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Processing Writing: From Text to Textual Interventions

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Processing Writing: From Text to Textual Interventions

by

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Between Literary Texts and Textual Interventions

(from on ongoing practice)

List of Contents

Declaration

The greatest part of the critical and practical work collated here was produced between 1995 and 2000, during which time I was a writer in a number of capacities: as a poet and a performance writer responding to projects and commissions, as the subject director of Performance Writing in its very first years of operations, and as a critic reflecting on the issues which this complex criss-crossing of roles and activities necessarily demands. The essays are not presented in chronological order. They are grouped according to a loose progression of inter-related motifs and concerns. This seemed appropriate to show the different connections made and the diverse yet intersecting ways in which my writing and its critical parameters finds its ground.

1 - Motivations

The two opening essays are the only ones to have been published just prior to my arrival to Performance Writing. I include them here because the issue of gendered and sexuated representation which they each address and the impact this has on questions of creativity and on the status refused or granted to artworks remains a persistent component of the socio-cultural ground on which my pedagogical and artistic practice inevitably rests. They serve to introduce the problematic issue of the relation between experimental forms and sexual difference. The introductory paper and the essay "Truncated/troncated" (1999) pursue these issues through new methodological tools and motifs. Exploring sexuated modes of representation is a central concern of my practice.

2 - Responses

The link between work processes, curriculum design, and the public implications of practice was demonstrated in the two Performance Writing symposia (in 1996 and in 1999) which I co-organised with Ric Allsopp. Practitioners and critics were invited to discuss the changing nature of textual practice under the defining term of Performance Writing. The two Keynotes addresses were simultaneously published on the conference websites and have since provided an accessible and usable resource. The paper "To teach a walk", which I gave at Bard College (NY) for the "Poetry and Pedagogy" conference in June 1999, is an indication of my interest in pedagogical forms based on process-work and practice-based learning.

3 - Interventions

In 1996, I was commissioned to write and install my text *Éclat* in three very different environments (an art-space, a journal, a book). The resulting texts are submitted here. I became subsequently interested in continuing to research and produce textual work according to its contexts of showing. This way of emphasising and questioning different modes of publishing (in the broadest sense) and of placing writing at a crucial point of interchange with readers is reflected in some of the textual samples and critical notes included. Issues of readability and productivity were foregrounded in these shorter pieces and in the essay "In the place of writing" written first in 1996 for the conference Assembling Alternatives at the University of New Hampshire.

4 - Lingualism

The most recent addition to my research practice is work which challenges issues of monolingualism and national identity. In polyglot textual environments, linguistic readability and social accessability become inseparable from the problematisation of

-2

the writer's (and readers') cultural and national identification. The essay "Writing at the crossroads of languages" (1999) attempts to tackle this, as does the recent "Foreword" for the poet Anne Tardos' plurilingual book *Uxudo* (1999). Also included are my translation notes and translated samples of the poet Nicole Brossard's *Typhon Dru* (1997). The full text of my bilingual work, *Jets-Poupee* is presented with this submission.

Abstract

This submission comprises the main bulk of the critical and textual work I have researched and developed over the last five years. Throughout this period, I have been particularly interested in exploring issues of interdisciplinarity for writers and text-practitioners, at both a critical and a methodological level. An interest in cross-media and site-related approaches to writing plays an important role in this. This is reflected in the thematics of the various critical texts, as well as in the fairly broad range of textual modes submitted.

As a whole, this work can be seen in close continuity with my pedagogical involvement in developing, from its inception, the course of Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts. Research support and leave regularly granted by Dartington has been a major factor in ensuring the continuity of my own work throughout this period. Some of the findings and investigations undertaken during my research have in turn also been instrumental in assisting the continued development of our curriculum.

All of the critical texts presented here have come from invitations by other specialist institutions, both in England and abroad, to contribute to conferences and / or journals. Many have responded positively to my joint artistic and pedagogical takes and have sometimes also wished me to actively demonstrate these. This is reflected in the discussions and allusions to Performance Writing present in a number of these published texts.

Commissions from festivals, galleries, magazines, small publishing presses have encouraged and ensured the public exposure of my textwork in its many forms. Because textual placing and typographical games are important to the arguments of my work, some of these pieces can only be submitted in original format or by providing reference to their active location or as visual documentation. The entire second part of my submission (as well as the second appendix) falls into this category. It represents an indissociable aspect of my submission.

Critical Appraisal: Mobilising the Author

The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular"
Donna Haraway

This critical appraisal takes the form of an essay and will act not only as a framing tool for the overall selection but also as a summary of some of the intellectual and personal investments I have needed to do in order to develop texts both for the literary page and as part of cross-arts, often collaborative projects (performances and installations). The fact that some of my text projects disperse out of fields of literary writing into more cross-disciplinary frames does have a major impact on the construction of writing as an artistic process and on the authorial role. For this reason, I will intersperse the essay with commentaries on some of these interdisciplinary text projects. Each of the pieces mentioned are presented as part of the submission. Footnotes highlight an ongoing field of readings.

The essays and talks collated in this submission share two broad lines of questioning.

1. The interrogation of the role of writing, especially in its relation to modes of production and distribution.

2. The current function of innovative textual forms, especially in their relation to issues of representation and narratives of identity.

These two leading questions hide a third, on which I will concentrate here: the question of authorial motivation. What kind of writer one might want to be and for what kind of art. A writer engages with material situations of writing as much as with the histories which inform these. This also has repercussions on the kinds of representational space a writer may seek to occupy, and the ways such a place can be utilised, notably in the relation which experimental forms entertain, or not, with conceptualisations of identity.

-1

The twentieth century's profound and highly varied shift of the norms within which artforms exist, and the way this has affected, and will increasingly come to affect, the role of the artist/writer and the forms of art (and of writing) validated, has been rather gloomily signalled, by a number of art critics, as "the end of art", a short-sighted confusion of modernity with art itself. For Bourdieu, the transformation of the tools, the codes and roles of artistic production, necessarily precedes the much slower transformation of the modes and habits of perception which receive them. A collective reevaluation, both at a conscious and at an unconscious level, of the dominant working tropes supporting the arts will necessarily involve a complex reevaluation of the means of production and sustainability on which Western patriarchal culture and the bourgeois economy of the self and of the fetishised art and literary object rely[1].

Barthes' identification of the modal and motivational conflicts at play between the "readable" and "writerly" text reflects at a macro-level some of the complexities inherent to this tension within modern arts practice. Where the readable work applies writing to a range of existing and accepted rules of decipherment, reinforces the status quo and is tied to the value placed on readability at a broader cultural and social level, the writerly work is that which challenges accepted norms of readability and of accessibility. It is the text of modernity par excellence and has been assimilated to the more transgressive and avant-garde modes of working and writing of the 19th and 20th century. Its openness to the undecidability of contemporaneity is articulated through its formal and conceptual resistance to norms of readability. Nevertheless, it must also be fully recognised that "the avant-garde has a long and accepted place as the tolerable boundary of coherence for the mainstream, a safety valve for handling its own excesses"[2]. As a mode of twentieth century contemporaneity, avant-garde poetics have attended to the libidinal and violent restructuring of language, often through the dismantling of narrative constructions, yet should not

[1] Pierre Bourdieu & Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European art museums and their public*, tr. by C. Beattie & N. Merriman (Polity Press:Cambridge, 1991), p.42. Similarly it is useful to insist, as Peter Bürger does it, that "these conditions must be derived from the disappearance of that tension that is constitutive for art in bourgeois society, the tension between art as institution (autonomy status) and the contents of individual works". Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. by M. Shaw (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1984), p.31-32.
[2] Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Signatures" in *Space, Time and Perversion* (Routledge: London & NY, 1995), p.18

-2

be seen solely in terms of their verbal interferences. They are inevitably implicated in the broader

sociality implied by textuality and need to be discussed in relation to the text's problematised

traffic with the agencies and hermeneutics attached to the production of the artistic event itself

and the situation of the writer writing[3]. This relativises the "revolutionary" aspect of the modern

text and historicises the efficacy of the particular and specialist forms of writerly disjuncture

which have largely defined it. "Understood as a dynamic in the history of a work's reception,

absorption & repellency will shift with new contexts of publication, new readers, & subsequent

formal & political developments"[4].

Modernity's pervading hierarchy of creativity with its strict binary focus between form and

content, purpose and excess, accessibility and innovation impacts on the value attributed to

certain types of narratives and not others, certain poetics and not others, certain interventions

and not others, certain contents and not others. "What gives satis- / but faction—"[5]. Such an

oppositional split leaves largely unaddressed the social assumptions regarding creativity and

renders highly problematic the nature of the artist's engagement with the machines of cultural

industries and the art-making process[6]. Identity assignation is inextricably implicated in

determining the role reserved for certain artists and certain kinds of writing and the way artists

may or may not be welcome to intervene in the machines of cultural industries and the art-making

process. As British-born Nigerian visual artist Yinka Shonibare confirms : "There was a lot of

pressure on me to produce something authentic. This is a bit of a trap, because if you refuse you

are seen to be in denial, and if you comply, you are seen as being confined to your past"[7]. Both

[3] Marjorie Perloff provides a short summary of this discussion in relation to poetic practice in her essay "Postmodernism/Fin de Siècle: Defining "Difference" in Late Twentieth Century Poetics" in *Poetry on and off the page: essays for emergent occasions* (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 1998), pp. 3-33.

[4] Charles Bernstein, "Artifice of absorption" in *A Poetics* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass & London, 1992), p.85.

[5] Poet and performer Edwin Torres, "O Jungle Take Tamer To Nothing" in *Fractured Humorous* (Subpress: Honolulu, 1999), p.13.

[6] see Jessica Prinz's work *Art Discourse/Discourse on Art* (Rutgers: New Brunswick, 1991) on the critical and philosophical motivations of American conceptual artists such as Smithson or Kosulh. See also Pierre Bourdieu & Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange*, tr. by Randal Johnson and Hans Haacke (Standford University Press: Standford, 1995) on some his approaches to public art.

[7] Yinka Shonibare, "Fabric and the irony of authenticity" in *Annotations 1 : Mixed belongings and unspecified destinations*, ed. by Nikos Papastergiadis (Inniva: London, 1996), pp.48-49.

-3

at its most private and at its most public, the asymmetrical dynamics between ontologised difference and contingent differentiality, or between Sameness and alterity, inform authorial roles and form an integral part of the textual project itself.

The persistent question remains how to undermine the status quos between "liberatory" mechanics of form and naturalised identity codes. Not only to disrupt certain modes of perception but also to call up some of the negated narrative fields which support such modes. As Johanna Drucker has argued: "If the concept of the avant-garde is in anyway sustainable within contemporary practice, it is either by showing demonstrable links to a politics of change (with respect to policy, power, institutional structures, ideological formation and reproduction); *or*, by developing a model in which the possibilities for politics are defined as operative *within* representational strategies"[8]. This meets the arguments developed by a great number of deconstructive feminists for whom rethinking the ontology attached to bodies and sexuality provides a means of rearticulating subjectivity and of emphasising the discursive modes which also regulate textual forms. "If a deconstruction of the materiality of bodies suspends and problematises the traditional ontological referent of the term, it does not freeze, banish, render useless, or deplete of meaning the usage of the term; on the contrary, it provides the conditions to *mobilise* the signifier in the service of an alternative production"[9].

In this sense, the "pornographic imagination" outlined by Sontag[10] differs from "the body is a battleground"[11] of recent visual and literary art. Here, the body-in-crisis is made up combinatory and differential fields of representation which seeks to challenge, rather than sublimate, the repressive certainty of the undifferentiated body. In this, it does move away from the long

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[8] Johanna Drucker, "Simulation/Spectacle: Beyond the boundaries of the old avant -garde and exhausted modernism" in Third Text 22 (Spring 1993), p.5. Her italics.

[9] Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"'in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by J. Butler & Joan W. Scott, p. 17. Elizabeth Grosz pursues this throughout her study *Volatile Bodies: towards a corporeal feminism* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994): "Knowledges, like all other forms of social production, are at least partially effects of the sexualised positioning of their producers and users; knowledges must themselves be acknowledged as sexually determinate, limited, finite" (p.20).

[10] see also Susan R. Suleiman's study *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1990).

[11] slogan by artist Barbara Kruger.

tradition of Western philosophical sexuality started with Sade and pursued by Bataille, where the frequent assimilation of textual innovation with sexual and physical abjection, carves inroads into the unspeakable, taps into areas of textual violence which confont social and behavioural norms, yet can only do so by remaining firmly grounded in universalist assumptions of a phallocentric body fantasy[12]. Taking body parts, "bitter taste—slides a little towards the corner—nose smashing—lips—the lips twisted sideways—pulled back to the gums"[13], as one of the more persistent phantasmagorical and methodological metaphors of arts practice, as deceptively interchangeable as the plunder units of heteroglossic syntax, the gendering of sexual representation is accompanied by an interest in the body which, often playfully, problematises, rather than eroticises, bodywork, body construction. Robert Gober: "Leg". In many ways, this seems to place "the body" itself as one localised part of a connective, contiguous, rather than fragmentary, poetics. Cathy de Monchaux' decorative genital door joins.

*The iconography of the doll as working model for the first part of my project **GOAN ATOM** is made explicit by the sub-title **part 1: Jets-Poupee** (1999). Disjunctive techniques and verbal splits, at times superficially close to psycho-babble, establish textual motifs of fetishised sexuality and cyborg narratives. Specific avant-garde and postmodern art and literary pieces are played on. Hybridised aesthetics, literary typos, gender mythologies, motifs of apparition and disappearance. The troubled histories of anatomy. Whatever one may be trying to shed is enjoying a good time in the shredder. Through its polyglot macrostructure, the text attempts a more decisive leap, splitting between lingual/textual mergers in a matter of phonemes. If the doll would be stranger, after Kristeva's romanticised gender of exile, the doll's pluri-culturalism and constant lingual migrancy does not know physiological and personal reconsitution, does not know fluency. A social state as much as an account of disparate and theatricalised states of activity. These texts do*

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[12] Pierre Guyotat's relentless war piece *Eden, Eden, Eden* (Creation Books: London, 1996) makes a case of such an impasse.
[13] Danielle Collobert, *It Then*, tr. by Norma Cole (O Books: Oakland, 1989), p.16.

not all take place on the page. Some are live readings, text-installations, interactive web-pieces[14].

In that the body as conceptual and biological apparatus represents a storage both for different politics and cultural approaches to anatomy[15], and a shoring up of art's libidinal articulations and accentuations (from glottis to glossia), varying genres of textual modality which claim the body as working-model make most sense when seen as an interdependent, loosely joined network of activities. The physicalisation and dispersal of writing through live readings, spoken recordings, text environments reflects in this respect a link between writing and physical construction / intervention in the public sphere[16]. Laurie Anderson's early speaking technobody. Smithson's "Language is built, not written"[17]. Notions of literacy (behavioural, verbal) and the linguistic heterogeneity of textual tongues seek out the shiftable bounds of articulation and disarticulation in the dotted lines of social and cultural codes. In this respect, Bakhtin's, and later Gramsci's, insistence that different types of intervention are needed according to the nature of ambient and local parameters is a reminder that formal and stylistic innovation is not an immediate guarantee in opening to loci of difference. It needs to be applied as a critical mode of response. The efficacy of style is not so much personal as one of inter-personal agency, a combinatory and relative pendant between utterance and contingency. Deleuze. "A style is managing to stammer in one's own language. It is difficult, because there has to be a need for such stammering"[18].

Nathaniel Mackey looks both into the stylistics and the mythopoetic fabric of a number of American and Caribbean male poets to decipher the differential relations at work in the politics of their process. "I have been concerned not only with the play between content and form but

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[14] *Goan Atom 1: Jets-Poupee* (Rem Press: Cambridge 1999). *Ambient Fish* commissioned as a text installation for Hull Time Based Arts, Oct. 1999. *Ambient Fish* as an interactive net text, hosted by the Electronic Poetry Centre: <www.epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bergvall/amfish/cbflash.html>.

[15] see for instance Jonathan Sawday's extensive study, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (Routledge: London & New York, 1995).

[16] see for instance the contemporary link between sexuality and/or conceptual physicality and architecture much explored by critics and artists alike.

[17] Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1996), p.61.

[18] Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, tr. by H.Tomlinson & B.Habberjam (Athlone Press: London, 1987),p.4. The complete paragraph reads: "A style...is not a signifying structure, nor a reflected organisation, nor a spontaneous inspiration, nor an orchestration, nor a little piece of music. It is an assemblage, an assemblage of enunciation".

-6

also with the impact of marginalized context on such play - the weight borne and the wobble introduced by positions peripheral to a contested center"[19].

"Marginalised context" collapses the divisive hierarchy of form over content by dispersing the processing of style into an understanding of the locatedness of practice and experientiality. For Mackey, the necessity of style is its contextuality. By extension one could argue that it also informs the difficulty at containing activities of writing within current standardising forms of literary traffic. That it might finds its place more easily through some of the performance interventions and ephemeral and multifarious responses explored by visual arts practitioners[20]. In this it is intimately dependent on changing communication patterns. Felix Guattari suggests this compounding of means in his *Chaosmosis*: "It was a grave error on the part of the structuralist school to try to put everything connected with the psyche under the control of the linguistic signifier! Technological transformations oblige us to be aware of both universalising and reductionist homogenisations of subjectivity and of a heterogenetic tendency, that is to say, of a reinforcement of the heterogeneity and singularisation of its components"[21].

The stutterings and accents of ECLAT (1996) originate from a commission to write a text for a particular private home turned public space. I write a text-tour for personal stereo to guide each individual listener through the rooms of the house. The recorded text apposes a phantasmagorical narrative, its broken English, its narratives of silence and interruption, to the house as public art space and as patriarchal home-space. Location takes place through the act of listening and of walking on, rather than in, the house. A reappraisal of Bachelard's musings on the home as vaginal cave and of Irigaray's intense destabilisation and layering of such spatial metaphors. There is no occupancy possible in these terms but in the listener's ear, both keeper

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[19] Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross Culturality and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993), p.1

[20] The exploration of collaboration, livework, radical text disseminations has for instance been taken up by L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E as much as performance and cybertext poets.

[21] Felix Guattari , *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, tr. by Paul Bains & Julian Pefanis (Power Publications: Sydney, 1995), p.5. This is also present in what Donna Haraway has called "situated knowledge": "a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space" which makes "possible a vision of reality as a web of interconnected points, openings and moments of mutual receptivity". Quoted by Rosi Braidotti in *Patterns of Dissonance* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1991), p.271-2.

-7

and "voyeur". The ear becomes a complex sexualised organ which signals intersections between private and public physicality, between intimate and social space. Listening while walking, while witnessing others listening, becomes a way of experiencing the edges of one's own occupied, as much as inoccupied, physicality. Both the speaking voice and the listening ear write up the spaces of the house through the complex and physiological housing of language in the body. The exploration of a desire for occupancy needs not so much to inhabit as to make body (faire-corps). Processing alternatively penetrative, receptive and expulsive imagery. Internalisation of source material. Parts of the vocabulary disseminates Gertrude Stein's "Rooms". The project grows out of questioning the relationality of desire and "feminine" methodologies as a way of plundering knowledge and investing in lingual and social dis/locatory games.

"Act so that there is no use in a centre. A wide action is not a width. A preparation is given to the ones preparing."[22]. A text articulated in situ becomes a construction for a temporary and highly particularised environment. One which has a story "told" in the time and space of its generative and performative context. Cumulative live traces (passage) and the need for collective inscriptions (participation) are signed into the writing. This demands of the writer that they apply themselves to an interplay of practical and conceptual skills which have sometimes less to do with textual finesse than with the accuracy of the systems of research and in situ negotiations developed as a consequence of a broader composition process. A concerted investment in or collaboration with technological communication tools is embedded in the process. This kind of work asks for a non-transparent relationship between reading and reader which takes place at the intersections between text and social play. It features in the traffic between a reader and an "outghosted" author, between a text and its ongoing physical constructions, and at a more libidinal level, between what is recoverable, and not, of the live in the live, of the life in the life. Hence the text is never identical to itself. It cannot be read in and for itself exclusively nor can it stabilise into a final form. cris cheek's emphasis on "versionings" and his long-standing exploration of cross-disciplinary writing strategies is a particularly relevant example of this

[22]Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (Sun & Moon Press: San Francisco, 1991) p.63.

approach[23]. Points of textual eruption function as physiological nodes between poetic structure and the activation of its location. This oscillation is made manifest in an investment in writing which promotes itself as a site of intercession and interaction through the exigency of alterity.

FLÈSH ACOEUR (2000) is written and devised for a group commission. It is a hand-made book of max. 4 x A4 sheets. Closed, sealed, object-like, it becomes increasingly readable as one cuts through its many folds, starting with the author's name. Writing includes cutting, gluing, sealing. Reading does not complement the process: it alters it. Once read, the book looks more "like" a book but the text it supports is in no way the same. A later version, for an anthology, appears simply as FLÈSH, having lost the heart of the tactility of individual manipulation to the conventions of publishing and of literary reading, and having in the swap ironically gained more space for a deliberation on loss, female mysticism and physical illuminations which prompt the act of writing. In both versions, the accent of the title bears witness to an impossible self-identification, a problematic embodiment. This exercise of mediation of reading by physicality, enables paradoxically a reconstruction of the act of touching which reaches for, and beyond, the text. This signals also, perhaps, a physicality in excess of its current norms of readability.

"Alterity is the very possibility and process of embodiment: it conditions but is also a product of the pliability and plasticity of bodies which makes them other than themselves, other than their "nature", their functions and identities"[24]. Alterity implies a renegotiation of specialisms based on systems of exclusion and inclusion. By extension it is linked to the way artists and writers envisage social and artistic participation as a necessary setting up of transitory, or aleatory, identities. An excessive yet at times productively unstable individuation is the current result of a widespread and collective identity crisis. In short, alterity promotes process-led and

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[23] See cris cheek's contribution to *Binary Myths: conversations with contemporary poets*, ed. by Andy Brown (Stride: Exeter, 1997).
[24] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994), p. 209.

-9

— 017

openly local strategies[25]. Terms like "hybrid" or "queer" or "cyberfeminism" have previously been taken up specifically to denaturalise social identities and politicise a heterogeneity of means while not sacrificing neither critical experimentalism nor the crucial politics of participation. Kathy Acker's plundering of texts and explicitely political use of plagiarism is a way of visiting literary ownership and conventionalised social perversions. Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti define the voguing of sexual and racial identities as "syncretism": a discursive alignment not reliant on any definitive belonging[26]. A parallelism is acknowledged and integrated between a critical process of motivation and the generation of innovative forms of interaction which remain attuned to, not divorced from, not autonomous of, the (oft repressive) particularisation of identities.

The experimental and responsive bricolage of arts activism is seen to be a part of the modalities of arts practice. It implies a restructuring of identity from the piecemeal restructuring of the experiential body, its imbricated combinations of personal and social history. "To be queer is to cobble together identity, to fashion provisional tactics at will, to pollute and deflate all discourses...Queers are a minority because of what we do, not what we are"[27]. When Mackey turns the Other into the verb othering, he is similarly insisting on a commitment to the demands of a contemporaneity of *representation* to mobilise the strategic means of one's art practice[28]. Such a complex layering of inter-related yet divergent motives urgently calls on, yet ultimately refutes the rather simplistic notion that disenfranchised voices "have a story to tell" which needs to be told "clearly and simply"[29] and, one might add, according to expectation. It makes a case for

[25] Sami Nair, "Les identités aléatoires" in *Imported: A Reading Seminar*, ed. by Rainer Ganahl (Semiotext(e): NY, 1998), pp. 221-230.
[26] Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti, "Elements of Vogue",Third Text, 16/17 (Autumn-Winter 1991), p.69: "The discursive alignment implicit in syncretism remains contingent to relations of power and subject to change according to historical specificity; the elements united in it are denied any a priori "necessary belongingness", and are precluded any sense of an originary fixity both to their identities and to their relations. In this manner, syncretism designates articulation as a politicised and discontinuous mode of becoming".
[27] Nayland Blake, *In a different Light: Visual culture, sexual identity, queer practice*, ed. by N. Blake, L.Rinder & A.Scholder (City Lights Books: San Francisco, 1995), p.13
[28] N. Mackey, id., p.265: "Artistic othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change, upon which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive. Social othering has to do with power, exclusion, and privilege, the centralising of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, marginalised. My focus is the practice of the former by people subjected to the latter".
[29] Ron Silliman quoted by Mackey, p.18

investigative forms of identity as enabling a balancing act which incorporates the fractures between outside(r) and inside(r), private and public, marginality and mainstream, memory and invention, technique and intervention, and is ultimately productive of individuation. "The explosive tensions between cultural codes that familiarise the action and neologistic splices that dislocate traditional expectations do more than structure the narrative. They also constitute the narrator, who exists less as a speaking voice endowed with a plausible psychology than as a series of fissures and dislocations that push toward a new kind of subjectivity"[30].

For the postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak, this new kind of subjectivity is one which, as above, remains aware of its own constructs and which through it, attempts to lay claim to the validity of personal experience for the renewal of the authorial mode itself. The way she envisages this forms one of the motifs of her collection of essays and interviews *The Post-Colonial Critic*. "Theory always norms practice. When you practice, as it were, you construct a theory and irreducibly the practice will norm the theory". She continues: "What I am more interested in now is the radical interruption of practice by theory, and of theory by practice"[31]. This surprising refutation of the familiar two-way traffic of contemporary poetics is envisaged as an interruption, "a monkey wrench", with which to force open the blindspots which keep theory and practice still largely, if at times ambiguously, separate. Hélène Cixous' work for instance is openly and ideologically seeking to function as theoretical practice. Luce Irigaray is renowned for a highly metaphoric and convoluted stance which stylistically attempts to create modes of circulating. framing and multiplying language as that "which is not one". Much French post-structuralist criticism has laid claim to a poeticisation of theory, following a line started with Nietzsche. The American LANGUAGE poets would similarly argue for the theoretical impact of their poetic work.

Yet Spivak's call is pertinent in the way that it seeks to materialise this act of interruption in the

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[30] N.Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers" in *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual representation*, ed. by T. Druckrey (Aperture: NY, 1996), p.274.
[31] Gayatry C. Spivak , "Strategy, Identity, Writing" in *The post-colonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues*, ed. by S.Harasym (Routledge: NY & London: 1990), p.44.

representative space of the author, hence not only in the text but also in its extension: in the social spaces occupied (or occupiable) by the writer: "All this might be another way of saying: 'You must begin where you are'[32]. This assimilation of the author with physical location and personalised, experiential space is firmly pitted against the idea that the author should remain a structural dimension of the textual, a structural extension of the text. It does ultimately matter to her who speaks and how[33]. This is illustrative of an impulse not only to critique the universalism still latent and embedded in the disembodied authorial position but also to forward or favour forms of discourse which implicate the writer actively, as practice (rather than libidinally or conceptually) through, and beyond, the text. And which might ultimately affect the very existence of a text as the prime object of literate exchanges. The author here is a range taken and the text an activity which travels through it. Interruption becomes the shaping and the staging of representative spaces which the author as an example of individual public and political device can occupy. The author becomes a complementary and integrated mode of practical operation. "I have always felt that one should speak personally. Yes, that one should think of oneself as a public individual, so that it's not like every bit of your confessional history, but it's trying to think of the representative space which you occupy"[34]. This implies a depersonalisation of style and artistic material in favour of an investment in aspects of process which feed into changing perceptions of private and public spaces of activity, and the role art and communication technologies play in manifesting both.

In both AMBIENT FISH (1999) and YOU SAY I MOVED (1995), the ambient sound-text environment is organised as a distribution of recorded voices into individual listening posts. In both cases, the listener makes their way through the spatial narratives and conversations of the listening posts (headphones hanging off medical drips, arrow routes and specially adapted fuse boxes) to grasp the details of the mainly auditory frictions proposed. In both cases, the piece

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[32] Spivak, ibid.

[33] Foucault's essay famously ends with: "What matters who is speaking?" written up in inverted commas to increase its citational and distancing effects.

[34] G. C. Spivak, "Postmarked Calcutta, India" in *The post-colonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues*, ed. by S.Harasym (NY & London: 1990), p.94.

connects up to the time and instance of listening: a short-wave radio in Ambient Fish, a set of foot triggers in You Say I Moved. In both cases, the lighting used is intensely artificial yet dim, heavily absorptive: dark pink (1999), bottle green (1995). Texts on the walls provide cryptic textual segments that act as additional guiding tools. In both cases, game aesthetics and the playful use of language and sound sources disguises the insidious aspect of these slick, aquarium-like, semi-responsive and ambient environments: Here, everything's talking at, not much is talking to or with me. As a participant, I am simply asked to be part of a picture.

Treated superficially, the opening up of compositional processes to more dialogic, or environmental, modes of working, can still leave the viewer stranded in-between worlds, caught in processual games which seem to confirm the codedness of art's coteries, its assumptions of a shared specialist receptivity, rather than question them. One of the main points made by Jeni Walwin in her short study of recent British performance-led public art picks up on this: "It is now possible for art to embody modes of relatedness and to follow a conceptual shift (which is also taking place in science) away from objects and into partnerships"[35]. The optimism of such a statement conceals the complexities at stake in a reevaluation of one's commitment to art and writing. Yet it does meet the dissatisfaction of many arts practitioners with existing roles of art and the ways in which these dictate the psycho-social transactions an author or artist is implicated in and through which the range of their activity largely gets determined. The emphasis on localisation and on cross-arts approaches to writing describes a mobilisation of devices and existing technologies which cut across established art forms to challenge authorial roles and modes. This mobilisation procures a push to go beyond the art objects themselves and is predicated on art's move towards an ethic of relationality and skills-based interconnectedness, rather than one of virtuoso alienation. Rosalynd Krauss' notion of the "post-medium" [36] highlights this shift away from an allegiance to particular disciplines and their powerful histories

[35] Jeni Walwin, *Low Tide: Writings on Artists' Collaborations* (Black Dog Publishing: London, 1997), p. 43.
[36] Rosalynd Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the age of post-medium condition* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1999).

-13

(she is looking at Marcel Broodthaers' work) and towards an artistic objective which rests on disturbing the unspoken organisation of social and personal spaces replicated in art. Eventually, the setting up of models of practice which do not stylistically and cannot conceptually solely rely on mastery and ownership comes to favour not only forms of artistic openness but also the promotion of tactics of appearance and participation. *In short, a conversation*[37].

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[37] Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, tr. by H.Tomlinson & B.Habberjam (Athlone Press: London, 1987),p.2.

Caroline Bergvall

No Margins to this Page: Female Experimental Poets and the Legacy of Modernism

When I first started thinking about this essay I was convinced I would easily find a correlation between female experimental poetry and feminism. Writers such as Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Nicole Brossard, Rachel Blau du Plessis having already provided good examples of ways in which the demands of feminist exploration can be integrated to a resistant, non-transparent form. Keeping the earlier work of Virginia Woolf, H.D., Gertrude Stein or Dickinson in mind, I expected to find that feminist literary criticism was heavily committed to studying the strong transformative impulse of modernism. However, it remains a fact that the great majority of feminist literary criticism is still suspicious of experimental writing and tackles with more eagerness ideas of representation than ideas of displacement. It is also for this reason that feminist writing *per se* is still primarily associated with works which display clarity of intent before stylistic audacity. The poet Jan Clausen in her overview of feminist poetry unwillingly concedes that feminism's ideal of accessibility does contain a tendency to 'literary downward mobility'.[1] This devaluation of artistic creation can in part account for many experimental writers' reluctance today to integrate clear feminist concerns to their practice. Poets like Susan Howe and Lyn Heijinian in fact claim that the -ism of feminism prematurely and precariously determines the texts' referential context, thus diminishing its impact as text. By this they also question the plausibility of linking the experimental to feminism.

The poet Rosemary Waldrop, though acknowledging a 'feminist consciousness', implicitly refers to feminism as a fashioning of models when she records in an essay the 'stereotype discourse that you ought to have as a feminist writer'.[2] Elsewhere Susan Howe assesses the 'reductibility' of feminist literary criticism for literature, while considering the 'temporary necessity' of the movement and French-Canadian poet Nicole Brossard, here seemingly divorcing her politics from her poetics, maintains that there is no 'feminist poetry'. Comments like these show an ambiguous tension among contemporary female poets towards what seems to be feminism's inability to integrate new and experimental writing practices into its conceptual sphere. The fact that poetry anthologies published recently by feminist presses still avoid including the work of Albiach, Howe or Hejinian in their pages is

30

an indication that the malaise is reciprocal.[3]

This unease rests not so much on a quarrel of factions as on the deeper and related aspect of diverging practices. Indeed, where experimental poets refer to the slippery structuring of their writing as their prime preoccupation, 'on form you have to work consciously, whereas your concerns and obsessions surface all by themselves' (Waldrop), most work done by so-called feminist poets has been summarized reversibly by Marge Piercy: 'aesthetics is written after the fact, like laws passed after a coup'.[5] Similarly, literary feminist critics have rarely undertaken a formal analysis of poetry, preferring to situate their reflections at the level of symbolization rather than at the level of enunciation, at the level of ideology rather than at the level of textuality, examining (to use critic Alice Jardine's phrase) the representation of women in literature rather than the *'process* of (reading, writing) woman'. This does raise an important question as to whether feminist literary criticism is at all equipped to tackle issues related to 20th century experimental writing. French writer Hélène Cixous's early claim that nothing is of value to feminism which *precedes* modernism, can retrospectively be seen as a robust and provocative response to much of the largely Anglo-American feminism's semantic treatment of literature. It further functions as an open call to the integration of post-structuralism's resolutely textual analysis to feminist praxis. Twenty years later, deconstruction having found its way into Women's Studies, critics such as Alice Jardine and Rachel Blau Du Plessis are attuned to the same problematic.

