a threatening interruption in feminine

performativity, as is made clear by the line in the same section, "They asked my mother to correct my views or to keep me home" (41). Not surprisingly, the responsibility of gender discipline falls on the mother, herself bound to follow and provide a proper behavioural example. Overtly displaying the constitutive effects of discursive pressures, Hejinian declares, "What she felt, she had heard as a girl" (48).

The genre of autobiography is itself one of the routes through which regulatory norms of identity are promulgated. The critical apparatuses of that genre also contribute to the trajectory of those norms, as scholars determining the proper subject of autobiography end up buttressing certain ideals of selfhood, denigrating others. In *Autobiography and Postmodernism,* Leigh Gilmore articulates this generic program:

> The Augustinian lineage drawn by traditional studies of autobiography has naturalized the self-representation of (mainly) white, presumably heterosexual, elite men. Efforts to establish a genre of autobiography based on the works of Augustine, Rousseau, Henry Adams, and so on, must be seen as participating in the cultural production of a politics of identity, a politics that maintains identity hierarchies through its reproduction of class, sexuality, race, and

> gender as terms of 'difference' in a social field of power. (5)

Inserting herself into this tradition with *My Life*, Hejinian is aware that the subjectivity presented in her book will fail to align with that of the traditional ideal. She remarks, "And if I feel like a book, a person on paper, I will continue," suggesting that proceeding with a life-writing project is facilitated by one's proximity to this ideal. What kind of "I" can properly "feel like a book"? Following immediately on this statement is her question, "What is the gender on paper" (76) -- here is another 'something on paper' -- which more pointedly addresses the androcentric bias of conventional figurations of the autobiographical subject.

How does the story of *My Life* compare to the chronological rendering of a distinguished man's career? On the first page we read the sentence, "Hence, repetitions, free from all ambition" (7). A succinct characterization of a compositional method which energizes language through a field of iterations rather than taking as its goal some final version, this statement also announces this book's deviation from the traditional template of the ambitious male's rise to eminence. Consider the following passage in light of such a template:

> The pattern of the linoleum tiles organized my mopping of them, and when I have to cross clean

> floor in order to rinse the mop, I spread a towel and step on it, though then that makes more laundry. (114)

Hejinian includes the quotidian events and observations of her life as a wife and mother, a gesture which both interrogates the normative content of standard autobiography and critiques the gendered division of labour. Passages such as this one inflect with seriousness the ironized "*I laugh as if my pots were clean.*" Significantly, mopping linoleum is discussed in the final section of *My Life*, at the point where we might expect traditional autobiography to detail the attainment of some long-pursued goal. In addition to including commentary on the banal chores assigned to women, Hejinian valorizes those women's experiences which might not be considered 'eminent:' "I couldn't join the demonstration because I was pregnant, and so I had a revolutionary experience without taking revolutionary action" (67). Her repetition of the word "revolutionary" here insists that the pregnant woman, like the activist, does cut a figure in the sociopolitical landscape. And while her commentary on mopping functions mainly as a critique of labour divisions, Hejinian often includes everyday events with the effect of recasting them as valuable knowledges. Recalling the year she was twenty-one, she writes, "Now I too could find a perfect canteloupe, not by poking the flesh around the stem of the melon but by

sniffing at it" (57); the word "too" suggests that this bit of wisdom was received from the previous generation of women.

In her insistence on moving beyond the paternal fictions structuring conventional exemplars of the genre, Hejinian enters in on that generic performativity, expanding our idea of what an autobiography might look like. Smith describes the common experience of many female life-writers who have taken up a genre densely sedimented with the patrilineal:

> But as she appropriates the story and the speaking posture of the representative man, she silences that part of herself that identifies her as a daughter of her mother. Repressing the mother in her, she turns away from the locus of all that is domesticated and disempowered culturally and erases the trace of sexual difference and desire. (53)

