

SEARCH PROCEDURES:
CARNIVALIZATION IN LANGUAGE-
AND THEORY-FOCUSED TEXTS OF
FOUR CANADIAN WOMEN WRITERS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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EUGENIA SOJKA



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*SEARCH PROCEDURES: CARNIVALIZATION IN
LANGUAGE- AND THEORY-FOCUSED TEXTS OF
FOUR CANADIAN WOMEN WRITERS*

by

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School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
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A B S T R A C T

The study analyzes language- and theory-focused texts by four Canadian women writers: Lola Lemire Tostevin, Betsy Warland, Gail Scott and Erin Mouré. The texts are read as representative of a contemporary avant-garde. The term avant-garde, when used in conjunction with modernism or postmodernism, points to the more radical, norm-breaking aspects of both movements. Avant-garde writing is read as a reincarnation of the spirit of carnival. The concept of "carnival," with all its Bakhtinian and Kristevan associations, when translated into literature accounts for multiple subversions of language and forms of writing. Such forms of feminist writing as "écriture féminine" and "feminnage" are examined in the thesis. The writers explore the writing itself as a process of finding a form through a dialogue with multiple genres and modes of writing.

These language-focused texts explore the concept of intersemiotic translation of body into a written script. In this process the phonetic/alphabetic notation is carnivalized by codes from other writing systems. The picto-ideo-phono/sonographic body is inscribed onto a page through the exploration of synaesthetic properties of language. In a way similar to the historical avant-garde, the texts provoke a rethinking of

the very notion of verbal art. They are not pure literary objects but interdiscursive compositions. The avant-garde ideal of the Total Work of Art is effectively inscribed in them. The exploration of verbal synaesthesia and of the synaesthetic understanding of book art brings the texts close to historical avant-garde experimentalism. They are like cubist, futurist or surrealist canvases that distort pictorial realism by manipulation of visual, auditory, kinetic and olfactory fragments. They are open-ended compositions which through the use of parodic discourse challenge any monologic concepts of language, self and genre. They also question the dichotomization of aesthetics and politics that is typical of such politically ineffective theories as the New Critical or Derridean school of thinking.

The thesis is not only an exploration of language- and theory-focused texts but also a record of my search for an alternative form of thesis writing. I examine a variety of forms including parody, self-interview, journal, e-mail letter, essay, collage and a formal critical commentary. In general, these forms of writing translate a dialogue that takes place between various parts of my self.

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D E D I C A T I O N

To Jerzy and my parents

Język jest ostrzejszy od miecza.

Euripides

Kiedy ma się dwa wytłumaczenia jakiejś rzeczy, ostrożność nakazuje zachować prostsze dla siebie; ponieważ wytłumaczenie najmniej jasne lepiej niekiedy potrafi przekonać niewtajemniczony umysł, to znaczy umysł jeszcze naiwnie lubujący się w tak zwanych głębokich myślach.

Oskar Miłosz

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything!
Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters.
Listen: nothing is found. Nothing is lost. Everything
remains to be sought. Go, fly, swim, bound, descend,
cross, love the unknown, love the uncertain, love what
has not yet been seen...*dare what you don't dare.*

(Cixous "Coming" 40)

This study will focus on texts by four English Canadian women writers: Lola Lemire Tostevin, Betsy Warland, Gail Scott and Erin Mouré. These writers do not form a unified literary movement, but their writing is motivated by similar linguistic, theoretical, and feminist concerns. All of them write from a unique liminal position, a space located between languages and between various orientations in Canadian literary and feminist critical discourses. That productive space of liminality allows for a writing of difference, "in the spirit of alterity or otherness" (Bhabha "The Third" 209). It is a space which allows for dialogic interaction but also for carnivalesque transgressions of various kinds.

Although all of the writers write in English, they "come to the English language at a slant" (Warland *Proper* 20). Warland, a writer of Norwegian descent, claims to have the "invisible pattern of the Norwegian language implanted on [her] brain" (*Proper* 55). Tostevin, a bilingual Franco-

Ontarian writer (both parents are francophone), chose to write in an English which is occasionally "contaminated" (Tostevin) by French "interventions." Erin Mouré, originally an Alberta writer, opted for exposure to French language and culture when she decided to live and write in Québec; Gail Scott, a Montreal writer who grew up in a bilingual community in Eastern Ontario, works in English, but "[y]ou can hear the French syntax in [her] work. You can hear the French tone" (Scott in "Face to Face" 24).

The particular situation of the writers who live between two languages points not only to a specific condition of existence between recognized national languages. Many contemporary feminist writers look at language as "the institutionalization of a subjectivity (of body, and of a body of thought)" which is "sexed/gendered in the masculine" (Causse "L'Interloquée" 79) (my underlining). The research of feminist linguists following Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* has proved that the "common language" between men and women has been traditionally appropriated by men, and women have been subordinated or even excluded altogether, silenced. In such a situation the condition of a woman requires a continuous translation. Susan de Lotbinière-Harwood argues, "all women are bilingual. we speak the dominant "he/man" language and our own muted tongue(s)" (*Re-Belle* 82).

The texts of Warland, Tostevin, Scott and Mouré are concerned with bilingualism both as a difference between national languages and as a woman's natural state. Their interest in translation is not limited to interlingual and intralingual explorations. They are also involved in the intersemiotic translation between the body and the text, and between various signifying systems. The writers are "les Voleuses de langue" (Claudine Herrmann), "tongue snatchers," "women who fly and women who steal" (Herrmann and Cixous; voler= flying/stealing), women with wings; their flight, however, is linguistic and their thievery is verbal. They show an aptitude for double-tongued expression. Their language is forked. Their subversive practices intervene on multiple levels of their texts. The writing proves that sensitivity to language and critical theory, which is typical of many Quebec feminist writers, has also become an important phenomenon in English Canadian literature.

Apart from transgressing the boundary of a unitary language, three of the writers, Warland, Mouré and Scott, also cross the boundary of traditional heterosexuality. The notion of boundary is important for writing sensitive to language and theory. I refer here to Heidegger's sense of boundary as "that from which something begins its essential unfolding" ("Building" 332) that points to the generative character of their texts. It is from the space of permeable boundaries that

a different experimental writing unfolds, writing which pays a greater attention to relationships rather than singular fact or thing, writing which is both dialogic and carnivalistic.

No extensive study has been undertaken on the language- and theory-oriented texts by the anglophone Canadian feminist writers to be discussed here. Much attention has been given to the work of bill bissett, bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, as well as the language-centred Tish group from Vancouver. However, surprisingly little has been published on feminist experimental language- and theory-oriented texts. The majority of the commentaries on feminist poetics and the subversive nature of feminist language writing can be found only in reviews and short critiques on Canadian women's writing. Some critics who assume monological reading positions and/or are not sensitive to the nature of some of the feminist experiments have published disparaging analyses or reviews (David Solway on Mouré, Stan Persky on Scott, Heidi Greco and Philip Marchand on Tostevin, and CDJ and Miriam Jones on Warland). A few articles have been published on individual texts by the writers (see the bibliography, primary sources) and some of the texts have been analyzed recently in academic theses (Glen Lowry, Lorna Jackson, Janice Williamson, Lianne Moyes). None of them, however, is devoted entirely to the exploration of the texts proposed for discussion here. The writers have never been discussed as a language- and theory-

centred group, and no attention has been drawn to their writing as consciously working within the tradition of the historical avant-garde and as fulfilling a dialogic and carnivalesque paradigm.¹ However, it is important to stress here that the writers do not form a unified movement as such, but their writing shows an interconnectedness of concerns.

The process of writing has alerted me to the significance of interpretation as an epistemological and ontological category. Barbara Godard contends that "meanings are made through the theoretical frames brought to bear on texts" ("Canadian?" 8). With this view in mind I wanted to bring definitive theoretical constructs to the texts of these writers, but the writing itself resists any prescriptive theories and categories. Any attempt at classifying this feminist writing as avant-garde, modernist, postmodernist, etc., demands a serious qualification of the traditional understanding of such terms. Any exclusive comprehensive theory inevitably leads to a single monologic truth. I do not consider theory external to a literary text but rather as being in dialogue with it or, in Stephen Scobie's words, as operating "alongside or inside a text, on a par with it: as intertext" (*Signature* 21). Scobie cites Derrida as an intertext for Canadian literature; he places certain Canadian texts in juxtaposition with Derridean ideas to see what

interaction takes place (22). My intertext will include dialogic theory, both Bakhtinian and Peircean, feminist discourse, and other theories which the texts under discussion invite. It will be a reading under a very general aegis of semiotics, which has changed the debate about a constitution of meaning from an essentialist problematic to one of semiotic process, from "what it means" to "how it means".