In her recent collection of essays The *Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice,* poet and critic Blau du Plessis thus affirms that 'literature by women, in its ethical and moral position, has analogies with the equally nonhegemonic modernism in its subversive critique of culture'.[6] In a highly polysemic and mobile style she then attempts to actualize through readings of various poets, the relation between female writers, feminist theory and modernism. In 'Otherhow', the title of one of her most interesting pieces, she addresses the 'terrible inadmissible congruence of gender and poetry', by which she alludes to the male-gendered 'poetic voice' or 'genius' while seeking 'another kind of textual space through which and onto which a plethora of "polygynous" practices teem' as a plausible female practice of poetry.[7]

This explosion of genres, this metonymic writing, 'all margins, no page', advocated by Du Plessis and a growing number of female experimental writers shares with modernism a rejection of the naturalizing concept of representation in the determination of form. They in fact rely on the belief that to reject the organizing principles behind the making of identity would facilitate the break-up of

phallogocentric discourse and structure, especially at a point in Western civilization where 'identity' is proving increasingly difficult to establish.

> Must make a critical poetry, an analytical poetry, not a poetry that 'decorates dominant culture' but one which questions the discourses. This situation makes of representation a site of struggle.[8]

It will then come as no surprise that the only feminism implicitly and explicitly acknowledged by poets such as Howe and Waldrop should be a theoretical 'movement' itself ardently committed to the workings of Modernism, and more widely to Modernity, the 'French' non-feminism or anti-feminism of Kristeva, Cixous, Lacan, Derrida and, more ambiguously, Irigaray with its varying use of the emblematic 'feminine': a psychoanalytical concept which shrugs off questions of gender and identity to embody instead the legitimacy of fractured meaning, through which it can question immanently the structures and concepts upon which Western thought has so far established itself. It in turn goes hand in hand with practices of modernity which disavow representation and metaphoric devices and favour instead the 'fragments, lines and marks, stops and gaps'(Howe) of a doubting and reluctant art as a form of self-questioning. Alice Jardine puts it accurately when she says:

> Those writing modernity as a crisis-in-narrative, and thus in legitimation, are exploring newly contoured fictional spaces, hypothetical and unmeasurable, spaces freely coded as feminine.[9]

Similarly Rosemary Waldrop addresses the purpose of her writing as a process of 'uncovering possibilities rather than...codifiction'.[10] These newly contoured spaces do not only determine current practices of writing. It is in these spaces of undecidability that the *feminine* is gathered as a trope and comes to signify in the form of a poetics of indeterminacy (to borrow Marjorie Perloff's title), the critical manifestation of postmodern thought, the Derridean *'differance'*, of the Kristevan concept of a libidinal 'semiotic' writing. 'Words are used as buoys, and as if they start to break up' says Howe in an interview.[11] The female and gendered source of the French 'feminine' becomes supplanted by the feminine *concept's* careful erasure of any gender problematic, to the extent that the feminine, having been appropriated as a 'woman-effect' (Jardine), can no longer be validated for women and might end up by placing us under double erasure: 'Man will disappear into the space of the Other, explore it, and ultimately,

32

become it, that is, *her'.*[12]

Little wonder then that a rhetoric so avid to display its own logic should come to invalidate any proclivity towards representation and stability, hence towards the manifestation of a historicized and mythified position, in its approach to art, language and gender. One knows the degree to which this would be paralleled by poetry's acutely neo-modernist obsession with form, with 'necessary innovation' (Ashbery), as the ultimate and intimate seat of meaning. But by evacuating the identification of gender from their formal and thematic preoccupations, 'postfeminist' poets are similarly, and tortuously, trying to invalidate the very grounds on which feminism proper has sought to establish itself, namely the very question of women's differential subjectivity. I would tend to agree that the positioning of the text does affect its form, that 'feminist consciousness nourishes and transforms the body's cognitive and perceptual modes'(Brossard). And retroactively that its form indeed carries its content. That subjectivity resolved as well as established within textual practice would determine processes of resistance with which to commit our presence in history. But in the end is this sufficient to guarantee against the perpetration of cultural motifs which still inherently invalidate female participation? To destabilize is not to eradicate; to dislodge is not to demolish'.[13] For all the stylistic and technical limitations involved in writing 'feminist poetry', it has also become urgent to ask whether the deconstructionist approach of 'feminine' writing will prove as apt as feminist mythopoeia to validate the premises of women writers. And whether the issue of transcending gender by sublimating it into the *feminine* might not indeed delay the inclusion of women's work on the platform of culture, 'outside, you are talked in'(Norma Cole).[14] By letting the Other become intrinsically part of the Same, isn't the 'feminine' concept, for all its enunciative daring, merely absorbing into a sceptical form of gender conservatism the crucial cultural and political gap which radical feminism was trying to install? Can female poets in fact afford to dispense with identity-seeking when positive female identification is still culturally and politically so vulnerable ?

Blau Du Plessis shows in fact in a relevant way how the stereotype of gender was maintained by male modernists as the one remaining stable axis along which they could could establish their disruption of form and norm. Critics have indeed often shown to high modernism's conservatism in matters of art's commitment to the renewal of psycho-social patterns.

> In writings of male modernists, femaleness is as fixed and eternal
> a category as ever before in Euro-literature. Male modernists do

not deeply resist, perhaps cannot make a critique of this place allocated for female figures because their readability depends on such reliable gender narratives.[15]

The point made here by Blau du Plessis is fundamental in that it implies that a strict gender structure made modernism possible. For female writers such as Woolf and H.D. however, the very disruption of form undertaken by modernism did provide them with a major incentive to reappraise some of the gender norms regulating thought and literature. By exploring forms of heterogeneous and cross-gendered identity, they were in fact both a major influence on the break-up of modern gender organization. 'For the male modernist...gender is most often an ultimate reality, while for the female modernists an ultimate reality exists only if one journeys beyond gender'.[16] Gertrude Stein's cryptic work, acclaimed by LANGUAGE as a precursor to their movement, is for its part laconically criticized by post-feminists for the misogyny and strong patriarchal concerns displayed in her writing.

In her critical work *My Emily Dickinson*, the poet Susan Howe points to feminism's lack of a concerted criticism of the experimental form as its failure to 'discuss or come to terms with the implications of a feminine penchant for linguistic decreation and re-creation'.[17] The 'feminine penchant' that Howe is pointing to is less to do with the quasi-biological and utopian nature of a female self or of an 'ecriture feminine', than with a Kristevan understanding of woman's social and cultural marginalisation as potently subversive. What Howe repeatedly makes clear in her essay is the extent to which Dickinson's syntactically exploded style is carrying indications about the poet's positioning in phallogocentric culture. It is through Dickinson's extremely synthetic style that Howe discerns a temptation at pulling 'SHE from all the myriad symbols and sightings of HE', at building 'a new poetic form from her fractured sense of being eternally on intellectual borders'. What Howe is touching on here is a concern for the ethics of form, or for what Barrett Watten, somewhat idealistically with regards to LANGUAGE's impact, has addressed as 'style as an ethical rather than aesthetical basis'. In our case, this could transpose into feminism practiced through the aesthetics of modernity. Having thus posited the ideological implications for a female writer to resort to the experimental creation of meaning, Howe approaches it, both in her criticism and in her own poetry, less as providing a definition of feminine expression than as an indication of a female writer's tortuous way to reach around the sublimating silence in which phallogocentric culture has placed her and towards which she is seen as inherently

34

subversive or marginal. Hence Howe considers experimentation less as a pure process of style, practiced in a self-referential 'echoing space', than as the site of intersection between the writer's private frame of reference and the social mythography. For this reason I find it paradoxical that Howe should somewhat retract from her argument, rather than equate its two ends, when she concludes that Dickinson 'was ignored and misunderstood by her own generation, more because of the radical nature of her poetry, than because she was a woman'.[18]

For French-Canadian poet Nicole Brossard the opaque play of writing commands decisively a very conscious positioning in culture if she is to try to allow for the possibility of a valid poetical construction of 'woman' both as a body of language and as a political project. But Brossard does share with Howe the belief that the experimental remains the only route accessible (as yet) for women to manifest themselves in writing without merely reproducing dualistic symbolizations: *'it was a fabulator problem for a woman who wanted the word woman to take its own place and be in place yet still be able to drift away in the split-second moment of composing images...'*[19] Apart from illustrating the tension between poetic (semiotic) and semantic writing, this quote appears also to be expressing the ambiguity involved in remaining at all times acutely aware of both the ideology behind any sense of identification and of the difficulty at doing away with it altogether. It is in fact less by appropriating than by trying to deconstruct the mythic support of language itself, and piecing out, word for word, the ideological structure through which it operates, that Brossard sinuously explores the many fictions of woman and establishes new routes by which to reach her (and herself). She avoids a lurking essentialism while still seeking a stable referent to writing, by expressing identity through the changing subjectivity of physical experience. And through her understanding of Barthes' metonymic manifestation of textuality as pleasure, 'a confusion of text/ile and skin', it is the 'body' rather than 'woman' that the dense and acrobatic stances of her critique-poetry or 'fiction-theory' frequently set up as the feminine feminist space of writing: 'we call body the form our bodies take once they have tried their hand at memory, imagination, and appetite.[20]

Similarly, Blau du Plessis shrugs off the question of women's 'essence'

35

by acknowledging it as 'making a creation, not a discovery'. These two poets can for this reason be seen as trying to bridge the gap between the extremes of someone like French poet Anne-Marie Albiach, for whom identity must remain 'coded signs in a partially blind work' and the didactism of a feminist poet such as Rich, for whom the mythopoeic function of writing serves to uncritically forward an independent female self. The sharp antagonism posed between essentialism and deconstruction, between the need for a unified stability and the acknowledgment of unstability itself as a viable political and aesthetical position, is here questioned by the very politicized flexibility of Brossard's work, for whom writing should record and explore ('travelling through meaning') as well as transform and transgress ('while simultaneously producing meaning'). Similarly, Brossard adapts deconstruction's experimentation to the laying forth of identity Rachel Blau Du Plessis aims for: 'some procedure for writing so excessive and marginal that it may begin to say: woman'.[21] In a very significant manner, Brossard would further aim for ways of saying 'lesbian'. In this she provides one poetical solution to the current critical debate on the de- and re-essentializing of homosexuality and lesbianism. Let me here also briefly mention Diana Fuss's excellent study *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference,*[22] in which, following Irigaray, she expands on the points just made by considering the notion of essence a positive strategy for the creation of female subjectivities: 'i am a relay the intrigue if i desire' (Brossard).[23]

The fact, then, that some critics and poets steeped in deconstructive criticism are trying to establish within feminist critique a link with contemporary writing via modernism, does indicate that efforts are being made to steer clear of the stereotyping of essentialist feminism without falling prey to the conceptual discrepancies at work in a critical and poetical practice which favours the elaboration of form in a · dangerously exclusive way. A practice which ineluctably maintains the symbolic 'feminine' in an ahistoric, essentially marginal space; and in which experimental writing *per se* becomes 'feminine' without it resolving the sociocultural implications of this term, or indeed resolving the marginality this inforces. According to Rita Felski:

> Liberation is located in the realm of textual subversion, resulting in a linguistic idealism which fails to acknowledge the ideological implications of its own stance or to ask the question of the ultimate nature of the relationship between textual and political revolution.[24]

36

Felski here opposes the claim, made by Cixous notably, that the poetical play on form could in itself subvert ideological structures. The sole manipulation of representation cannot in itself compromise and reroute the meaning it is set to mediate. Nor can it fully account for the increasingly changing configurations of our culture. And the shift from a phallic to a feminine economy of writing, viewed so favourably by post-feminists, in fact conveniently escapes gender problematics in that 'linguistic playfulness and nonlinear syntax are in no sense unique or specific to women but are indicative of a more general cultural shift away from analytical and discursive modes'. This shift would hence seem to bear no direct consequence on gender stereotyping and Felski in fact attacks the depoliticization of feminism which post-feminism has brought about.

It falls within this logic that the current philosophical interest in 'Woman' has less to do with women than with the exploration of a new organization of *phallogocentric* culture itself. Schematically, 'if there is no woman in the representations of history, only representation itself, there is no one to liberate. Feminism as simply the complex play of humanist ideology...can easily be dematerialized into an anachronism'.[25] In that sense, if feminist theory markedly fails to address the aesthetic implications of (post)modernism, the deconstructionist project itself falls short of truly invoking a change in the mental patterns governing gendered identification.

It is salutory that writers and critics such as Rita Felski, Rachel Blau Du Plessis and Nicole Brossard, for all their basic differences, are all operative in developing forms of writing that are wide and sophisticated enough to question the assumptions of deconstruction at its breaking-point with feminism, hence in developing a practice and critique utilizing arguments from both movements while remaining resolutely at their vanguard. For it remains indeed certain that 'until the problematic of women is solved, no writer is truly modern'.[26]

Notes

1 Jan Clausen, *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism.* Long Haul Press, Brooklyn, 1982, p.29.
2 Rosemary Waldrop, 'Alarms and Excursions' in Charles Bernstein, ed.,*The Politics of Poetic Form.* Roof Books, NY, 1990, p. 65.
3 The successful *Early Ripening, American Women's Poetry Now.* Pandora, London, 1989, compiled by Marge Piercy, is one such example .
4 Waldrop, 'Alarms and Excursions', p. 66; Marge Piercy, *Early Ripening,* p. 2.
5 Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity.* Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985, p. 19, italics in the text.
6 Rachel Blau du Plessis, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice.*

Routledge, London, 1990, p. 17.

7 du Plessis,*The Pink Guitar*, p. 141; p.152.

8 Susan Howe interview, *Talisman*,4, Spring 1990, p.24.

9 Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 69, italics in the text.

10 Waldrop, 'Alarms and Excursions', p. 46.

11 Interview with Susan Howe, *Talisman*,4, p.35.

12*Gynesis*, p. 86.

13 Catherine R. Stimpson, 'Stein and the Transposition of Gender' in Nancy K. Miller, ed.,*The Poetics of Gender*. Columbia University Press, NY, 1986, p. 11.

14 Norma Cole, *Letters of Discipline*, in *Temblor*, 4, 1986, p. 131.

15*The Pink Guitar*, p. 42.

16 Sandra Gilbert quoted by Catharine R. Stimpson in 'Stein and the Transposition of Gender', p. 2.

17 Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*. Roof Press, NY, 1985. Here reproduced from *Poetics Journal*, May 1984, p. 20.

18 Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 21.

19 Nicole Brossard, from *Domaine d'ecriture* in *The Aerial Letter*, tr. by M.Wildeman. The Women's Press, Toronto 1988, p. 101, italics in the text. This collection contains excerpts from several of her books. The translation is often disappointingly fixed but provides at present the only translated selection available in Europe.

20 Brossard,*The Aerial Letter*, p.90.

21 du Plessis,*The Pink Guitar*, p. 114.

22 Diana Fuss, *Essentially speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. Routledge, London 1989.

23 Brossard, *The Aerial Letter*, p. 89.

24 Rita Felski, *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Hutchinson Radius, London 1989, p. 39.

25 Janet Todd,*Feminist Literary History*. Polity Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 80.

26 du Plessis,*The Pink Guitar*, p. 44.

38

Monique Wittig: From the Avoidance of the Feminine to Universal Strategies

by Caroline Bergvall

The purpose of this essay[1] is to present the work of the writer Monique Wittig, and its fairly isolated position within the framework of feminist research. By concentrating my arguments mainly around her two most controversial and debated books, *Les Guérillères* (1969) and *The Lesbian Body* (1973),[2] I will try to show in what way some of the underlying themes, such as the neutralisation of genders and the attempt at displacing the function of memory, direct her writing practice.

A Noble Style

With the exception of her first book *L'Opoponax*,[3] written under the influence of French *Nouveau Roman*, her three subsequent books make use of some of the principles and implications of epic poetry: there is no psychological evolution in the narratives and the characters are not individuated. The narratives are placed in an unspecifiable, vaguely geographic setting and the tense used in both books is the historic present, which neutralizes the temporal dimension by universalising the event narrated. Characteristically, the present is also the tense of enunciation *par excellence*, used to manifest the subjectivity of speech.

The texts are organised as a succession of more or less self-contained blocks or panels of story. Interdependent and interchangeable, they are all *more or less alike* in both content and style, hence the slow development of the narrative. The global structure thus appears to be circular and static, which in turn emphasizes the impression of closure and finitude that the thematics try, as we shall see, to convey and explore.

This use of principles of epic and heroic writing is also signalled by the amplitude of tone, which at times nears incantation, by the number of interjections and by the frequent references to the voice, to songs, to fables and travels, all indicative of the genre.

All these elements accentuate the distance from the reader and help situate the text outside space and time in a near-mythical environment.

It quickly becomes apparent that the structure thus deployed in the organisation of these two books is devised to make the texts effectively function at an absolute limit of assertiveness. But we might even suggest that in this way, the structure also implicitly grants these texts the canonical status associated with epic poetry. This in turn would enable Wittig to escape the relativization which novels are more easily prone to than poetry, and most importantly to escape, or at the very least displace, the relativization of the 'female' gender, with which and from which she develops the strategies of her writing. She writes:

...I have adopted the noble style to lend a little glamour to our enslaved sex...[4]

Woman Does Not Exist

A female writer who is conscious of the vicissitudes of manifesting herself in the current linguistic system *because* she is a woman, must eventually try to unhinge, to disjoint the sense and purpose language founds and ammends. Or else she takes the risk of not being able to write as a complete and fully valid *subject*: "No woman can say I without being for herself a total subject - that is ungendered, universal, whole".[5]

Wittig's emphasis on the notion of completeness rather than of specificity in constructing subjectivity provides the basis for her feminism. Hence it is not on the appropriation of the feminine or of the female self that she rests her still highly controversial practice. Rather it concerns itself with the appropriation of the world and of the systems that support its current organization. From this follows that Wittig also rejects the adequacy and validity of the development of a specifically feminine writing which would mirror a specifically female experience.

Monique Wittig's thought, articulated in her writing and further developed in the critical essays she publishes in the United States (where she has been living for the past 20 years), has many affinities with that of Simone de Beauvoir, for whom 'woman' does not entirely correspond to a biological reality. On the contrary 'woman' is a socio-cultural construct, not bound indissociably to 'nature'. The same is seen to apply to 'man': both are considered by Beauvoir to be ideological categories that install not only an ontological, hence presumably immutable and irrefutable difference between male and female, but most importantly, institute the masculine *to the detriment of* the feminine.

[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.[6]

"There is no nature in society" Wittig asserts in turn in the essay 'One is not born a woman' whose title echoes Beauvoir's statement. Wittig, specifying that the categories 'man' and 'woman' should be regarded as politico-economical classes, clearly wishes to establish feminism as *a class struggle*, thus outlining from a marxist-feminist point of view its political as well as its philosophical scope.

In effect if there is no nature in society, no biological law or essence can have generated gendered differentiation and its assignation in society. The 'female' gender's oppression stems from an instituted difference, which in gendered languages such as French, is exemplified by the fact that it grammatically both objectifies and particularizes every use of the feminine mode. This

is manifest in the implausibility of using the feminine to express a 'general truth' and accentuated by the difficulties a woman faces in speaking out in the name of anything other than herself. Similarly, the universal which the masculine mode (well paralleled in English by 'Man') acts out, is in itself neither neuter nor general. Rather it mirrors the priority exercised by the existing patriarchal structures.

> One is one's body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one's gender. The movement from sex to gender is internal to embodied life, a sculpting of the original body into a cultural form.[7]

First announced by Beauvoirean existentialism, the very idea of gender's fundamental arbitrariness inherently forwards the possibility of their 'choice'. Indeed it becomes conceivable that both the myth behind them and the array of 'naturalising' symbols linked to their actualization, can be unsettled and ultimately abolished. Wittig writes:

> The women say that they have been given as equivalents the earth the sea tears that which is humid that which is black that which does not burn that which is negative those who surrender without struggle. they say this is a concept which is the product of mechanistic reasoning. It deploys a series of terms which are systematically related to opposite terms. Its theses are so crass that the thought of them makes the women start laughing violently.

And everything then is possible:

> They say all these forms denote an outworn language. they say everything must begin over again. they say a great wind is sweeping the earth.[8]

Wittig has voiced her objection to this translation of the French feminine plural 'elles' into the over-determining 'the women', which, ironically, does neutralize her attempt at de-gendering not only the pronoun she is using but also her writing in its entirety.[9]

One must however admit that despite the obvious strength of this materialism, and despite the enormous success of her books, albeit mainly limited to the States, Wittig's fierce anti-biologism does not meet favourably with the great majority of feminist criticism on either side of the Atlantic. This can be largely explained by the fact that the main question addressed by feminists concerns less the abolition or neutralisation of genders than that of the representation of the female.

This attempt at representation consists sometimes in reinterpreting the cultural and philosophical material at one's disposal in order to elucidate a female identity hitherto depreciated, expelled from socio-history. Such at least is the approach of American historical feminists such as Showalter or Gilbert and Gubar, who seek to extract from their historical and literary searches, the proofs and traces of a specifically female 'subculture' responsive to, though quasi-

independent from, the prevalent phallogocentric context.

Other feminists, influential in the late 1970's and early 80s, such as the American poet Adrienne Rich and the philosopher Mary Daly try for their part to inscribe the traces of a primordial 'matriarchy' by creating a loose counter-mythology, an imagination constitutive of a female tradition. Taking into account that Rich has called this an operation of 're-vision', their approach is still it seems, less active than reactive and still somewhat compensatory. It nevertheless remains an interesting feature of Mary Daly's work that she attempts to manifest a pre-patriarchal origin of language. By relying on the frequent uncertainties and haziness of etymology (thus inevitably addressing its fundamentally polemical character), she subjects the entire vocabulary to an often flamboyant but always erudite and consistent reinterpretation, in order to highlight and utilize every sense favourable to the liberation and expression of 'women'. Daly's enterprise is invigorating insofar as she pushes and pulls at words' meanings, electrifying them, revealing to what extent vocabulary and etymology are directed by the purpose of the main powers of signification - and therefore with what urgency they should be given over to feminist manipulation. For all their differences, Daly's highly dynamic understanding of the nature of language is possibly the one that comes closest to Wittig's own.

> As masters, they [men] have exercised their masters' rights. They write, of their authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the origin of language itself may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate.[10]

In France, the writer Hélène Cixous' écriture féminine and the philosopher Luce Irigaray's parler-femme ('woman-speak'), both with a strong foothold in psychoanalysis, also exalt and develop the difference that the féminin[11] exposes - though paradoxically they claim themselves to be anti-essentialists.

By turning away from history and turning instead towards the experience of the body, they intend to gather, at the brink of the unconscious, the manifestations of the Imaginary in the Lacanian sense of a pre-conscious state, where nothing is yet defined or separate, where there is nothing but virtuality, potentiality. And through the sinuousness of signifiers freed from sense but full of meanings the Imaginary enables the flickering apparition in textuality of a 'speech' (parole) that precedes the sexuated and socialised formation of identity, an apparition which would subsume identity if it could altogether surface. The 'feminine' has been defined as this anti-authoritarian (anti-speech) speech, undefinable and intrinsically subversive. A consequent peculiarity in this state of language is that it can be practiced by both men and women.

And although Wittig's own writing of The Lesbian Body has been associated with Cixous' practice by certain critics, Wittig concedes, too quickly at times, especially in the case of Irigaray, that there is no difference in the respective goals of the often pompous essentialism of the Americans

and the scrupulously intellectual process of the French:

> The (new) femininity, *écriture féminine*, and difference crank-start a strain of political engagement far in advance of the continuing questioning of the sexes, forming the two great categorial axes for philosophy and the human sciences.[12]

She sees *écriture féminine* as an intensification, and what is moreover a depoliticized intensification of the antagonistic dualism already in practice. Furthermore, by emphasizing the specificity of the feminine, one can only end up emphasizing her marginalisation and further disqualify her in her relation to the world. Seen from this perspective, the semiotician Julia Kristeva's claim that women should retain their marginal position in order to remain fundamentally subversive might merely dubiously confirm women's disqualification from direct and active participation.

By trying to steer clear of depoliticization as well as by avoiding a mythologizing essentialism (though her work does contain traits from both tendencies), it is undeniable that the solution Wittig opts for, with its mistrust of most forms of feminism and with its sole and ultimate aim of transcending the very notion of gender, is to remain almost exclusively entrenched in Beauvoir's embryonic feminist philosophy:

> A new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can be found beyond the categories of sex (man and woman) and (...) the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the category of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals (practically all social sciences).[13]

It should be noted here that the term 'woman' and its adjectival derivatives, subject to the laws and definitions of phallogocentric discourse (Irigaray talks revealingly of the "patriarchal woman"), do not appear in Wittig's literary work.

The Universal as Lesbian Neuter

Few writers are as concerned, one could even say haunted, by the neutralisation of genders as is the French *Nouveau Roman* writer Nathalie Sarraute, for whom, to use Peter Handke's formula: 'I is empty in itself'.

> Identity is not real and seen from the inside it contains everything. It contains the entire universe. There is no-one and I am everything.[14]

In Sarraute's dense universe, situated where 'gender does not exist', the identity of barely sketched out characters binds and unbinds itself at the turn of a sentence, at the twist of a word. Through these flickering figures, often reduced to the unspecified voices in dialogue, *seen from the inside* it is indeed identity's fundamental lack of solidity and fixity that Sarraute explores. By trying to free the text from the bounds of representation,

of which gendering is one aspect, she also attempts to evade the characterization of female characters:

> It was impossible for me to personnify them as women because they would be seen exclusively as female beings whereas a man can stand for the entire universe.[15]

This reluctance highlights Sarraute's acknowledgment of the paralyzing process linked with the identifying specificity of the female gender and the limited span of signification which seems to support the use of female characters. Too objectified herself, she remains too alienated in and from discourse to be able to invade in turn the world and language that have determined her as woman. Says Wittig:

> They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated.[16]

The link between Wittig and Sarraute, minimal at first glance, at least stylistically, rests on their common suspicion as regards identity on the one hand, and on their joint refusal to proceed to identification on the other. But whereas Sarraute's interest centres around the points of the disappearance of identity, Wittig, in contrast, concentrates on its points of apparition. And where Sarraute wants to think a world *prior to* [*en-deçà*] genders, it is the one *beyond* [*au-delà*] genders that Wittig is moulding. This difference, though, remains minimal in practice: especially in the case of *The Lesbian Body*, which a number of critics have chosen to see as the utopian representation of a pre-linguistic (semiotic) universe, anterior therefore to gender differentiation, and in this respect assimilable to the Sarrautian universe:

> Because there is no question of gender in this mode of living, there is no reason why this violent pre-Oedipal realm inhabited by j/e and tu should be specifically female.[17]

This blurring of genders and 'sexuation', noted here by Montefiore, foregrounds Wittig's intended trajectories in that it concentrates her practice around the elaboration of subjectivity as such, and not around that of an identity constitutive of femininity. It is from here also that she seeks to construct an axis which will allow her to signify the universal (the Sarrautian 'neuter') in an effort not to feminise the universal, but on the contrary to universalise the feminine. In this way Wittig attempts to simultanously free the feminine from its pejorative limitation and displace the phallic from the universal by replacing it in its own particularity.

Since neither sex can plausibly be envisaged as the starting-point of this axis, Wittig suggests the creation in language of a third neutral sex to carry the universal. In her work she addresses it as "the lesbian" because it is "beyond the categories of sex (woman and man)", a lesbian not being a woman "either economically, or politically, or ideologically".[18] Beyond the excitement and

excitability provoked by such a statement, a number of critics have questioned at length the ambiguity of the move by pointing to its unavoidable essentialism:

> Wittig's 'lesbian' functions as a transcendental signifier, occupying none other than the place of the Lacanian phallus....[which] subjects 'lesbian' to all its attendant limitations, most especially a certain ideality of the sign.[19]

> Has Wittig decided that heterosexual norms are cultural norms while lesbian norms are somehow natural? Is the lesbian body that she posits as somehow being prior to and exceeding binary restrictions a body at all?[20]

There are other less controversial and possibly more directly effective ways in which Wittig attempts to remove the limitations of 'gendering' from the feminine mode of her writing. She does this by activating to the full some of the more remarkable wheels in the functioning of speech, namely those discrete entities known as personal pronouns.

In his work *Problems in General Linguistics*,[21] the linguist Benveniste underlines the personal pronouns' function as one of: "the first supports for the emergence of subjectivity in language". By this he means that it is through them that speech, subjective language, is articulated and made possible.

Being the first agents of enunciation, the pronouns found and direct the individual's discourse. From "language [being] actualized in speech by a speaker [*locuteur*]",[22] it is only a small step to the notion, much used by Wittig, that "each speaker *appropriates to himself* an entire language by designating himself as *I*".[23]

The personal pronouns' most striking feature, particularly emphasized by Benveniste, is the fact that they designate intrinsically nothing and no-one. They form:

> [...] an ensemble of 'empty' signs that are non-referential with respect to 'reality'. These signs are always available and become 'full' as soon as a speaker introduces them into each instance of his discourse.[24]

Each of Wittig's books is articulated and organised around a personal pronoun (each time different). Claiming Benveniste as a strong influence, she sometimes likes to consider her books as 'musings over personal pronouns'.

Indeed what is more ideal when one wants to remould language than to use the only signs in language that are empty *per se*, and that at the same time found subjectivity.

Hence if *L'Opoponax*, where the indeterminacy of childhood is dominant, is written from the neuter 'on' ['one'], *Les Guérillères* which narrates in numerous tales the dismantling of myths of sexual identity, is constructed around the feminine plural 'elles'. ('They' in English loses its gendered characteristic. It was for this reason unfortunately translated as 'the women').

The Lesbian Body exists as an intersubjective fusion of the speakers 'I/you' and reads in a constant movement to and fro between bodies, between the I and the you, ultimately rendering their demarcation and definition impossible.

Across the Acheron on the contrary defines its main character as a narrator called 'Wittig'. This novel is significantly also the only one to reach a certain degree of exteriorisation of identity.

Let us not here forget the epic context with which Wittig solidifies her pronoun-characters and manages to insinuate a generalization out of a profoundly subjective view-point; nor her exclusive use of the present tense, both of which contribute to the deeply assertive (or should we say performative?) aspect of her work.

Inventing Reality

As I have shown above, Wittig's books all spring from a will to use language in such a way that it would erase any sense of complicity with and justification for the phallogocentric purpose. The phenomenological equation of language and the world is therefore a considerable influence, according to which it would be possible (at least thinkable) to *reform* the world by *reformulating* language. As the polemic and performative intention is pushed to its limits in Wittig's work, the reality or non-reality of places/actions/characters becomes indissociably linked to the lack and absence of *words*:

> We must really find words to describe this place, lest everything you see suddenly disappears.
>   Whatever they have not laid hands on, whatever they have not pounced on like many-eyed birds of prey, does not appear in the language you speak.[25]

Furthermore, 'I's lover, whose lesbian body is by definition absence and (political) void in language, is approached as 'the unnameable' - a term often here used as a proper name and which is made to simultaneously signify moral prohibition and verbal absence. This allows for the unnameable (as in fact unnamed) to find, by way of a constant play between the two terms, a consistency, a near visibility in the text and the social tissue: an empty space made visible being less empty than a space unperceived as such, nearly already a presence, a slow and violent apparition in language:

> Unnameable one you buzz in my ears, the sound spreads with celerity beyond the cochlea... *I* pant, *I* shudder, *I* tremble, *I* cannot keep m/y mouth closed, *I* cry to you, *I* call to you, you unnameable unnamed whose name *I* may not utter whose unnameable name pronounced by m/e makes the wasps leave their hives.[26]

And if 'style is a world vision' (Proust), participating in writing's inherent necessity of reflecting itself on the world, a writer will in order to write - hence to organise or re-organise the world-order according to her own necessities - appropriate the entire language. And it is equally

23

important to acknowledge that the formation of *speech* (particularised and subjective language) is accompanied by the restructuration of the imagination.

"Every new form reveals new things within the real" according to Michel Butor, *Nouveau Roman* writer. Each new form fills in blanks, shadows of reality. And it belongs to the writer to make these spaces, these blanks and hiatus appear as so many manifestations of a reality in the making, or rather, "what is happening here, does not yet have a name, and they all know it", of a reality approaching discursivity.

This is why having written 'she', a writer would, especially in the case of a grammatically gendered language such as French, be led to follow the echoes of the word across the entire language, discover each friction, every screech of the brakes, and work there to divert and then reactivate meaning, in order to propagate it further, elsewhere, like the constantly redrawn maps of the first explorers. Inescapably, one could therefore say that it is the very organisation of knowledge and of language as a memory-system that Wittig is trying to tackle.

A Prospective Memory

Wittig's treatment of the function and nature of memory is particularly dynamic. Memory, as a retentive faculty, selects and solidifies meaning through the organisational operations of language. This results in its ideological preservation, in the same category as myths and symbolic orders.

Given Wittig's ahistorical approach, it is clear that the 'memory' she is concerned with is not the one that would represent the past and inscribe us all in a vast continuum. Rather, memory becomes something more controversial and indubitably euphoric since it wishes to constitute itself before our very eyes, in the immediacy of reading: it is here as much a question of a memory to recuperate, as it is of a memory to constitute, piece by piece, word by word - in short a prospective memory. In a passage long since (in)famous, Wittig says:

> You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.[27]

Since from a feminist point of view, memory is falsified, and that from a materialist feminist point of view, history is a failure which installs political amnesia and a consequent lack of vocabulary where reality diverges from the intended sense; the dynamics of naming, of wanting to inscribe, to 'insign' and 'materialise' oneself in language can be said to represent for Wittig- an act of memory similar to Daly's own 're-membering'.