As several of the passages I have cited from *My Life* demonstrate, Hejinian refuses this scenario, is definitely not "repressing the mother in her." The sections recalling her childhood are full of references, both direct and oblique, to her mother. She recalls being six when "In the school bathroom I vomited secretly, not because I was ill but because I longed for my mother" (20). These moments of yearning -- remember also the birthday party scene quoted

earlier -- function as an emphatic refusal of autobiography's ideal subject, a heroic and resolutely individuated public figure. Also present in *My Life* are Hejinian's reflections on her own motherhood, often involving some comic infringement of the bounds of 'good' mothering: "All the kids at the park had been warned away from the rain puddle and the mud, but mine were sitting in it" (70). One of the recurrent phrases of the book, 'As for we who "love to be astonished",' is usually tagged to the kind of Ripleyesque statements so impressive to children, such as "a weasel eats twenty times as much as a lizard of the same size" (24). In section ten, it appears in the sentence, "As for we who 'love to be astonished,' mother love" (30), making visible the force of a love that is routinely taken for granted. This phrasal pairing is recapitulated, with a generational shift, in section thirty-three: "As for we who 'love to be astonished,' my love for these kids" (83).[41] Interestingly, the 1987 version of *My*

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[41]In a review of *My Life*, Diane Wakoski argues that the formal experimentation of this autobiography makes it "hard to like but easy to admire," and that such an innovative style inspires no "emotional response" in the reader (207). My experience is contrary; I find coming upon the heartfelt phrase "my love for these kids" in the midst of the often ironized, playful, disjunctive climate of Hejinian's paragraphs to be very moving. The sincerity is stunning, more so than if this sentiment were to appear, quite

Life inserts new details from that time when Hejinian's children were "seven and nine," such as the locale of a family outing, the precise time (6:45 a.m.) she would have to get the kids to the bus, her son's theories about outer space; reading between these two incarnations of the book, I register the gathering of a certain nostalgia for the everyday around her astonishing "love for these kids."

Offering us two versions of a life, Hejinian posits a model of subjectivity radically divergent from the one expressed through formal autobiography and its critical standardization which, as Shirley Neuman says, "construe the self as individuated and coherent rather than as the product of social construction and as a subject-in-process . . ." (293). While the entire repetitive text of the first *My Life* remains intact in the second, every sentence is inflected further by the eight new sentences in each section, the eight new sections. The subject-in-trans- which emerges hovers here and there among meanings, shifts constantly, is figured by and refigures her linguistic context; "My life," writes Hejinian, "is a permeable

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expectedly, in the course of a more familiar narrative. I have a similar "emotional response" to "Lifting Belly" where, among the puzzling and comic lines about cars and Caesars, among all the different registers and voices, I find the simply stated miracle of "I am with her" (42).

constructedness" (93). The second version ambiguates the first, as in the following example:

> Just get on a plane to see other things somewhere. The water ouzel flies either over or under water. No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot. A neighbour rolled the terriers in a stroller and wiped their little bottoms with a tissue when they shat. (1980: 66)
>
> * * *
>
> On the grimy laundry porch, dove-like really, a pretty pigeon laid an egg, then when the egg eventually hatched the repulsive bird ate the chick. Just get on a plane to see other things somewhere. The water ouzel flies either over or under water. No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot. A neighbour rolled the terriers in a stroller and wiped their little bottoms with a tissue when they shat. (1987: 67-68)

Between the two passages, the deictic "this" shifts. In the first instance, dogs (and parrots) will never be capable of a) flying both above and below the water's surface and / or b) wiping their own butts. The added sentence in the second edition invites "this" to refer to eating chicks, so that the dogs are now also c) incapable of eating their young. More subtle thematic deviations occur as well; the play

between over and under, sky and earth, is heightened by the inclusion of this "dove-like" pigeon, which joins the parrot and the plane -- the ouzel mediates -- in contrasting with the earth-bound dogs. Fittingly, the dogs are terriers, their breed name drawn from Medieval Latin *terrarius*, meaning 'of the earth.' The pigeon anecdote also resonates with the pampered terriers in its challenge to notions of acceptible motherhood. Creating an autobiographical environment where meaning is in flux proposes a more fluid relationship between self and language and a processual model of the subject.