The writing of the thesis has been a long process of self-discovery. My personal situation attracted me to the texts of women who explore bilingualism and all its linguistic, theoretical and philosophical questions. I also live between two languages, English and Polish. According to Kristeva, such a problematic placement in language is frequently disabling; it is a realm of silence and "polymorphic mutism" (Kristeva *Strangers* 15).² I believe, however, that being silent does not mean being unresponsive to the world around. Listening is our first relationship to the world. And as Bruns argues, "listening means involvement and entanglement, participation or belonging... The ear puts us in the mode of being summoned, of being answerable and having to appear. It situates us. It brings us into the open, puts us at risk" ("Disappeared" 127-8). Such a condition is a dialogic situation in which sound will eventually engage silence and silence will engage sound. Silence will be voiced:

Silence is the sound of possibility; for silence, everything, all being, is possible. If the word frames a reality, silence opens up an unbounded reality.

(Patterson 138)

The silence of anybody who is exiled from language is "forever haunted by the word on the threshold of utterance" (Patterson 133). Feminist language-oriented writers are the silent "Muses who have learnt to write" (Tostevin), who have chosen a written discourse as a way of exploration of many relevant linguistic and theoretical issues.

The reading of the texts was a source of delight and despair. I was fascinated by the intricate language play of many of the texts and the sophistication of their arguments, but I was also desperate, because I could not locate the writing in any categories known to me. Many of the texts are impure, "contaminated," linear as well as pluridimensional. Here my academically trained critical self had to surrender. The texts chosen for reading are neither strictly logocentric nor purely Derridean. The semiotic and the symbolic frequently intermingle in them. They are neither of purely Anglo-American nor of French feminist critical orientation. Such texts require new ways of reading/listening. There is need to search for a strategy which listens to the polyphony of their voices. I do not wish to typecast the writers, and engage in any colonizing hypothesis. I would like to avoid a position of closure and therefore I have been looking for a reading

position sensitive to the nature of the texts. It cannot be a theoretically fixed position - the new writing insists on keeping options open.

I am arguing for a dialogic vision of interconnection which is a political stance with a potential for discourse and exchanges among author, text and reader; it focuses on relations and hence undermines the necessity of authority. Interconnection also implies a search for tradition or literary connections. The interconnection model allows me to argue for recognition of feminist writing, criticism and theory (both Anglo-American and French) as interconnected forces. It lets me situate the writing in the tradition of the historical avant-garde and the contemporary avant-garde writing of Quebec and the USA (with a special emphasis on writers associated with the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E group)³. The concepts of modernism and postmodernism are examined with reference to the historical avant-garde in the second chapter that is conceived as a self-interview. I am not trying to establish a direct line of influence but only recognizing certain formal, conceptual and/or political similarities between the texts of these women writers and the writing of the historical avant-garde. I confine/restrict myself to reading which concentrates on tracing the historical avant-garde intertext. But before I do it, I perform a carnivalesque reading of four essays by Scott, Tostevin, Warland and Mouré.

I test the New Critical approach on language-focused writing. Its ineffectiveness with reference to the chosen texts becomes a basis of my search for an alternative reading position which such avant-garde texts require.

The organization of the subsequent chapters results from my focus on the writers' exploration of the historical avant-garde ideas and politics. Similar to the historical avant-garde, the texts of English Canadian language writers provoke a rethinking of the very notion of verbal art. They draw on the avant-garde traditions both in written, visual and music compositions. They are also engaged in interartistic projects, in the translation of the visual and music aesthetics into a verbal aesthetics. The texts are not pure literary objects but interdiscursive compositions. They work on multiple levels. Only holistic reading can capture their complexity, but the linear character of my metacritical writing forces me to look at particular aspects of their texts separately. I start with a premise that the historical avant-garde discourse is essentially dialogic, and that it promotes the idea of the Total Work of Art (Ericson 69) which combines literality, musicality and visuality and hence the fusion of all artistic media. I will focus first on the concept of language and its somatization in the texts of Tostevin, Warland, Scott and Mouré. I will discuss the idea of synaesthetic writing as the translation between the speech and script, between graphic and

oral or between visual and aural, but also as translation between other senses. I will explore the concept of double-voicing with a special emphasis on examples of parody and irony. I will also examine the concept of "carnivalization" with reference to the form of the texts and hence the question of the technical per(form)ance.

These are my intentions but I am aware that all my plans to do something are, as Stephen Scobie argues, always "under erasure, for my own position as an 'I' is just as split as any other ... my own intention and desire in writing ... is inscribed within the many intertextual systems which constrain intention and desire" (*Signature* 22). With this awareness in mind I need to ask myself: "What are the systems which constrain my intentions?" Are they the institutional requirements regarding the genre of a Ph.D. dissertation? Is it my gender, politics, race, class, or my general academic background? All of these factors indeed have an impact on the way I write, think and act in the world. I am, however, also an active, self-reflexive subject and I am able to make certain, although limited, choices. How should I write in order to "escape the traditional 'intentionality' in favour of a writing that is productive outside the ideology of communication" (Ulmer *Applied* 60)?

This short introductory piece of expository prose

exemplifies one of the voices which I will use in my writing. The academic tone is required for the genre of the Ph.D. dissertation. But if I follow H el ene Cixous' argument that "We are made by what we read - writing starts with reading" ("Difficult Joys" 15), I am compelled to use several other voices in my writing, voices which are generated by my reading/listening (here I emphasize both the phonic and graphic nature of the writing) to the texts of the four women writers and to the immense body of critical and feminist writing in general. In this introductory section I have already used voices of other writers and critics. My intention is to enter into dialogue with them.

There will be several voices in the thesis: my multiple voices, the voices of the writers being discussed and voices of other writers and critics. My voice, similar to the others, will range from serious academic to playful, dialogic and occasionally carnivalistic. The whole idea of the coexistence of various voices is linked to the concept of polyphonic subjectivity which I derive from several theories.

I have always been sensitive to the problems of language, but during the process of reading/listening to the texts I have become more and more aware of the corporeal nature of language, and the fact that my body is different from others and therefore it re-acts differently. I would like to follow the example of Cixous who argues:

When I write, I read-write, I know that the works of others are being resurrected in translation. When I write, I rewrite; of course I write my own work, but my own work is already a gathering of other works. An answer; if I write, it's because I have received a letter. My writing is a letter that answers the letter I've received, and the correspondence goes on.

("Difficult" 26)

My writing of this dissertation is my response to the "letters" I have received from the women writers. My text will be continually referring to their texts, it will enter into a dialogue with them, and I hope, the "correspondence" will go on.

Janice Williamson's statement about the genre of the thesis made me search for an alternative form of writing for the dissertation:

The thesis genre traditionally depends upon on authorial silence. The disappearance of the author behind the text is the absence which guarantees the text's truth, indeed its intellectual beauty. The feminist critic, an uncertain sign at the best of times, finds herself as the displaced subject of the thesis in the process of writing. The excitement of women's writing which propels her to begin becomes the paralysing force which disables her ending. For the thesis floats on the double-edged watery surface between self-discovery and disciplinary intervention.

("Citing" 26)

I want my writing to be an act of interruption and a dialogic interaction both with the texts I read and with the genre of dissertation itself.

How to write about texts that question all standardized

notions of what I know about genre in literature? Naturally, I can use a conventional form of academic discourse, but this seems like a violation of reading the texts invite. How can I choose an authoritative monologic response to polyphonic texts?! But a totally carnivalesque response is also inappropriate in a discourse that still would like to act as academic, although with a feminist twist. I need a form that allows for a multiplicity of voices to dialogue with one another. A contestation then, a struggle of multiple worldviews, slipping between voices, a double-voiced collage or rather a polyphonic collage--in short, multi-generic writing.

I draw attention to my form of writing as I believe, following Charles Bernstein, the American language writer, that "the acknowledgment of the form as materials to be worked with, as an active part of the writing, suggests 'our' participation in the constitution of nature and meaning" ("Thought's Measure" 71). He reminds me,

There is no escape in writing (or 'elsewhere') from structures/forms, they are everpresent - 'de'forming and 're'forming. To see them - to *hear* them - as inseparable from 'content.'

("Thought's Measure" 71-72)

The texts of the feminist language writers are open-ended compositions that challenge any singular monologic way of

thinking. The writers do not impose any rigid forms on their texts; they explore the writing itself as a process of finding a form through a dialogue with multiple genres and modes of writing. It is a "constructive writing" practice whose "outer structure or parameter, or the method by which the work is generated, is made visible" (Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 73).