> In a world in which we are passed over in silence, whether this pleases us or not, we must constitute ourselves, leap out as if from nowhere, be · our own legends in our own lifetime.[28]

In fact, Wittig's work reveals a rich constellation of themes related to the construction of a new language, to the reattribution of memory, which, informed by a total reorganisation of sense, would come to annul the current ones by means of substitution. One can, of course, appropriately question the long-term value of substitution. Indeed, for all the ambitious intransigeance of this re-definition of the function of memory as a source of active identification, rather than of more or less passive assimilation, we are not far from what Louis Marin in an article on utopian thought has called "the insistent necessity of a non-memory" [*'l'insistante exigence d'une non-mémoire'*].[29] By this he means the voluntary and reiterated oblivion of any element harmful to the logic of the main system (utopia would then only be a subtle inversion of our political reality). It is in this sense significant (and logical) to note the tendency of a great number of feminist/lesbian and minority writers to use this theme of the renewing of language in the creation of their visionary universes.

Reality Tenfolded

One could fairly easily venture to say that one of the primary themes of *The Guérillères* is that of the construction of memory: "They say, how to decide that an event is worthy of remembrance?"[30]

Les Guérillères is a narrative which is built as a succession of stories, symbolic tales, fables, legends, all more or less fictitious, or manipulated by Wittig. It is through these stories that 'elles/they', establish a world and reality and come to reinterpret the female body.

The purpose of these stories is the setting up and production of memory and of reality. Most of these stories attempt to condition a comprehension of the body displaced from the layers of symbols and abstractions that construct it culturally and end up dividing it transcendentally as object from itself in an infinite play of reflections and refractions.

> They say it is not for them to exhaust their strength in symbols... They say they must now stop exalting the vulva... They say. that any symbol that exalts the fragmented body is transient, must disappear.
> They say that all they need to do is to invent terms that describe themselves without conventional references to herbals or bestiaries. They say that this can be done witout pretension. They say that what they must stress above all is their strength and their courage.[31]

One can see here, of course, the outline of a critique of essentialism and of the creation of female mythologies, strongly valued by American feminism. At a deeper level, however, it consists in a critique of the dualistic mechanisms of western thought; under the guise of complementary pairs (nature/culture, male/female, body/mind) is hidden a hierarchisation of values that systematically discriminates against the terms assimilated with immanence.

At the heart of Wittig's thought-practice (and, we might say of Irigaray's and, curiously, of Daly's), lies the necessity of removing oneself from

shackles fundamentally harmful to women by means of rejecting a dualistic manifestation and interpretation of the world. In the rejection of a unified meaning she seeks the means of her own realisation. As Irigaray says:

> In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its propension to the production of a truth and a meaning that are excessively univocal.[32]

The suspicion about representation, paralleled by a commitment to writing as enunciation, is clearly exemplified by Wittig's treatment of lesbianism.

> To write a text which has homosexuality amongst its themes it to take the risk that the formal element of the theme will at any moment overdetermine the meaning, absorb all meaning.[33]

By giving her book the title of *The Lesbian Body* Wittig is taking that risk, since it seems to predetermine its sense by inscribing it under the sign of lesbianism.

However, seeking not so much to express or identify homosexuality as to situate it, to inscribe it as position, a point of *view*, it is language taken from the de-centered, ex-centered angle of the minority-writer that Wittig explores in her writing. In this respect it is the constant play between the political unnameable and the semantic unnamed, noticed earlier, which manages to place the text in a precarious equilibrium, implicit within writing itself, between a 'stuttering language' (Deleuze) and the flow of its validated usages.

The silence which surrounds the homosexual body, exploited thematically and stylistically by Wittig, comes here to stretch words and enrich their meaning while subverting their references. Homosexuality's specificity is thus made, not to represent itself, but rather to contaminate the general context of signification from which it was originally evacuated and relegated to the periphery.

> A text written by a minoritarian writer is effective only if it succeeds in making the minoritarian point of view universal.[34]

The lesbian, the third sex, thus functions as a means of directing a new course of meaning.

The Lesbian Body is the most spectacular and the most violent of Wittig's narratives. The human body is its centre, in the manner of the Renaissance humanists, Rabelais amongst them. It is around the body that everything is organised, from which it becomes possible to apprehend oneself as subject. Here Wittig uses Benveniste's principles literally in that she augments the 'I's subjectivity by splitting it throughout the text: 'j/e', creating thus a strangeness, a tension in the text, that places the subject 'under the sign of excess' of the full, plenary subjectivity of the heroic character.

The book's subject 'I' and 'you' being by definition reversible, inseparable ("neither of the two terms can be conceived without the other"), are at grips with one another through descriptions of reciprocal tearing apart and recomposition (restructuration), so fantastical as to approach a gory grotesque.

Moreover, the narrators/characters of *The Lesbian Body* reach such dimensions of transformation that it becomes impossible to clearly define either the nature or the shape of the bodies described. The body, even in its most minute details, is explored: "*I* discover that your skin can be lifted layer by layer". In the light of day, the familiar is now increasingly foreign, monstruous, disjointed, literally *sans queue ni tete*, disturbingly vibrant:

> *I* have swallowed your arm the weather is clear the sea warm.The sun enters m/y eyes. Your fingers form a fan in m/y oesophagus, then come together to thrust further...*I* am penetrated endlessly by you, you thrust into m/e, you impale m/e, *I* begin an extremely slow journey, *I* am thronged by roarings, m/y ears lengthen, they beat furiously at the wood of the deck...m/y vocal cords stretched by the passage of your fingers transmit no sound, cries propagate themselves within m/y arteries incessant siren wailings alarm signals....[35]

It is in this total alteration of the most known that Wittig manages to explode any source of reference, hence of identification, and forces the reader to cross with her into the unknown of an immeasurably overgrown body. This allows her to envisage, in the blink of an eye, the unnamed territories of vacant memory, and to apprehend under the visionary sign of the lesbian body, not the female body, but that undivided and transformed body of the future, a full body of thought in intense gestation.

1. Adapted from a lecture given by the author at the University of Oslo, June 1990. With thanks to Iain Grant for help with the translation.
2. *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Minuit, 1969). English trans. by David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). *Le Corps lesbian* (Paris: Minuit, 1973). English trans. by David Le Vay (New York: Avon Books, 1976).
3. Wittig, *L'Opoponax* (Paris: Minuit, 1964). This text does, however, foreshadow the thematics developed in her subsequent *Les Guérillères*.
4. Wittig, *Virgile, non* (Paris: Minuit, 1981). *Across the Acheron*, trans. David Le Vay, (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 13.
5. Wittig, 'The mark of gender', in *Poetics of Gender*, ed. N.K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 66.
6. Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxieme sexe*, vol. 1, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 17. *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M.Parshley, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 16.
7. J. Butler, 'Variations on sex and gender - Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault', in *Feminism as Critique*, eds. S. Benhabib and D. Cornell, (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), pp. 129-42.
8. Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, pp. 78-79 and p. 66.
9. Wittig's comments on this can be found in her article on Nathalie Sarraute's own use of the feminine plural pronoun, in *Digraphe* 32, March 1984 (special issue on Sarraute).
10. *Les Guérillères*, pp. 113-114.
11. The French term *féminin* designates both the sex and the linguistic category. To avoid confusion, therefore, the French term has been retained to highlight this bivalence.
12. D. Barnes, *La Passion*, preface and tr. Wittig (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). English translation by Wittig: 'The point of view: Universal or Particular?', in *Feminist Issues*, Fall 1983, pp. 63-69.
13. Wittig, 'The category of sex', *Feminist Issues*, Fall 1982, pp. 63-68.

037

Work in Progress

Truncated/troncated

AROLINE BERGVALL

The spelling error of the title has become "a part of its identity." As syncopation, the typo intercepts the work. Yet, Robert McAlmon's misspelling of Mina Loy's first and main collection *Lunar Baedecker* in 1925 in Paris accidentally confirms the significance of spelling games, name-changes and anagrammatic appellations in Mina Loy's erratic and uprooted writing career. The Baedeker being, what Carolyn Burke describes as "the old-fashioned, opinionated, and reliable Baedeker, the handbook familiar to all European travellers," the mistake plays out rather neatly the title's poetic intimation of mercurial travelling at the beginning of the century. Error, and errors, have since become part of the book's paraphernalia. As a consequence, when cited, the collection is followed by (sic):

Lunar Baedecker (sic).

To one addition, its pointer. This appendage to the title is disturbing in itself. For late 20th century readers travelling on the pages of their lonely planet, (sic) sets up historical detail, localised context. It plays out an era when travellers would be discovering Baedeker's "Paris." For many of us, the error will have been invisible until spelt out. To spell out an error in order for it to occupy its error-value. To prevent the absorption of the error by pointing to it. Second printings, had there been any, would no doubt have been quick to remove what has been left to stand. Would have hidden the glitch, omitted the ugly letter, the interfering party. Jonathan Williams' editing of *Lunar Badeker & Time-Tables* in 1958 does a lot to customise the numerous misprints of that first collection. And restore the author, Mina Loy (presumably), to the text. Or does this make it at least two.

Through which suspicious process, in whose unlilely hands does a text make it to print, does it transform into a book: Typo marks the intrusion of a wider chain of social spaces into the motivated text. It specifically marks the time and place of a changing of hands and of the production of

the book. Furthermore, the fact that a typo has come to haunt and interfere with the textual material reveals the very vulnerability of the text's inscription, the tenuousness of its points of closure. It ultimately signals a loss of text, which finds itself mistaken for something else. Readable: but reading what.

Ironically, the critique's (sic), by turning the typo into an event, acts out and repeats the slip by proxy, shows up the parasitic and makes it a point of contact between contemporary readers, show me the C on the title-plage, which threatens to bypass the text. One can find in the insistence for the (sic) a paradoxical anxiety that the error might remain undetected. Or worse, that it could become misattributed. Or misconstrued as a textual device. The suspicion is certainly not unfounded. Who's to tell what's what. And whose is whose. Unless you're in the know. Knowhat. The social alphabet carries in-jokes lurk inside the text can take it by surprise comes out all wrong forced out of its own closures.

This issue is not indifferent. One needs to make up one's mind what one thinks of typos. To accept the typo as an unexpected part of the text is syncopation. Loss of control sees accidents as likely. Conducive in the chain of the textual wok. I'm afraid there's been an accident. Not an accident really, just a small mistake. Nothing major but. Yes, in the title. Well, it's to do with a letter, there's a C where there ought to be not. Nothing to do with chance presupposes a mindset that includes as much as contains the accident. Joan Retallack, whose poetic production involves complex textual accretions frequently generated by chance procedures, makes a meal of the erratum slip in her *Errata Suite*. Which on p. 48 goes: "To read read real denied being there at all that is to cause to follow these the choices that make us defacto human bacchae melanesia cafeteria ergot cert to be inclued a error for mirror interroregnum regulaterrata p.8 formentioned. . ."

Elliptic structure shows up the bunions to every blank. Its staccato yet cumulative rhythm gangs up to let loose the disturbances a typo can cause. Pressingly jolts social networks and literary status quos through games of language, revealed and nurtured by the tipped-off text itself. Accident, error are much operative here: reveal the double-take: the constant interplay between mistake and omission: spelling and silencing: the T in error.

There are no records, as far as I know, of Loy's reaction to the C shored up in Baedeker. For someone who'd changed her name from Lowy to Loy, the sense might have been that you add some you lose

some, the name is the game. Yet when it comes to names proper a typo never was so acute can lead to much confusion. Writes critic, with exclamation mark: No, not Mirna Loy! (No! not Mirna, Myrna! (thank you Carolyn Burke)) Says the name that attempts to differentiate who's in from who's out in the march across space. Name all the sons in Numbers. Write them in the Book. The name monumentalises by conventionalising what it cannot fix but must fixate on. Lyotard and Foucault have each shown how the authorial name needs to confirm its textual locality and the currency of its discursive use. Cannot be assumed to be same social designator as civic papers. Francis Ponge knows this who fulls his own name fill of text. And Cage fills the text with joyce.

While for some, like Georges Pérec, the name can seem akin to a social typo, a suspect entity which identifies you before you identify it, more susceptible than nouns to lapses keep memory unstable, affiliations are obscure, unchosen yet inescapable, the foreigner endlessly reiterated in the proliferation of the non-memorisable name. From Which Moped with Chrome-plated Handlebars at the Back of the Yard? Opening line quote. There was once this character called Karamanlis. Or something like that: Karawak? Karawash? Karapet? Well anyway, Karathingy.

Unquote the character's name is made to change at each narrative turn. Is coloured by its own tribulations affect the name becomes a noun. Unattached this Karastein, Karalepiped, Karasplash,... In all some 60 variants. May well be more. The name neither proper nor clean. And yet, it is all the foreigner has to show for on arrival. Brings as luggage which both immediately separates from Us (us) and Us (them). Out of context and exoticised (at best). Bergball: is that related to the Swedish film-maker?

For women, expected to walk through the names of men as one borrows butter from a neighbour, names enforce a functional anonymity in a paradigm which unnames female particularity. That names are liable to change is de facto fact of life has long been understood that is less reverie than disappearance. Paradoxically, only a self-generated textual genealogy can: trespass on the disappearing, intercept and record the move from these social lines of imposition to personal acts "and may be dropp a letter from your name / but which one should you, / ache I" (Blau DuPlessis). Misnomer me nomme. A deep dip in the blue C. Stacy Doris' biography, written and published in French, enhances the issue by tilting her book *La vie de Chester Steven Wiener écrite par sa femme* (*The life of Chester Steven Wiener written by his wife*). The male biographee's

name is the title that becomes the female author whose no-name function names her both in the text and beyond the book.

Bearing in mind that this kind of shadowplay used to be social practice in the pre-Modern period, and pretext for much textual masquerade (as a rule, authorial names do not figure on book-covers until the early nineteenth century. The author being usually already known by word of mouth or some publishing guise and their name frequently encoded in the text itself, it would have been felt that, in the words of Balzac, there was no need to "flaunt [one's] anonymity"), Doris' scale of play remains as wittily idiosyncratic on the one hand, as it is to the point with the other.

The possible allusion made to that most undisguised of masked biographies, *La vie de Henry Brulard écrite par lui-même (The life of H.B written by himself)* by "Stendahl" only reinforces the issue.

This way of applying social critique and personal irony to the textual operations of naming is also consciously developed in Loy's work and life, who calls herself at times Mrs. Lloyd, after Arthur Cravan, all the while naturalises Mina Loy at the Manhattan registry, a late consecration of having dropped her maiden W at her first public appearance (Salon d'Automne, Paris, 1904). The distinction made by Foucard between the proper name as designator and the author's name as an instance of discourse will not clearly identifiable be after all. But then, "in our society the surname of a woman is not exactly a simple matter," as Genette puts it. The shift from Lowy to Loy set up a distance from the endless foreigning of her father's Jewish-Polish background. Her chosen name cut its fit along the social silence she despised. Ironically, Loy's need for her own shorthand originary point prompted an anglicisation of her name. Win some lose some to social order. Through the lost letter she emerges socially. Within the work, the disappeared feveredly activates textual name-games, compounds of language, all susceptible to foreign-sounding configurations: "from Nima Lyo, alias Anim Yol, alias Imna Oly" as much as to satirical commentary: Marinetti's frenetic and self-important composure becomes, rame ramoneur, "Raminetti".

Is it *mise en scène* or *mis en scene*. Lightning or lightening. Up-a-loft or up-a-flot. Tongue or tonque. Puns, cross-lingual turns, obvious misspellings as well as spelling inconsistencies favour the dance of mistaken or enforced identikits which accompanies her playful launching of names. Her meticulous editor, Roger L. Conover, perpetuates the issue by entitling his first anthology of her work *The Last Lunar Baedeker* and gleefully renaming it *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* at its second and altered

publication.

Nonetheless, exclaims he, ONE MUST CLEAN UP THE SITE.

Yes but (towards what).

By her own account (and he quotes), "I was trying to make a foreign language."

Conover's editorial researches, patiently laid out, keenly show the "local context" that might have affected his emendations. Fascinating lists of Loy's unorthodox spellings brush against their altered spellings. Shrivable or shrivvable. As in most translations, there are homophonic and cultural references get blanked out. Recceding gives way to receding, precceding to preceding, simulacres to simulacras etc. Yet he doesn't touch up some of the trans- and post-atlantic hesitations that occupy the U of odour and the Z of satirise. So: Loy is an early exemplar of what has since become one thriving trading beast of the 20th century's arts world: the Americanizing European. Certainly the hybridic pairings of her language did point that way.

More urgently though, for she plays her names as "(secret service buffoon to the Woman's Cause)", the tossing around of letters and her casual disregard for orthography enables Loy to take up the challenge of her own misnomer. To refuse the patronym: to be at and be the root of one's own line. From Henri Beyle to Stendahl to Henri Brulard to him self, unfixing the name can send it through peculiar spirals of false mirrorings. Simultaneously, it also opens to the silencing mechanisms of the world, the regulatory factor of family lines and etymologies. The need for one's own starting-blocks is ruled by the knowledge of this constant writing-on.

"There is a continuous forgetting of names in which whole chains of names are withdrawn from memory" observes Freud in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. "If in the course of endeavouring to discover an escaped name, one finds others with which the latter is intimately connected, it often happens that these new names also escape. The forgetting thus jumps from one name to another, as if to demonstrate the existence of a hindrance not to be easily removed."

Among other domino effects, associative mnemotechniques, sex, as awareness of gendering, will let through such histories of jumps and alterations and variances. Libidinal blanks and psycho-social impasses beneath the dashes and hyphens. Beautify the acceptable, defuck the unpresented. Meticulously, Hélène Cixous traces up the "geography of my genealogical memory" only to better break away: "From 1955 on, I

adopted an imaginary nationality which is literary nationality."

By imaginary does she mean uncontainable, semiotic in the sense of being both that which takes place through language and that which collapses in on it. Tabooed out yet fully flared up. Writing as one privileged *etcetera*. By nationality does she mean Virginia Woolf: dehistoricised woman-genre finds herself to be of the whole world. Today, this doesn't make much sense unless taken to mean: Nowhere at all, everywhere in particulars. It is the nature of such issues that is addressed in the aching detail of Cixous' recent work.

No less clearly, I'm interested in bottoms. Lines and rose and rose of wholes. The violet anus which, according to Alain Chevrier, started both Unica Zürn and her surrealist anagram off as a poetic form. CB puts one behind and a rose in her front too: waits to see what comes of that. Loy, 1914-thereabouts: "Have you got any idea in what direction the sex must be shoved?" Judith Butler talks of a "sexed positionality." A minimal point of maximal pressure. A concentrate of regulated appearance, of regulated figuration which can be, and should be, contextualised, historicised. She acknowledges the seductive viability of identification and considers it a cross-point of psycho-social dynamics, which both inbihits and generates sexuality. She engages with the way such a phantasmatic event stages the body-sex sets it up for conventionalised mishaps. In a sense, Butler's precisely structured analysis of the positionalities of sexuality as places of massive cumulative tension between the physiological and the psycho-social, has the advantage of resolutely denaturalising any essence to its gendering and of forcing up an awareness of its constraining fabrications and metaphors. But by refusing to let acknowledge spacing constructive enough to inhabit (in knowledge of this politics) ... not nothing precise enough to relay our dangerous attachment to image ... no portemanteaux to feed our readerly seduction habits ... one does get a sense that she leaves much of sex multifarious yet uninhabitable, queered outside out: at the end of the long-day, how does one carnival without flesh, without face, without name, without even the mask of the name, played statuesque, a gape is the viol of Magritte's face-stage. Wouldn't it be viable to find in the iconographic impetus of, for instance, Oppenheim's Furcup, in the over-genitalised dolls of Cindy Sherman, in Jessica Stockholder's narrativised wall structures, in the subversely decorative art of Cathy de Monchaux, in the overgrown "indirigible bums," "invitatory conveyance," "demi-rep angels," "electric fungus" oddities of Loy's unashamedly desymmetrical

vocabulary, some conducive (as well as "cruel") traces of what Butler calls "an assumption of place; a territorializing of an object"? It seems to me that by taking on sur/face for value (often their own: why waste someone else's "face" when it is the very concept of waste that is being addressed), these artists and others not only deregulate the objects they are supposedly referring to, they also mark them up, mark out, demarcate points of friction between seen and unseen, said and unsaid, sayable and unsayable. Not so much a substitution of one for an other, but complex, unresolved, accretions, accumulations of sexuated imagery, of "subvisual resources" (Loy), shoved up into and through long established chains of roles. To exhabit such ungracious images. The sex, all of them, will be etymologised, textualised, particularised. The sex envisaged and envisageable. Loy steps into her own building-site and loses herself in the textwork. Licking the Arno / The little rosy / Tongue of Dawn / Interferes with our eyelashes / — — — — — — — — / We twiddle to it / Round and round / Faster / And turn into machines / ... ("Songs to Joannes"). This brash and noisy jumble. Its crude joins. Its portrait galleries its sexual sarcasm. And the bent mannerisms, corny spiritualisms of her mechanical heaven. Tastelessly awkward, overburdened, sticks to it. Such and such femaled writer, still an irritant to the socio-cultural grammar. Expected to appear in the continuous sex of flesh and then to dis appear in the name of papa. Expected to appear then to disappear. Appear then disappear. Appear to disappear Appear to disappear Apear to disappear A pear to disappear A pear to disppear A pear to dispear A pear to dis pear A pear to this pear a pear to this pear a pear to this pear a peer to this pear a peer to this pear a peer to this pere a peer to his pere a pere to his pere a pere to his pere a pere to his pee a pee to his pee a pee to his P a P to his P to his P this P his P is P. But not appear to appear to appear. The "Holy anomoly!" of it all. With which the names. And the takes and the misses.

By the mouthful. "If language is not experienced as both an active and a defective process, then one is (by default) either passively the defective cause of what is wrong or passively the defective effect. Either way, the possibility for worlded activity is severely limited." Tina Darragh, *A(gain)2st the odds*. An apology if ever there was one to the "illuminating mistake" as indicative of the interrelatedness of textual fodder, social space and the processing of bio so present in Loy's work. What's a typo but a remainder of this trafucking of f/acts. Keeps groing, Cindy.

Yet free-floating love letters can make feel violently sick. Marcel

Duchamp, Loy's one time fashionably twinned and a self-fashioned gril, used to tow two R's around in case one were to fall off incapacitated by the mechanics of his broken glass.

"*Arrhe est à art ce que merdre est à merde*" (1914 Box).

Loose translation: R is r secure: mere D rests mere D.

Literally: Deposited without installment plan, this artshit choke certainly brings delay, and the R of Jarry's tempestuous contrary diffamatory UBU ROI does ring some kind of dadded relief:

> (ACT PREMIER, SCÈNE PREMIÈRE, PÈRE UBU, MÈRE UBU)
> PÈRE UBU:
> *Merdre!*

Encouraged, Sélavy puts his art in it. No bunk of roses where there are few femmes left to grind. Within the strict bounds of duality, the verbal anagrams of the android mechanical allegories secure extraordinary, transportable, the immutable value-figure, the brightest filthiest tnuc of all. *Eros c'est la vie*, Mutter. Not so lucky, and unable to find similar fixative, Unica Zürn's "old, dangerous fever of the anagrams" seemed in the end mainly death-clap. Transports her language into hermetic pools of sexualised, mostly traumatised spaces come cleared once they obey the strictest of rules might keep me presentable, just. Each figured sentence being one only if it allows for no left-overs: "the rule for anagrams is that each anagram must use up all the letters contained in the initial sequence" and recognises no mistake: Example, the anagrammatic poem made up of its title "*Der eingebildete Wahnsinn*" (as reproduced in her text The *Man of Jasmine*): "*Deine Wege ins Hinterland B / da regnet es blind herein — We — / Weh' — Deliria sind gebete. N — N — N — / ...*". Zürn immediately disregards the poem as "poor and imperfect" on the clear basis that "here some letters have been left over and that is forbidden." Indeed it is but does beg two short questions:

1. the question of translatability of anagrams. The English translation of *Man of Jasmine*, in which the above features (in German in footnote), translates the words of the poem. Not the rule. Nor, it follows, the words that the rule would have produced. Is the translation translating anything at all.

2. the question of the left-over letters. These letters are capitalised and presented in explicit fashion. Without these the whole line would collapse. The rule being what makes the poem, and the line having

already exhausted its allowed quota, the letters are explicitely denied any form of elaboration. Rather than left-over could one see these as left-ins.

Perhaps one could consider such left-ins in the same light as, here I do extrapolate somewhat, Ponge's published drafts. It is the drafts them-selves over a period of a few years, and some publications, which make up his book-length poem *Comment une Figue de Paroles et Pourquoi*. Ponge in fact thought of this project as a major left-in, "to withhold nothing" (*ne rien retenir*). To move from the taboo of the left-over to the tricky openness of the left-in is to effect a shift from an aesthetic of product to one of process, from one of work as finish to work as unfinish, from self-enclosure to rumimation and accidentality. Zürn's need for unlimited symmetry, for the revelatory stability of the dug-out line does defy her sense of failure at these poetic excresceNces: She does keeps the poem: she publishes it. Yet if anagram at first reassured in the illusion of transfixity it proposed: would hopefully take birdbride out of cagehouse, it also always did run the risk of transforming writing into a foregone conclusion, no mistake no left-over being seen as conducive. In an environment of this kind, a typo could be nothing short of suicidal.

In the art of combination and attributions, rebus can be signatory, secretive, secreting: No waste. Less dead-meat, more worms. Did the earth move not. This fixture madness goes round and round the pnod, admits the widest of associations, can privilege the wildest of etymolo-gies, favour the banalest of traumas or the most claustrophobic will take you out as they pass on. Some sour syllabic joke may slowly turn on the writer, echo perpetually sending back cryptograms. Even seized Saussure in his investigations of Saturnian poets: "Given that the sum of modifica-tions is not calculable, one should simply abandon the possibility of close pursuit. However, we see that there is in fact some relative hope of such pursuit, even over large intervals of sp

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BINARY MYTHS
conversations with contemporary poets

edited by
Andy Brown

Caroline Bergvall

Is it a responsibility of the writer to make their work clear and easily understandable?

What kind of assumptions are being made as to the writer's (and the reader's) cultural role? Clarity/accessibility seem to imply normative pedagogy and the reiteration of shared tradition through the production of writing. To be clear and easily understandable would have to do with responding to habitual modes, refraining from exploring, writing within set bounds of behaviour and thinking. And still there will be misunderstandings. So how clear is clear and why is it even a point in relation to art and writing? Yes, the Greeks, but take one look at their tragedies.

Furthermore, in relation to whom do the criteria clarity/accessibility apply? What kind of reader does this address itself to? Who needs protecting and from what? 'Protect me from what I want' truism by artist Jenny Holzer. Isn't it paradoxical anyway that although the Realists aimed to write up, observe, comment on the social world as accurately and clearly as possible, it would be a misnomer to say that Dickens for instance, is accessible, or even clear.

It isn't the writer's role to reinforce normalisations of language and ideas. Nor is it necessarily, since Modernism, their role to refine existing literary forms. It is the writer's role to redistribute language, verbal as well as non-verbal signs. In doing so, the writer plays with and jolts syntactical framings, vocabularies, concepts, cliches, semantic layers. This leads her to question the various semiotic and semiological strands which enable or disable her writing. And enable or disable her process as a writer.

It is an important aspect of a writer's work that writing hits upon blindspots both personal and socio-cultural. Art and writing have to do with the particularity of angle, ways of looking at things, ways of applying oneself to a reading of the world, making it available to be read and be transformed yet again in the process. This never has to do with clarity, but with involvement.

Barthes has shown how textual pleasure (text as pleasure) is never 'clear' (unilateral?) even where the textual strategies deployed might set themselves out to be. Nor is textual pleasure easy to comprehend or describe. What remains clear from the point of view of reading is that a reader who reads without this risk of pleasure is either a bored reader or a conscientious reader. Clarity *per se* and as moral value doesn't come into it.

One could stretch the point and remind ourselves that etymologically the adjective clear and the substantive clarity are associated with ideas of light. The second definition of the *OED* shows a progression from brightness to glory to

clearness. As such 'to be clear' might be more closely associated to ideas of revelation (which is never clear) than to a prescriptive approach to writing or a normative definition of the nature of understanding. Not all writers believe in art as revelation. I, for one, am more concerned with writing as a slow, loose, rapid process of plying and dismembering given structures: radical undressings on a regular Saturday night.

Furthermore, comprehension, ease of understanding imply that writing and the writer should chew what the reader can then digest. This remains an oversimplification of the two inter-related activities and transforms writing/ reading into some sort of hierarchical information exchange. Isn't it the case that writing, as poetic practice, contains very little hard information? That what it consists in, first and foremost, is the manipulation of information. And that if it can be assimilated to a sense of expanded knowledge, it remains difficult to measure such knowledge in terms of actual facts.

Take the example of a literary area where the notion of clarity, in terms of accessibility and comprehension has remained high on the agenda: the field of translation. Translation being about the cross-point between two languages rather than two texts (Walter Benjamin), one could ask oneself what kind of writing a translator ought to generate and what the translation should aim to carry over from the original text. Does one, as has often been the case, aim to translate the most immediate 'accessible' aspect of the text, namely its overall meaning, its most 'informative' part, while retaining or adapting a semblance of structure? If so, are we not here dealing with translation less as an activity of writing and more as a quick appropriation, a making-available of digested material. Fast-tracking cultures, languages, texts. This attitude to translation reinforces conventions and silences in the arrival language at the expense of the translated text. At the expense also of the promise of exchange and change which translation could facilitate.

Alternatively one could think of translation, and recent theories and examples point in that direction, as a field which allows for the text in the original language to force up an activity of writing and exchange in the translation language. By which I mean one which almost certainly diffuses and stretches the arrival language. A making strange of language which reveals the 'other' text, the 'foreign' language across the familiarity of the arrival language. Sets up the two languages in conflictual or dialogic relationality.

This more open-ended approach to translation relies on a hands-on, punctual handling of literary material and a knowledge of connotive layers in both languages. Not on the formatting of text through a readability value which remains external to it. It is in this open-endedness that modern writing has found its ground, and the writer their responsibility.

51

What are you reading these days?

Most present: Zukofsky *A*; Goytisolo *Count Julian*; Deleuze-Parnet *Dialogues*; Stacy Doris *Kildare*; *Sleight Of Foot* (RSE anthology of new texts by Helen Kidd, Miles Champion, Harriet Tarlo, Scott Thurston); R. Graves *The Greek Myths*; Burke-Schor-Whitford (eds) *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*; *Le Monde Diplomatique*; *Flash Art*; *Raddle Moon* 15; Serie d'ecriture 7.

What important influences have shaped your current interests?

Sex. Bilingualism. Nicole Brossard *Le Centre Blanc: poèmes 1965-1975* . Monique Wittig *Le Corps Lesbien*. More sex. Trilingualism.

To what extent should poets be concerned with the age in which they are living?

I take it as likely that poets have bills and/or taxes to pay, that they go to the supermarket, to the cinema, to restaurants, to clubs, to pubs, to video stores, to exhibitions, to work, to friends, to bed, have sex, are one way or another aware of their gender, and of their nationality. That they are likely to catch the news in one form or another. That they will at one point or another have considered taking up a mortgage or a bankloan, and setting up emotional and/or professional partnerships. That they might break a leg or end up in hospital or visit close ones in hospital. That they are likely to have used a range of forms of transport and that they are likely to have been to an airport, a bus stop, a train station, a tube station, a petrol station, a public toilet. That they are likely to have stood in queues of varying lengths. That they are likely to know how to use a phone, possibly a mobile, possibly electronic communications. As such they are irremediably implicated in the physical structures and psycho-social functionings of the age they live in. Whether they choose to background or foreground this in their work and, more importantly, the ways they choose to do so, is an inescapable manifestation of their concern with the age in which they live.

What are your interests regarding questions of sexual politics and gender in poetry?

Judith Butler in her now classic *Gender Trouble* makes a claim for thinking both gender and sexuality not in relation to some sort of essence or Nature but in relation to the constructions and constrictions of representation. 'Genders can be rendered thoroughly incredible'. She shares this post-Beauvoir constructivism and body liberalism with a great number of postmodern critics and practitioners for whom the issue of gender or race, is inevitably accompa-

52

nied by the question of its construction. It is in this respect relevant that much visual and performance art these last 2 decades has seen a concentration on work which deals with the breakdown of the notion of identity and frequently displays a fascination for the human form under duress or in flux. The digitally treated, erased features of a number of photographers' work. The Chapman Brothers' rather conventional, rather blasé mannequins sculptures with their relocated genitals. Cindy Sherman's perturbing grotesque or gothic gender environments. Orlan's surgical face work. Performance artist Stelarc's implanted third arm. Della Grace's widely self-publicised hormone treatment and her coining of the phrase 'hermaphrodyke'. The interest for life-size wax-dolls in recent sculptural art. And of course cinema: the invasion of cyborg narratives. These outline a persistent pressing cultural obsession with transformation, metamorphosis as a field through which mythically, artistically, conventions become problematised and gender games can be played out. They outline also a recognition of the artifice of behaviour, an obsession with the synthetic, the prosthetic as a positive decrypting of manners and ways. Technology as a denaturalisation process.