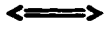
Many of the new lines offer commentary on the compositional modes of *My Life*. The line "The front rhyme of harmless with harmony," for instance, is an addition, as is "Velocity and throat verisimilitude" (10), which also appears in the "sunny lunny tina" section, and determines the physics driving the transliteration of that song. In the midst of section ten we read the line "It is impossible to return to the state of mind in which these sentences originated" (30), which underscores the contingent quality of autobiography, its shape determined by the moment of composition. A 'faithful' life-writing exists in the present, Hejinian suggests, consistently casting both life experience and writing in this iterative present moment: "Adolescence is repetition, moment by moment beginnings in the middle" (40). This assertion typifies the more

analytical and reflective material introduced in the second book. Translation comes further into play as a suggestive compositional figure here. Considering the difference between literal and letteral transfer, Hejinian writes "But any translator will complain, woof is translation and gav transliteration" (110). Her invocation of the Russian word for a dog's bark points to her own translation of the Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoschenko, a project she took up between the two writings of *My Life*. Attending to the dynamics of the writing process, Hejinian's metacommentary encourages the reader to carry the trans- further, participate in the restlessness of the book. The 1987 version asks, "Are your fingers in the margin" (10).

"I gather words to make a great straw-yellow fire, but if you don't put in your own flame, my fire won't take, my words won't burst into pale yellow sparks. . . . Without your breath on my words, there will be no mimosas" (107). So writes Cixous in "The Last Painting or the Portrait of God," entreating her reader to engage in the repetition of "mimosas" so that they might bloom as do the iterative paintings of Monet, Hokusai, Rembrandt. Intertextual links to Cixous' essay suggest Hejinian read this moving treatise on repetition with change. The cover of the second autobiography displays a repetitive triptych, each painting of the sea / sky scape differing only slightly from the last, so that the piece resembles a strip of film. Holding

this cover between my fingers I caption it with both Cixous' wonder at Monet's knowing "how to paint the sameness of the sea" (106) and the title of *My Life*'s thirty-third section, "*There is no 'sameness' of the sky*" (82). Hejinian's figuration of "Language which is like a fruitskin around fruit" (43) recalls Cixous' claiming "the right to repeat the word until it becomes dry orange-skin . . ." (128). Both writers characterize myopia as a poetic disposition, as it facilitates attention to the immediate, the close-at-hand, the words on this page, the present. Cixous details the benefits of her poor vision: "My nearsightedness spares me the agony of those who see the secrets of the sky. I write because I am nearsighted . . . . I am someone who sees the smallest letters of the earth" (109). "Myopia," claims Hejinian, "may serve to dispel the pains of chronophobia" (46) and, in another instance of self-reflexive commentary, writes, "I may have started inexactly, I thought, nearsighted to a buttercup; I will begin again, and I rolled over into the next indentation" (39-40). Like Cixous, Hejinian embraces the myopic practice of repeating what is already before her. What results is a poetics which agitates the particulars ("the smallest letters") of language, and thus sets in motion the meanings which bear on the world and on subjectivity, concomitantly representing with keen accuracy the sameness and difference, the beginning over and over, which structures a life. "This is

how I live," says Cixous, "this is how I try to write" (104).



When I was 3 or 4 I slouched in the back seat of the Hillman, my window screening the waving procession of late summer trees that lined the street. I tried to name them as rapidly as we flew by them: tree, tree, tree, tree tree tree tree tree treetreetreetreetree. The meaning of tree, to my delight, began to unhinge, gave way to a sound event, the arbitrary and sensuous performance of lips teeth & tongue. After a time, meanings began to creep back, some of them resembling trees.