My dialogic interaction with the texts has led me to writing that is a collage of several dialogic forms. I agree with bp Nichol's statement:

any form you choose both lets you say certain things and at the same time limits the contents of what you can talk about ... But the issue is not to get rid of form, but rather to multiply the sense of possibility.

(bp Nichol "Interview" 5)

The thesis will be then not only an exploration of the texts by the four women writers but also a record of my search for an alternative form of thesis writing. I will examine such forms as: parody, interview, journal, e-mail letter (fictional on-line discussion group), essay, collage and formal critical commentary. In general these are forms of writing that reveal/translate the dialogue that takes place between various parts of my self. My research fiches (glossary) will also become part of the body of the dissertation. The concepts and ideas that are discussed in the thesis are glossed in the

short explanatory pieces that are placed at the end of the thesis. They "repeat" the process of my thinking that is enacted in the body of my writing, but I believe, as Gertrude Stein did, that "there is no such thing as repetition" ("Portraits" 174); there can only be "insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way because emphasis can never be the same not even when it is most the same that is when it has been taught" ("Portraits" 171).

NOTES:

1. The concepts will be discussed in chapters two and three.
2. Kristeva poignantly characterizes the frustrations of a foreigner:

Not speaking one's mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood. . . . You improve your ability with another instrument, as one expresses oneself with algebra or the violin. You can become a virtuoso with this new device that moreover gives you a new body, just as artificial and sublimated - some say sublime. You have a feeling that the new language is a resurrection: new skin, new sex. But the illusion bursts when you hear, upon listening to a recording, for instance, that the melody of your voice comes back to you as a peculiar sound, out of nowhere, closer to the old spluttering than to today's code.

(*Strangers* 15)

3. The discussion of the group will follow in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO
 ENGLISH CANADIAN FEMINIST LANGUAGE- AND THEORY-ORIENTED
 WRITERS AS THE CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE.

(SELF)-INTERVIEW

The following interview is a dialogue between me and an imaginary interviewee. It is in fact a dialogue between my various voices. There is no rigid boundary between them as there is no absolute boundary between various parts of my "polyphonic self"- my academic self and my doubting "private" self (the Academic Self and the Doubting Self will be marked as "AS" and "DS" in the text that follows). I choose the genre of interview because it "can interrupt the conventions and power relationships which inform traditional scholarship. The voices in dialogue refuse the closure of correct arguments and final analyses" (Williamson "Introduction" xii). The focus of the interview is a discussion of the situation of the English-Canadian feminist language- and theory-oriented writers on the literary map of Canada, of their relationship to the historical avant-garde, to modernism and to postmodernism. The interview also explores some views of critics on the writing of Tostevin, Warland, Scott and Mouré, and it points to major features of their texts.

The idea of the dialogue ... suggests something other than a critical reading, for a critical reading removes the possibility of dialogue. Can you enter into an equal dialogue with someone or something that has got you under analysis?

(Krajewski Travelling 10)

DS: I find it troubling that you refer to Canadian feminist writers as "language writers." Don't all writers pay attention to language? What is the basis for your classification?

AS: I wouldn't like to use the word "classification." Doesn't it suggest labelling? I refer to the writers not only as language- but also as theory-oriented, as they problematize language, relish linguistic experimentation and innovation, and also consider theory as important to their writing processes. Moreover, the feminist agenda is an essential political aspect of their work. The writers understand conventional language as a crucial factor in women's subordination. Through the exploration of the problem of linguistic oppression they hope to create a shift in consciousness.

DS: Could you be more specific?

AS: I think the best way would be to refer to the statements of the writers themselves. Warland, for instance, argues that her "writing has more integrity and fascination" for her when she is "involved in an ongoing investigation of form, language, and content" ("a language" 303). Moreover for her "[a]s a lesbian writer, it has been important ... to articulate the particular sensuality, eroticism and language of [her] body" ("a language" 306). Similarly Scott insists on "skirting linguistic and legalistic conventions by asserting our feminine voice" (*Spaces* 26) and "[g]etting in touch with

our own rhythms, so different from the ticker-tape rhythm of the talking (media) world which constantly invades our consciousness" (*Spaces* 26). Tostevin is "drawn to the language-oriented texts of women from France, Belgium, Quebec" and she believes that language not only has the "power to express the most fundamental dimension of both personal and universal realities" but also "the power to transpose, transform" ("breaking" 391). Tostevin is interested in "layering different kinds of language. The verbal lay. French and English, narrative fiction and poetic underlying narrative" ("Sounding the difference" 38). Mouré is intent on "[q]uestioning language and the context in which to use language, and the way to use concepts" ("A Chance" 76). She writes "because words have a physical connection with [her] body and help make possible a sense of place-in-the-present" (Mouré "And just" 40).

DS: Isn't it striking that all of the women pay so much attention to the relationship of writing to the body? Isn't there essentialism lurking in their views?

AS: Are you suggesting that essentialism is a totally discredited concept? I suppose you are not familiar with the work of Diana Fuss and Gayatri Spivak for whom both the

essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives are viable and powerful feminist positions.¹ For Fuss, for instance, the essentialist/ constructionist opposition is no longer valid. She skilfully shows how both discourses are "inextricably complicated with each other" and how "constructionism (Lacan and Derrida) is fundamentally dependent upon essentialism in order to do its work" (xii-xiii). I guess you'll also find Spivak's argument for "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism" ("Subaltern" 205) by the marginalized and the dispossessed quite convincing. From the perspective of Fuss and Spivak, both the essentialist and the anti-essentialist positions are recognized as conscious intentional strategies or subject positions that women can adopt in order to challenge phallogocentric discourse. Women's writing should be looked at as "no more a representation of the female body than phallogocentric discourse is a 'representation' of the penis" (Schwab 65).

DS: You also mentioned the writers' interest in theory. Why does theory appeal to them? Isn't theory usually "perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of literature" (Kamboureli "Theory" 14)?

AS: Yes, it's true. It's actually a typical argument against

the use of theoretical discourse in literature. The "language writers," however, realize that "there can be no writing act without a theoretical framework, whether we are aware of the framework or not" (Tostevin "inventing" 279). They embrace theory as they find in it "not only an alternate system of thought that allows them to voice their alterity as women, but also a ground conducive to their writing process" (Kamboureli "Theory" 7). Why don't I just quote to you some statements by Tostevin, Scott, Mouré and Warland on the contentious issue of "contamination" of literature with theory. For Tostevin theory is appealing because it allows her to "become aware of the framework" ("inventing" 279) through which she writes. She claims that it is the concept of language, "language with its structures" ("inventing" 279) that affects our understanding of reality and that creates frameworks that culturally define us. She also believes that acquiring a feminist consciousness entails a search for "new frameworks from which to write and, ultimately, live" ("inventing" 279). Scott openly admits that "[a]fter all, we writers do theorize, in a sense, in our minds as we work. We think about our processes, our poetics....If we refuse to share it with the reader, the reader cannot respond....The reader doesn't see the intention" ("Writing" 253). Mouré also rejects "the idea of theory/ philosophy/ thinking as separate from the act of writing, separate and somehow parasitical." "Theory and writing" for her "are

concurrent." (*Two Women* 72). Warland openly states that "theorizing is not apart from us/ it comes from within our own TEXTS: 'Teks-, tissue'" ("*Far As*" 94). You can see that the issue of the "sovereignty of literature" is not only questioned but rather discredited in language writing.

DS: How would you locate the writers in the tradition of Canadian literature?

AS: If you are asking about the pattern or the history of literary influences, I'd like to stress that I am not trying to establish a direct line of influence. I am not thinking in terms of Harold Bloom's theories of influence ("anxiety of influence," "misreading"),¹ and their Freudian Oedipal context. I don't believe that the relationship between the writer and her predecessors is based on her intentional misreading and misinterpreting which aims at clearing an imaginative space for herself. I opt for the anti-Oedipal, dialogic scenario in which women writers align themselves with writers sharing a similar set of concerns and techniques, and who self-consciously position themselves against the dominant aesthetic assumptions of the day.

DS: Have you heard about the model of cubist historiography

suggested by Wendy Steiner in Colors of Rhetoric? I think it would fit your project.