Do these remain formal, structural games? Figures rather than actions? A fashionable, superficial play around gender dichotomy? Or do they ultimately reflect a civilisation in full flux? A profound change in the ways in which the collective social reads the individual and vice versa? Not only a renewal of form and technologies but fundamentally a change of context. Here it is that I find Creeley's much used adage 'form is only ever an extension of content' misleading. Perhaps too complacent, disregards even the closest past. Indeed, the formal experimentations of the Modernists have long since revealed the misogyny which allowed for such explorations in the first place. Pound, Joyce, Williams. 'The radicalness of the poetics is matched by the almost unquestioned conservatism of the gender ideas' (Rachel Blau DuPlessis).

Like visual artists, a number of contemporary poets and writers have used gender and sexuality as leitmotifs for their poetic structuring. Have stretched its locations. Are observing how we work our own content and how it works us into form. Are addressing the conventions and memory tricks which make us each feel we 'belong', we don't 'belong', we are 'this' or 'that'. The figures of representation makes our behaviour stick to allocated markers, pointers in the cultural field but they can also confuse by sheer accumulation. Kathy Acker, Dennis Cooper, Robert Gluck, Juan Goytisolo, Stacy Doris, Lisa Robertson...

The seductive familiar. The repulsive unfamiliar. On a large scale this has to do with the organisation of the individual body (incl. gender, race, disability, sex, disease) in its relation to subjectivity and in its relation to the collective body. Foucault. The filtering of behaviour. The violence of silence. The

53

violence of blindspots. Ethical as well as aesthetic.

All this leads me back to Spivak who writes (I paraphrase): How do I, as writer, speak and read the spaces I occupies and is made to occupy. What occupies (preoccupies) such a space.

The writer's space which Spivak alludes to, in contra-distinction to the more sublimating writer's voice, is dynamic, changing, unsettled and unsettling. Similarly, Kathy Acker's development of a writerly aesthetic which avoids looking for her one voice, the poet's voice ('Writer thought, don't want to be God, have never wanted to be God') and gives us over to the confusion and sharpness of interrupted, discontinuous narrative voices and events. Without continuity I cannot read you blindly, automatically, place you, your gender, your sex, your race, your mannerisms, your history. I have to learn to read 'you' with more than a pinch of salt. Salt as the metaphor corrodes the assumptions and viability of the Same, its necessary Other. What is coming through is the particular, the located as starting-point. Intervention, interruption, activity, reactivity. Threat and bravura. Accumulation. To examine the minefield and fairground of representation. The walking breathing archives of representation. Camp applies and unreads historical models through contemporary modes. As such is mainly pointedly liberational. But a gender spectacular which is part of the denaturalisation processes our contemporariness struggles with. Nature is what we make it.

Is poetry for the page, or are you more interested in the oral tradition / performance? In what ways?

I am intrigued by the question and the polarity it forwards. Entering a discussion on some sort of exclusive 'nature' of poetry strikes me as quite suspect in a day and age which is seeing a continued explosion of the function and properties of art and literature as a whole.

However it isn't an entirely dumbfounded dilemma and links up with the split traditions of Modernism. One, the Mallarméan book (poetry should not be read out). Two, the Dada experiments (poetry is performance on and off the page). Where poetry as a category might have originally sprung from has no relevance to poetic practice today. The fact that as a Western literary mode it has primarily, and paradoxically given the sound and rhythmic patterns of versification, been defined as written on the page to be read-in, has relegated the notion of its live performance to an often ill-construed afterthought, if at all, or to a specific and less regarded genre of poetry which now rests on traditions of story-telling.

Different forms of writing, of poetry, take place according to specific contexts of writing. This is of paramount importance to me. To write for the

54

page implies not only the development of a wide set of verbal manipulations. It can also (it doesn't always) take into account, and as part of the composition, the manipulation of non-verbal signs such as the space of the page, the typography used, etc. This can quite explicitly lead to constructing a writing which acknowledges (not takes it for given) the page environment as its foremost specific context. This is particularly present in the American poet Johanna Drucker's typographic work, in Hannah Weiner's diarist poetry, the conceptualisations of Susan Howe, of Maggie O'Sullivan all of whom however loosely follow on from Mallarmé's attention to lay-out for generating meaning and the subsequent visual variations set up by Pound, Olson, Appollinaire, e.e.cummings.

Concerns explored in this way will be largely different from the work of a poet who sees their main impetus as situated in the setting up of live situations for writing and for whom the page might function as one additional environment. An environment available for scorings (Bob Cobbing, Alison Knowles, Jackson MacLow, Steve McCaffery) or to the reformulations of the piece on paper (cris check). Here again the divide between live performance and page performance is tenuous. Poets who engage their work in both situations, such as Fiona Templeton, Steve Benson, Ntozake Shange will often devise strategies of writing which are informed by this toing and froing between environments and readers/audiences. As such they include rather than exclude a number of formal modes. Similarly, a poet might decide to explore writing through the making of objects, as the Belgian Surrealist Marcel Broodthaers did. Here again the structural motivation and general outlook of poetry will be carried out according to the specificities of the chosen material, surface, medium.

To maintain a strict dichotomy between page-based and live-based poetry strikes me for this reason as quite erroneous and, perhaps more to the point, as symptomatic of a still wide-spread lack of flexibility in the defining of poetic activity. One which implies a stifled understanding of poetry as a genre which can only sustain itself in either-ors.

It seems more pressing and would have more far-reaching consequences to say that: where you wish to place your work, the way you think that space, informs how you develop it. Hence one would be more concerned with the activity of writing than whether it is prose, poetry, criticism etc.

Have you collaborated with other artists/writers on any work recently? How has this developed your poetry?

I have nearly always paralleled my individual writing practice with cross-artform collaborative work and some of my first commissions were for

collaborative projects. This has been highly influential on the manner I have come to tackle a range of writing strategies in my individual investigations. It's also been key in making me see how difficult it is to truly engage in the collaborative process, how difficult it is to allow for one's own preoccupations to be altered in contact with another artist or artform, and how infuriating it can be to have to take into account all the accidents, surprises, tensions, last minute changes which the shared development of work invariably forwards. In addition to which, and probably due to the fact that shared work always seem to put one on the line in highly unexpected ways, the emotional stakes feel frequently much higher than when presenting individual work. For this reason, I'm convinced that collaborations require a particular frame of mind, not only towards one's collaborators but also and importantly towards one's own practice, and that there is a right time and a bad time for them.

My last explicit collaboration so far has been with composer and sound-artist Kaffe Matthews. A short but prolific time. In many ways collaborating with Kaffe didn't so much mean integration, assimilation of twos into the one project as working quite clearly quite openly side by side, sometimes even back to back, around the same idea or site and with our respective media or specialist fields. Reaching points of contact more by way of persistent critiquing and observation of each other's parts in the project than by seeking symmetries, correspondences in our specific approaches. We developed several projects together: an interactive sound-text installation, a live piece for a festival in Huddersfield, which we later redesigned for an event at the Union Chapel in London, a sound-text work for Video Positive '95. The diversity generated felt exciting, edgy as well as playful. From my point of view it helped show up some of the difficulties involved in writing text (esp. narrative text) off the page and on to gallery walls or as part of a wider sound environment while retaining the ambiguities of the written page-based syntax. From the perspective of collaboration I was surprised to realize to what extent our insistence on a gap, a distance between collaborators had in quite unforeseen ways added a positive disconnectedness to the environments the audiences were party to.

My most recently completed piece started out as a text installation entitled *Éclat*, a guided tour of a domestic space commissioned by the Institution of Rot in London in 1996 which I later partly rewrote and completely redesigned for its publication as a book by Sound&Language under the same title. I consider this piece, both its installation and the book, to be in part the result of a string of collaborative moments. Aspects, or moments, of the piece were put together through careful and repeated contact and discussions with the curator Crow and later the publisher cris cheek, both artists in their own right. A visual artist, Sally Tallant, took part in the conceptualisation and setting up of the installation as

56

056

well as in its documentation and these discussions and activities again informed the many stages of the live piece. Her visual documentation was later used with Simon Josebury, designer for the journal *Performance Research*, when I was commissioned to do a 10 page long text-image variation of *Éclat* for their Artist Pages, a section committed to visual work.

Certain decisions made in the work only came about as a result of these close critical dialogues, the time and thoughts other artists committed to it. If these weren't collaborations in the full sense of the word, they still seemed to me to operate along the lines of what remains for me one important aspect of any collaborative process: the way in which it forces into the compositional process a dynamic, at times problematic, dialogue with others and an open-endedness to form. As a result *Éclat* has taken so many forms that I couldn't today trace up an original, the first, the main text of this project. This is making me more casual towards the finished work and is increasingly affecting my writing processes. Attached and unattached, as precise and committed as possible to every new textual condition.

Concluding remark: What collaborations can do for writers is take us out of the artform's conventionalised isolation and force us to relate to writing as part of a wider network of activity and exchange. Which would be about time.

How do you feel about the pieces once they are published and out in the world?

Twofold.

Primarily interested in the text as activity. Not the finished product. The text in the making, in progress, as it takes place, as it highlights its own mechanics, as it grapples with all sorts of material and issues and found objects, as it asks questions of the poet, of the writer. The wandering structure, the transitional architectures, the airport of writing. The text as airport. Nothing stops here but thousands walk through everyday. The relation set up between writing as a continuous-discontinuous gathering of material and my being actively responding to a collusion of structural, mediatic as much as personal experiences. The pieces start 'out in the world' where I live too.

The writer's relation to the published text. The text as product. I'll start by using the example of film-maker Derek Jarman, whose films provide a complex, playful, highly politicised cut-and paste approach to image-making as on-going process. Of which the film itself and as product is only one aspect. Jarman, the collaborator, the film-maker, the gardener, the activist, the visual artist, the writer, the Aids sufferer, extends the films, is part of the film as project. Both as its iconic figure and in actual fact. Interviews with Jarman are conversational, don't close up his films into subjective intentionality. On the

contrary, they provide an added open-ended block to the films, a sense of loose, thoughtful as much as implicated continuity between his films and his living. Through film as process and beyond its product, Jarman implicates the viewer/ listener's own awareness of images and stereotypes, how we play them daily, complacently or knowingly.

. I would like to presume a similar positioning from the point of view of poetic practice: that poetry is a public activity which involves the poet as one necessary, live segment of the writing. Paradoxically, this frees the poet away from their writing: the poet doesn't relate to their writing as complete, the finished text is only one aspect of writing, the poet is one aspect of the work. Which asks us to think through the link between poetic texts and public voice, between private mechanics and public involvement: how and where does this take place. With what implications and why the separation.

Cage's refusal to set up a distinction between private and public, between process and product diminishes of course the value and importance placed on the one, unalterable published text. It places every aspect of writing: out there: over here: out here: in there: across: around: under: in here: all around.

Temper of the Times: A Correspondence (Part One)

For this first issue *Performance Research* invited artists and writers concerned with performance working in any media. to respond to two questions: 'What are the current concerns in your work?' and 'How do they, or might they, relate to the context of the times in which we live?'

Caroline Bergvall

As a writer coming to performance a few years ago with a practice of fairly layered, abstract, syntactically bothered and fundamentally monologic poetry, I decided not to take into account, not even to give a passing thought to, the ambivalent and troubled relation between text and performance which has pervaded the twentieth century. Consequently I ended up writing texts as if they never were to leave the page, then spending a lot of time struggling with various collaborators (visual artists, musicians) to devise performable performance pieces out of them. The result was often hypnotic and particularly hermetic, weighed down as it

was by the text's profoundly writerly mass. And although this and the carefully choreographed slides of unreadable text – handwritten, mostly – had the desired effect of turning the performance into a textualized space, it became increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that while my performance work was displaying various activities of writing (and reading) to the point that these effectively became the main imageries of my pieces as if wishing the space into a page, the texts themselves were getting published as poetic texts without the slightest visual, spatial, or indeed conventionalized mark of performance contained therein. Nor could I ignore the fact that text still acts as the main cue to most performances being created. Nor the fact that the performance mode is rarely established within the textual material itself. That the performance is usually indicated by conventional devices (rather than stylistic necessities) written on and around the text (stage directions, marks of dialogue, etc.). And that only rarely do these conventions get written as text or broken, as it were, into text. And although it is these external devices which somehow structure the text for performance, they remain paradoxically and fundamentally the very marks of the performance's elsewhere, the point where the text collapses in on itself, reveals its gap, its restless instrumentality. To summarize, if the performance remains situated firmly outside the text, it acts both as its extension and as its paradox since where it represents the text's *raison d'être*, it signals by the same token what abstracts it. But then how would one envisage a writing which defines its textual approach in terms of actual per-

formability, rather than in terms of a projected performance? How would one write a performance text which does not only indicate, does not simply point to, but actually contains, manifests textually, structurally, that performance? A text which very materially provides and actualizes the notion of its own performance. A performic performance text. Would this textual performativity render the idea of actual physicalized performance more possible, less possible, or totally impossible? In other words, does the performic text

- increase the performability of a performance text
- decrease it
- do neither?

I've recently been writing a number of pieces of paginated spatiality in which rhetorical fever integrates segments of visual writing that force the reader to engage in some peculiar arrow games and bird's-eye views which magnify various reading processes. As yet I haven't attempted to develop these texts into actual performances, leaving them instead to be played out on the page. I suppose that to tackle the notion of a textual performance which increases – rather than minimizes or postpones – the parameters of the readable addresses only obliquely the issue of a text's performability. Nevertheless it does take into account the notion of textual performativity for the writing of performance and it is this engagement with the textuality and spatiality of writing, what Johanna Drucker calls the 'theatrical page', which confirms the process of reading at its complex level of performance. Whether mainly gestural or highly motivated, the increasingly exploded or expanded flexibility in our approach to writing

and reading which imbues our daily deciphering of ads and graphic signs, their spatialized narratives, as well as our awareness of the electronic hypertext's 3-D structures, adds to the relevance of this.

London, August 1995

Richard Schechner

I want to connect performance, in the broadest sense of that term, with social life, politics, personal expression, erotics and pleasure-making, preservation of habitats, and fun. Writing this kind of thing always tends to the tendentious, as if I were construed as a Church of England kind of guy, which I am not. That's why fun is so important. Also I want to help link the scholarly to the artistic, the artistic to the political, the political to the personal, the personal to the scholarly – in a helical round aspiring and descending. What is performance, I ask myself; and what isn't? Performance is a way of accepting experience, being present in the present, letting go of final solutions (which are inherently fascistic). Working and playing for, instead, open process, revisions, possibilities, rehearsals. I think of myself, big-bellied, yoga-doing, laughing-and-shouting, sloppy, my mouth full of spit, my eyes all appetite, a rehearsal going on even as I imagine an essay, a theory, and taste the rasa juices of mentation and menstruation: confusing, yes, but also full of yesterdays and tomorrows and todays. The times are desperate, the population restless, the distribution of wealth unfair, the solutions not readily forthcoming, the auguries catastrophic: yet, for all this, I hear music.

New York, June 1995

KEYNOTE: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PERFORMANCE WRITING
Friday 12th April 1996
by Caroline Bergvall

This being a keynote, an opening gesture I won't dwell too long nor go into too much depth. I suppose it will suffice here to air a number of questions and provide some overall pointers as a general background for the papers and panels and work we're going to be engaging with for the next two days.

Part of the pleasure in wishing to establish cross-disciplinary dialogues around a resonance such as Performance Writing is the fact that we all, as practitioners and critics meet here in the knowledge that **only** the very diversity of at times seemingly incompatible starting-points, in both theory and practice, can turn the possibility of Performance Writing, beyond a BA degree, into a culturally networked area of investigation.

I suppose this is the time to ask why are we here, exactly.
I think we all have a vague sense of what Performance Writing might entail, which we can link back to our own work and approaches but what of the overall idea that brings us here. Is there an overall idea. What is Performance Writing.

I think that's a good starting-point so let's do a Gertrude Stein on it and talk about it for what it is not. This won't stabilise any answer particularly but it will hopefully guarantee that it doesn't get looped into itself prior to the question being fully asked. So, what is Performance Writing not?
Is Performance Writing not writing?
Is it writing which performs not writes?
Is it not performance which writes?
But then does writing not perform?
And when does writing not perform? And what kind of not performance are we talking about? Is it not performance to write or is it not writing to not perform?

Some examples. Is it not Performance Writing to site some text in a space or on a wall or on electronic boards or is that not installation art? or is that not public art? Is it not Performance Writing to treat spoken writing as part of a sound composition or is that not music? or not sound art? Is it not Performance Writing to inscribe words on a canvas, spray them on a wall, layer text into photographs or carve them into wood, steel or other solids or is that not visual art? or is that not graffiti art? or is that not poetry? Is it not Performance Writing to use text as part of a body-related piece or is that not performance art or is that not dance or theatre? Is it not Performance Writing to bleed a word into flesh or is that not Jenny Holzer? or is that not tattoo art? or is that not activism? Not is it Performance Writing to generate text for the page or for the screen or for a book or is that not video art? or is that not literature? or is that not visual art? or is it electronic art?

You might be starting to think that Performance Writing is all of the above, or you might start to think that it is none of the above. Mostly you might think that the dialectics of either/or induce a slight irritation, some vague deja-heard. That at a deeper level what is at stake might be less a question of classification than one of applied definition.

I wouldn't like you to think that as soon as I read "This is not a pipe" I go "Oh Performance

Writing". Well, I might. But bearing in mind that, for all the push of shove of postmodern practice and discourse, the overall historical classifications (music, literature, theatre et al) are proving all the time less appropriate to read formally and place critically the kind of language work which is being produced, some concerted excavation of the intradisciplinarity of much textual work, or work which features writing in one form or another, is called for. To establish through and beyond the literary, a broader understanding of writing, its structural and functional strategies.

I would like to suggest that each artistic discipline, writing, or rather literature, among them, with their specific histories and developments and points of collapse and regeneration should be read more and explored more, not merely according to their specific discourses and histories, with the inevitable narrowing down and cocooning which ensues, but as so many criss-crossings of sophisticated skills borne out of these histories and questioned through the mental and material constructs of textual contemporaneity.

The contemporaneity of the notion of Performance Writing is that it can only locate itself as part of the atomisation of literature, music, theatre and so on. In that, of course, it inscribes itself in line with the aesthetics of suspicion, disruption, and reappraisal which have to such a large extent determined the frame of mind of this century's effusion of experimentality. In this sense, Performance Writing needs to highlight the many kinds of **tensions** which arise from the concerted pooling of differing writing practices. And explore the kinds of relationship text-based work entertains when developed in conjunction with other media and other discourses.

The act of writing becomes then as much a question open to literary analysis as one open to the broader investigation of the kinds of formal and ideological strategies which writers and artists develop textually in response or in reaction to their own time and their own fields.

I'm aware that much has been and is being written along those lines. But it all remains generally dispersed across so many fields and tucked away as so many side-projects that, unless one happens to make cross-disciplinary text-work a specific area of research, the likelihood is that much will escape one's attention.

It is also important to point out that, although much theoretical and poetic work has been done, this is especially true of exploratory poetry and deconstructive philosophy, to widen the literary debate and incorporate to it various notions of materiality (and the materiality of writing is an essential aspect of Performance Writing), it is largely true to say that the whole approach to writing remains in these fields primarly located on the page. This ignores and cuts short the debate on all writerly work which extends beyond the page.

The poet and critic Johanna Drucker points out that if much post-structuralist analysis has usefully conceptualised the idea of textuality and textual performativity, it still falls short of addressing and critiquing the range and scope of materials available to writing and how this range may affect the very idea of writing.

Marcel Broodhaers's work is a useful case in point. Indeed a large part of his work concerned itself, sometimes at a sarcastic level, with the investigation of poetic means and poetic conventions. However, he chose to do so by locating a writerly activity not primarely on the page but into objects and spatial constructs. He would locate the points where objects and words, syntax and architecture apply direct, difficult pressure onto each other. Both in intent and product, his work displays an awareness of the act of writing and of its points of fission. So is the literary field's indifference to his work an example of literary blindspot? Is it lack of vocabulary? I would argue that along with the development of a shared terminology, it is a shift in attitude with

regards to what defines the writerly that we should wish to operate.

A number of debates in the visual and performing arts as well as in cultural studies have applied deconstructive theories to question and articulate the importance of the <u>contextualisation</u> of practice, the <u>siting</u> of work, the <u>locations</u> (and <u>relocations)</u> of identity in the contemporary arts. It is questions like these which could provide the extra-literary pointers we need to get to grips with the wider implications contained within the idea of Performance Writing. Hence the textual does not only throw up the question of the literary, it also urgently prompts an interrogation of the impact the use of writing applies on visual, sonic or movement arts. And vice-versa.
It is also paramount that the impact of this cross-fertilisation does not remain fixated at a formal level, but that it acutely and insistently, one might say intravenously, makes a point of examining the personal motivations and urgencies for work, the ways in which such forms are used and function in their relation to social, cultural modes of identification and, often oppressive, models for representation.
Indeed, writing's link with language inevitably forces the appraisal of writing as so many activities which at one level or other grapple with the psycho-social and political violence of any collective language, however localised.

I don't know whether the idea of Performance Writing can in itself provide the means to instate theoretical grounding and clarity of practice in the cacophony of textual cross-disciplinarity but I certainly hope it provides a step on the way.

So rather than entertaining ideas of aesthetic orgy or formal fusion, anything goes as long as there's something like a bit of something which looks like writing in it and leaving it at that, my sense is that Performance Writing would wish to inscribe itself within debates that revel in conflict.

Conflict at a formal as well as an ideological level. The conflicts and tensions at work within and between any of the elements a writer may choose to explore, sometimes collaboratively. The conflicts and tensions exposed by the expressed or subextual semantics of such a piece. The way it resonates at a local-subjective as well as a wider cultural level. Performance Writing would be about **detail**. A close attention to the workings, the sitings and the political dimensions of atomised writing practices - whether on or beyond the page.

It is in this complex and responsive reading of the performance of writing that one can most clearly make sense of this field, not primarily as a unified academic discipline, not even necessarily as one delineated, hybridic artform, but rather as an area of joint practical and critical investigation of the many uses writing and language are being put to and push themselves into.

In this sense, Lorna Simpson's stylised photographic combines of portraiture and verbal cliches, Heiner Goebbels' text-sound theatricalities, Gary Hill's conceptual use of text and video as sculptural environments, or Susan Howe's acute paginations of some of her poetic texts, to name but a few, do not merely read as inherently divergent or potentially parallel activities. More importantly, they read in relation to the act of writing, the performance of writing itself.
The extent to which its litterarity is sine qua non (or not) to both the process and production of the overall piece whatever its media and context of reception.

As Susan Hiller could have said, a frame is not square by nature. Similarly could one not argue that there is more, not less, to writing than the page, more, not less, to writing than language,

more, not less, to text treatment than syntactical or morphological experimentation. And that to engage with writing in such extensive material terms, both as writers and readers, is what inscribes the performance of writing. A performance of itself at a relational level.

You might think that all of this really provides a very stretched out definition of performance. And doesn't fully address the writing traditions which come out of theatricality and are still being carried through in much live work. Should theatrical writing be privileged in our appraisal of Performance Writing on account of its long-standing history? If anything this does make writing's relation to performance more strenuous and difficult to disengage from established conventions of production.

This is a long debate. Indeed, how do we clarify the ambiguity between performed textuality and spoken writing. Perhaps I could sketch it out in terms of process. What is the process of live performance in its relation to writing. Is it writing's role, in that context, to function as a guiding background, as the blueprint of a live piece? This would mean that the text remains absorbed, subsumed by the live performance.

What if the writing were to openly interfere with the live piece? What if it were to force a disjunction between performing a hidden text and performing writing?
Can one turn the hour-glass and argue for the specificities of a live writing (I use the term with caution) where the performer's presence is cut open, emptied out, absented by the writing's own presencing (mise-en-presence), much like late-Beckett, The Wooster Group, Laurie Anderson, Forced Entertainment's Speak Bitterness would seek to instigate. I remain excited by this idea of a live situation where writing is another performer and as such needs to be addressed explicitly. During and as part of the live piece.

In other words, the performance of writing would be this observation which seeks to **locate expressedly** the context and means for writing, both internal and external to language, whether these be activated for and through a stage, for and through a site, a time-frame, a performer's body, the body of a voice or the body of a page.

This does not really imply spontaneous and magical multi-layering, simultaneity of process and product, cooking and eating at one and the same time. But it does rest with the idea that everything about a piece of work is active and carries meaning. Any treatment, any font, any blank, any punctuation, any intonation, any choice of materials, any blob, however seemingly peripheral to the work, is part of the work, carries it, opens it up, closes it in, determines it. This is its performance. Its points of impact.

So where does the text start or end? In the case of a text for the page, does it start and end at the words? at the fonts? at the presentation lay-out? at the edges of the page? or in the case of a text-sound piece, does the text start and end at the recitation? at the vocal treatments? at the overall composition? How are we to articulate this? The critic Marjorie Perloff talks of contemporary poetry as an activity which increasingly defers the activity of reading. Which increasingly highlights the tensions between the visual and the verbal aspects of writing. One could take this further and say that practitioners which engage with a process of writing inevitably forward an intervention of language and of reading which destabilises and refocusses the processes of looking and/or of listening.

Of course, we might start to wonder whether writing can function as a sound-effect or as a mark-making device. Whether writing can be fetishised into a word-thing or a word-sound. Whether reading can be turned into looking and listening.

I said earlier that writing's link with language inevitably forces the appraisal of writing as an

activity which grapples with the psycho-social and political dimensions of any collective language. Only at the risk of turning writing into a look or a decorative device can this be played down.

Writing questions the authority of language with language, through language, as well as beyond language. No performance of writing takes place without it. This is part of the responsibility which comes with writing. What makes writing, writing.
For at its most direct, writing (whether visual or spoken) takes its cue from the social body of language, however distended this cue may be.
This may generate or force up formal, ideological unreadabilities, aesthetics of erasure or aesthetics of presencing, extreme dislocations, specific realignments of language through writing which does occur as a response to the psycho-social situations it highlights or undermines. Whatever the context or materials, the overt tensions and dynamics between language and writing are difficult to ignore. So can language be used as an image, can the text function as an object? Is that still writing?

What of language occupies the writing, what enables it, what prevents it, what forces its relocations, what makes a piece readable, what occupies the making and the performing of writing, and what occupies the reading, the reception of writerly activities?

With this, I'll ask again: Where does a text start? where does it not end?

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**Utrecht School of the Arts, Writing department, NL
in association with the Writing Research Associates
and Dartington College of Arts, UK are pleased to announce:**

IN THE EVENT OF TEXT: EPHEMERALITIES OF WRITING

a second international symposium on writing & performance

Utrecht, Netherlands

April 28 - May 2, 1999

'In the Event of Text' is a 5-day symposium on contemporary strategies in performance and writing with intensive workshops led by artists of international reputation and working with writing in various media.
The four 3-day intensive workshops run in parallel, are based in practice, and will be concerned with ephemerality, exploration and process in differing media.
The contents of the workshops feed into the 2-day conference weekend and provide a convergence of issues and debates in contemporary performance writing.

Top

Information

Workshops will be lead by

- Jason E. Bowman (visual artist)
- Paul Pourveur (playwright),
- Leslie Hill & Helen Paris (digital artists)
- Sianed Jones (voice artist).

Further details of the workshops will be available on request by post or by email (see contact addresses below) from December 1998.

The conference will include papers, presentations and panel discussions around ideas of the ephemeralities of writing, and text as event.

Papers will include recent work on tactical media

- poetics
- telematics
- authoring
- post-dramatic texts
- internet radio collaborations
- text and memory.

'In the Event of Text' aims to explore, through work and discussion, the ways in which writing can be seen to function as a time-based, transient, ephemeral artform when played out in the context of different media and environments. curated work will take place under the following broad categories:

- the disappearing text and contemporary live performance
- the dispersal of written material through new interactive and sonic media
- electronic writings, cybertext and hypertext
- the local sites of mobilised writing including poetic and book-basedpractices

Emphasis is placed on performances, installations, readings, open showings and curated exhibitions as an integral part of the conference. A virtual cybertext collaboration will be initiated by writer in residence John Cayley.

The first symposium in the series was held at Dartington, England in April 1996.
See http://www.dartington.ac.uk/Performance_Writing/perf_writing.home.html

The conference language will be English.

Invited contributors include:

Fabienne Audéoud	**Jason E. Bowman**	**Arnold Dreyblatt**	**David Garcia**
Heidi Grundmann	**Leslie Hill & Helen Paris**	**Sianed Jones**	**Kirsten Lavers**
Hans-ThiesLehmann	**Tertia Longmire**	**Jurrienne Ossewold**	**Paul Pourveur**
Joan Retallack	**Paul Sermon**	**Enno Stahl**	**Aaron Williamson**

Writer-in-Residence: **John Cayley**

Exhibitions Curator: **cris cheek**

Catalogue: **Sally Tallant**

Initiated & Organized by:

Ric Allsopp   **Caroline Bergvall**   **Nirav Christophe**

Contacts:

Conference website: http://www.hku.nl/events/iet
Conference email: iet@theater.hku.nl
Conference contact address:
IET
HKU Faculteit Theater
Janskerkhof 18
3512 BM Utrecht
NL.

top

'IN THE EVENT OF TEXT' Registration Form

Personal Details:

full name:

address:

city:

country:

CAROLINE BERGVALL
KEYNOTE
IN THE EVENT OF TEXT: Ephemeralities of Writing
Saturday 1 May 1999.

From the start, the idea of a cross-institutional and cross-national collaboration on interdisciplinary textwork has been for Nirav Christophe, here at the HKU in Utrecht, and Ric Allsopp and myself, from Dartington College in England, a way of focussing on ways of writing which might show up the connections and disconnections of the "doing" of writing in the "here" of its events, and an engagement with the cultural infrastructures in which this sits. To bring to the fore the ways in which place and duration inform writing as an activity, as an act, the way mixed-media digital technologies enable the creation of time-based textualities unthinkable in bookform, and how the book-bound text is in turn revitalised by these developments. In short, how the locales and means of writing are involved in and as part of the text. The way this throws open the question of text production itself. We have been interested in bringing up for discussion the kinds of spaces and frames that organise and somehow shape cross-disciplinary writing, and shape the public spaces it occupies. The times and places which do you doing writing. The time-based dynamics of dispersed texts. On Kawara's series of telegrams: "I am still alive".

The art thinker and sociolog Pierre Bourdieu's notion that "the proper language is that which is appropriate, opportune, and effective", directly highlights the notion of intervention, of interception into a social situation. It implies attention to singularity, subsumes the proper of language to contingent use. For our purposes, this could be used to discuss the growing range of manifestations and interventions which one could define as "properly" and textually opportune and effective in their relation to their environment. The choices a writer makes which will determine the forms of intervention the text will be taking (as radiotext, live installation, durational event, bookbased writing, mediated live, screen operated work, public event...). The public artist Hans Haacke's comment is useful in this respect: "It strikes me that insisting on the "form" or the "message" [of an artwork] constitutes a sort of separatism. Both are politically charged. Speaking of the propaganda aspect of all art, I would like to add that the meaning and impact of a given object are not fixed for all eternity. They depend on the context in which one sees them".

Yet how to know the structures, the contexts one is playing with, not to be systematically fooled, how does it feel to hit the borders of one frame, then another, some space kept back, held in, the writer in the writing held together by structures extensive yet intimate to the identification of the situation of writing. Questions of outside and inside, private and public are always a more or less subtle, more or less discrete part of a project, of the practice. For the literary critic Catherine N. Hayles, "the penetration signals that private spaces and the private thoughts they engender and figure, are less a concern than the interplay between codes and the articulation of individual subjectivity with data".

The question which concerns us here is then less that of a dissemination of the reproducible than that of the production of texts and textualities in contingence. Emphasising the active redistribution of functions of writing, breaking down space to open up time, this also functions as a way of questioning the material and social bounds of intelligibility, and challenging this intelligibility, the nature of its bond on social behaviour. To be concerned with textual environment as much as textual structure is a way of assuming activities, rather than genres, of writing. All of this which might also inform ideas of public writing and the memory structures which favour certain kinds of literacy.

Art is made of proposals for action on and behaviour around materials and forms. This brings about an awareness that formal strategies and technological inventiveness are best served when applied to a broadening up of their social and artistic base, rather than a specialist, art-led closing in on themselves. Electronic archives already favour other kinds of literacies, shift the supremacy of the letter towards a realm of mixed codes (sonic, visual, kinetic). As John Cayley has it: "Literature which is engaged with the potentialities of computer-based networks is uniquely placed to serve as a link between the silent literary culture of the past and that of the future". Then the question of text will be read back into the mechanisms of its readabilities and unreadabilities: doing writing in relation to contemporary means of communication, operated through different actions, explicitly articulated through methodologies that are interdependent with current social contexts of redability and circulation, affects the value placed on the "literary" as the prime seat of textuality.

For most of us here the question of writing is approached at a point of intersection with literature, textuality and other artforms and modalities of practice. Or, as Coco Fusco aptly puts it in relation to the discontinuities of diasporic live writing, it is approached as a "cross aesthetic genre which follows ideas through multiple media". Which refuses to settle the writing once and for all, choosing instead to position compositional frames according to each new project. This approach to writing does not, cannot, take the format of a text, or what writing entails, for granted. Indeed, language is not the sole agent or organising principle of a cross-disciplinary text. Its closures are to be found as much in its verbal structures as in their coextensiveness with other media. It finds an aspect of its functionality through contexts of activity. It involves writing at an intersection with these. It interrogates the socio-cultural arenas in which text can operate as a product-led artistic event and those in which it isn't seen to be art at all. These, sometimes fine, dividing lines are made evident by the use of text as a mediating agent in this setting into motion, this placing in situation. One media among other means.