* * *

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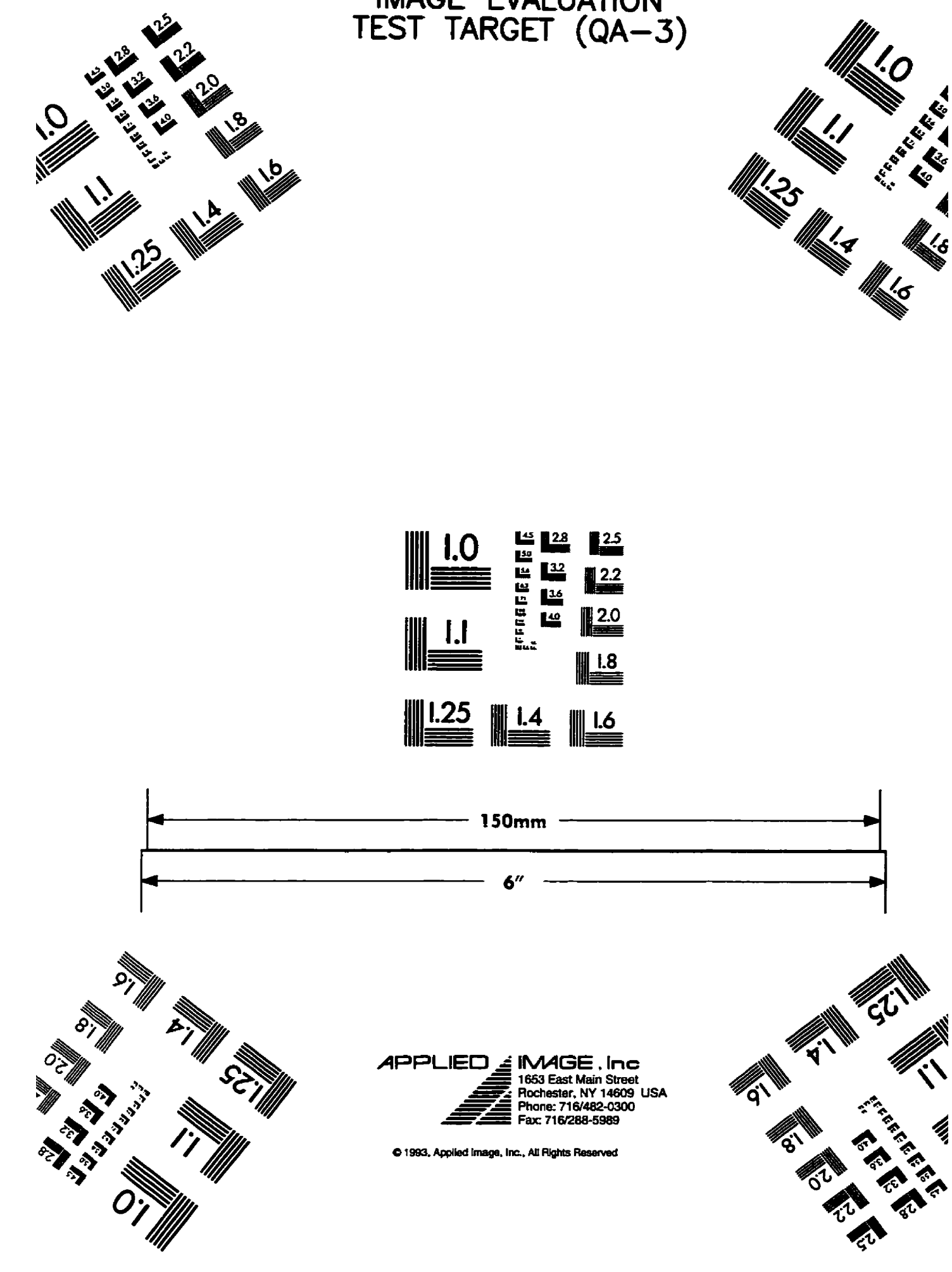

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