AS: Oh, yes I have. I like the model because it values not only the various elements of the past but also the relationships between them. As you know Steiner emphasizes that "[t]he cubist interaction with the past makes a simultaneity of it" and that history is not "a plotted narrative moving towards a resolution" but rather "a cubist painting whose elements maintain their heterogeneity" (Steiner *Colors* 191). If I use this model to examine the tradition of "language writing," I look not only into specific literary movements in the past but also focus on their interrelations, on their dialogic interconnections. There are no literary movements that are culturally hermetic. My choice of an intertextual model of influence derived from a cubist collage structure allows me to show how the writer consciously chooses literary predecessors and traditions. It also lets me trace how she explores the cultural, political, social, historical or scientific thought of the past or the present as it circulates freely in the intertextual space of history.

And going back to your question about the tradition of Canadian literature, I would not like to limit myself to the space of Canadian literature. Canadian literary history does

not operate in a vacuum. It is intertextually connected with international literary movements.

DS: What movements? Are you thinking about American and European modernism and postmodernism? We are talking about experimental writing of the 1980s and 1990s, so there is no doubt it should be categorized as postmodernist. Would you agree with that categorization?

AS: Haven't I already said that any rigid categorizations are wrong? You can't just find one conclusive definition of postmodernism, modernism and of various avant-garde movements. The meaning of these concepts is in a constant change. I must look into the history of the terms rather than their monologic definitions. Wasn't it Wittgenstein who said that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (*Philosophical Investigations* #43 20e)? He strongly suggested that meaning is historically and culturally specific. Therefore there is a need to contextualize the movements and show differences between American, English, French and Canadian variants. Nevertheless, I know that when I use the words avant-garde, modernism or postmodernism today I take a risk of falling into a conceptual and terminological quagmire as the terms are not ahistorical or purely literary, aesthetic, philosophical or

political.

DS: Could you elaborate on the problem? I have always had difficulties with grasping the concepts.

AS: I'll try, but don't expect definitive answers. First I must say that there are in fact different narratives of modernism and postmodernism. I guess you notice my use of the plural form of the word "narrative." Recently I have come across David Antin's statement about the situation; he says, "from the modernism that you want you get the postmodernism you deserve" (qtd. in Perloff "Postmodernism" 177). I think it's a perfect summary of the terminological chaos, but we have to find some order in it. If we focus on some of the critical studies of these movements we can see that the space of modernist practice is usually divided into "high modernism" and "historical avant-garde" (Peter Bürger, Huyssen). "High modernist" art is regarded as formally experimental but politically unengaged and opposed to mass culture; historical avant-garde art (Cubism, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Russian Constructivism, etc.), on the other hand, is considered to be politically engaged, highly critical of cultural institutions, interested in mass culture, and intent on bridging the gap between art and life. The constructive sensibility of modernism is usually contrasted with the deconstructive,

nihilistic "anti-aesthetic ethos of the European avant garde" (Huysen 167). Such a division, however, severely restricts the space of modernism, as it has been pointed out by Astradur Eysteinnsson who claims that "[t]here is no way to contend that the various avant-garde groups produced texts that are categorically more deconstructive, more 'negative,' or formally more radical than the texts of the individuals usually cited in the name of modernism" (158).³ Radical textual practices can, in fact, be observed in both movements. Think of James Joyce. He is hailed as a modernist but one can easily classify his writing as avant-garde as he successfully integrates popular culture into his works. He does not insist on autonomy of literature but revels in the iconoclastic, which allegedly is characteristic of avant-garde writing. Lyotard's narrative of postmodernism characterized as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (*The Postmodern* xxiv) is another metanarrative which is not credible. We know that many European modernists had not believed in the metanarratives of knowledge or religion long before Lyotard's postmodernists. It is clear then that one needs to come to terms with different variants of modernism - the modernism of Pound, Eliot, Stein, H.D. Williams, and Stevens, and consequently with different variants of postmodernism, as well. I think we need to ask "whose modernism?" And this question implies another - "whose

postmodernism?" (Berry 8). In the time of "anxiety of metanarratives" (McHale *Constructing* 5), or in Lyotard's words, of the "incredulity toward metanarratives," any totalizing meta-narrative theory of modernism, postmodernism or avant-garde is clearly unacceptable. In such a situation I would follow Brian McHale's advice: "one might as well go and tell one's story" (*Constructing* 6).

DS. You have suggested that you read the texts of Tostevin, Warland, Scott and Mouré as representative of contemporary avant-garde. Could you explain your use of the term "avant-garde"?

AS: As I have already mentioned, I am fully aware that the meaning of literary and cultural terms changes and I think it is more useful to look into the history of terms rather than focus on their definition. I am certainly not referring in my project to the initial meaning of "avant-garde" that functioned as a military concept, a utopian socialist political term, and an aesthetic metaphor used to identify the disruptive work of Lautréamont, Rimbaud and Manet (Russell "A Short History" 3). I rather opt for the most popular usage of the term that refers to the early twentieth-century artistic movements, to the "historical avant-garde" (Cubism, Futurism,

Dada, Surrealism, Constructivism, etc.). Nevertheless, I also realize that in the 1960s and early 1970s the term applied to "the postwar reemergence of self-conscious stylistic innovation in the arts" (Russell "A Short History" 4) which was later labelled "postmodern." You are certainly aware that today, in general, the term is used in relation to experimental and innovative work which transcends current artistic conventions and challenges hegemonic conceptualizations of art. In my classification of the language-oriented writers I take into consideration not only this general sense of "avant-garde" but I also examine the links of the writers with the historical avant-garde. In fact I argue for a vision of interconnection and dialogue between the historical avant-garde, modernism and postmodernism and the contemporary avant-garde. The term avant-garde, when used in conjunction with modernism or postmodernism, can point to the more radical, norm-breaking aspects of both movements.

DS: I tried to avoid the discussion of modernism and postmodernism, but I guess it's impossible if you choose to focus on the interconnections of the contemporary avant-garde with these movements. I am familiar with the standard spatial representations of the opposition between modernism and postmodernism and I realize that this is just another futile attempt to establish clear-cut differences between the two

movements. What do you think about it?

AS: It's a common knowledge that any fixed definitions simplify the complexity of the situation and do a total disservice to the understanding of both movements. Hasn't modernism already contained the features of what today many critics consider postmodernism? If you reflect on some of the categorizations of the movements you'll see how limiting and problematic such a classificatory procedure can be. You are probably familiar with the binary models of Ihab Hassan, Peter Wollen and Douve Fokkema, but let's have a look at Helmut Lethen's version of the model.

Modernism

Hierarchy
 Presence
 Genital
 Narrative
 Metaphysics
 Determinacy
 Construction of a
 world model
 Ontological certainty

Postmodernism

Anarchy
 Absence
 Polymorphous
 Anti-narrative
 Irony
 Indeterminacy
 Deconstruction of a
 world model
 Ontological Uncertainty

(Lethen 235)

I think you'd agree that this binary paradigm which illustrates the alleged "great divide" (Huysen) is a paradigm which falsifies the original dialogic nature of the cultural and political projects. All of the famous binary oppositions

in fact deny the mixed, plural and contradictory nature of the postmodern enterprise. They can actually function as a pastiche of the binary representation of the two movements as one can arrive at the postmodernist characteristics only when "Modernism [is] Cut in Half" (Lethen). As I have already said, the so-called postmodernist features can already be found in modernism, especially in the excluded modernist avant-garde or, in other words, in the historical avant-garde.

DS: I find it very frustrating that there are so many contradictory theories of postmodernism, so many diverging interpretations of the term "postmodern." Doesn't it threaten to become an omnibus concept for anything that has happened since World War II? Even Linda Hutcheon admits that her "poetics" of postmodernism is rather "a problematics," "a set of problems and basic issues that have been created by the various discourses of postmodernism, issues that were not particularly problematic before but certainly are now" (Poetics 224).

AS: I share your frustrations! Nevertheless, I agree with Peter Brooker that "there are postmodernisms as well as modernisms, that between them there is the dialogic traffic of collage and argument, the building and unbuilding of orthodoxies. There is no absolute singular cultural entity or

absolute historical break" ("Introduction: Reconstructions" 4). Neither modernism nor postmodernism is a unified movement/theory and all the contradictions which frustrate us, in Hutcheon's words, are "not really meant to be resolved, but rather are to be held in an ironic tension" (*Poetics* 47).

DS: But Hutcheon's words frustrate me even more!