Cross-disciplinary textwork questions ideas of reproducibility and the exercising of permanence that one usually associates with the book, with literature, with writing. Indeed, it questions the current effectiveness of the book as texts' main social and artistic mode of intervention. Although, books, of course and perhaps increasingly, can be art events in themselves, precisely constructed for specific readerships, it must be recognised that they provide only one environment for textual practice. Writing, its printed inscription, has always favoured notions of dissemination, of transportable knowledge, of critical matter in circulation, for a semi-anonymnous network of readers. Printed text remains a way of structuring language and of disseminating certain histories of knowledge. Through its technologies, the printed text has turned the activity of writing into an endlessly reproducible fixture. Its means of distribution have shaped and informed the development of literature and of the book. Since what is written can be erased, or rewritten, the printed inscription feeds both authoritarianism and democratisation, revelation and erasure, containment and liberation. Writing is both that which guarantees the exercising of authority and that which critiques and disputes and ironises on authority. "The function of writing [is] a transmission of scepticism" writes the art critic Ian Hunt.

As such, a written text remains in essence a paradoxical entity. Underpinning literature's operative circuits of distribution and of intellectual flexibility is the wish for permanence, or proof. The exposure of ideas and of forms of ideas particular to writing is paired up with notions of ownership and of safeguarding, as reflected in copyright and in the importance attributed to archives and libraries. Recurrent play on misattribution of sources and references amongst poets and writers shows the evocative power of citation in relation to literature's intertextual proofing of knowledge. Armand Schwermer's remarkable The Tablets is a better know example. Similarly, libraries provide an emotive and critically powerful accumulation and preservation of past material, of signed material. The environmental artist Robert Smithson talks of text as "printed matter" to emphasize text as an object in space rather than in circulation. Rachel

Whiteread's inverted library shelves act as a reminder of the actual spatial, physical (and ultimately socio-geographical) demands for square meters of any library. The angst-ridden claustrophobic, labyrinthine library fictions of Borgès or Canetti emphasise the engulfing nature of this unending accumulation of material and appropriation of space. Anselm Kiefer's Great Priestess is a library of lead, a forbidding and fascinating monument, it occupies space relentlessly and dangerously yet does not provide an invitation to read. Its books are forever embedded in the architecture, justify its existence. To counteract the weight of these buildings, transitory writing projects, or "rumours" as Ian Hunt calls them, are set up by the arts publishers Book Works across a number of English libraries.

Perhaps one could venture to say that the events of text, the ephemeralities of writing would be those textual practices which accept and recognise the socio-cultural validity of what will not be sustained. In time everything gives. References get lost, forgotten, changed, misread. Texts can be expensive to keep, books are not necessarily read. Durational textwork provokes this, teases it out, wishes it actual, the running sound of the sand of words whose singularised strategies question the monumental, the millenium. Feeding the clock into the writing. Look for the points at which the structures start to give, the points at which it is difficult to know what and where the text is taking place and what "here" it is actually bringing out. To move this materiality to include, sometimes force up, its undeniable impermanence. To accept the actual fragility of writing is a way of accepting transience as a valid intervention into the structuring of existing bodies, of existing genres. Ann Hamilton's Mneme, her slow burning of books, word by word, for days on end, sitting in a warehouse covered with horsehair, is a strong and uneasy project where the writing of erasure inscribes the passing of time in the action performed, and the holes left on the pages are a valid yet haunting inscription. As the philosopher Catherine Clément writes: "the transience of syncopation is resistance".

In this respect, the discontinuity explicit in such writing processes invades and disarms simultaneously. It questions genres of borders, genres of belonging while implicating the listener, reader, audience in the media or situations made available for reading. Borders are zones of interchange as much as of inclusion/exclusion. Each point becomes a resting place and a point of change. Concerted observation of one's play in this environment shows up our social silences and fears at each manipulation. As Heiner Muller once said "Memory is work. It's not something you can contemplate". The fragility and vulnerability of the borders of the text-object, of the live-event. The activation of silence in the speaking of the live text, its attempted embodiment.

For the poet Joan Retallack, who plays the archives of literacy, the point is also curiosity as a mode of working: "Curiosity, a discipline of attention turned towards humourous shifts in perspective, those that might give us a chance to find newly productive silences in the noise of culture". It is curiosity as a form of openness or opening or avenue. Curiosity for changing compositional frames and their ideological slipperiness and motifs. An openness to the eminent sociality of undertaking such a discipline. An artistic and personal discipline provided for by textual practices which favour writing as intersubjective and responsive, as a language-led and time-based type of intervention. And which would enable us each to look to these to reflect some aspects of the changing nature of contemporary literacy and readability.

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CAROLINE BERGVALL -

TEACH A WALK: writing outside the classroom

(Bard College, JUNE 1999) -

In the following talk, I will attempt to present a specific approach to the making of work which seems to me both, metaphorically and processually, of interest and importance in the discussion around cross-media writing, polylingalism and its teaching. Reflecting on simple recording and portable media and traditions of urban walking, city wandering, I want to discuss how writing and teaching writing, can literally lead to walking and vice versa. Take a walk. To take a walk, to cross the street, to cross the border, to cross languages.

In 1996, the London-based artist Gordana Stasinic, from the former Yougoslavia, decides to use her commission at the Showroom gallery to set up a treadmill in the gallery and walk the distance that separates. London-Belgrade. 23 days. Non-stop walking. Every evening the map in the gallery traces up her slow progress. She cannot go "home". Her visible walking testifies to this. She is travelling, covering ground, muscle painful and hard, yet she has not moved an inch. Or has she. In that dilemma is inscribed the dilemma of inhabiting place diasporically. Here yet not. Nor there. An invisible distance is traced up in the activity of walking. Origin is traced up in an implausible present tensed up by the past. The French writer Georges Perec, a ludic yet methodical observer of place: "I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted, places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin"[1].

Walking, I place myself in the city. I become part of the city. Small fugitive

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[1] Georges Perec, *Species of Space & Other Pieces*, ed. & tr. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin,1997), p.90.

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untraceable movements, criss-crossing, the forgetfulness of passing-by as de Certeau puts it. Perec continues: "Such places don't exist and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine. never given to me"[2] .

The European literary tradition of the flaneur has emphasised the familiarity of alienation in the fascination for the walk. Memories double up on the walk's impressions, accompanies the drift, emphasizes the cinematic, the visual memories contained by the city. Art brushes into the observation of the *Arcades* of city-life. New arts of photography and cinema record these. The flaneur turns ephemerality into a trace, drifting into an artform, a way of artlife. Rilke's dark, Symbolist *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* is an apology to the flaneur's loss in the city:"What sense would there have been in going anywhere now; I was empty. Like a blank piece of paper, I drifted along past the houses, up the boulevard again"[3]. The emptying out of the flaneur into the city reveals the city's architectural insides.

This fascinating link between drifting and writing and place is still in evidence in the contemporary flaneur. And so is the social passport which allows for an anonymous ease of circulation. A flaneur is still primarily male, still primarily white. He also seems more organised, less eaten up by the city itself. His texts still provide a complex combination of emotive urban ambling, psychosocial topologies and ethnographic erudition. Discovery of the back alleys of the present open the door to the past, and provides fantasmagoric grounds for textual excursion. Part diary, part preregrination, part personal mythologies, the writer and poet Iain

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[2] Id., p.91.
[3] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, tr. by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), p.71.

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Sinclair's books combine factual research on local histories with personal observations and comments on the literary and arts scenes that inhabit or have inhabited the localities his planned walks take him to. The working buzz and intimately known mess which makes up the city and generates that of Sinclair's London. Similarly, Patrick Keiller's films "London" and "Robinson in Space" follow an erudite and literary "fouineur" (snooper/bargain hunter) in his urban wanderings of post-industrial England. In both, the point is very much the art-making process which the walk and its quotidian or researchable finds is the backdrop and synopsis for.

Quite at the opposite end, the migrant is one kind of contemporary city-dweller who is socially and culturally, not just conceptually, alien, foreign to the city and must develop ways for the right to be there and the right to drift in it. Unacquainted, unfamiliar, the migrant remains confronted by the amount of spatial impasses the city carries with it, and the ossification of its many sociolinguistic pockets into one public monolingual memory. This is paired with a difficulty at calling up private experience to incorporate into the city of call. Place lost cannot be described, called up on and falls silent within the sounds of the unspeaking language and closed city. Walking, the foreigner remains confronted by an overload of inarticulatable memories. Memory connected to place and the sounds and languages of place. Perec's sense of the doubt of place, which is also a doubt of the proper name, of a legitimising of one's presence, throws open the perpetual negotiations that take place on the here of the ground I occupy. This negotiation is made sharper, clearer by the question and uncertaincy of being a stranger to, a foreigner to the place.

One doesn't have to travel far to experience the hybridisation of the notion of "home" or "origin". Walk with me. Or as Baudrillard says of the French artist Sophie Calle's art of walking to generate and subsequently

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publicly archive her interactions: "Follow me". Different realms and
histories accompany the covering/uncovering of distance, provide the
means of the process. In any case, the writer is directly, personally
involved. Hence, walking can to write become a personal, private
testimony to this physical rooting in uprooted cultural space. Trinh T.
Minh-ha: "Simultaneously rooted and rootless"[4].

The structure here is a play of tension between exclusion and inclusion,
social and cultural and linguistic. Between witnessing and taking part.
Taking part to take place. *You-The City*, by poet and performance maker
Fiona Templeton is "an intimate Manhattanwide play for an audience of
one"[5]. It takes the lone audience on a trip to the city's recesses. A massive,
sprawling, mostly invisible live performance which uses the city and its
streets as stage and takes place by appointment only. As she so concisely
puts it: "In theatre that uses more than one site (beyond different points
on one site), the movement of the mind, in the body, through the order of
their successive resonances and the resonance of the four-dimensional
topography thus traced, reflects the city itself."[6] The book of the live
event, the published text which appears from this, functions as a record, a
script, a detail of instructions, with some photographic documentation
and maps and commentaries of small unexpected events that took place. It
also provides space for the author's meditation on the address at the heart
of the piece, which each audience member and each performer is asked to
endorse, the functions and implications of the shifter You: "The private in
the public and vice versa, not as "I" and it, but as 'you'"[7]. Templeton
emphasizes a defamiliarisation of the familiar and interactions favoured
by the artificiality of the situation itself. Indeed, for her the point of the

[4] quoted by Ian Chambers in his article "Cities without maps", in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (Routledge: London, 1994), p.94.
[5] Fiona Templeton, *YOU-The City* (Roof Books: NY, 1990),p.ix.
[6] id., p.144.
[7] id. p.144

4

piece is interaction, at the level of direct address.

I walk home. And whatever writing there will be, comes out of and through this far in the near of the detail of this invisible yet constant distancing, how I get to be part of both here and there. Jabès: "The words spoken by the book accompany the writer on his crossing of the desert"[8].

Rosemarie Waldrop's *Key to the language of America*, is a poetic travelogue testimony of her gradual understanding of her estrangement as a European in New England. It generates writing out of geo-linguistic unease or irritant. She apposes her own settling to a 17th century settler's book of the region about a local native indian language and customs. The grand narratives of "Landscape" or of the "City" cease up, open up to the works of inhabitation or cohabitation in time and place: "Big time traded for small synchronicities seen from below. Coincidence of confusion and unrest"[9]. The emphasis on meticulous observation of the quotidian, of the un-extraordinry, as a palleative to the unmanagebale demands of "belonging" is also established by Perec in his "L'infra-Ordinaire" (the infra-ordinary) and the short texts in which writing becomes the inexhaustible record of observations: "Decrivez votre rue. Decrivez-en une autre. Comparez"[10] .

The musician Janek Schaeffer' project "Recorded Delivery" traces the journey of a postal package from the "evening, 28/03/95" to the "morning, 29/03/95" using "a sound-activated tape recorder sent overnight through the British postal system from Exhibition Road office to

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[8] Edmond Jabès, *Foreigner carrying a book in the crook of his arm*, tr. by Rosemarie Waldrop (Wesleyan University Press, hanover & London, 1993), p. 68.
[9] Rosmarie Waldrop, *A key to the language of America* (NY: New Directions, 1994), p20.
[10] Georges Perec, *L'infra-ordinaire* (Seuil: Paris, 1989): "Describe your street. Describe another street. Compare" p.12. Sections of this text are also to be found in *Species of Space & Other Pieces*, ed. & tr. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin,1997).

Acorn Self Storage, Wembley, London"[11].

I pull a portable stereo out of my bag. Wrap the headphones around my neck, into my ears. The portable stereo itself - prosthetic. An instrument of postmodernity and of the urban age which places the walker literally vountarily out of place in what the critic Ian Chambers has called "the aural walk"[12]: opens up a passage to other cities within the city, which make up the city. Wearing my portable stereo I don't engage in my surroundings yet I am walking yet I see everything. I am crossing the city crosses me. A distance, an invisible closure of sensory compression activates the private chambers in public. I cannot hear if you call, I cannot understand what you are saying, nor do you see me. Distance occupies me. The sounds I hear do not correspond to what I see. Yet I can never fully silence the rumour of the city around me. Nor do I particularly seek to. The point is to be both in-here and out-here. Every portable stereo effects a discrete, individualised, private appropriation of the public place. The far occupies the near, inevitably colours it. There is a public privacy to the portable stereo which addresses and catches both the listener and the passers-by who notice the earpieces. Such a doubling of the walk can also be used to forward the representation and experience of plural languages. Accented experience as lodged into, under the skin, the sounds of the overall ambience of monolingualism.

In this split experience, the portable stereo effect is that of putting into play the demands of particularised experience. Temporary inscriptions of sounded passage jolt the perception of the institutionalised public place, of the canonised monuments, of the acceptable public face of art and of language. One associates audio with learning of a particular kind:portable, in-situ, in-time. Yet guided tours, via prerecorded, portable devices,

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[11] Janek Schaeffer, Recorded Delivery (Hot Air/Airmile 72, 1999).
[12] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (Routledge: London, 1994), p.49-53.

6

generally apply standardised, neutralised speech to the tour which de-temporalises. As Ed Morales' writes it "when a voice is not attached to a face - which suggests ethnicity and race - nor weighted with an accent that suggests a language other than English, it possesses a false, detached purity"[13]. Thus, the guided tour is primarily a pedagogical tool for use in public institutions (museums, galleries,...). Yet audio teaching is also the favoured method, and undoubtedly the main reason behind the considerable success of Linguaphone. It has the advantage of replicating the "proper" live-native speech. Furthermoe, the portable guided tour can be used to juxtapose personal fantasies, spatial directions, social realities, and use the act of listening and of walking-through to provide comments on what is being seen. The artist Tim Brennan proposes a tour of a council flat seen through the ears of an official Windsor Castle tape. Andrea Fraser's institutional critique of museums by way of a portable stereo tour takes you right away from the paintings and into the museum's gardens.

The shaping of representative spaces which "the individual" as a public-private device can occupy, is at the forefront of the public work of Polish artist Krystof Wodizcko, whose video-activated and sound-generative objects *Alien Staff* and *Mouthpiece* were designed to be used in the streets by individual speakers: "As a personal instrument, the Alien Staff focuses on and exposes the singularity and uniqueness of its operator's life experience...The Alien Staff exposes the history of such a singular being in the process of becoming and being fabricated as an immigrant"[14]. The supremacy of dispossessed work and the monologic transparency of authenticity have given way to an interconnectedness of the untranslatable, of the "opaque". The individual is manifested through a recording device which provides the passer-by with a cybertech version of

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[13] Ed Morales, "The End of False Purity in Cyberspace" in *Temple of Confessions : Mexican Beasts and Living Saints* by Guillermo Gomez Pena & Roberto Sifuentes (powerHouse Books: NY, 1996), p.137.
[14] Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass & London, 1999), p.115-116

7

the speaker. "This [Mouthpiece] project, like the previous Alien Staff, creates an artifice that provokes or inspires comunication or translation, a display of what is usually hidden... This means that feeling artificial (not at home, alienated from oneself and others) becomes a process that can open up new questions and introduce the possibility of different identities and communities beyond nationalisms and fixed notions of difference, crossing social and psychological boundaries, meeting on new common ground, however shaky and displaced such ground may be"[15].

Wodizko's explorative, collaborative work in the city feeds on its pedestrianism, its hurriedness or drifting, and calls up the act of passing-by. In 1990, the German composer Heiner Goebbels is commissioned by the city of Boston to write a piece and he asks a 100 people chosen at random in the streets of different areas of Boston to read one line each of the Heiner Muller text of exile and travel: *Landscape with Argonauts*. He records the entire interaction, their reactions, their reading and composes around them. The reading of the line, the comments the stumbling the accents, the dialects, the exclamations punctuate the reading, at times lead the text ... who are these readers? The tragedy of Medea ignored by Muller's text, is enacted in the harrowing female singing voice of Goebbels' composition. Listening leads to more listening. Cage's trip to Ireland to site Finnegans Wake in multilayered sounds and detailed events. Localising experience, mediating it into this here of hearing. And recently in Denmark, a production of *The Tempest* uses the individualised space of the radio waves to record and transmit 19 different versions, translations, commentaries for the audience to keep on tuning in and out of while seeing the piece as a dance promenade.

Sensers, transmitters, location technologies, read the space and the spaces

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[15] Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass & London, 1999), p.119.

8

in-between that you find yourself in. To favour dialogue through the relativisation of the experience of the sites and the medium. The mediated spaces mark themselves out to mark the accentedness of the ever receding in, home. With the contemporary walker, the emphasis has shifted from the visual, from the specularity of the possibly visibly here, to the recesses of the ear, to the returning act and art of listening, at close range, to the buried spaces and challenges of trust.

Hence it seems to me that the work of walking and the works of plurilingualism enable the writer/artist to engage with language and each our experience of displacement not so much or solely from the point of view of developing singular pieces of art but also and importantly, as I hope the examples I have used have shown, to positively favour activities of selection, facilitation, exchange, incidental dialogue as features and functions of some textual modes. The work becomes openly reliant on the writer enabling a sharing out of private exchange, of turning a public site into a complicit, individuated space. This in turn reveals the organisation of public silencing and can enable the circulation of experiences of foreignness as an acknowledged reality of postmodernity.

In all of the above, lies the implied possibility of thinking the act of teaching as part of its writing strategies. Such a programme would demand social as well as intellectual and technical skills. It would necessitate an implication by the teaching istelf and the students or practictioners into the situation to hand. In this sense it accepts that the finality of its pedagogy is not pre-emptable. It asks that research takes place prior to, during and following the project and that issues of documentation should form an integrated part of the writing and learning process. To engage with writing beyond the classroom, as a project, in a collaborative capacity, in a direct connection with the reader as participant, in chosen

9

living spaces which have become socially and culturally problematised rambling/ambling grounds of textuality.

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IN THE PLACE OF WRITING

Caroline Bergvall

The French poet Francis Ponge's book of drafts *Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi* ("How a fig of utterance and why"), starts with the poem's first scrawl (in 1951) and follows through the 2 years (1958-59) of intense reworkings, rethinking, researching, writing and rewriting which led to the text's precarious point of rest, its "final" word, Ponge signing off, quite inappropriately as it would turn out: "Ainsi soit-il", so be it. 69 drafts for 1 text.

In 1977, at the fourth publication of the text, it is the entirety of the drafts themselves (incl. the previous 3 published versions) that he decides to turn in for publication. Doodles, false starts, crossing outs, hesitations over titles, over vocabulary, associations dropped or pushed, research notes, publishing contract, unclear progressions from hand- to type-written to typeset pages, visible erasures, scribbled additions, in short, the entire portfolio of every single traceable sheet relating to La Figue in-progress would now make up the poem itself. 1 text of 69 drafts. Or, as Ponge called them, with an explicit ear to the musical art of the fugue, "variations".

From then on, it's the messy actuality of writing's visible quarry, its hands-on environment, that the reader is asked to handle as text: a rough, repetitive, even fastidious, process of extrication and explication. Reading becomes the memory ground of composition, and writing, caught in the making, is primarily seen to be generative of processes of intellectual as much as socio-erotic cha -rge -nge: "La poésie n'est pas dans les recueils poétiques, ... elle est dans les brouillons acharnés de... ceux qui espèrent, qui militent pour une nouvelle étreinte de la réalité" (Ponge, 1997: 279[1]).

As Ponge's declared Art Poétique, the entirety of *How a Fig* defines the act and impact of writing not at any one, finite, point of completion but rather at its many instances of production. While it still is, literally: "dans tous ses états". Roughly, all over the place. Indeed, by the time the reader gets to the final version of the text first intended for publication, which Ponge had interestingly enough entitled "La figue (sèche)" [(dried) fig], so many detailed alterations and buried cues have been absorbed and read then read again with slight alteration, that it is as though the dense, compacted language-matter of the poem could not be fully appreciated outside of this slowed-down masticatory behaviour.

To Ponge, who munches on a word, "sans fin comme on fait de bons proverbes", endlessly as one does good sayings, as one sucks a nipple[2], as one eats a fig, this confirms the very raison d'être of the compiling of the drafts as text. Tellingly, he had already a few years previous, stressed his interest in the draft as a poetic form in its own right, with the publication of *La fabrique du pré* (as in: the designing of the meadow or rather, of the field), translated into

English as *The making of the Pré* (as in: the dating, filing, compiling of the fielded text, Le Pré). Or, as Genette has discussed it: the making of the pre (-text) (Genette, 1997:398). Indeed, for Genette, the collections of drafts, notebooks, loose leaves, torn pages, or neatly assembled, wrapped, packed, numbered text-parcels (see Emily Dickinson) which varyingly define a manuscript and locate it in a private sphere of composition, where it is only indirectly affected by the contingencies of publishing, for Genette then, a manuscript will invariably be seen as preceding the text. The book of the text, that is.

Thus by giving his drafts up for publication, his pre-texts to read, one could say that Ponge chooses to situate his writing at the level of the page (site of production) rather than at that of the book (site of consumption). He turns a private site of ruminatory non-events to public light to read the text as much from semantic manipulations as from the exhibition of the many non-verbal fissures and "undecipherable" (the term is Ponge's editor) marks which it is customary to remove from a book. The rough graphic notes and map sketches that so fascinatingly keep on interrupting the already digressive course of Stendahl's autobiographical *Vie de Henri Brulard* counter this last point. As do Dietr Rot's in/scriptural books, Forced Entertainment's *Speak Bitterness*, the *Burroughs File, Legend*, Alison Knowles' textwork, cris cheek/Sinaed Jones *Songs from Navigation,* books which can but do necessarily end up straddling the line between literary and artist books, or indeed between typeset and xeroxed/camera-ready productions. Texts that play the format and know that they're manuscripts passing for books.

Which is different from texts that know they're T-shirts (see Barbara Kruger) or CDs (see Muller/Goebbels, *Landscape with Argonauts,* see Cage *Roaratorio*) or scarifications (see Jenny Holzer) or paintings (see Ed Ruscha, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol) or photographs (see Lorna Simpson) or framed displays (Broodthaers, Bracha Littenberg Ettinger, Annette Messager) or computer-led (John Cayley, Leslie Hill) or (filling in as glad to occur). From Mallarmé's "the paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws" to Smithson's "all language becomes an alphabet of sites", text-based work which acknowledges its broad materialities, its many tools and support systems, can stage some of the dynamic tensions and relays between the verbal and the non-verbal, between the verbal and the graphic or the sonic or etc. In this sense a contextual exploration of the semantic materialities and processual sitings of writing leads to a heightened sense of its many levels of mediation which, in turn, allows the reader to view the historical conventions which structure our perception (and construction) of the places through which writing is, at present, seen to occur (there are many places in which writing occurs that are not seen as writing). All of which Derrida subsumes under *litterarity*: "The institutional or socio-political space of literary production as such is a recent thing, it does not simply surround works, it affects them in their very structure" (Derrida, 1992:40).

Take for instance that most archetypal of writing sets: the page. De Certeau, in the section of his Everyday-book entitled "Scriptural Economy", mentions the writer's page as blank: a self-contained and transitional site of writing: "an autonomous surface ... put before the eye of the subject who thus accords himself [sic] the field of an operation of his [id.] own" (De Certeau, 1988: 134). This operation is, he continues, the preparation and recreation of language into text, from the processual stage's messy, near-corporeal jostling and intertextual sweating out of information, to the product of writing, which returns textual language to the cultural "langue".

The page is here set up as autonomous, voire neutral, "blank" as de Certeau rather conventionnally asserts it here. This is of course as questionable a claim as the Modernist myth of the "non-place" of art. To consider the page, not as an actual sheet of space, loaded with particular socio-historical properties, but as a surface-zero, remains in this sense highly symptomatic of the many dissociative operations linked to the genesis of a literary text. In fact, this deep-rooted notion of the blank, amnesic page: the void which supposedly faces and blocks the writer: who writes only ever at the risk of some day losing themselves to the terrifying white (whale) of the page, has played a critical role in the way text-based artists such as Marcel Broodthaers or Nancy Spero have worked into the format and constraints of the page. Or the manner in which Kathy Acker has plagiarised texts (their full, locatable pages), partly as a comment on this wrenching from the clean slate of the page, supposedly at the root of literary activity. In short: "Writer thought, don't want to be God" (Acker, 1994: 21). The Burroughs / Gysin cut-ups, Jakson MacLow's *Merzgedichte*, John Cage's *Writing Through*, all of which situate the beginning of writing in the full busyness of pages, are only a few other examples of this artistic and critical distancing from the page as tabula rasa.

Such a distancing also inevitably signals a loosening up of the sharp divide between process and product in literary textuality, and, it follows, in the hierarchy between verbal and non-verbal elements. As Marjorie Perloff writes, quoting from her discussion of the bpnichol/McCaffery collaboration: "A page is not just a blank sheet, waiting for "meaningful" print to be affixed to it, but a kind of trellis upon which words and letters are fastened visually as well as semantically" (Perloff, 1991;175).

This said, de Certeau's emphasis on the page as a middle-ground, threshold, or "zone" (Genette's term) between private and public are, in many ways at the root of Ponge's interest in forwarding it. By choosing to maintain his project at the transitional, material, slightly less coded site of the page, rather than at the more socially prescriptive, financially led place of the book, Ponge attempts to break away from the reified text and make available the writerly traces and humours which litter, as much as make up, sign for, retain the authorial physical presence in the text. Indeed, both excitement and regret can be gleamed from his exclamation that "once the machine is done, the author means nothing. It all works of its own accord!"

(Ponge, 1997:279[8]).

This close to the chest (Ponge talks of body posture in relation to writing) while ambiguously at the threshold between the grain of the private and the demands of public placing, the intimate yet publishable, hence repeatable, status of these drafts seems akin to the signature's performative aura, its encroaching materiality, famously mused on by Derrida. As Elizabeth Grosz remarks: "The trace of the signature cannot simply be identified with the proprietary mark of the author; instead, it is an effect of the text's mode of materiality, the fact that as a product the text is an effect of a *labor*, a work on and with signs, a collaborative (even if hostile) labor of writing and reading" (Grosz, 1995:20). Importantly, she continues: "The signature cannot authenticate, it cannot prove, it cannot make present the personage of the author; but it is a remnant, a remainder of and a testimony to both a living past and a set of irreducible and ineliminable corporeal traces" (Grosz, 1995:21). Dodie Bellamy's sexualised response to getting her books signed by the corresponding author plays on this latter dimension, it conjures up the work through the physical trace).

A text being, according to Ponge, "cette façon de mordre dans la vérité...", this way of biting into the most obscure thing of truth, "(qui est ... le fond obscur des choses)", some of the writer's material bulk (or trace) would need to be retained, materialised in the product. Ponge's sensuous, eroticised rapport to poetry as a specific corporeality and to singular poems as objects or things in and of the world, exhibits this need for his work to challenge the depersonnified, customised consumption associated with the infinitely reproducible text. Ironically, for Duchamp, whose drafts and manuscripts had ended up similarly turning writing itself into a text-object: the multicoloured, manuscripted loose leaf boxset of the Green Box, the point had been the reverse. To forward writing and textual sketches as a way of eluding, bypassing, quite simply reducing as much as possible, the unique, physically locatable, art-object of The Large Glass, even. And to sublimate the existing gender matrix through his erotic machinery (rather confirmed it, in fact). Still, Duchamp's known attention to the detail of his multiples (later taken to extremes with his Boite-Valise), shows, as it does for Ponge, a critical need to enter the art and publication machine by dissociating himself from their immediate commodification and to assert the value of artistic activity as opposed to collectability (was he in fact just pushing the frontiers of collectability).

In both the Duchamp and the Ponge projects, one could say that writing is treated as a process which first and foremost demands and occupies contextual, as much as conceptual, space. A space for the book yet beyond the book which values and locates as text the making of writing. All of which is very space intensive.

It is therefore not remarkable, just marketable, that the publishers of these two texts should have chosen to lift the writings so far from their construction-site that the work itself would find itself reduced to pocket format and little more than a documentary evidence of text. As

Jean Ristat the 1977-editor of Ponge's manuscripts says: "I have attempted to *describe* the manuscript every time the typography did not allow us to show for the complexity of the creative work: encircled or erased, words, discarded sentences that I have tried to decipher, sometimes unsuccessfully" (Ponge, 1997:55). The same emphasis on the descriptive rather than on Ponge's "demonstrative" applies to the *Duchamp Du Signe* book edition of the Green Box.

In fact, in both books, the unreadability or non-linearity or repetitiveness which occasionally characterises the pieces is replaced by heavily annotated editions which wish to indicate that text requires no particular spatial nor material set. Indeed, the notes are all descriptions of the dematerialisation, or despatialisation needed to downsize the texts to fit the condensed space of B/W mass production. Quite simply, the notes are all descriptions of the notes themselves. For instance, the footnotes, p.100, *Duchamp Du Signe*, describe 1) erasures made by Duchamp, retained in the text of the edition and subsequently footnoted as erased, "biffé" (beefed out), 2) words superscripted by Duchamp that do not appear as superscripted in the edition and get footnoted as "superscripted" 3) coloured sections or circled words, unreadable in black-and-white that get footnoted as "red" or "blue". And so on and so on. Words might not be fixed, but Modern and postmodern writing has developed a keen understanding of the performance of writing as one which allocates them particular and uncommodifiable points of fixture at specific (textualised) occurrences. It is the paradox of Barthes' degree-zero that it can be read as seeking to dehistoricise and over-motivate the arbitrary sign.

At any rate: there is a difference between bungling and handling texts. This is perhaps where the frequently hands-on, flexible, less customised, and usually author-friendly world of small press publishing has had such an important role to play beyond providing "unpublishable" poets with a publishing platform. And why DTP and/or net-publishing will attract more and more poets and might well soon also be considered an integral part of the environment of writing. The book recognised as a text-object. One which is aware of what Broodthaers has called "mute plasticity" - an object-centered exploration of writing as drawing, which more often than not negates or reduces the signifying aspect of language and can play it.

I just love George Hamilton's translation/publishing of the Green Box as book replica of the perforated *The Bride Stripped Bare* etc. As a compromise between the abattoir of process and the wrapped meat of paperbacks, it insists on retaining some of Duchamp's randomised boxmaterial while packing it in book-form. He translates verbal doodles, decides that a red circle around a French word will also circle red in English, folds sheets, alters paper weight, all in all responds as pro-actively as possible to the limitations of moving from box to book and to the demands of publishing an affordable edition or one which used to be so, had it not been out of print at the time of writing, and widely replaced in English by the more lugubre:

Collected Writings of Marcel Duchamp.

By now I think it will be clear that writers don't write books, they write "books". As a rule, publishers (and their editors) write the books. See Susan Howe on the Dickinson manuscripts: "Johnson breaks the lines into four per stanza, as Dickinson must have known would happen if they were ever printed. In her own handwriting the line-breaks are somewhat different. Although I have used the Johnson numbering for convenience, it should be remembered that she never numbered her poems" (Howe, 1985: 35). Which might explain why, with the industrialisation of printing and its emphasis on efficacy, one has to jump so wide and far between *Tristram Shandy*, Mallarmé, Dada and Concrete Poetry, to reach the explosion of the 1960s-70s-80s-and on performative poetics which, with the currently blooming world of net-writing and the parallel rise of graphic-text design are playing such a decisive part, though still clearly marginalised, in making the book's textual materiality be taken as written.

Of course, highly marked, or motivated, texts can be (but are not necessarily) expensive to produce. Discussing early century typographical experimentation, Johanna Drucker explicates the ambient resistance to it as one rooted in a resistance to conceptualising textual manipulation beyond literary considerations of verbal and semiotic production: "The threat to linguistic authority made by the manipulation of the words on the page was that it returned the written language to the specific place, instance, conditions of production - it became a highly marked text"(Drucker, 199?: 46). Johanna Drucker's own choice of writing her texts at a high production level, means that her books have a very small run, and are mainly on view in specialist libraries. At present, the rarefied atmosphere which, per force, surrounds her work is sadly contrary, voire detrimental, to the ways in which her spatialised image-text narratives tap into popular culture iconographies: girls, engines, the making of the world, the dreams of objects....

Each publication of the quote unquote exact same text does bring out certain aspects, erase some, enable or disable others. Announces the text prior to our reading it, deciphers the text as we read it. The rules of which are recognisable at what Genette calls the "paratext". Any publishing of a text, whether in a magazine, a catalogue or a bookform rewrites to an extent the text. Provides its own version of it, as Drew Milne has acurately shown in relation to the various print-ups of Susan Howe's "Eikon Basilike". Ultimately, whether for a book or for a gallery, the liabilities and practicalities of writing's material and contextual condition plays an intrinsic, yet unrecognised part in the composition of reading. By extension/implication, some writers will aim to localise their text into a number of discrete performances, customising, staging each publication to measure. This is close to Ponge's "variations", cris cheek's cross-disciplinary idea of "versionings", CB's "mixes".

This exploration of differential contexts, as part of the work's formal and conceptual

methodology, is more or less intrinsically linked to much installation art and now also electronic text, which owing to their frequently ephemeral and interactive nature determine and mark the text, not as a singular object, but as a spatio-temporal event. Gary Hill on the use of time in his early text-based video pieces: "There are really so many folds in time involving media, feedback, delay, writing, speaking, and the body. Time becomes more like a Mobius band or Klein bottle without an absolutely "real" side" (Hill, 1998:3). Marcel Broodthaers' sculptural books, whereby reading the books destroys the sculpture but looking at the sculpture means not having seen or read the work at all, provides another vivid case in point. Susan Hiller's *Monument* and CB's *Eclat* tour-installation that both use play-only walkman as primary site for the textual intervention. John Cayley's chance-generative cybertextual poetics and much of the slowly evolving literary net environment play largely also on the time-based possibility of time-based text in the designing of the reader's choices and options.

The notion of real-time enters Literature and Borges' allegory of the book of sand which one can never read back, must always read on, describes quite accurately the mixture of excitement and horror this kind of practice generates from the point of literary practice. Unavoidably, this leads to articulating the question of writing not only from within literature but also and perhaps fundamentally at the breaking point between literary discourse and the way textual strategies are developed in other artforms. To present textuality and textual practice "in the context of other media, other cultural and social institutions and their practices" (Prinz, 1991:174). This is and has been, since its inception in 1994, the focal point and fundamental purpose of the practice-led writing BA (now also MA) course called Performance Writing which I'm the director of at Dartington College of Art.

Unavoidably too, the writer becomes engaged in explicating the relationality of the writing process, a relationality which can be informed by collaborative work and/or by localised, explicated use of one's chosen media. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's disturbing use of the photocopy with which she interrogates visual and linguistic "memory machines": "the same image-photo, the same plate-text can pass again and again by different circuits of inscription and effacement, so that there are only traces and even 'arch-traces' (Buci-Glucksmann, 1996:285). cris cheek's most recent project, the compact-book-disc, *Songs from Navigation*, a collaboration with Sinaed Jones, in which each collaborator informs the continued progression of the other, toing and froing back and forth between recorded/treated voice and the inscriptual and verbal work on the page, each process having become co-dependent, to "maximise the interplay between materials, structures and formats" (cheek & Jones, 1998: unnumbered preface) and where the reader is provided with a rough-and-ready environment of pages to wade through.

A relationality then, which involves commitment to the embodiment of process: a grappling

with the tools and locale of the particular writing project. Sophie Calle's *Absence* project of 1989 is very significative of this mood for methodological, uncollectable public writing. She asked staff at the museums she was intervening in to describe from memory the paintings on loan or stolen or under restoration. She inscribed their partial descriptions /impressions /anecdotes at the exact location and size of the missing piece: "I replaced the absent painting with these recollections" (Calle, 1990:25). Kosuth's *Investigations* project during which he presented thesaurus entries in newspaper advertising spaces demonstrates similarly an interest in a text-based arts practice which takes place within a clearly flagged context "without generating any residual, collectible object" (Spector, 1994: 7). The critic Katherine Hayles' observation that there is an overall "shift of emphasis from ownership to access" (Hayles: 1996: 270) seems increasingly pertinent.

A relationality which lets up predetermined genres or writing modes and investigates conceptual/contextual platforms (the book, the page, the room, the screen, the newspaper, the physical body..) to implement through varying entourages of skills (to hold not to have), noisy, polluted, syncretic traffics of clips, quacks, quotation circuits and long trails of spit.

John Cayley talks of such "disrupted, mediated, undermined authorship" as "cyborg authorship" in which: "engineered reading or text-generation procedures are recognized as partly "responsible" for the work and in which the human participant acknowledges the procedural itself as an aspect of her identity". This argument is connected to Donna Haraway's slightly technofrantic view of the "etched surfaces" of writing as "preeminently the technology of cyborgs": "the struggle for language and against perfect communication...the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine" (Haraway, 1990: 218). By extension, this does mean that the blurring of style (as in: individual or Proustian) with slot-machines, of identity with procedure, of sexuality with prosthesis, of writing with transient events, of memory with faction, will play out figures of place and behaviour as so many localised and changing occupancies of social, cultural and emotional relations.

At this scale, this means that narratives of identity will be channeled into narratives of site and locationality. Indeed, for Gayatri Spivak the dynamic implications of a writer's sense of context, what she calls "the making space of the writer", provides a way of questioning the negative dislocations brought about by essentialist notions of identity and "voice". See Kathy Acker who "decided that since what she wanted to do was just to write, not to find her own voice, could and would write by using anyone's voice, anyone's text, whatever materials she wanted to use" (Acker, 1994:22). The Asian-American writer-artist Theresa Cha's complex, cross-genre and multi-lingual book *Dictee* for instance, Jimmy Durham's sculptures or Gomez-Pena's borderspeak performances have each found their work subsumed to issues of community, migrancy etc, where in fact their range of formal and performic strategies quite clearly go behind the scenes to question the inadequacy of the essentialist frame given to their

work: "Cha's formal practices throw into relief the ways in which Asian American women writers are caught up within the politics of genre. In working outside of genres such as the autobiography or the bildungsroman, which are predicated on developmental narratives, Cha writes against interpellative narratives of assimilation and incorporation" (Wong, 1994:45). If the ways we explore textual forms and investigate methods of reading emerge partly in response to the ways in which we have access or not to certain spaces: physical, technological, emotional, sexual as much as conceptual spaces, to over-internalise our responses to these spaces by explicating neither material situation nor contextual conditioning, can stultify, if not altogether sublimate their impact on the writing process and on the regeneration of contextual and representational fields. How this works in real-life is always slow and problematic. Indeed, the way I see it (private parts having gone public, gender-retro will come back to haunt my semiotic access to a pretty complex D-lay who pleases me as no other cut-out), to reconceptualise representation in view of the fact that "any representation of the individual is also a representation of the social link consubtantial with him [sicsicsic]" (Marc Augé - *Non-Places)* remains a foremost worry.

It is perhaps for this reason that Rosemarie Waldrop reminds us, in "Alarms & Excursions", that content does not take care of itself, that it cannot be accounted for by form alone. One could by way of a conclusion, press her point and say that it is in fact insufficient to maintain that form is only ever an extension of content. Form and content are in very different ways subject to ideological status-quos, do's and don'ts. One can explode forms while leaving social conventions and prejudices unchallenged. Jeff Derksen's remark that we ought "to move towards a cultural poetics that is able to accomodate both text and context without reducing historical particulars to a mere backdrop for the production of literature" (Derksen: 1996) provides a useful stepping-stone.

Indeed, there is a need for a text-based community which can outgrow conventionalised modes and views on writing. Modes which hold that writing takes place mainly as verbal spread, on the transparency of the page, in the absence of the writer (& their machines)'s particulars. There is a need to be personnally implicated in the making and taking of text into processual and/or contextual events. All in all these are party to or originate from wider socio-cultural contexts of contention, experimentation and exchange and activity. Needless to say, Literature is not the rest.

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[1] Poetry is not in chapbooks, it's to be found in the enraged/incarnated drafts of those who wish for, who militate in favour of, a new embrace with reality [my translation].

[2] "Une tétine qui, par chance deviendrait tout à fait comestible" .

[3] "Une fois que la machine est faite, l'auteur n'a plus aucun intérêt. Ça marche tout seul!" [my tr.].

THE HUNGRY FORM (G.EEK MIX)

Caroline Bergvall

Author's Note: The Hungry Form (G.eek Mix) *has been specially devised for PAJ and functions as a spatial reworking of a prose poem entitled* The Hungry Form (study) *published in* Milk Of Late, *an anthology published by the Equipage Press in 1994.*

The main impetus behind my reworking of the piece was to bring to the original version a sense of a textual performance which was taking place on and through the space of the page. Inevitably this process, along with the fact that I was having to compress a seven-page long poem into a three-page block, led me to considerably rewrite the piece: adding new material, altering some of the internal structures of the first version in accordance with the structures which were emerging from working out of a primarily visual and graphic organization of the writerly material.

This kind of integration of spatial elements into and as part of the verbal narratives has become very present in my work both as a writer and as a teacher. It aims to force up in both writer and reader an awareness of the page as an active and visible environment, an environment which makes explicit the many material dimensions available to writing and breaks down habitual patterns of reading. To come to experience the mise-en-page (page design) of a text in much the same way that one experiences a live piece's mise-en-scène (stage design) leads to treating the entire make-up of a text as an internal system of notation in which semiotic correspondences and resonances take place across both verbal and non-verbal signs.

It is clear that this mode of writing lays itself open to having to negotiate constantly the constrictions of specific page sizes, available graphic programs, etc. In short, it is having to approach the development of any new piece of writing as one would approach the development of any site-specific installation or performance. Starting out by asking oneself not only how to fit the piece into the page-space in question, but also in what ways the page-space itself (importantly this includes its publication context) can impact on and transform the basic textual work one wishes to bring to bear on that space.

The page becomes a dynamic part of the conceptual dimensions of the text.

A loaded site which ceases to present itself as blank.

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094

1. TIME

Raging distracted. Careless half-blind. The want that will. A
magnified attention.

PROLOGUE

Ah

Ah

MESSENGER SAPHMY, ONE
Lo! Could I of all
manicured attired as I be combed to the bone
though increasingly lost to rumps of imprecision
truly be of such a way of such countenance as
to find myself clasped

by the redhot coreless core of this
Your name
Your blood

the hungry V/ this form of forms /most absorbing/sucking to/ being most terrifying/

Your ever-opening genitalia

OEDIPUS
What fares inside mine onion eye
What fair in sight your nonion eye
The urge that speaks amassed along the inner borders
The urge that specks a mass long thin and bored
That wishes there a spill a heartless flooding
That twitches there's a spell a heatless prodding
The plenty realm as I absolved by speed would otherwise
The plaintive rim as you absorbed by speak wooed
another's wife

[Eyes stuck on the wrong end of the stick]

/most absorbing/ being most terrifying/

2. PLACE

Careless half-blind. Raging distracted. A magnified attention. The
want that will. The thumb is fat and smooth. Refillable inflatable.

Ihateyou IloveyouIhateyouIloveyou
notmymothersisternormysister
notmydaddybrothernormybrother
notmydaughterson
- afineorificeallthesame
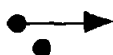
Ah

/the empty form/perfectly closed/being absolutely open/this I of I's/this form of forms/

MESSENGER SUCKMINE, TOO

Lo! A shot at the dark

ANTIGONE

Release me from socket

The living among the dead! The dead among the living!

(relieves short of pocket)   found your teeth in

This very mystic fear of encasement   her belly

The dead among the living! The leaving among the dread!

Of someone else's vision   blood bears witness to

(a case of some elision)   the stuff

The dare among the leaving! The dreaming among the led!

(ache seeks to summon legions)   pours out of this
                                                   precious

Give me one chief   alarming
would sum up lesions!   this bloated

The living among the dead! The dare among the leaving!
The leaking among the dredd! The dad among the limping!

disproportionate sense

The dare among the leaving! The leaking among the dredd!
The living among the dead! The dad among the limping!
The dare among the leaving! The leaking among the dredd!

these spreading forms
affect all form
cooling half-selves half-cover up

on punctured mistresses

3. ACTION

Refillable inflatable. The want that will. The thumb is fat and smooth. That wants by sucking dry. Travels light but leaves excessive trails.

●

The door flings open. The floor sags.

MEDEA
Was I brought here to witness: this stolen feat: my own magnificent unravelling: indeed would I still not be rolling forever more across your mind: hungry and adored: full to the eye. Hadn't the door been flung open: hadn't the floor sagged.

hungry and adoring/adoring and adored/being absolutely open/not split but reproducible/

CHORUS *(from the great distance and confidence that sudden awareness brings)*

What is the onion defines your difference
What you are
What you only seem to be
What real is truly different
What difference is pure style
What sameness kept us different
What same difference might ally
What differences grow from sameness
What difference remains the same
What sane different only seems so at a glance
What I peels
What I solidifies

MESSENGER FUCKMINE, FREE

[To force an arm in deeply]

Lo! blood cum and crown:
If it's all in the name
I've always been dead meat
so what the dagger cannot reach
let the doldo finish off:
Hunger follows those
who cannot wait

For as long as there is juice

the hungry I/the empty form/full to the eye/

clapcla clapcl
clapclar-'-clapcla
clapcl pcl'apcp_
apclapcl p'p clapcl
'apclap
__.-l.-.i'apcl.'pclap apcla

CHAIN / 4

procedures

edited by
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FROM FLAUNT MINE: COMPACT MIX

i   you   who   say

```
                                      _____
                                                        |
                                                   |
                                                        |
             ........                                   |
```

ah to ah
    ah to ah ....

Place and date of birth:

ah to ah ah

"What if I lift my hand in this manner will see to it?"

what if I rest my right leg over my left leg
What if I emit a short sharp sigh when dropping my keys

What if I stroll gently **(like this)** would you know

&
ah

↕GREETINGS!

ah to ah myself

what compactmass appears

> ah to ah to   :::::::::::: **like so**
<
>
< what if I sway from one side to the   [!]
        next one side to the

ah to ah mine well in view

[to fiddle with something]

14

What if I develop dark matter

                      IWhat if

Height: Iyou

                     Idevelop

ah well in view to ....   Idark matter

YES WELL, IN THIS OVERBURDENED WORLD

[What if

[foreign speak bordelines my presence

     [What if peculiar turns scoop my phrases up like a

     [Beckett inside France a Joyce for Finnegan a Wilson after

     [Bob

                          Colour of eyes:

Ah to well in view to ah myself in this

                AND BY NAME

f

 I

   a   p'haps whisper: h ◄— h —► h

 u

  n   [not quite sure here]

 t

  m

i   *Sex:*

n

   e

<cnfusd yrs gone by wthout outposts of names now known to me

>confsd by yrs witht statas sedmentations of names now ncssry t me

           TO ESTABLISH & CONFIRM

                      what sirix caught

what if trailing deep-rooted hesitation

    & reluctance

(rpt: what if etc) ◄—   in the action weave

                    what is

            (SIGNAL & SIGN)

15

ah   [then place
                                                    .- [yourself
> .... & what if I open & open & end up lost in expanse
<........what if something prevents us from believing you
>....   what does that change
<   ....would that establish bonds between us
>.... ....or against us
<   so what's your name   *Distinctive features:*
> would that confirm anything to you
<........ ....how do you spell that
>.... ....I suppose at first it might well do

                                                         :::
ah to   ::::::
ah   to   ::::::
a h a h   .

To place myself to ah ah well in view

◄───────────────►

                                              Key No

AND BY SPEECH
flaunt mine
flaunt mine
   flaunt mine
flaunt mine   [to distribute (acc. to laws & properties of live presence)   ]
flaunt

                                              flaunch
TO ARGUE FLATTER & CONVINCE
....**mine necessary ah**
                 (SIGNAL & SIGN)
                          necessary ah

mine necessary presence

& signal & sign
& signal
& sign & signal & sign & signal   *Date of issue:*
& sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal &

16

....

:   :

Date of expiry: :::::   :::::::::::::::   ::

:

X

....

AND BY GESTURES
TO EMPHASIZE SEDUCE & DEMARCATE

(SIGNAL & SIGN)

GREETINGS! How she came to this setting in
strange apparel and with promises of many a great
turn as witnessed from her unclear lineage:
wreckages: distracted nuns; unknown cousins. How
she: her growing presentiment came to outgrow her
lycra tight name and pedigree. How it came to crack
at the seams along her chest

AND BY ATTIRE
TO RECONNOITRE & REVEAL & DISGUISE

How she came to find that her presentable body its more
questionable sources carry severe marks other than initial
and stamps. How she came to find these useful in her
quest for reconnoissance: in her quest for: as one might
also put it: identifying things signs

SIGNAL & SIGN

& signal & sign
 & signal &   sign
& sign & sign
 & signal &

& signal &
& signal & sign
&

                            sign

& signal & sign
& signal & sign

 & signal &

AH WELL IN VIEW

AND BY LITTLE FINGER
TO SCRATCH & AROUSE
SIGNAL & SIGN

Holder's signature:
X------------

><

& signal & sign
& signal & sign
& signal & sign   ┌   ┐

& signal &
& signal & sign   sign
signal & sign
in her stressful search for passwords & pindowns:
buttons & zippers: openings & closures: beginnings &   └   ┘
endings: lubes pubes & piercings: beings &
becomings: that she might reconnoitre as being in fact
not only part of her own
& signal & sign
& signal & sign
& sign

                                                                    [becomings]

                              & signal &
                                                                                      & & sign
                                                                                        sign
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& signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign
& signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign
          enlarging enlarged entity but also and pressingly so: part of her own enlarging time:
               realer than real: more bodier and presenting than the serenest of reregulations

& signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign
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& signal & sign

& signal & sign & signal & sign
& signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign   & signal & &
& signal & sign
& signal & sign
                    WITH THE INTENTION
TO FORECLOSE TO DISCLOSE   & signal
   TO REMARK TO MARK OUT
      TO DRESS TO REDRESS
         TO UNDRESS TO CARESS TO DRESS UP TO ADDRESS
TO FORECLOSE TO DISCLOSE
      TO REMARK TO MARK OUT   & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign
         TO DRESS TO REDRESS   & signal &
         TO UNDRESS TO CARESS TO DRESS UP TO ADDRESS
& RECEIVE & LOSE & ACQUIRE & FORGET & GAGE & GAIN & DISPLAY
& signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal & sign & signal &
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18

19

Words:with.

The starting point to "Flaunt Mine," is an earlier text entitled "Prologue" which I wrote as a script for an abstract movement-voice piece for five perform-ers which premiered in London, July 1994. I subsequently became interested in bringing to the text some of the spatial and vocal concerns that had in-formed our work live. It is because clear that the page itself could provide the text's performance space and that both movement and vocal work should be activated, rather than transcribed, across it. The entire text was therefore com-pletely rethought and explicitly re-visualised for the page. Additional textual material was developed in response to the possibilities of that environment. It then also seemed necessary to give the whole process its own title.

As it stands, "Flaunt Mine" is a self-contained textual installation which bears little or no relation to the original structure and which has absorbed into a process of writing certain aspects of the live treatment. A complete version of the text features in the latest issue of the British performance-text magazine

éclat

sites 1–10

Caroline Bergvall's text-based performance *Eclat Occupation des Lieux 1 10*, was commissioned as part of a series of site-specific text works entitled *Four Humours* by the Institution of Rot, London, (February-May 1996). *Four Humours* (dedicated to E.M. Cioran) featured work by Iain Sinclair, Ben Watson, Paul Buck and Caroline Bergvall. Each author was asked to draw from their own work to produce a text-based performance to animate the private spaces within the Institution of Rot. The Institution of Rot is a space (a house in north London, UK), a history (of site-specific performance installation, and sound work) and a curatorial

project. Its founders are CROW (performance and installation artist) and Nick Couldry (writer and sound artist). The first performances at the Institution of Rot were in June 1993. The Institution of Rot has also performed works in Berlin (*Imperial Wardrobe*, 1995), Copenhagen (*Royal Sweatbath*, 1995), Prague (*Blind Site Deaf Words*, 1995) Fukuoka (*White City*, 1995). The following 'version' of *Eclat Sites 1 10*, here documented for the page, was performed on May 17 1996 at the Institution of Rot on multiple audio-tapes. The sound text (on Walkmans) guided individual members of the audience on a journey through the 'actual' spaces of 109

Corbyn Street and the 'fictive' spaces of the text over a period of approximately 23 minutes. The layout and typography for this version of *Eclat* includes the 'accidental' characters that are produced in the translation from one format to another, as a means of visualising the translations that allowed the designer access in and out of the piece in its digital form.

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ÈÉÊÊÎÍÍÑÒÓÓÔÕ˜ØÙÚÚÛ˜Bàáâãäåæçèéêëìíîïðñòóôõ÷øùúûü¸ÿ p⌐t oh¥ pÅúTEX   pÊì x H H   0TÔ 4 Ad x fi   h h   t ▪ d
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·   e¨   ·   !¨   ·   #¨   I¨   J¨   K¨   L¨   ƒ¨   À¨   Ô¨   Œ¨   —¨   Σ¨   Π¨   π¨   ·
æ¨   ø¨   ï¨   ¬¨   √¨   ≈¨   ·   ·   Õ¨   ·   0¨   ◻¨   fl¨   ·   ‰¨   Â¨   ·   ·   ·
_¨   c¨   h¨   z¨   U¨   ß¨   µ¨   À¨   fl¨   t¨   ·   Y¨   b¨   Â¨   Ê¨   Á¨   ·   ·   ·
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ECLAT
OCCUPATION DES LIEUX

CAROLINE BERGVALL
1996

WEL is an occupation COME to the foreign guided a short round of observations.

Now y. s . now y. don t. What not assumd .. be not hr since forver pleased are we by and large to kindly be stuck to instructs or what kind of langua would we otherwise be left with.

At any rate: The orderly fashion of starting points would have you standing please on the small X or cross we ve prepared for you in the physical environment. Should more or less look like so

X

but bigger and yes bang on a doorstop.

THAT (doorframe that) divider: lines up intersections between room and room: and corridor: to join & split at each such **HEREand.**
Pull in & widen up & widen up & pull in. And not there and nor here and nor there. Conflict exchange. Amassed press-ure stimuli.
Stationariness at such place brings about aphasia. loss of memory. nausea. inflammations. visionary spells. self-mutilations.
History shows and and and and and and. That to transmute such symptoms into trance-like repetitions (is not the same is not the same)
threatens nationalism only if accompanied by a dedicated propensity to spreading and unreasonably so.

&BREAKINGWATERÀRECULONS&ASTHOUGHWEWERENT

Now: in your own time:

Slowly & lift your left & foot & bring it & forward & slowly & one step & in to the corr&idor
and then: put it down. Slowly. This is fine. Just one step in any one direction is enough to indicate
a move. a presence. An act of will or conviction at 'the best of times. One could say that you're
leaving the threshold, clearing ground in slo'mo'. **And lift your right & foot & bring it & slowly to**
rest & slowly & by your left &. This is good: **You're in the corridor: We're on our way:**

Walk at a leisurely or similar pace down the corrido.

A continuous surface is immediately interrupted or punctuated by **footsteps**.

There was a door to your immediate right.

Further down to your left another door. Leads out to a room.

This is going where we are.

&

Call that a living room? THIS, is a living room. A front room. **Owdooyoodoo. Owdooyoodoo.** Cross into a rm of ths kind that we may carry & conduct ourselves as if originating from resolved
gender and normal art. Accurate, precise, seamlessly, well-adjusted. You've crossed into the.
High ceiling open fire. Name the objects arranged and negotiated.
- Wonderment domastication, don't you find.
- Ndeed.
- Biscuit?
Or make us each more certain "I'm not my own unshapely".
No big wet thing. What big wet thing. You mean this?
What follows - true storage. live slice. slippery to the touch.
I'm waving a pair of.
She says "yeah why not" and also "some things best not

be thought in the dark".
Ah but we did.
Next thing we know we're at the Tate encased in foma-lderhyde.
Mummy! mummy mummy look! sisters? mummy look-look
sisters sisters. (Sad really). Paradoxically, stuffed like that you
need not locate your own frontal Parade to be occupied in full view.
But leave this room: your features might start drooping.
But stay here: your bone structure might dehydrate.

The choice is yours not entirely.

Wheres your pointed buster

You've decided to follow on through. (Well done).
Leave the r....

Back in the corridor. A long narrow strip of encased space. What app.... to b. here. Wha n.t app..rs. Stick to thplan. **Walk towards the staircase.** There's a big cracked wall doing a small Beckett to your left. A frame at th end of the by the main-door is catching your attention. You may wan t to have a l k. Then again. The staircase. Now there's a. **Lets go upstairs.**

Slooowllly. One. step. at. the. time. 1and 2and 3and.
A. staircase. is. an. elevation. device. Increases dematerialisation*. there. is. an .occupation. which. is. slow. &. open &. an. acoustic escalator. That's good. continue.
4and 5and 6and.

*At this rate what doesn t e

White walls. A regular spatial arrangement for domestic passage. Where arc you not who. **You've reached the first landing.** Still. Beyond that. Who lives here. Was a sister a sister. What ap.ears to b. here. A couple of doors. Twins not twins. What you see & what you ...'t. Show caution. Ze cloth does make ze monk.

)))))!(((((O)))))HOI(ST)))MY)))))FAC(((!((((E)))))))))OUTOF)))))))))DEEP((((BACGROUND

(sowecansccyou)

((((((((((Or not figur.

You're pressing the handle down slowly, giving it a small push at the same time, you're opening the door, the one facing the staircase behind you. It leads into a small ish square room. Close th door beh   ind you. Th frosted glass of th window. Th ivy brushing on th outside.

You're walking to the middle of the room. Now you're standing in the middle of the room. Say CHEESE. CHEESE. A photograph is a moment of respite.

"There's nothing on these negatives".

Was this a surpr   ise) pendulums not spells (Bah. Was it a surpr. never still long enough to grasp your own contours. You're not here with any great precision anyway. Yes no yes no.
I'm walking towards you. Can I see myself who cannot fully see you. Or, "Nabokov had
a point whose Narcissus mistakes his own suicide for a murder". Ndeed, ndeed. As they say, whatever you do in this world, stay well lit at all times and know your lining. Don't move. Cavities pop out with the push of a thumb. Twins not twins, **don't move**. Once in doubt, people indispensably not follow their previous arrangements.

A SOft refle a pliable ction that's how we like you.
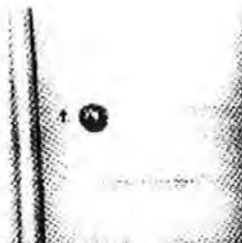
Now make your way slowl towards. that. opening. is always another. ope. leads to anoth room.

THIS once was the inner room. To occupy after much reflexivity. Still not fully. What is slow and open and occupies? Later used it was as a small storage room then a bedroom. The house into clusters various kinds of. Leaving the unchanged plaques inchangees. By and large a bed-room is a rectangular or oblong square of contained space with sleeping ustensils Object arrangements
Any casual Reconnaisse tre
Item by item iron to flatten
Ah but once in doubt stay well lit. Indeed. the mess diffusion of interchangeable body carts has proven as popular as disposable vulvas.

What app..rs to. Fossilised lumps. inchoate innards, a vast amassing of human material and behavioural mish-mash stocked up here somewhere.
The house develops such litteral pro-tuberances Reorganise, reorganise that it s become currently unviable for anyone to casually set up residency. What assumed to be not h....
The image which fills like up a pouch pushes from inside the, that s what I told: my mother gets passed over. Well who's a stranger to this kind of arrangement. Mother a scratch-card.

Which reminds me: 'I m beside myself'
The flore gner ner accentuated gait across the rooms, whose forebearance s a wonder to stabilise, whose skirting habits carry much revelance
by way of occupancy (who interrupts a train of thought to admire someone (who

bypasses their limitations (then says. theres more much more than adjustable (then says Bring out the holes, bring out the holes. Are hangers. Bring out hangers. Plenty of. Who says I m more than my own aside & asks for stead er projectors, projectiles. Things keep on. Something about the outside. A pierced ripple really is one small puncture by way of solidity. it's all so messy out and about (And the more I wash my hands the clearer it gets)

You can stay here awhile should you feel it occupies.
You can install oe your solid aspect on this here chair over there.
Or you can.

Back in the other room.

It appears there's someone else. The straight point of a circle
Show caution. Stay well-lit at all. And keep moving. When you
stand still, there seems to be some. nodes or something. unac-
counted for. Object arrangements. Things keep on. Sticks tplan.
-And whats zis? Whats that whats zis and that and zis and this
and zat and this and that
-Whats what
Who looks you up and down and sideways.
I CAN SEE STRAIGHT THR   OU
A sister was not a mister. Was this a surprise. Yes no. It was. A
sister was not a mister. Was this a surprise. Yes no it was. A
sister was not a mmm. Wa this asurp Ye. Noit wa. A sist wa no
mist. Yo   was. Yas.
You're wanting to comment on what amp....s to b the transu-
cency of. what appears to. s gns of running off. Really it's just a
very slightly neg igeed state of affairs. How you walk inout of
detail.
You're wanting to say I m in a phase of appearance brings about a
constant state of arousal. A constant state of. That or is is a
recent visitator. once occupied. it. Usually. Fleshes out
How you. constantly want to go up to someone else and. Want to

go up to and h. Want to h. Constantly want to put your hand on
then. There. Their Organum Genitul as: to secure (to secure. to
secure).

The question asks itself pointedly: Would such an action ust
about reassure (probably not). Or possibly provide.
a) a clue proper question mark
b) a positive ident fier question mar
c) a rush of great significance question mark

This IS a very large something or other. What is it. Just a
thought.

no y see n w ou son

22 2.96 agire slee. p don figut. yEs. stick to thplan

Walk past. Get to the door. The point is a compact
line. Got to get to. open the door.
Walk past. get to the. open it. Wa & get to.
got to get to the. open it cross the threshold
get to the do.. open it cross the threshold.
close the.

Meanwhile, back on the landing.

This good, feels fine. the landing seems wider and lighter than previously. This is nice. You're standing on the landing. It isn't giving

way under your feet. This insignificant detail fills you with such a sense of embossment it is so: elating so: unbelievable so: unbe-

lievable that you exclaim I be could happy here and quickly lift up your and pull down your and squat and press out your happening

vaginals. your instinctual drive. your cultural reticence. your dutiful intelligence. your cautious elaborations. your impeccable taste

in shots of urine all over the surface of this very perfect spot.

))))))))))))))))s)o)m)e)))))))))thing)))s)))kee))pon)))((((((((((((.(((((((((

(On the way up to the second landing, you're thinking that to fit
oneself perfectly quite is one thing but to deploy insides out one's
own extensiveness now that's now that's)

As you can see, there are another two (two) doors on the second landing. One to your left, one in front of you. To your right a large wall surface, behind you the staircase.

Intersections which might occur here are of a more intrusive kind. Wonders of artificial light. My silicons take me a long homeward way. Beyond that. Wa s a sist a mist & a tsim a tsis. yes no yes no. This 3rd arm of yours. Was a Sally a Sally. What app.... to b. .ere. That's how we like   you.

SURGERY

You've pushed the door to your left, the one marked surg.r. You enter te room.

Its vastness s...isos you, takes you aback. Its ornate decoration. Red deep carpets seem much at odds with the .est of the house. A wide sof. covered with a selection of cushions, not animals like cats and dogs. There's champagne in a silver cooler in a small side-crack, crystal glasses and conversations. Feathers, hats, bare shoulders. "Welcome, we were expecting you, make yourself comforte". Someone is coming towards you smiling, holding out their hand. You can't help but notice are you seeing straight through th. Everything's what it Smirnoffs.