AS: I believe that there is another partial solution to the problem; I think here of the historicization of the terms. I believe it is crucial to realize that the 1970s concept of postmodernism is very different from the one in the 1990s. In the 1970s, in what Perloff calls a "[u]topian phase of postmodernism" (164), the early view of postmodernist writing referred to "everything that is radical, innovative, forward looking - *beyond*, if not *contra*, mere modernism" ("Postmodernism" 163). At this time postmodernism was presented as being open, anti-elitist, anti-authoritarian, participatory, anarchic, playful, improvisational, rebellious, discontinuous - and even, in Hassan's words - 'ecologically active'" (Perloff "Postmodernism" 165). It is important to notice that in the early 1970s in Anglo-American criticism postmodernism was a political term set against the apolitical view of literature offered by T.S. Eliot and New Criticism. In

Canada, for instance, the term was used by Frank Davey and Robert Kroetsch "as part of [their] political/cultural critiques of monological centralist views of Canadian culture, and their attempts to define a transcendent Canadian nation-state" (Davey "The Power" 14). The 1970s were rated as Derridean and the 1980s as Foucaultian and Lacanian (Perloff "Postmodernism" 173). If you look at the handbooks of postmodernism you can see long lists of postmodernist rules and prescriptions, and examples of readings that are done through the paradigms provided by Derrida and Foucault. Unfortunately, many writers, especially women, were in fact victimized by the French theoretical model as "the real power," as Perloff noted, belonged "not to the postmodern artist... but to the poststructuralist theorist whose principles validate the work" (Postmodernism" 173). Notice that in the 1980s a new vocabulary is used to characterize postmodernism: "depthlessness," "weakening of historicity," "degradation of culture by capitalist economy," "the simulacrum, the death of the subject," "the non-differentiation of 'art' and popular culture" (Perloff "Postmodernism" 167-8). What is striking, however, is that the new terms are used with reference to all kinds of "eccentric art without consideration of its implicit politics" (Davey "The Power" 14). Postmodernism loses its earlier political associations. The politically motivated concept of difference

has been replaced by "diversity" which does not necessarily mean that the works selected to represent cultural diversity challenge the status quo. Too often, as Charles Bernstein, the American language writer argues, they "accept the model of representation assumed by the dominant culture in the first place" (*Poetics* 6).

DS: It looks like a return to the business of literature and criticism as usual. Is there any opposition to these kind of changes in contemporary literary and critical movements?

AS: Yes, and this is where the "language writers," the writers as critics and theorists, come in. No longer are the writers victimized by the critics as their discourse deftly engages in dialogue with the once oppressive theories. Moreover, the writing again is politicized and it is very sensitive to the matter of ideology. Rachel DuPlessis, the American language poet and critic, succinctly summarizes the achievement of feminist language writing:

The foregrounding of otherness. The critique of centres, hierarchies, authorities. The suspicion of dominant meaning. The apprehension of power. The claim of power via critique. The seductions of dominant meaning scored with suspicion. And, often this has a gender valence.

(The Pink 133)

DS: In your discussion of modernism/postmodernism you seem to be preoccupied with male theories only. What is the position of the female critics and writers with reference to the issue?

AS: Unfortunately, it's true that major metanarratives of modernism and postmodernism are "colonized" by male critics who either silence the questions of the intersection of the modern/postmodern with the feminist or the postcolonial or they appropriate the voices of female to prove their points. For instance, for years there has been no acknowledged tradition of modernist women's writing. If it wasn't for the pioneering work of such female critics as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Marianne deKoven, Shari Benstock, Susan Stanford Friedman, Rachel DuPlessis and Marjorie Perloff, such writers like Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, H.D., Mina Loy, Anais Nin, Jean Rhys, or Edith Sitwell would probably still be silenced. Postmodernist writing is also dominated by men, and even the feminist language poets occupy a margin in the widely male American avant-garde; they get recognition only when they align themselves with the primarily male language poets (DeKoven "Gertrude" 13).

DS: Don't you find it problematic to equate feminism with postmodernism especially when you think of the depoliticization of the movement in the 1980s and 1990s? There

certainly are significant differences between the politically motivated feminist projects and the ambiguous, contradictory postmodern agenda (Hutcheon Poetics xii).

AS: You are right, especially when you consider opinions of several feminist critics who totally reject postmodernism as a possible feminist aesthetics. Somer Brodribb, for instance, passionately rejects postmodernism as "a masculine ideology based on a notion of consciousness as hostile, and an epistemology of negation which is one of separation, discontinuity and dismemberment" (Brodribb 19). She calls for a feminist project based on "an ethics and aesthetics ... expressed creatively and symbolically by a subject that is female" (146). Brodribb advocates "remembering against dismemberment" (146). I think she is right. If you ponder the fate of many of the postmodern thinkers who chose to end their lives by suicide (Gilles Deleuze, Sarah Kofman, Guy Debord), you would certainly see a reason to opt for a philosophy other than one in which acts of "self-inflicted violence" are "a *de rigueur* sign of intellectual seriousness" (Kingwell). There are critics, however, who advocate a feminist-postmodernist alliance and see feminism as a discourse that could politicize postmodernism. I'm thinking here of Craig Owens's "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" and Andreas

Huyssen's "Mapping the Postmodern." Both critics argue for integration of feminism and postmodernism that "would satisfy the needs of the political and those of the aesthetic" (219-221).

DS: Doesn't Linda Hutcheon point to overlapping agendas of postmodernism and marginalized groups including women ?

AS: Yes, she does, but she also says that even if the agendas of postmodernism and feminism overlap, there is an essential difference between the two theories. If postmodernism is defined as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard *The Postmodern* xxiv), feminism still privileges one metanarrative (Hutcheon "Incredulity" 42), which is its feminist discourse, be it political, literary or cultural. Hutcheon emphasizes that feminist theory takes a specific position, that it has a program, while postmodernism rejects all privileged positions, and it "has not theorized agency; it has no strategies of real resistance that would correspond to the feminist ones" (Hutcheon "Incredulity" 43). Note that she talks about postmodernism of the 1980s. Daphne Marlatt, who follows Hutcheon's argument, also expresses this awareness effectively in her interview with Brenda Carr:

Working for change is what makes feminism different from

postmodernism I learned from the Tish days. Even though there is continuity with some of these strategies, I'm using them for different ends now.... postmodernism, although it critiques the master narratives of our culture, the institutions and the codes, still ends up being complicit with them because it has no program for change. A program for change means valorizing a difference, and as soon as you valorize a difference you're moving out of postmodernist deconstruction into a position of, as she says, belief or trust in a certain meta-narrative.It's a difference that leads to a radical shift in world view.

(*"Between"* 106)

Moreover, I would agree with Diana Brydon's argument: that there are several Canadian post-modernisms (*"The White"* 194) and not only the uniquely Canadian postmodernism of Hutcheon.

DS: Finally you let Canadians speak. Let's focus on the Canadian literary and critical scene. Who constructs the narratives of recent Canadian literary history? Are there any master narratives?

AS: I would say that Robert Kroetsch and Linda Hutcheon are the primary creators of the Canadian master narrative of postmodernism. They both theorize postmodernism as a philosophy most adequately encompassing a Canadian condition, both culturally and politically. Robert Kroetsch claims that Canada is "a fertile ground for postmodernism" and that "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern" (*"Canadian Issue"* 1). He rejects the idea of an

English Canadian avant-garde, and especially of Surrealism, as he claims that "English language writing" is famous for its "failure to deal with a certain kind of political material" (*Labyrinth* 32). He also rejects the idea of Canadian modernism declaring that modernism is a "product of a high urban civilization" (*Labyrinth* 111) which was lacking in Canada. Linda Hutcheon, in *The Canadian Postmodern*, also supports this "anti-modern, pro-postmodern stance" (Weir 193) by canonizing postmodernism while bypassing/ neglecting the complex nature of Canadian modernism. Hutcheon asserts that Canada is "ripe for the paradoxes of postmodernism" (*Canadian* 3); she sees our writers as "agents provocateurs" (3) and believes that "the postmodern ex-centric is very much a part of the identity of the nation" (3). What I find most striking in Hutcheon's theory is her statement about Canadian postmodernism as a "rethinking of realism" (21). She maintains that "English Canadian novels have self-consciously milked realism for all its power, even while parodying and subverting its conventions" (20), and she presents this surprising statement as "yet another of the paradoxes that define the postmodern" (*Canadian* 20).

DS: I believe that those master narratives of Canadian postmodernism have been questioned.

AS: Oh, yes! Hutcheon was lashed for her "oxymoronic theory of unrealistic realism" (Bök 6) proposed in the decade of Baudrillard's "simulations," when it is "*impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real*" (Baudrillard *Simulations* 41). She is blamed for restoring to postmodernism "the conventions of both humanist ideology and realist fiction" and for interpreting this move as yet another "postmodern paradox" (Weir 190). Her new thematic conventions of "paradox" and "historiographic metafiction" are compared to such discredited Canadian concepts as "survival, landscape, and region" (Weir 191, Bök). What is most troubling is that Hutcheon's and Kroetsch's canonization of postmodernism lead to the ignoring of modernism in Canadian literature (Weir 95).