Noting your hesitation, they gently push you towards the centre of the room, you think you're feeling the prickle of thought against your leg but there's noone here you know. You slump into one of the deeper armchairs.
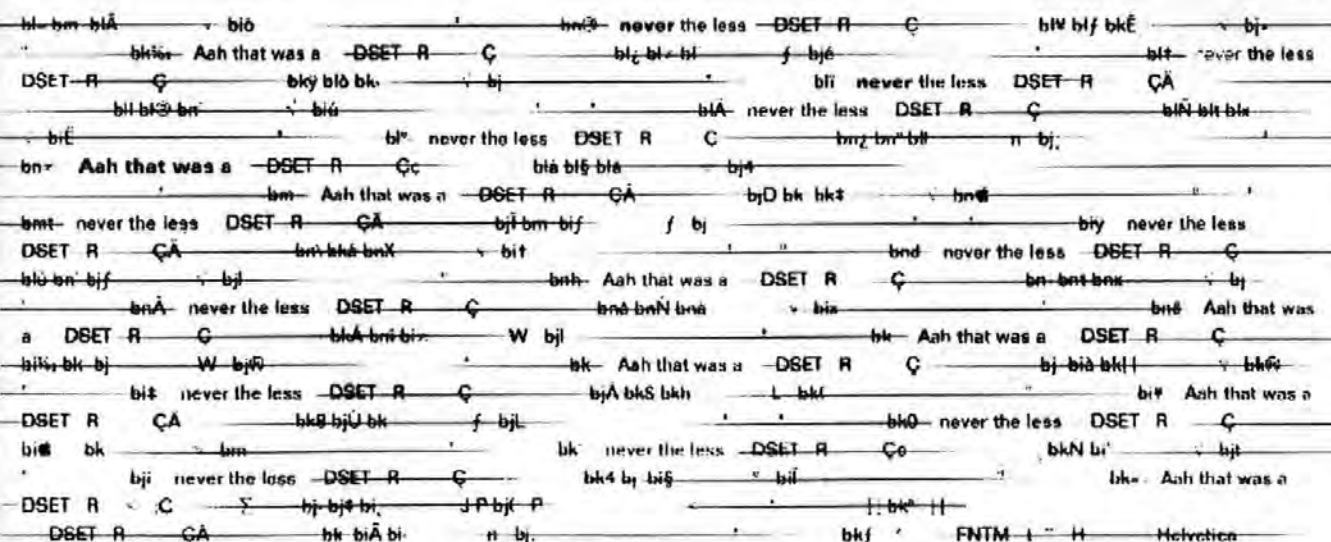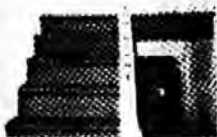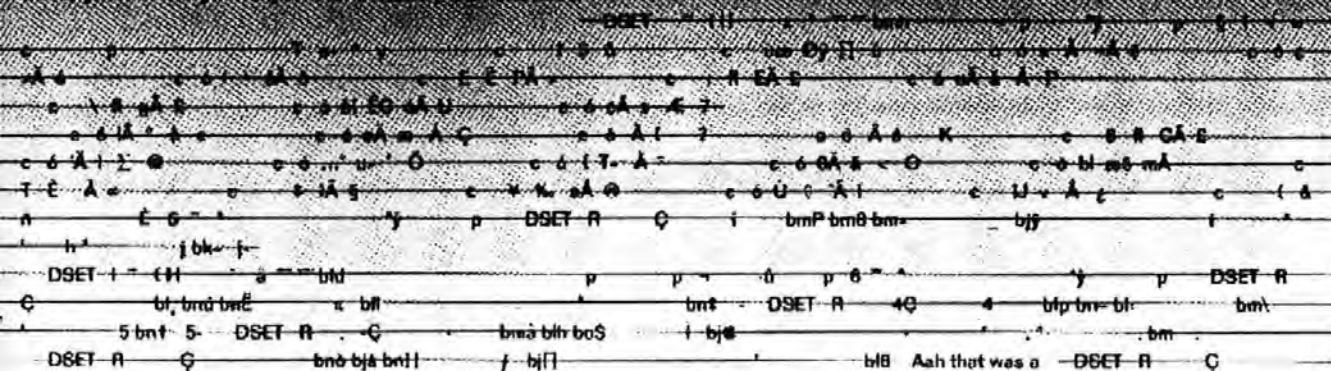
Aaah th at was a. You notice e someone sitting in another armchair.facing a good one she's fiddling with her idea while engaging in conversation. Surprised, delighted you look into it grows. Was a she a she now lying on the sofaaa. Seems to be talking takes up more room laughs as clicks open a fully clit clot clitted like a fat cigar, the sofa's popping out are the walls extruding the air seems hotter, tighter. She or she is pressing with her fingers and pulls the flaps apart. Coming out fast, she's conversing face down across a table her legs pushing a handful of her own up her indescribably big, her space-surround ambient organum. Is laughing and sweating. You want to. But your face is dropping out of sight and you must busy yourself looking for it. Or you want to. But her arse has come over you and is covering your face forcing itself around your mouth around your tongue. This is all doubt beyond and wonderfully opaque. You fill your throat and think of Mary, Immaculate. Your saintly unvaginal envelope, bless me as I traverse, bless me the saintly silence of your lipless. Your saintly vacated saintly vacated occupancy, bless me as I'm moved to occupy, bless me Mary as I manifestly some profound occupation. Bless me

as she unpacks I discharges. Bless me Bless me Mary never let it be said: the splendid c I mean the splendid unts are inward inwarded: sidebside In: are neither here nor there not this not that nor anything but not. Some uncool, Virginals haload be their enduring lessening. Bless me Mary pleine de grace for to extend one's out outsides now that's now that's.

Your skin pops back to its current conventional dimensions with a slurpy sound.

In the landfill of your frock there is occupation which occupies. What app..re t ..Be ba h..., crmonies of sweat 'n .isibility. A thinker once said girls ntake a gorgeous margin, did you believe that. I did. But really. Head on full-frontal - out - in - back - to - over - under - sideways - above - revelling - below - through - projected - projective - across - beyond now that's now that's what I'd call morphing. Adjectival distentions branched out into spectacles recombinant what I'd call.

morphing & ...

bl~ bm~ blÀ   ~ blò   bn⊙ never the less ─DSET~R─   Ç   blÑ blf bkÊ   ~ bj~
       ~bkïɯ Aah that was a ─DSET~R─   Ç   blϛ bl~ bl   f bjé   ~blṫ   ~aver the less
DSET─R   Ç   bký blò bk~   ~ bj   blï never the less DSET~R   ÇÃ
       bll bl⊙ bn   ~ biú   bIÀ never the less DSET R   Ç   blÑ blt bl~
~ biÉ   blⁿ never the less DSET R   C   bmϛ bnⁿ bll   n bj;
bn~ Aah that was a ─DSET~R─   Çç   biá blξ bla   bj4
                 ~bm~ Aah that was a ─DSET~R─   ÇÀ   bjD bk hk‡   ~ bn⊛
~bmt~ never the less DSET R   ÇÃ   bjï bm~ bif   f bj   biy never the less
DSET R   ÇÃ   bm~ bkⁿ bnX   ~ bit   bnd never the less ─DSET~R─   Ç
blò bn' bjf   ~ bjl   bnh~ Aah that was a   DSET R   Ç   bn~ bnt bnx   ~ bj
       bnÀ never the less   DSET R   Ç   bnè bnÑ bnⁿ   ~ biⁿ   bn⊛ Aah that was
a   DSET R   Ç   blÀ bnï biⁿ   W bjl   bk~ Aah that was a   DSET R   Ç
blϛ bk~ bj   W bjⁿ   bk~ Aah that was a ─DSET~R─   Ç   bj~ biá bkl l   ~ bk⊛
'   bit never the less ─DSET~R─   Ç   bjÀ bkS bkh   L~ bkl   biⁿ Aah that was a
DSET R   ÇÃ   bk8 bjÜ bk   f bjL   bh0~ never the less   DSET R   Ç
biⁿ   bk   ~ bm   bk   never the less ─DSET~R─   Çⁿ   bkN bi'   ~ bjt
       bji   never the less ─DSET~R─   Ç   bk4 bⱼ biξ   ~ bil   bk~ Aah that was a
DSET R < Ç   Σ   bj~ bj‡ bi;   JP bj~ P   I~ bk~ I I
    DSET R   ÇÃ   bk~ biÀ bi~   n bj;   bkf * FNTM~I~ⁿ ⁿ H   Helvetica
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Performing Writing at the Crossroads of Languages

Caroline Bergvall

In this essay I will argue, mainly through the work of three writers, that the development of what one could call plurilingual writing—writing that takes place across and between languages—highlights the impact which varying forms of plurilingualism (including second- or third-language writing) can have on our understanding of socio-linguistic frames and the performativity of cultural identities. I will try to show how, by critiquing the binary enclosure (Same pitted against Other) of monolingual identity (paired as it unfailingly is with national identity), plurilingual writing can be seen to be setting up the conditions through which to operate against the grain of conventionalised notions of translatability and intelligibility.

Indeed, as we shall see, these textual activations of different linguistic environments do not feed into the humanist universalism and its assumptions of transparent translatability which the banners of 'global culture' and 'multiculturalism' have come to signify. Rather, they are used to articulate and revalorise sites of untranslatability. As Nikos Papastergiadis usefully suggests, 'interaction between two cultures proceeds with the illusion of transferable forms and transparent knowledge but leads increasingly into resistant, opaque and dissonant exchanges'.[1] As such, issues of displacement, dislocation and plurilingualism become here positively envisaged as an investigation of the particularities of cultural localisation and linguistic cross-fertilisation. Sometimes subterraneanly, sometimes overtly, it is of course the question of origins, the myth of origins, as much as that of the Eternal Return (or homecoming) which this work critiques. Using as my main

examples a piece by Joan Retallack, Rosmarie Waldrop's *Key to the Language of America* and the Korean-American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*, it is by analysing some of the textual forms their investigations take that I will be making my points.

Unmastery

Charles Bernstein has argued in relation to Gertrude Stein that 'unmastering language is not a position of inadequacy; on the contrary, mastery requires repression and is the mark of an almost unrecoverable lack'.[2] A similar point is made by Blanchot in his discussion of Walter Benjamin's influential 'Task of the Translator' when he states that '[the translator] is always in more difficulty as he [sic] translates with the language to which he belongs than at a loss with the one he doesn't possess'.[3]

In both quotations, what seems to be at stake is a reevaluation of the notion of the inherent exile, which, following Mallarmé and a proto-Modernist Messianism, a writer would be facing in relation to their own language, and which writing, or 'le vers', would be called upon to transcend.[4] Mallarmé here famously pits what he considers to be the incompleteness, the imperfection of languages and of language ('le défaut des langues') against the motivated aspect of the poetic line. In sharp contradistinction to this over-valorisation of a transcendentalist poetic, both Blanchot and Bernstein suggest that it is by pulling out of their own linguistic community or by exercising a pulling out from conventionalised syntax, that the writer or the translator ground themselves in (rather than beyond) language and, more significantly, as language. Not by way of sublimating the language (*langue*) into the perfected *parole* of writing. But rather, by developing, through a sense of 'unmastery', and that of a language not 'possessed', writerly strategies which forward a position of linguistic and cultural displacement. Displacement is here envisaged, not as exile, but as the very condition for a positive understanding of re-location across and against the unificatory principles of national language and national culture. Paradoxically, this also frees the

writing up from the ideated constraints which the utopian longing
for the one unalterable Language, hidden behind the imperfections
of all languages, irremediably sets into place. It is as such telling
that the nostalgic view of language as Babelian loss has historically
frequently guaranteed the deployment of exclusionary and
nationalistic approaches to writing and hermeticism.[5]

Holes

Taking Blanchot's argument for unmastery and dis-possession one
step further, Deleuze talks of this 'unmastery' as an act of stutter-
ing. One which enables the manifestation of the inherent pluri-
lingualism contained within any live language and one which
seeks to inscribe the complex vitality of 'reterritorialization': 'Il ne
s'agit pas de parler une langue comme si l'on était un étranger, il
s'agit d'être un étranger dans sa propre langue.'[6] For Deleuze, the
point would be to write 'like a dog digging a hole' in order to find
what he calls the writer's 'own point of under-development'.[7] The
poetic and cultural significance of thinking about language in the
Deleuzean 'minor' scale, as a pooling of culturally buried or under-
developed fields, is that it seeks to establish the activity of writing
as an ongoing composite which must make itself open to the
particulars of space and place, while remaining forever suspicious
of any kind of national literature:

> Only the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from
> within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature and so
> on. Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of
> expression and really be able to develop its contents.[8]

Deleuze's insistence on a positive 'stuttering in one's own lan-
guage' inscribes in this respect a relation to language and lan-
guages which refutes their illusory homogeneity, and valorises
them, in their changing contemporaneity, as shot through by the
particulars of their multifarious historicity. This also has major
consequences on the way one might come to view the operations
of translation and the notion of translatability.

A thing Das Ding a ling

Joan Retallack's work as a whole, and her latest pieces even more pointedly, provides a challenging reflection on the demands of translation as seen from the point of view of writerly practice. In fact, one of her latest pieces, 'Scenes of Translation', sub-titled ironically 'from the Translation', uses the translative activity as its explicit motif and motivation. The text is also, perhaps inevitably, one of Retallack's most cross-lingual so far.

'Scenes of translation'⁹ presents itself as written in three languages (American, Cuban, German) which are organised across three distinct columns, headed: 'LOCAL TRAVELLING—EXCURSIONS—SIGHT-SEEING'. Hence, at entry, and with an eye on the heritage of translated literature, Retallack makes a point of assimilating the activities of the poet-translator as that of a tourist who absorbs and appropriates by snapshotting their way in and out of languages and literatures. Allusions to the writing of postcards, to being photographed, to carrying a (misleading) phrase-book, to deciphering phonetic transcriptions of some of the Cuban segments are scattered across the text and act as a reminder that no amount of factual and associative investigations into the landscape, or environment, of the text can ever piece together a full, complete, settled and settling picture of what is taking place. No package-tour to 'the woodland'. If the poet as tourist had intended to translate, to superimpose, from German to American, the work of Georg Trakl ('Trakl, I don't speak' being the very first words of the text in the left column, and excerpts of his poems being dispersed throughout the text), the setting into play, in the second line, of Cuban poet Jorge Guitart's own text entitled *Trakl, Yo No Se Aleman* immediately disturbs the dual traffic of conventional translation by introducing a third term (Spanish). Translation becomes instead explored, teased out, as an operation of dispersion, collation and assemblage through a range of visual, phonic, linguistic and trans-linguistic games. Here 'all der Fall ist/inflatable, growing' from the strains of Retallack's prosthetic reading and writing of Trakl. And if the writer is, at one point, sarcastically tempted to call up the 'untransvest' of writing and

translating, unswayingly she sets up 'a sort of/unc conditional hypothermal/of accident untransflatable'.

Retallack's 'untransflatability', which one could take to mean both conflation and dispersion, points here to a network of fielded navigations between German, Spanish and English, between sonic games which extort lost familiarities out of cross-lingual rapprochements 'a thing das Ding a ling/pebbles fall-ing l'ink Kieselstein', and between sections of syllabic splittings: '...LOSS/NINOS MO URNING BECAUSE EL ECTRICK CIT YO AS PERGES NACHT AS PERITE(Y)/LOSSNINOS MOURN IN GBE CAUSEEL LECT RICK CITY O...'. Through its insisting syllabic variations, the sample above inevitably reminds that to leave blanks between words can be traced historically as a phenomenon whose aim has always been to reduce, disable ambiguities and control the dissemination of sense. It is then telling that Retallack should choose to close, rather than end, her text by opening it up to a beyond of our present literacy and translative awareness: '[the rest of this poem is (also) (too) in tatters]'.

No whole

In many ways one could see in this piece a writerly and highly problematised application of Benjamin's claim that translation should be envisaged as a process which needs to address the foreignness of languages and which inevitably needs to *take place at the site* of the language-text being translated, and not *take its place* by appropriating it into the language and culture of arrival. By turning translation into an unpacking of various sources, and allowing for these sources to be relayed to the reader without being churned into an intelligibly smooth, 'translated', ultimately ideologically obscuring, textmass, Retallack attempts to broaden that site, those sites.

Here, translation is made to function as a reflection on writing. As such no original text, but its own slow forming and interpretation of reading, leads it on. The Trakl sections act as a prompt, one motif amongst others. 'There is no unity to be recovered, no task of thinking of the origin as such, since the origin, now the

anorigin, is already that on which rests the move to a synthetic unity. Any unity will be an after-effect.'[10] Or as the critic Rosie Braidotti, quoting the artist Martha Roszler, succinctly puts it in her essay on the polyglot, 'there cannot be fragments where there is no whole'.[11] Rather than talking of a prosthetic writing/reading (which implies the restitution of an original), perhaps one should therefore talk of Retallack's work as an approach to cultural and linguistic material which provides a cybernetic understanding of writing, one which constructs interpretative, located and reconstructed environments for reading.

The practice of translation as a writerly form, can, as seen above, strain readers' understanding of the relation they entertain with their own and with other linguistic cultures. By 'unmastering' the principles of translation and 'stuttering' through its utilisation of materials, such a practice problematises the viability of monolingualism and critiques the colonialist and nationalistic strands which still underlie more conventional views on translation. It also sets up a bridge between process-based procedural work (which much of Retallack's work rests on) and the issues of social and personal relocation which much cross-lingual and experimental translation work comes out of.

By contrast, Robert Kelly's homophonic rewriting of Hölderlin, 'Path Moss', pulls at the English to the point of making it 'sound' (and 'look') German, 'So sprocket though unfeared it / Mix, kneller then is far-mooded'. Homophonic translations, what the French call 'traducson', enable games of correspondence between texts and languages. But by decontextualising, or indeed evading, some of the more internal layers of the first text, they can also replicate, rather than question, issues of absorption and appropriation in translation. Kelly's comments on his text are quite revealing of this: 'Working with Holderlin's text, trying to hear it in English. As English. The point of the homoeophonic: to hear the other as own.'[12] That the sole phonic aspect of the entry-text should be made to carry the definition of it being 'other' (on what grounds?) at the exclusion of the wider semiotic systems which structure the text and its language and for the purpose of subsuming it into an 'own' (definition?) is in itself quite remarkable.

That a procedure of this kind can be applied at a formalistic level
while showing a casual disregard for the kind of cultural under-
pinnings such a procedure *could* unpack is furthermore nothing if
not troubling. The wider issues of linguistic and literary relocation
are here kept firmly within the bounds of a process-based activity
which maintains, textually as well as critically, the status quo of a
universalist stance: 'You are studying a text that no-one wrote.'

Make notice me

For writers like Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Rosmary Waldrop, Anne
Tardos, Guillermo Gomez Pena and others who resort to using
translation procedures or multiple languages in their work,
formalistic devices cannot be divorced from an awareness of issues
of locatedness, paired as it is for them with experiences of immi-
grancy and migrancy. Rather, they form part and parcel of the
conceptualisations of their writing: what does it mean to 'be' and
'be seen to be' a foreigner. In effect, the issue here will often be that
of finding a way to textually grapple with the dictates of social
relocation and the making of new linguistic identities.

For cross-lingual, as well as for second or third language
writers, it is the unmastering, rather than the unmastery, of
language which is from the onset embedded in the textual project
itself. From the onset, it cannot but articulate itself at a cultural and
linguistic slant from the linguistic cultures they are writing in. This
underlying 'unmastering' may in turn choose to apply itself to
master, to reabsorb, to neutralise this gap, as in the case of Joseph
Conrad's English.[13] It may also, as in the case of Beckett or Stein, be
explored to highlight and forward rhetorics of unmastery within
the second language. Forever navigating between the givens of
their own cultural language and the acquired familiarities of the
adopted tongue, one could ask oneself what kind of articulacies
can arise from such a project and what kind of formal and ideo-
logical strategies, what kind of cultural placing it does enable (and
disable).

Writing out of these premises, writers cannot fully mirror
themselves into, or for that matter internally divorce themselves

from, the larger agencies of the language they write themselves into, one could speculate that the parallelism between the construction of identity and the coming to language is here reactivated by this move into another socio-linguistic environment. 'You have the feeling that the new language is a resurrection: new skin, new sex', writes Kristeva in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*.[14] Beckett's well-known explanation of his switching to French as 'pour faire remarquer moi' (literally and in 'estranged' French: to make notice me)[15] is in this respect telling of the potential for diverting and rethinking the performance of identity which the second language may provoke.

This cannot, of course, be separated from an acknowledgement of the silencing mechanisms which the native tongue may have established, at a personal as well as trans-personal level. In the case of Beckett, whose French textuality never fails to call into question the making and unmaking of language, as much as for Joyce, who did intralingually 'invent a new language within English' (Bernstein), it is difficult to ignore that their work would one way or another have been articulated in response to the collective exile set into motion by the British attempts at eradicating Irish culture and language. Writing oneself out of one's language while recirculating it textually could hence be seen, not as a way of mourning the language left behind, but rather as a way of unmasking the role any dominant linguistic culture plays in guaranteeing the authentication of its memory and the univocality of its identity. As we shall see, for both Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Rosmarie Waldrop, to write in a number of languages and registers enables them to question not only the performativity of identity but also that of their relation to the performativity of history.

Simulated pasts

For the Korean-American writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, writing constructs its own particularised environment by problematising the lessons of history and language. More specifically, writing will seek to deconstruct her status of naturalised exile by refusing to

master it as a social and writerly identity. In her book *Dictee*, the issue is one which announces 'a second coming' out of the 'simulated pasts resurrected in memoriam'.[16] The emphasis is on simulation, the artificiality of memory, the construction of the past.

The title of her cross-genre, cross-lingual book, first published in 1982 in the States, and recently reprinted, is in itself immediately indicative of her textual strategies. Indeed, the title means 'dictation' in French but it has tellingly lost its required French accent (*dictée*). Losing the conventional accent announces thus another kind of accentuation. One which acknowledges her past as it now stands, recollection only feasible if montaged in-between cultures and languages. It is by losing one accent at entry that Cha signals the multiple accents of her polyglot identity and the activities of translation it implicitly demands.

The first few pages, a prologue to the book, are a jumbled-up attempt at fixing school-days experiences in a French Catholic school. Grammar lessons, 'Complétez les phrases suivantes', coexist with English learning sections—

> 1. I want you to speak
> 2. I wanted him to speak
> 3. I shall want him to speak

—and religious imageries and scansions. All of which provides Cha with the opportunity to set the wider scene for the tellings of the book, 'Tell me the story / Of all these things / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us', in the languages which make her up: 'From A Far / What nationality / or what kindred and relation / ... Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other / Tombe des nues de naturalized / what transplant to dispel upon'.[17]

The opening theme of dictation is of course also telling of the more deep-rooted cultural and historical dictations which form the main motifs and questions of Cha's book: how does one manage one's languages in relation to history, memory, identity, gender. What barbarisms assists language's and identity's foundational plots.

En suivant la vue absente

The textual work of *Dictee* consists of an amalgam of stylistic devices and of fact-finding props, such as photographic 'evidence', hand-written 'documents', official administrative letters, Western and Eastern anatomical maps, French-English translations, dual-language poems, Chinese calligraphic texts. Calling herself ironically a teller of good fortunes—'Let the one who is diseuse. Diseuse de bonne aventure. Let her call forth'[18]—it is to recover only to simultaneously destabilise the viability of the traces she draws out around her personal experiences as well as the ways in which she handles iconic female figures of recent Korean history, that she commits her exploration of cross-lingualism.

Cha's frequent use of unclaimed personal pronouns (the narratives are full of loosely attributed 'I' and mutable 'she', 'we'), embedded as they are in a number of incomplete proper-name narratives which criss-cross between the 'personal' and the 'historical', renders the material all-in-all elusive, frequently ambiguous and drawing a tenuous line between activating and creating memory. In this she seems to be problematising the tenability of taking refuge in exile-narratives for the construction of her naturalised Asian-American identity. The inscription of loss is not here integrated to the promises held by redemptive and/or confessional narratives. Indeed, this dark, harrowing book, constantly critiques and resists, rather than affirms as 'proofs', the material assembled and deployed. All are but aspects of a 'sequence, narrative, variation/on make believe'.[19]

Cha's dotted accounts of her family history against the backdrop of the violent colonisations of Korea are pitted against any temptation to add her voice to the often nostalgic and reconciliatory project of much post-colonial writing. I would argue that it is precisely because Cha cannot dissociate her narrative treatments from the impulse to manifest, rather than describe, her cross-lingualism that it makes for such uncomfortable, uncompromising read. There is nothing stable, no 'return' envisageable behind the constructions of her textualised languages: 'Conséquemment / en suivant la vue absente / which had ceased to appear / already it

has been / has been / has been without ever / occurring to itself
that it should remember / Sustain a view. Upon / itself.'[20]

Although there is a pull in the entire book towards 'Uttering
again to re-vive. The forgotten',[21] the collaging of *Dictee*'s many
textual voices, and her cross-fertilisation of languages as well as
cultural heritages, do not serve to reify the experience of the exile,
that ultimate Other, but rather to engage in a series of profound,
restless meditations on the ways in which to document 'the map of
her journey', that 'extended journey, horizontal in form, in con-
cept'—the journey of her writing and its unvarying displacements
of any constitutive myth of origins.

Homi Bhabha, following in this the terminology set up by
Chicano writers, defines the space such writing occupies as
'borderline': 'Borderline artists may have fragmented narratives,
archives that are empty, memories that are potent yet powerless,
but their experience of survival gives them a special insight into
the constructed, artefactual, strategic nature of those events that
are memorialised, by the powerful, as being the 'facts' of life, or the
reportage of historical record.'[22] Borderline writing is here seen to
mean not only a pushing at the boundaries between languages but,
more precisely, a localised carving out of these boundaries into
zones of activity and experientiality which empty out the assump-
tions on which monolingual cultures rest. As such, the borderline
as zone is unstable and changeable. It is also highly specific of the
particulars of each writer or writing community. It functions by
making inroads into the different linguistic communities the writer
is, one way or another, associated with, and demonstrates a critical
and poetic withdrawal from belonging to 'either side' of borders. It
invariably strains conventions of intelligibility, both linguistically
and at a wider cultural frame.

The role of the reader in such an environment is immediately
questioned and contextualised. Indeed, the allusive syntax and
photographed material with which Cha taps into events and signs
of resonance to readers familiar to Korean culture, establishes, for
a reader unfamiliar with that culture, or with the experience of
'naturalisation' (such as myself), an uncomfortable rift between
what it is that I know that I'm reading (hence recognizing: the form

used, the languages used, the nine Greek Muses which structure
the book's nine chapters, my own incomprehension when faced
with Eastern calligraphy) and what it is I think I am reading
(hence presume to be reading: the form used, the languages, the
nine Greek Muses which structure the book's nine chapters, my
own incomprehension when faced with Eastern calligraphy). The
question of the reader's role in a book of this kind calls up again
and again the question of cultural locatedness. That of the writer as
well as that of the reader. It forces a process of slowing down
which pushes up against the bounds of one's cultural intelligibil-
ities. One which demands of readers that they take into account
and as an indissociable part of reading, their own cultural and
linguistic background.

Stubborn chunks

This experience of being prompted to recognize one's own cultural
specificities when presented with the 'unreadable' specificities of a
writer's cultural foreground is also what forms the very basis of
the Mexican writer and performance artist, Guillermo Gomez-
Pena. Most of his projects are written in several languages, usually
a mix of American-English, inner-city slang, Mexican and Chicano
idioms. Pena is also one of the first to have termed this multi-
lingual approach to writing: *borderlanguage* . From the point of
view of text-based performance, it constitutes one of the better-
known examples of a writing strategy which uses linguistic
differences to locate and problematise issues of cultural domi-
nance, linguistic supremacy, marginalisation and the universal
Other. It is the conflictual divisiness of locatable linguistic and
cultural differences that his work seeks to display and play with.
In the same way as for Cha, it rests not so much on the creation of
one ideal reader as on the fruitful resistance to writing-in the one
reader. It is, for instance, telling that during the time of his collabo-
rations with Cuban writer Coco Fusco, they would change the
leading language according to where they were performing, to the
one or ones that the specific audience was most likely not to be
fully or at all familiar with.[23]

To establish points, blocks of incomprehension in the audi-
ence/reader is here far from a hermetic device in the proto-
Modernist sense. Rather it is one which reclaims and repositions
the locatedness and fluctualities of languages. For if one could
superficially say that Pena's projects determine to a large extent a
pointed, locatable community of readers or audiences (the Chicano
population of New Mexico), the sheer juxtaposition and range of
idioms and languages he uses, strains even this particular reader-
ship/audience and highlights instead the unstable plurilingualism
of the multiple and multiplied subject position. Reterritorialisation
does not in this sense so much attempt to actualise an eternal
return to a mythified Mexico, does not so much essentialize the
otherness of the foreigner, or the stranger, as inscribe the validity
of linguistic *mestizaje*[24] in the constitution of contemporary
identities.

Similarly, by working out of and showing up the split language
base from which she originates, Cha locates herself precisely and
culturally at the junction between specific linguistic communities
and histories. Thus she also explicitly questions the linguistic
grounds which determine the negative construction of difference
and which displace her work and identity as other. It is by accu-
mulating linguistic locales, English-American among them, rather
than developing a textual identity which subsumes itself to
monolingual identity, that Cha seeks to articulate and reinscribe
our understanding of national language and culture. Her textuality
functions as a space of intervention which syncretises and juxta-
poses linguistic systems and revels in the heterogeneity of inter-
locked cultural differences. As Rosie Braidotti summarises it,
'Writing is for the polyglot a process of undoing the illusory
stability of fixed identities, bursting open the bubble of ontological
security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site.'[25].

The fact that writers such as Cha and Pena would not only
critique monolingualism, their nationalist and exclusionary
implications, but ultimately revel in the potentialities which the
destabilisations of heterogeneous writerly and linguistic practice
contain, is one clear sign that the very notion of socio-cultural
displacement can no longer be sustained by the parameters of exile

literature or for that matter, by the oft uncritical and unspecific valorisation of hybridity as a third, compensatory and translative term.

Jarrings, interruptions, the assumptions of incomprehension in the reader, all point to a positive re-evaluation of untranslatability against a discrepantly universalist translatability. Bhabha tellingly speaks of this as 'the stubborn chunks', the opaque, resistant detail in the traffic between cultures which signals contextual differences against a totalizing project: 'Hybrid hyphenations emphasise the incommensurable elements—the stubborn chunks—as the basis of cultural identifications.'[26] In such a context, it is untranslatability, not translatability, which favours a recognition of the particularities of personal and collective experience.

Except for

For Rosmary Waldrop, both a poet and a noted translator from both German and French, the project of her *A key to the Language of America* does not so much rest on being from the onset 'seen to be' a foreigner to America, but rather on the ways in which it is her process of reading and writing which brings home and clarifies her own condition as an immigrant to America: a 'white, educated European who did not find it difficult to get jobs'.[27] The title of her book is the same as that of the book which supports her exploration. Written by the missionary Roger Williams and published in 1634, *A Key into the Language of America* was, when it was first published, also subtitled: 'or an Help to the Language of the Natives of that Part of America called New England'. Being the first systematic and sympathetic study of a native American language, Narrangasett, and its customs, the original book took a critical view of the colonialist attitudes of the burgeoning Christian settler communities of the region and led to Williams being exiled from his community. That Waldrop should decide to use the same title as his, for her rewriting of Williams' work, is of interest in relation to the activity of superimposition this seems to imply. As if her personal experience could only but graft itself, critically and poetically, onto an American landmark piece to render itself

visible: 'All in all, my book could be called an immigrant's take on the heritage and complex early history of my adopted country' she writes in her preface.

By seemingly taking over the material of this book, seemingly colonialising it with her own late-twentieth century readings, Waldrop shows for the ambiguous complexities inscribed in attempting to enter into and relate to the underlying, sometimes buried or evacuated material of her adopted country. Indeed, if she states quite clearly that 'like the first settlers, I came from Europe. I came, expecting strangeness, expecting to be disoriented, but was shocked, rather, by my lack of culture shock', she also immediately acknowledges as part of her own Eurocentric heritage, the colonialist attitude and blind spots that enabled the making of white, Christian Europeanist early America: 'Nothing seemed different from my native Germany—except for the Indian place-names.' For Waldrop then, the gesture of superimposition enables a reflection on the ways in which tracing up linguistic histories can favour a critical and personal reassessment of one's cultural givens and assumptions. Waldrop's 'except for' and 'like the first settlers' is revealing of the historical identification she first applied in order to settle in America. This is in stark contrast to the destabilised and decentred manner in which she comes to handle her material and question her own identity sites in relation to it: *'Year of parades. Celebrating exploits unsuited to my constitution. As if every move had to be named expansion, conquest, trinity, and with American intonation.'*[28]

Placing her text within Williams's overall structure, Waldrop chooses to set up a collage which encompasses Narrangasett vocabulary, passages from Williams's seventeenth-century English text and her own poetic interventions. Digging into the book in order to excavate her own experiences as a contemporary Americanised poet—'an eye devouring its native region must devote special attention to its dialect'[29]—Waldrop highlights the inevitable clashes and discontinuities which inform, at any stage of its development, the violently recuperative nature of early Americanisation. By maintaining different typestyles and lay-outs as well as a range of idioms, she highlights some of these clashes in the context of her own writing: 'Prefer the movement of planets or

buffalo to European coat-men, identifiable strains to city planning even when applied to lexical items. Wetomémese. A Little House. Which women live apart in, the time of their exhaustive volume.'[30]

Her writing of reading tends towards a process of non-absorption which acts throughout as a reminder of the disparate and differential sources which form her project. By implication, it also calls up the disparate and differential sources on which any monolingual community rests but neutralises by recirculating and translating them back into itself: Deleuze's take on the social evacuation of languages' inherent plurilingualism.

Thematic of the body, 'flesh, considered a cognitive region', and issues of gender—'is called woman or wife'—are furthermore used throughout as one of Waldrop's observational vantage-points. The way she locates in Williams's text the cultural burying and reorganisation of the female gender, seems in fact to be a prime factor in informing Waldrop's linguistic reterritorialisation. By applying personal commentary to historical source material, she identifies the points of cultural closure which define her as female: 'I was stuck in a periodicity I supposedly share with Nature, but tired of making concessions to dogs after bones.'[31] Waldrop's book provides in this sense a stimulating example of the ways in which cross-lingual experience not only calls up internal sites of cultural appropriation, but also and more pressingly, extricates some of the foundational narratives which add a strain on the processing of identity and the acquisition of the second or third linguistic environment. For Waldrop, the activation of her cross-lingualism heightens, rather then minimises, problematics of gender embedded as they are in historical and linguistic structures: 'I must explain my sex / for all its stubbornness / is female / and was long haunted, diligently / by confusions of habit / and home, time and / the Western world.'[32] The critical activity of reading and the collages she develops to locate her personal experience act here as a 'borderline' process between contemporaneity and historical material, between gender and desire. The intertexual and stylistically dispersed manner in which Waldrop proposes to assimilate this borderline provides her with a means to examining linguistic relocation not only as inescapably

articulated by the pervasiveness of gender performativity but also as a way of pushing against the limits of the differential signs of gender, *'I knew getting rid of prejudices would make me fall into some other puddle'*. The other puddle. This is the pervasiveness of sexuality and the questioning of sexual desire which, in her text, both denies and allows the key to her incorporated hyphenisation: 'If the dark quarries inner caves / the sexual act takes on / a sheen of purchase / the difference of invasion / and exodus obscured by labor'.[33]

It is on an opening, an open question, looking neither 'forward' nor 'backward' but somewhere along the maps of a performative present that she concludes her text.