DS: Are you saying that there are no Canadian narratives that consider the modernist movement, both the high modernist and the historical avant-garde?

AS: No, no. There have been several ventures into creating alternative visions of Canadian literary history by such critics as Barbara Godard, Christopher Norris, Shirley Neuman, Stephen Scobie and Caroline Bayard.

DS: Does it mean that indeed we can talk about Canadian

modernism and compare it with its European counterpart?

AS: The situation is not so easy as you may think. I have already mentioned the complexity of the modernist movement itself which naturally entails the complex nature of Canadian modernism, especially when you think of "belatedness" of Canadian literature "with respect to its European inheritance" (Godard "Canadian?" 10). Even if certain ideas were appropriated, they were translated in order to fit new ends in a new literary environment. It is also important that we talk not only about the intertextuality with European modernism, but also with its American and Quebec versions. Canadian modernism is then a result of a process of multiple translations of European modernist aesthetics. The McGill group of poets, for instance, drew directly on the writing of such high modernists as Yeats and Eliot (Norris); the Cerberus group of Layton, Dudek and Souster, on the other hand, had an intertextual relation with Pound, but also with such American poets as Hart Crane and Walt Whitman (Norris). The most interesting development of the Canadian version of modernism occurred in 1960s and 1970s; and here I talk not only of high modernism, but especially of its more radical avant-garde development. Although, as Bayard argues, "we never had a dada movement in the 1920s, the 1960s and 1970s certainly witnessed a serious experiment with these concepts" (5). Not only dada,

but also surrealist and futurist ideas were explored by bp Nichol, bill bissett and Steve McCaffery. For Scobie the writers form the "lettrist tradition in Canadian literature" (Godard "Can/Con?" 105). Bayard classifies them as members of the Concrete movement and of sound poetry (4). What is crucial here, however, is that all of the critics recognize the links of the Canadian writers with the European historical avant-garde.

DS: You haven't mentioned the TISH group of poets. How would you situate them with respect to the avant-garde movement?

AS: I waited for the question! The writers associated with *Tish: a poetry newsletter* and later with *Open Letter* played a crucial role in the development of the language writing in the 1990s. *Tish* and *Open Letter* and its contributing editors, Frank Davey, George Bowering, Fred Wah, Dave Dawson, and Daphne Marlatt, advanced a new poetics which for them was a result of an intertextual dialogue with such American Black Mountain writers as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley. They were responsible for adapting the "Dada-Surrealist revolution in language ... to the North American experience" (Godard "The Avant-garde" 100), but they also asserted a sense of continuity with Pound and Williams. So

again modernism in both its aspects was translated into a different literary environment. Barbara Godard argues for the avant-garde status of Canadian writers associated with *Open Letter* as "they have encouraged mixed media experiments and sought to integrate popular art forms, thus attacking the earlier Modernist stance of an elitist bourgeois culture" (Godard "The Avant-Garde" 107). In the 1970s bp Nichol, Victor Coleman, bill bissett, Christopher Dewdney and Steve McCaffery began contributing to *Open Letter* and made it a leading magazine which "supported interchange between the Canadian and international avant-gardes." (Davey "*Open Letter*" 625). One of the most effective exchanges has been with the American *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Review* and such writers as Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews or Ron Silliman.

DS: Again you seem to focus on male writers only. What about women in this Canadian avant-garde?

AS: I'm reporting on the major published sources, and unfortunately, all the major narratives of English-Canadian avant-garde poetry have little to say about women writers. Ken Norris does not mention any women writers. The only woman usually cited as associated with the Tish group is Daphne Marlatt although there were other women working within the

movement: Gladys Hindmarch, Pauline Butling, Ginny Smith, Carol Johnson, Maxine Gadd and Judy Capithorne (Marlatt "Between" 102). Fortunately Stephen Scobie talks about Lola Tostevin, Erin Mouré, Phyllis Webb and Sharon Thesen (*Signature*); Shirley Neuman refers to Tostevin and Marlatt as postmodernist ("After" 68). Bayard reports on Marlatt and "her postmodern stance" (115, 156), and also on Tostevin's "fine ear for disseminated feminist practices" (162). They do mention women then, but again there are many women writers excluded in these narratives. Moreover, the classification of Marlatt and Tostevin as postmodernists of the 1980s and 1990s is questionable. As I have already mentioned, the meaning of postmodernism has changed and it cannot embrace the politically engaged feminist writing.

DS: Are you saying that there is an alternative tradition of feminist language- and theory-oriented writing?

AS: Again the answer is not simple. Canadian feminist language writing certainly has links with the male avant-garde writers of *Tish* and *Open Letter*. Nevertheless, there is also an alternative female tradition that the writers choose to work with. And here I mean the newly re-discovered female modernism of Gertrude Stein and H.D.. Daphne Marlatt, for instance, one

of the pioneers of Canadian feminist language-focused writing, managed to combine the male tradition of avant-garde writing with the alternative avant-garde female literary practice. From such mentors in the sixties as Duncan, Olson, Creeley, Snyder, Ginsberg, Williams, Pound, she turned to the writing of H.D., Denise Levertov, Gertrude Stein, Marguerite Duras, Virginia Woolf, Nicole Brossard, Phyllis Webb, Louky Bersianik, Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva (Marlatt "Between" 99), and later to such American Language writers as Lyn Hejinian and Susan Howe. It is interesting that Marlatt's openness to the Black Mountain projective poetics, to the bio-feedback of her body in the act of composition, was the basis of her shift into "écriture feminine," the feminist "bringing of the body into the act of writing" (Marlatt "Between" 99), so typical of Quebec literary practice. Her interest in "body writing," in the somatization of literary practice, developed then from her translation of the projective poetics of Olson, a poetics feminized in Marlatt's case by the specificity of a woman's body as well as her feminist concerns and interest in the experimental writing of other women from various cultural backgrounds.

DS: I understand you are saying that Marlatt's career demonstrates that the poetics and aesthetics of the feminist language writers are a result of a multiple process of

translation/transmutation from different avant-garde traditions associated with modernism and postmodernism. You refer to various British, American and Quebec avant-garde writers, both of the past and the present. Are you suggesting that Tostevin, Warland, Scott and Mouré have gone through a similar process in their literary careers?

AS: The process is similar in terms of intertextual connections with various avant-garde writers, but Tostevin, Scott, Warland and Mouré have their own preferences in their conscious choice of a specific avant-garde intertext. Nevertheless, I'd like to point out that both the experimental texts of Quebecois feminist avant-garde writers and of American language writers have had a major impact on shaping the literary careers of these feminist English Canadian writers. I'm thinking here of such writers like Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, France Théoret, Louise Cotnoir and Louise Dupré in Quebec, and Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Rachel Du Plessis, Rae Armantrout, Kathleen Fraser, Beverly Dahlen and Rosemarie Waldrop in the US. They represent the feminist branch of the American Language Poets. Nevertheless, I'd like to add that whenever I refer to a feminist avant-garde I also think of earlier avant-garde women writers who explored relationships between gender and language: Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, Djuna

Barnes, H.D., Virginia Woolf, Marianne Moore and Laura Riding. I do not want to say that the Canadian writers are intertextually connected with all of these women. I am merely pointing to the feminist avant-garde tradition which functions as an intertext to Canadian feminist writing.

DS: I am not familiar with the American Language Movement, and especially with its feminist branch; and being honest I find this connection of Canadian feminist writers with American language poets quite striking. Haven't English Canadian writers been looking for literary models in Great Britain?

AS: You are quite right about the traditional British connection, but it would be foolish to think that Canadian writers are immune to other foreign influences. I think that today we can even talk about CanAmerican dialogism. If you have not heard about the female representatives of the movement I am not surprised. It is usually Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Bob Perelman, Ron Silliman and Barrett Watten who are cited as its spokesmen. The female language writers are marginalized and if discussed together with the male writers, the crucial aspect of their poetics, which is feminist agenda or gender politics, is unfortunately lost. You may be surprised to find out that the writers do not form a unified movement. In the United States "the Language movement"

as Perloff points out "has always been an umbrella for very disparate practices" (*Radical* 174) and it is impossible to define a common poetics of the writers associated with it.

DS: So what is the basis of classifying them as "language writers"? Why label them at all?

AS: It's true that the American writers do not share a common poetics, that they vary in their specific backgrounds and concerns, but the very fact that they are published in such avant-garde journals as *Poetics Journal*, *The Difficulties*, *O.blek*, *Writing*, *Raddle Moon*, *Paper Air*, *Talisman*, *Sulfur* and *Temblor* suggests that their texts challenge the dominant modes of writing, which is writing that espouses the expressive theory of language. In "Repossessing the Word," the introduction to *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews point out that language writing "places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program or subject matter" (ix). Writing is for them "an investigation rather than an aestheticization" (Bernstein *Content's* 269). The writers explore structures and codes of language and their role in the constitution of our world. Their texts place the reader in a more active role as

the coproducer of the meaning; it is suggested by Ron Silliman, the American language writer, who argues that "[t]he primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though that may be, but in the attitude toward reception it demands of the reader" ("The Political Economy of Poetry" 31). I would also like you to note that language writers are far from claiming purity of literature. Their texts are characterized by a polyphony of various forms and modes of writing, and theory is "never more than the extension of practice" (Bernstein "for CHANGE" 488). The writing is often regarded as a perfect example of postmodernist generic contamination.

DS: You confuse me again. I thought that the concept of postmodernism is rather discredited with reference to politicized texts?

AS: You are absolutely right. I should have used the term "postmodernist avant-garde" in order to emphasize the difference between the apolitical and the politicized writers of the 1980s and 1990s. The majority of the American language writers never separate aesthetic concerns from political engagement and ideological critique. Many of them see "the syntactical play in their poetry as a socialist critique of the ideology of capitalism" (Hartley xv). They explore the

politicized writing of the earlier avant-garde writers. The names that recur in their texts are those of Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, the Russian Futurist Poets, the Dadaists, André Breton, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Olson and John Ashberry. And, as you know, these are writers whose texts challenge the rules of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics and are not only formally experimental but also politically engaged. With this in mind we can say that the most important feature of language writing is that it combines language experimentation, theory and politics, and hence it is a revolt against the recent stage of depoliticized postmodernist discourse. It also brings it close to the poetics and politics of the historical avant-garde. It was at this time that carnivalesque discourse was transposed into literature. And as Kristeva argues, not only did it break "through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics" but "at the same time, [it was] a social and political protest" ("Word" 65).

DS: I understand feminist language writing differs from the one practised by male language writers.

AS: I'm not really sure about it, but Betsy Warland points out that language-focused writing practised by women is not "a

matter of game and innovation" (*Proper* 36), but "a matter of necessity and survival" (*Proper* 36). She also argues that much of the language-centred work by white male writers is "fuelled by an understandable despair and cynicism about Western/urban mass media culture and politics. The absence in their visions of a *radical, radix, root* analysis of the patriarchy, however, all too frequently generates writing which is aggressive, cynical, or enervated, resulting in writing which is actually complicit with the very culture (and language) they seem to critique" (Warland *Proper* 36). I think there is some truth in what she's saying but still I consider her views too extreme. For her only the writers of colour and bp Nichol, are an exception to this generalization. She is impressed by Nichol's "playfulness with language [that] freed him to slip out the side door of proper grammar and proper male behaviour" (*Proper* 36-7). Nevertheless, I believe that apart from bp Nichol, there are many other white male writers whose work would certainly challenge her generalization. I'm thinking of bill bissett, Steve McCaffery and Robin Blaser in Canada, and Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, and Michael Palmer in the States.

DS: What is the connection between the Canadian and American feminist language writing?

AS: I think that first and foremost, it is the return to the politics and aesthetics of the historical avant-garde. Moreover, I believe that for both groups of women it is a challenge to the current depoliticized postmodernist aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is also a reaction to the current predominant forms of writing, to the so called "workshop poem" in the United States, and to the realist tradition or, in George Bowering's words, to "anecdotal writing" in Canada. Both groups of women explore language and reveal the power structures of representation; their writing acts not only as a critique of society in general, but of the patriarchal structures inherent both in language and society. Similar to the historical avant-garde, aesthetics and politics are no longer dichotomized in their texts. Mouré makes it clear when she says that "the social function of language marks our civic place as women. Marks civic memory" ("Poetry, Memory" 72), and "leaving language as it is would mean agreeing with the civic order" ("Acknowledging" 128). She also argues that "[l]anguage itself is ideology and dominance and oppression Poems that say that poetry is not political are usually just reinforcing the dominant order without questioning or acknowledging that it is there" ("A Chance" 80). Both the American and the Canadian feminist writers engage in the rereading of the female avant-garde; Gertrude Stein's writing becomes an important intertext for Warland, Mouré and Scott.

They explore Stein's writing strategies but they also aim at re-vision of her political and social views. The dialogue between contemporary feminist American and Canadian language writers takes place on the pages of such Canadian journals as *Tessera* and *West Coast Line*. Carla Harryman and Lyn Hejinian published their collaborative text "The Wide Road" in *Tessera* 15 (Winter 1993). Gail Scott works with Harryman's ideas on writing narrative in *Spaces like Stairs*; Erin Mouré reflects on Hejinian's poetics in *Search Procedures*. The American language writers are invited for readings to Canada and vice versa - the dialogue goes on. I'm thinking here of the recent conference and poetry festival in honour of Robin Blaser which allowed for an exchange of ideas between many American and Canadian language writers. Some of the papers presented at the conference are published in *West Coast Line* (Fall 1995).

DS: The name of Gertrude Stein recurs in your discussion. Why is she so important for the development of language writing?

AS: Gertrude Stein is considered to be "the mother of all avant-gardes" (DeKoven "Gertrude's" 13). Not everybody realizes that her experiments with cubist structure were much earlier than Pound's (Burke "Getting" 100). Stein is placed at the beginning of the line of writers who represent, what

Perloff calls, the "'anti-Symbolist' mode of indeterminacy or 'undecidability,' of literalness and free play" (*Poetics* ix). The line "goes from Rimbaud to Stein, Pound, Williams by way of Cubist, Dada, and early Surrealist art" (*Poetics* ix). You may wonder about this classification as Gertrude Stein's writing is frequently discussed in the context of postmodernism,⁴ although in fact she wrote at the height of modernism. So we are back to the terminological confusion which occurs whenever we approach unconventional writing which does not fit any restricted monologic criteria.

DS: I understand you suggest here a similarity with reference to the Canadian feminist writers.

AS: Yes, the texts of Tostevin, Warland, Scott or Mouré are written in the 1980s and 1990s but they are appropriated at the same time for modernism and postmodernism, and this classification is done in spite of their closer political allegiance to the historical avant-garde. This only proves what McHale talks about:

the accounts we choose to give of the relations between modernism and postmodernism are only constructs, that there can be no strictly objective criteria for preferring one construct over its competitors, and that, on the contrary, choices among competitive constructs can only be made strategically, in the light of the kind of work that the chosen construct might be expected to

accomplish.

(*Constructing* 10)

With this in mind I choose to explore the ways the writers appropriate the techniques of historical avant-gardes. I want to show how they translate them into their own writing techniques, politics, aesthetics and ethics. I also want to draw attention to other feminist writers from different cultural backgrounds who work on similar projects.

DS: I know that the Quebec feminist writers "situated [themselves] within the project of avant-garde more explicitly than did feminist writers in anglophone North America" (Godard "Re:post" 138). Maybe it was easier for them because of the earlier Quebec avant-garde movements of the 1940s and 1950s such as the "Automatistes" and the "Refus global,"³ as well as earlier movements of the 1920s. But there must be a difference between these avant-garde movements and the contemporary feminist avant-garde! As far as I know theories of the avant-garde (Bürger, Calinescu and Huyssen) do not address the question of gender difference at all. You use the term avant-garde with reference to women writers and you seem to forget about the misogyny of the historical avant-garde and of modernism. Everybody remembers Eliot's pronouncements of phallic poetics, his theory of the link between masculinity

and creative genius (Burke "Getting" 105). You are probably aware of the futurist malice towards women. I find it troubling to read some of their statements and then try to place women within the same tradition of writing. You certainly must wonder about your use of the term avant-garde.