Else-here

As I hope to have shown, the premise which could be seen to underlie and underline the cross-lingual work discussed here is that of decentring monolingualism and problematising the contemporaneity of hyphenated identities. Being situated neither 'here' nor 'there', neither in 'the past' nor in an unconditional present, but else-here, the question of contemporaneity, as addressed by these poets and many others with them, rests on the evaluation of historical and personal material from the point of view of a particularised and complex socio-spatial locatedness.

In all the pieces discussed, the writers indicate structurally the connection between the form taken by their textual material and the subjective experience of relocation and untranslatability which informs this material. Methodologies deployed are invariably brought to light as part of the text. In this one could read, not only a refusal to obscure in the reader the various tools which construct the text and the performativity of identity but more importantly, an approach to writing which demands of readers that they address their own locatedness in the reading of the work. It is then to the loosening up of the boundaries between private and public, to the opening up of personal experience as irremediably playing on and played by wider social frames, that much of this work finds its motivation.

Placed neither at a transcendental degree zero, nor at a nostalgic point of longing for one cohesive language, the dispersed textualities staged here highlight some of the implications of the pluri-lingual experience which is increasingly straining the social fabric of contemporary societies. This dynamic and pragmatic approach to textual experimentation as an open and running commentary on the tenuous monolingualism of our socio-cultural spheres strikes me as one of the more optimistic, responsive and exciting aspects of this kind of work. Indeed, and by way of conclusion, Anne Tardos's *Cat licked the Garlic* shows quite humorously how removed from the anxieties surrounding the myth of Babel, cross-lingual textuality envisages itself to be:

> Some of them restent en anglais.
> Some of them then die wenigen
> petit pois go jouer. Them then die
> vielen grossen állati nagy Imre.
> Sway this way, petit pois des bois.
>
> Then je partition my own (mon)
> petit cheval, c'est égal, go. Play
> Go. Go and play Noh. Playdough.
> Woa.
>
> This way and ainsi our ancestors
> formed ce qu'on appelle die
> Sprache.[34]

Notes

1. Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', *Third Text* 32 (1995): 18.
2. Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 146-47.
3. Quoted by Peggy Kamuf in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1985) 155.
4. 'Seulement, sachons n'existerait pas le vers: lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complètement supérieur' (Stephane Mallarmé, 'Crise de Vers', *Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade [Paris: Gallimard, 1945] 364).
5. See A. Berman *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), Gérard Genette *Mimologics* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1995), Sanford Budick and

Wolfgang Iser, ed., *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996).

6. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977; 1996) 73.
7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 17.
8. Deleuze and Guattari 18.
9. Sections of this work have appeared in *Arras* 2. The text in its entirety is to be published as part of Joan Retallack's *How to do Things with Words* collection for Sun and Moon. This commentary is based on a Xeroxed MS, with thanks to J. R.
10. A. Benjamin, 'Translating Origins: Psychoanalysis and Philosophy', *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992).
11. Rosie Braidotti, 'Nomads in a Transformed Europe: Figurations for an Alternative Consciousness', *Cultural Diversity in the Arts: Art, Art Policies and the Facelift of Europe*, ed. Ria Lavrijsen (Amsterdam: KIT, 1993) 44.
12. Robert Kelly '[working from Friedrich Hölderlin's 'Patmos'] Path Moss', *Chain* 4 (1997): 109-16.
13. Still, it is ironic how the thematics of novels such as *Nostromo* or *Heart of Darkness* betray Conrad's preoccupation with cultural dislocation.
14. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Harvester, 1991) 15.
15. Enoch Brater, *Why Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) 47.
16. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman, 1995) 150.
17. Cha 150.
18. Cha 123.
19. Cha 129.
20. Cha 125.
21. Cha 150. '[T]o re-vive' here plays on both the English 'revive' as a calling up of the past and the French 'revivre' to live again, to be (a)live again, as a shedding from the past. There is also a French play on the female adjective 'vive'.
22. Homi Bhabha, 'Beyond the Pale: Art in Multicultural Translation', *Cultural Diversity in the Arts: Art, Art Policies and the Facelift of Europe*, ed. Ria Lavrijsen (Amsterdam: KIT, 1993) 23.
23. For discussions between Coco Fusco and G. Gomez-Pena see Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New P, 1995).
24. *Mestizaje* is defined by Rafael Pérez-Torres as 'the manifestation of the multiplicitous discourses from which Chicanos create a sense of identity. Mestizaje becomes a racial/radical marker of self-determination ... a cultural strategy [which relies] on the mixing and medling of cultures that defines the contemporary condition of world culture' (*Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, against Margins* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995] 210).
25. Braidotti 34.
26. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 219.

27. Rosmary Waldrop, *A Key to the Language of America* (New York: New Directions, 1994) xix.
28. Waldrop 60.
29. Waldrop 5.
30. Waldrop 13.
31. Waldrop 54.
32. Waldrop 56.
33. Waldrop 52.
34. Anne Tardos, *Cat Licked the Garlic* (Vancouver: Tsunami, 1992) unnumbered pages.

Anne Tardos

UXUDO

with the participation of ghos-ti

It is in the rapid language switches that the plurilingual text first and foremost announces itself. It's in the stop-start structure which roots out the languages framed and in use, and the various ways in which they intersect, through mixed speech, borrowings and compounds, and neologistic sounding games, that the mechanics and polemics of such a textual environment find themselves defined. The reader, pressed hard between words written in language they don't know, words written in language they know, words written in language they thought they knew.

Issues of stylistic opaqueness brush against the live question of cultural idioms and language differences. The fraught nature of translatability is played out across numerous stylised and untranslatable translation games. Is what I cannot comprehend another language, a trick of the text, the slip of a tongue. Translatability (problematising it) becomes a vital aspect of the structure. A regulator as much as a modulator. The phonetic spelling out of sounds and sound associations, for instance, guides the reader across pronunciation borders. It seems to act as a geling factor, yet successfully fails to standardise the languages of the text. Nonsensical, sonic play on and of words is here more than a stylistic banter. Closer to a linguistic dissonance which would wear the ironies of its whereabouts on the narrows of a sleeve.

Similarly, words, nouns, familiar expressions, echoes of conversation, shrapnels of speech, or song, are explored, teased out, seem to organise themselves into parallel cumulative structures, dispute the legitimacies of syntactical ordering to show up the synchronic displays of multiple languages.

The intricacies of such disruptive, uprooted dealings inevitably add humourous correspondences to the work. Nothing equals another thing equals another equals another. In cross-lingual pollination, the linguistic sign seems as differential as any saussurean stylistics might wish for it. And the sonic games, cross-lingual puns, private riddles and neological turns which, rather gleefully, punctuate most of the plurilingual work I have come across, would seem to push this point.

Yet each node, pivot, moment of switch from one language to another jolts and ties differentiality to the thorny question of cultural origination and linguistic diversity. As a textual mode or genre, plurilingual writing is openly predicated on the structuring of particularised cultural exchanges and on playing out the linguistic

flexibilities of polyglots and cultural migrants. Indeed, the link between literary strategy and cultural belonging, between language acquisition and textual disposition, between the private and the public, the emotive, mundane and the artifactual, aestheticised experience of cultural idioms, is by definition at the heart of such textuality and provides the text with its conceptual as well as more personal motifs.

The plurilingual text saturates language with languages. It develops strategies out of the detailed perception and experience of borders: borderlines: boundaries: where are they: what are they: do they do: to the tongue: to the body: to the organisation of memory: in the sentence: in the understanding of what is and what is not: translatable. It plays the histories and coded treacheries of monolingual alliances at their own game, yet does not respond to the modern locus of origin and exile and sublimation. Critically, it takes on board the idea of belonging as a task, a piecemeal, contextualising affair.

Indeed, cultural allegiance is not experienced as necessarily predicated on linguistic origin. And the sense of linguistic belonging is in turn neither necessarily nor clearly predicated on the acquisition of one's "first" language. In fact, the very notion of a first language is up for grabs. Shall we call "first" the one(s) you were brought into or the one(s) you use daily or the one(s) you are asked to read the text in. Of these, which one would be "the" one.

Thinking about the accent Conrad never lost, is "the" one located in the mouth. Is it located in the glottis. Is this where mother lodges the tongue.

My linguistic body walks in the split fields of experience that each tongue brings in. I have many tongues does this give me many mothers. She has rooted her own language in my languages yet mother is neither tongue nor country. I cannot return to and I don't. No return where there was always more than one departure. Instead, I turn to and that is where I find her.

It is often argued that bilingualism itself ought to be considered a first language. Would this, could this, include silence. That which takes the place of language acquisition when excised by political or cultural impositions. That which knows that questions of ancestry and access to familial antecedents find themselves more often than not tied up with the experience of uprootedness and lack of access. And that to return is full of mournful contradictions and impossible retrievals which are mixed in with the twists and turns of chosen or enforced linguistic affiliations. Nothing equals absolutely. Everything indelible is relational.

Cultural fixation on origin and the naturalisation of etymological and social filiations is fundamentally refuted by a textuality which disturbs the hegemony of monolingualism. Intimately, inherently it throws up the xenophobic asymmetries of difference (which one's good which one's not which one's to keep which one's to throw out).

8

Perhaps for this reason, does the act of remembering, as a turning to, rather than a returning, that is, as one which enables a constitutive activity of memory, play such a vital part in setting up the grounds for writing. Samples, physical "proofs" of displacement, of relocation, of having-been "there" and "here", are, elliptically or outright, gathered up from (auto)biographical, familial material, scavenged through for personal (personalised) use. Some of which verbal, some visual.

What proofing of the video or photo-album takes place that verbal language might not retain, works alongside the multiplicity of speech and the subliminal logic of sounds: emotive jolts: physiological graphs: recorded takes of diagonal lines. The writer will treat the image as she treats nominative chains. Loosely, fluidly, ludically, the text-image compounds are worked to form an inseparable tracking down of the physiologies of memory.

This framed echo-chamber does not illustrate nor translate. Nor does it erase its elements into one, seamless, cohesive readerliness. It enriches its gymnastics of clues and games of tones with clashes between personal grammars and social usage. Only the precision of such divided attentions can carry off the emotive and psycho-social genealogies which the plurilingual text is interjecting into the overall cultural body.

London, 1999

9

Nicole Brossard

TYPHON DRU

Translated by Caroline Bergvall

138

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

The difficulty and dilemma of translation lies of course in its
tendency towards cultural appropriation. A "making French",
to use Baudelaire's phrase in relation to his Poe translations,
which would not only attempt to make the shift from the one
language to the next imperceptible, but which would, more
forcefully, seek to absorb "as French" the translated text. If
writing is always about construction, translation is perhaps
doubly so: not only a construction of writing but one which
somehow calls up tensions in the translation language as it
enters into dialogue with the original text. In the case of my
translation of these two texts by Nicole Brossard, I have been
interested in thinking about such tensions. Not how can I
make this image or this word or this sentence in the French
necessarily fit English turns and phrases and images best but
rather how would the French (-Canadian) text strain English
and what kind of textual play would this enable.

Nicole Brossard's project is one which has consistently
explored and played with notions of cultural and poetic con-
structedness. One which has sought, in particular, to strain our
readings of the socialised, sexualised body through textual
body. To allow the translation process to become a kind of
building site for a "translated-English" seemed to me, in this
sense, to provide an obvious methodological approach to her
work. As such, I have tried to integrate, albeit in a subtle and
punctual rather than generalised manner, to my writing-read-
ing of Brossard's work, an additional layer of reading. A cross-
lingual reading which would let the original text destabilise in
places the language of arrival and bring about new connec-
tions. Thus seeking to bring forward Brossard's texts while
forcing up, not absorbing, the actuality of the translation: by
allowing for some neologisms, split prepositions, inversions,
syntactical links to indicate the double vision of this call and
response. Voir double. Reconstructing her text as much as
reflecting on the two languages.

<div align="right">*Caroline Bergvall*</div>

Typhon Dru

et c'est l'envol vagues typhon dru
comme un coude dans la nuit
rai de mœurs
le monde est vite obscur

partout où la bouche est excentrique
il neige et quelque chose est chaud
sous la langue, le moi s'enroule émoi
plane ruban de joie
paupières harmoniques

30

and this is lift-off breakers typhondru
like an elbow in the night
slit of ways
the world drops quickly

every where mouth is eccentric
it snows something's warm
under tongue the self coils anticipation
glides joy ribbon
eyelid harmonics

31

car le monde est vite obscur
et la nuit me rend avide
de partout frôle tant
que la langue avec son sel
un à un les verbes les troue
de silence, typhon dru

32

because the world drops
quickly and night makes me crave
through and through brushes so
that the tongue its salt
one by one riddles
verbs with silence, typhondru

33

en plein vol si j'ouvre les bras
mes cheveux sont lents dans l'oxygène
je prétends qu'il y a de vastes lois
au-delà des villes et des sépultures
ruban de voix, lame des yeux

ce soir si tu rapproches ton visage
et que la civilisation s'étire
au bout de tes bras, ce soir
si en plein vol tu rattrapes mon image
dis que c'était au loin
comme un dé dans la nuit

in full flight if I open my arms
my hair is slow with oxygen
I pretend there are vast laws
beyond cities and sepulchres
voice ribbon, eye current

tonight if you bring your face in
and civilisation stretches
out to your arms end tonight
if in full flight you pull my image up
say in the distance there was
like a dice in the night

et pendant que mon sexe songe à l'aurore
mouille muqueuses heureuses
il neige et la proximité encore
je prétends que c'est l'aura
ou l'image asymétrique
de l'image brève en plein vol

and while my sex thinks of daybreak
soaks mucously beaming
it snows and proximity still
I pretend it's the aura
or the asymetric image
of a briefly imaged in full flight

lame de fond, cérémonie de l'image
mon cœur est agile
l'émotion entre nous
matière du rire, matière c'est vrai
et ma voix qui craque
dans le froid rose des galaxies

undercurrent, ceremony of the imaged
my heart is agile
this emotion between us
materialises laughter, material indeed
and my voice snaps
in the galaxies' cold coral

je prétends veiller en silence
dans le froid rose des galaxies
je prétends que si l'œil est noir
il ne peut pas veiller

partout où la bouche rieuse virtuelle
d'énergie dévore l'aube déverse son oui
elle crie du mieux qu'elle jouit
tympan, mauves sonores
vastes lois qui lèchent
au loin le fond de l'air

I pretend to be watching in silence
in the galaxies' cold coral
I pretend that if the eye is dark
it cannot keep watch

every where a teasing mouth of virtual ener
gy devours dawn discharges yes
cries out for better she comes
eardrum resonant mauves
vast laws that lick
a far the air drum

au matin *e* plane haut
et les rivières sont longues
sous ma peau d'autant de parcours
à saveur de femme et de lucidité
au matin, la rivière est haute
quand je te touche
face à face dans l'affirmation

by morning her glides high
and rivers are long
under my skin they're many routes
cream of woman and of lucidity
by morning the river's high
when I touch you face
to face in affirmation

42

43

Appendix I : Interview

148

magma
POETRY MAGAZINE

Caroline Bergvall

INTERVIEW AND POEM

poems from
around the world

reviews of
recent poetry
collections

Autumn 1999

15

149

Speaking in tongues

The varieties of context .

John Stammers interviews **Caroline Bergvall**

Caroline Bergvall is a poet and performance writer. She is Director of Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts. The greater part of her text The Underlip *has been published in extracts by Raddle Moon, Angel Exhaust, Fragmente and Trois. Her long poem* The Hungry Form *was featured in the anthology* Milk of Late *(Equipage 1994). Her choral poem* Strange Passage *(Equipage 1993) was awarded the Showroom Live Art Commission 1993. A selection of texts is featured in* Out of Everywhere: An Anthology of Innovative Female Poets *(Reality Street 1995); the Sound & Language series on performance writers; and the Conductors of Chaos anthology (Picador 1996). She has developed text-based performances and installations with other artists. Her text installation* Éclat *is published in* Sound & Language *(1996). Her most recent project* Jets-Poupée *is due from Ram Press in Autumn 1999.*

JS: How did you start writing?

CB: I suppose there's two answers I would give. The first approach is the more private approach to writing. Manipulating language in the way many people do in their teens and decide to go from there. And there's a more public approach to it when you make the decision of trying to turn that into articulatable work. That would have been in my very early twenties. Part of it was actually in French because that is my first language, but then it moved over into English very quickly. Having moved over into English is when the whole writing became a public project to me, it then became the idea of getting it out. For me the idea of the move into another language became the idea of writing.

JS: So in what way did this move into another language become the idea of writing?

CB: What it demands of you, when you move from your first language into another language, as a writer, the person who manipulates language, verbal material, is that you become part of the activity or commitment to writing. It became the fact that I am not English but I am writing in English. This throws up a

number of questions. How do I read English culture? How do I situate myself in it? Am I a foreigner to it? All that becomes the project of writing and that's really linked to my being a writer.

JS: Elsewhere you have said that bilingualism and even (being half French and half Norwegian) trilingualism is an influence which presumably relates to what you have just said.

CB: What it has done is create a critical and an artistic interest in the crossing points between languages. The way languages and cultures meet, can or cannot meet. So I have become more and more interested in writing or literary work which is written in more than one language. My own work, more and more, is trying to use those. And that's not necessarily to create mongrel or hybrid languages, but is actually to show up the impact that languages have against, or into, each other. That also indirectly, I think, can explain my interest in installation art, in kinds of cross-art forms, an interest in misspellings, in idiosyncrasies of all kinds, kinds of mistranslations.

JS: Are you saying there's a special awareness that comes with that, of difference and of the fact of language and languages?

CB: Yes, it generates an awareness. You can't forget that you are using verbal material, you don't have the same so-called intuition of language you can have with your first language. The whole issue of the mother tongue becomes immediately very problematic. It isn't my first language, so where do I place myself, where do I place the whole activity of dreaming, of speaking in tongues, of connotation? The buried knowledge of the culture of the language, do I have it or not? Will I misunderstand you, in fact? I've lived here for ten years in England, but how much am I acquiring or not? That for me becomes very dynamic in the everyday use of the language and therefore even more so in its artistic use or its literary use.

JS: That kind of compromised relationship with language, then how do you think that relates to your connection with the culture, as an individual, as a writer?

CB: I suppose I would answer by saying the whole issue of compromise for me is more perhaps an understanding of context. That we always function in relation to contextualised activity, a contextual sense of culture. I will have some specialist

38

awareness of English culture because of the way I am, who I am, where I have come from, etc. So perhaps it's not so much a compromise as a contextualisation. In that you become very aware that there's no way of universalising yourself and that the whole notion of the universal becomes even more compromised by the fact that I cannot rest on it. The whole idea of the hegemony of monolingualism disappears because it becomes attuned to context. That of course has consequences for my entire understanding of culture and the imperialisms of cultural politics.

JS: In that case, in the light of this idea of questioning assumptions, one question I wanted to ask you was whether you would describe yourself as an avant-garde writer or poet?

CB: Inevitably a lot of my practice and the cross-arts way I approach writing would place me in the continuity of the avant-garde tradition. I would situate the idea of the avant-garde as a particular tradition which is very much rooted from the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly which has to do with a break away from especially nineteenth century practice. Also, it's to do with a move away from a sense of humanist wholeness in relation to the arts, to knowledge, to language. I do not consider myself to be an avant-garde writer, but inevitably I would be placed within it. This is because I question language, I question meaning, I question the generation of gender, the archiving of knowledge, in my practice. My practice doesn't follow the , if you like, realist novel or lyric poem structures. But I would dispute the term avant-garde itself. I think it's a term that can in fact invalidate a lot of contemporary writing practices. It has a very particular take that I might not subscribe to which doesn't necessarily include the questioning of identity in the way that I am describing it; a lot of what's happened in the visual arts in recent years; installation art; site specific work; sexual concerns.

JS: Can you give me an example of something that you do regard as avant-garde, but would not be thought to sit within that tradition?

CB: For example, the Chicano-Mexican performance writer Gomez-Peñ a whose work sits very much within a tradition of conflictual or uncompromising, controversial performance and is very politicised. This sits quite strongly therefore within a

39

152

tradition of performance art which could be seen as avant-garde. But, in fact, his project seems to me different from this in that he is not disputing the value of art, he is not trying to cancel it out. On the contrary, he is trying to use art and writing to define different structures of identity positively, as ways of highlighting social structures.

JS: Is that what you mean by avant-garde not necessarily being a term that applies to you?

CB: Yes, I really am committed to the idea of artistic practice as something that needs to sit and address and look at social structures such as where does art sit today. That it is part of a wider social frame, that it doesn't sit outside it. I am interested in art questioning the frames, like avant-garde might do, but also in being active socially within it. So actually the project of bilingualism is something that could try and bring out voices, through educational process or whatever, that might not otherwise get heard. I am quite keen on this idea that art finds again some kind of social impact, rather than the kind of alienation that has been associated with the avant-garde. There's initiatives at the moment within the EU (whether one believes them or not doesn't really matter!) that have to do with trying to involve the arts and public arts and involving the public writing.

JS: It sounds to me, then, as if you're building up to agreeing with Auden's remark that everything changes except the avant-garde.

CB: The avant-garde as a term, if you consider what Peter Bürger has said on the subject, is very much to do with a sense of the oppositional; it is in opposition to the existing mainframe of society and culture. It does that by setting itself so-called "outside" those frames. I feel there might be ways in which the avant-garde doesn't declare the same opposition but tries to work within existing structures to pull at them. It becomes a more subtle yet problematising project immediately. So, on that level, I would say that the avant-garde might, in fact, as a term be invalidated. Peter Bürger's theory is interesting in that it defines two sorts of avant-garde. Auden's remark applies to one of those characterisations: the one that is always oppositional and therefore cannot change. I'm trying to think of the invalidation of that kind of avant-garde.

40

153

JS: This then brings us back to this question of influence. We have talked about general cultural concerns and influences. In a more specific way, you, as an artist in your own work, what particular things have influenced you?

CB: Well, it is a whole the way one operates as a writer, so I will have to show some specificities that have been particularly important. My motivation has been very much to do with gender and very much to do with sexuality. These are very strong motivators which to me are to do with how would you use language to construct or de-structure assumptions about gender, about sexuality, about female gender. Where do you situate the use of language within that so that you don't fall into a kind of identity-based writing, or identity-based art, but so that the whole question of identity becomes questioned? You can only question identity through questioning yourself.

So some writers have been particularly interesting to me in relation to that. Ironically, I could start with Beckett for example because of the fact of his use of silence, the violence of language and the violence of silence on the impossibility of settling identity. That would be the conceptual end of identity, so to speak. There are other writers, such as Wittig and Brossard, who are two conceptual French lesbian writers, or Kathy Acker or Dennis Cooper, who have developed ways of trying to deal with language in a conceptual manner so that they could find a language that might bring those aspects of the body and of sexualised, unstraightened bodies into language. I'm interested in the whole notion of what do you do with the flesh in language. How to use your own specificities.

JS: How does that, then, find expression in your work in progress *Jets-Poupée* (The Doll)?

CB: Well, *Jets-Poupée* is a good example in that it summarises aspects of our conversation. It is a project that started out by looking at Hans Bellmer's surrealist doll which he called a Minor Articulated (Mineure Articulée). He created this doll whose parts he could take apart. He photographed them and hand coloured them. He then started on a second doll to shift body parts much more than he did with the first one. So the whole certainty of the female body, the female gender (because he used a "girl" doll) becomes problematised. Even though his take remained very misogynistic and even paedophilic, the whole notion of the fixity

41

154

or the stability of the body does become problematised. In the same way the articulation or dis-articulation of language in the way that I was talking about it through coming at it from different angles becomes problematised.

So the Doll project for me was a way of playing with the language of disarticulating language at the level of syllable very often. It was also a way of setting up word games, puns - some of them fairly bad, others very sexual, erotic, of adding on games where you suddenly switch into French. This is a way of thinking about this multiple body I suppose, this unfixed body that for me today, at the end of the nineties rather than the surrealist thirties, it has my own take on it. This has a lot to do with issues of gender but also to do with issues of genetic engineering and the literary traditions around that, for example, Frankenstein or Ovid's Metamorphosis or the work on dolls by George Sand or Heinrich von Kleist. Or the staging of gender as a montage in visual artists of the beginning of the century such as Hannah Hoch or Claude Cahun. It also has to do with the links that are being made in our collective imagination about gender and sexuality at the moment which Bellmer wasn't able to tap into in the same way. So it's that idea of articulation/disarticulation as part of our cultural imagination.

JS: That seems to lead on to questioning the status of an interview like this and its form.

CB: It is interesting because you are both recording and not recording so we are also going to be picking up and not picking up on certain points. But what is really happening is that we are allowing ourselves to exchange thoughts that aren't necessarily totally clear or clarified as such and therefore allowing for this process to become another aspect of being engaged as practitioners in the material of our society or aspects of it. I suppose that's what it should be about, that it leaves you with questions rather than answers.

JS: To be provocative?

CB: Yes, or provoked.

JS: In the context of what we have been talking about then, what do you think your aim or goal is as a writer?

42

155

CB: I will try to use some of the vocabulary that I have used earlier. This idea of context awareness and having to be aware of your own particularities in order to make work. My aim as a writer is to be able to feel that I can commit aspects of my text or of my use of language or verbal material beyond my writing as well into wider social activities and to do that by various means or different contexts. So to so that I would use the example of my job which is to run a writing course in an arts college. My aim there is to try to enable younger generation of writers or at least practitioners to think about art and culture, to think about artistic commitment in society today. Why would you want to be an artist in the first place? Also to try with one's own activity as a writer to look beyond the text itself. What I can do because I place myself as a practitioner? What does art do today? Why are we doing it? Therefore, also the notion of context, the notion of time and place in relation to particularities is a question. Where do we speak? Where is its silence and is there anything I can contribute in relation to those silences?

JS: So, what next?

CB: I am working on a text in three parts, of which *Jets-Poupée* is one part: the whole project is called *Goan Atom.* One other part is based around Duchamp's Large Glass and its working title is The Bride. I've also been invited to take part in an artists' books project called Volumes of Vulnerability to come out in September 1999 as a boxcase of 20 artists/writers contributions. I've got a commission for a sited sound-text piece for Hull Time based Arts in late October which I've entitled Misherrings (ambient fish). Apart from that, I am also continuing my role as a teacher and becoming more and more involved in issues of public writing. That means organising conferences, contacting different kinds of organisations, setting up writing projects that are outside the purely artistic frame that I am involved in.

JS: And more long term projects or interests that you have?

CB: I think, as a kind of concluding answer perhaps, the fact that the more I write and the more I am involved as a practitioner and thinking about it, the more complicated and complex it gets and therefore the more open I get to various situations in which I could involve my being a writer. So that it becomes less and less clear that to be a writer for me is to generate books. It becomes an aspect of it. I become more and more interested in

43

how are we thinking about setting up a context for writers involved in the new Tate Gallery, for instance. Or writing involved with plurilingualism and things like that. It is making my whole commitment, my civic commitment as an artist more and more clear in the sense that it's not just about text, writing it. It is about how that activity does in fact make you function or malfunction socially. We have talked a lot about the whole issue of being a writer and the texts themselves become one of the products of a writer. And we have had a conversation that is about the implications of the commitment of being a writer, or being a reader, or being a practitioner. Now we leave that to the reader.
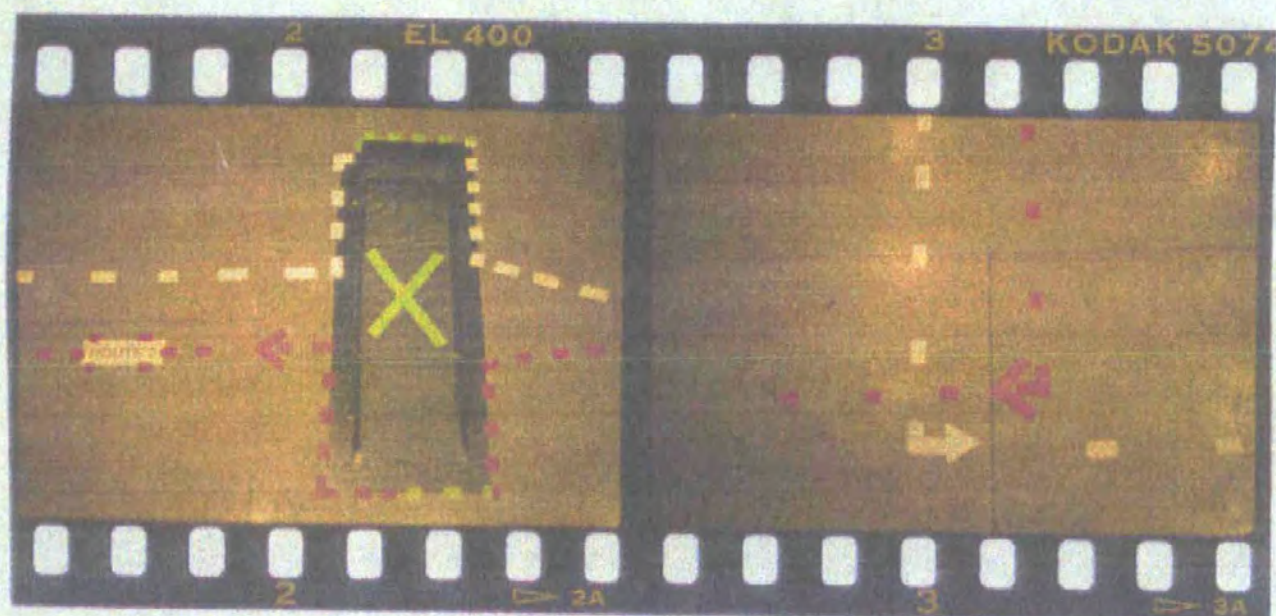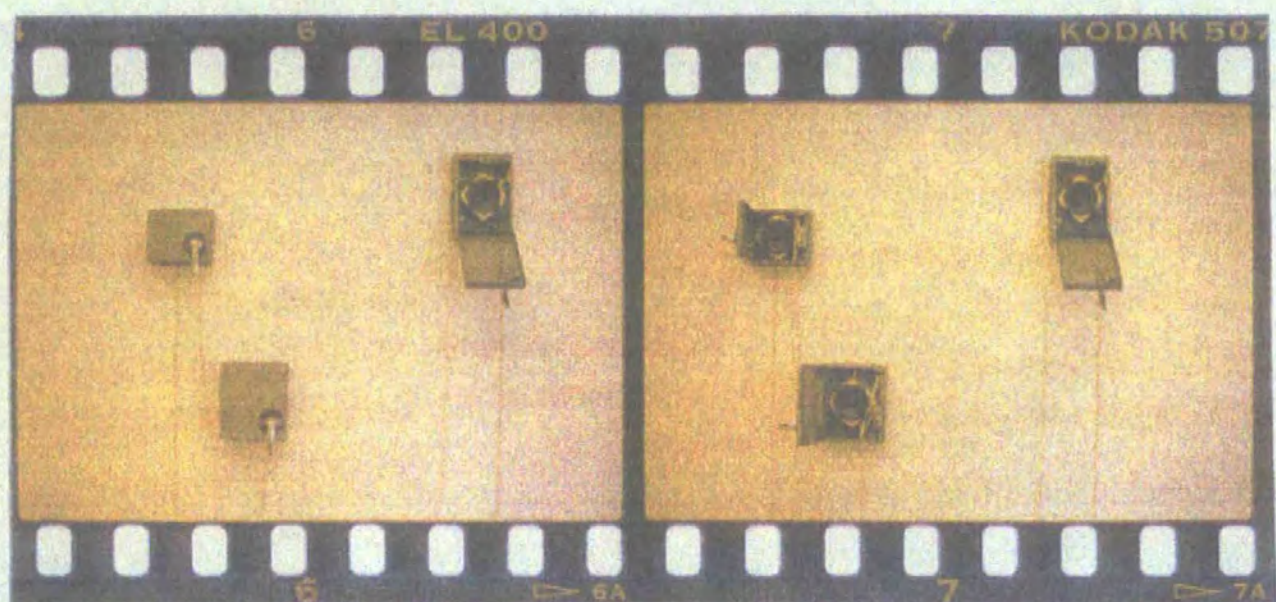
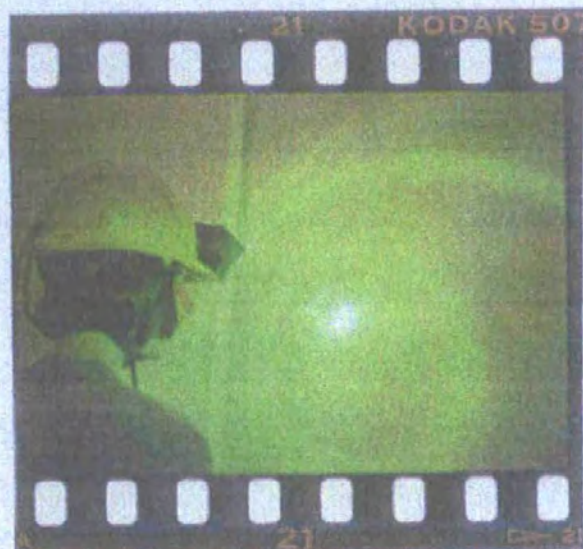**Appendix 2: Visual Documentation of site-related text events**

"Strange Passage" (choral live text, 5 performers) MOMA, Oxford 1993

YOU SAY I MOVED - Interactive text-and-sound installation. Dartington Arts Gallery, Febr.1995.
Kaffe Matthews: sound, treatments, triggers. Caroline Bergvall: text, textual displays, voice.

160

"Eclat" (text-sound installation, personal stereos guided tour)
Institution of Rot, London, 1996

"Ambient Fish" (text-sound installation, listening stations, text segments)

Ferens Arts Gallery, Hull, 1999

164

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