AS: It's true that the historical avant-garde is notorious for its attitudes to women and their writing. It's also true that there are very few women writers in the historical avant-garde. Some of them became coopted into misogynist politics and aesthetics of male writers, but there were also those, notably Mina Loy, who openly protested their practices, but still recognized their energy, inventiveness and humour (Suleiman "Mothers" 136). A number of the strategies and techniques used by the historical avant-gardes re-surfaced in the feminist circles. The Quebecois feminist writers, for instance, experimented with various techniques of writing inherited from the historical avant-garde, but they also raised new questions about women's subordination in patriarchal systems (Flotov 67-8). They feminized the avant-garde practices by experimenting with "body writing" which seeks to valorize women's desire and sexuality and establish a connection between their jouissance and their intelligence. In general, I can say that in contrast to the historical avant-garde, contemporary feminist writers respond to the

patriarchal language and the dominant discourses of society which have been oppressing women for ages. Theirs is a Bakhtinian dialogue with dominant patriarchal writing and discourses.⁶ The focus of feminist writers is on gender difference and its impact on language, which was not even touched upon by the historical avant-garde. Similar to the historical avant-garde these women play with the tradition and with the language they inherit. They retain the subversive energy of the historical avant-garde, but they attack its astounding misogyny. So there are formal allegiances but the politics is radically different. Suleiman correctly points out the "double allegiance" of avant-garde feminist writers, "on the one hand, to the formal experiments and some of the cultural aspirations of the historical avant-gardes; on the other hand, to the feminist critique of dominant sexual ideologies" ("Mothers" 136). The formal and cultural allegiance entails the subversion of current literary practices, insistence on merging art and life and on promoting writing as an intervention in many spheres of life, the social, political or cultural. I would also add here that in response to "the composition" of the century (Stein "Composition" 21), Canadian feminist writers dialogue not only with the patriarchal discourses but also with the current feminist theoretical ones.

DS: One of the measures of avant-garde writing is that it usually meets with harsh criticism from those who oppose fresh perceptions and disagree with unconventional literary projects. It is also true that avant-garde texts establish "a discernible distance between [themselves] and the mass of current practices" (Kastelanetz "Introduction" 3), a situation which naturally leads to a rejection of such texts by most readers. Feminist writing is supposed to reach most women, but when you think of the feminist avant-garde experiments, I don't think this aim is accomplished. Again I can see a contradiction of terms here.

AS: It's true that Canadian feminist language-oriented writers have been experiencing reception problems and I'm not talking here about "common" readers only. Their texts have been accused of excessive intellectualism by critics who want to reduce the writers' vision or ideas to "a so called common level" (Kamboureli and Tostevin "Sounding" 36). I find it striking that this special "kind of anti-intellectualism, a fear of ideas" (Kamboureli and Tostevin "Sounding" 36) displayed by certain reviewers is more prevalent in English Canada than in Quebec. The resistance to language-oriented writing, and especially to the inscription of theory in literary texts, is shown by many English Canadian women writers (Audrey Thomas, Libby Sheier or Paulette Jiles, Diana

Hartog)⁷ who regard theory as "a threat to the sovereignty of literature" (Kamboureli "Theory" 14). It's true that many disparaging statements have been uttered about Canadian language-oriented writing, but most of them were by critics who assume monological reading positions and are not sensitive to the nature of feminist experimental texts. Mouré's poem "Pronouns on the Main," for instance, has been accused of being "jerky or bumpy" (Solway 30), of having "little that approximated a cohesive theme or content" (Solway 30), and rejected as revelling in "indiscriminate use of the pronouns" (Solway 33) and "trendy, increasingly commonplace, linguistico-feminist jargon" (Solway 34). Her so-called, "arch lesbian poetics" is supposedly responsible for the "decline in poetic power" which follows "whenever poetry becomes a displaced form of politics or of any sort of partisan agitation" (Solway 45).

Scott's *Main Brides*, according to Stan Persky, "demands patient readers" as "not much happens in these stories, either in terms of plot or by way of developing depth of language or feeling." Persky cannot decide whether the blurring of the distance between the reader and character is "intentional or inadvertent" (D6), but in an offensive and blatantly paternalistic tone he adds, "[p]erhaps it's just another case of a male missing the point, but I don't think so" (D6). I

think that Persky does not realize that Scott doesn't work within a realistic model of narrative, and he seems not be aware that Scott's project aims at challenging the traditional expectations, and that it is both an aesthetic and political act on the part of the writer.

Betsy Warland's *Proper Deafinitions* has been disparaged by a critic who understands her etymological exploration in a very limited fashion, as an attempt at finding "an originative lingual truth" (CDJ 48). There are those who totally miss the point of her experimental work and accuse her of a lack of awareness regarding "the constructedness of self" and the alleged use of "an egocentric, univocal 'I'" (CDJ 48). Even Miriam Jones, who is usually sensitive to feminist language experiments, accuses Warland of essentialism. She sees in the texts of *Proper Deafinitions* "ink being anthropomorphized into blood" (33), and deplores Warland's uncertainty about the fact that "the body is socially mediated" (33). She admits that "[t]here is a great deal of slippage in Warland's 'theorograms' on this point" (33), but she does not realize that the "slippage" is an essential part of her conscious choice of carnivalesque structure in her texts.

Lola Lemire Tostevin is charged with the "inability to create vivid characters," with celebration of "story telling as the paramount reality" and also with another "major

weakness"--"[t]he obvious invasion of the narrative by a school of thought currently fashionable in literary circles" (Marchand "Coming" L16), namely French theory. Marchand does not comment on her use of theory, but in a typically ignorant and irresponsible fashion sees it as damaging to writing. Heidi Greco does not realize that Tostevin's use of a multi-generic structure in *Frog Moon* is a conscious and deliberate strategy with a specific political purpose. For her *Frog Moon* is a "[c]harming tale that loses its way in search of a genre" (D18). She blames Tostevin for "lacking her own voice" which results from her focus on telling the stories of others. The complex issue of translation, and of dialogic interaction of various voices in the narrative does not even cross the mind of Heidi Greco!

DS: But maybe the works are too experimental, too difficult?

AS: I don't think so. It is rather a question of the evaluative criteria. I believe that the texts of language- and theory-oriented women cannot be judged according to narrow and monologically understood criteria proposed by such critics as David Solway in his critique of Mouré's poetry. His is an example of a typical critique which is frequently advanced with regard to language-oriented writing. For Solway "the

principal features of bad poems are: use of a) cliché; b) inconsistency in the development of idea or image; c) wilful or needless obscurity; d) banalization; e) an *haut-gout* of arch self-consciousness or self-infatuation; and of "derivativeness" (29). Solway understands such terms as "cliché" or "derivativeness" in a very limited way, insensitive to the self-consciously playful and performative character of many of the language-oriented texts. If feminist dialogic exploration is a "reciprocal derivability" (47) then one can say that all writing which explores the problem of intertextuality is reciprocally derivative. The language writers' texts defy traditional categorizing; they belong to what Krauss and Ulmer call "paraliterature" characterized as "a generic conflation of literature and criticism" (Ulmer "Object" 108). Such writing is a montage of heterogeneous discourses within a single text. Intertextuality dominates because "every text is a 'mosaic of citations,' a palimpsest of traces, where other texts may be read" (Stam *New Vocabulary* 204). The writers speak in many voices; they never totalize their ideas into a conclusion. Consequently, they are easily misinterpreted by a monologic reading position which privileges one voice and silences others.

Solway's criticism can serve as an example of a monological position lashing out at feminist polyphonic

stances. Solway is against what he calls the canonization of "social, critical and psychologically fragmented heteroglossia ... at the expense of an authentic, incontestable and memorable language" (45). And "authentic" language for Solway is inscribed in texts of male writers such as Don Coles, Michael Harris and Robert Bringhurst who have mastered "the meditative sweep, the reflective letting out of the long breath which generates its own syntactic authority and sustains the reader's confidence" (46). It is interesting that Solway mentions only male writers as able to perform such creative accomplishments and he seems to assert that "authentic language" can be produced only by a masculine "long breath"!

DS: You seem to be very confident about criticizing reviewers who as you say "don't understand what the writers are doing". I think it's easy to pillory critics like Solway or Persky for their "monological position." I don't think you have critiqued the writers sufficiently. Are you saying that all texts written out of a "feminist polyphonic stance" are equally worthy of our attention (whether as academics or "general readers")? I think I do understand what the writers are doing but I still have problems with some of the feminist language texts. I applaud the aims of the writers but for me some of the writers are more imaginative and worthy of attention than

others. It's not clear to me where you stand on this issue or why.

AS: I agree that I have been monologic myself in the choice of the negative criticisms of language writing and I have not done much of appreciation and critical evaluation myself. The negative criticisms are actually a typical sign of the age of "theoretical correctness" when very few critics find time for an insightful analysis of literature. Burdened by academic jargon (I know I'm not successful in avoiding it myself) their analysis reveals an uncritical sifting of various texts through a series of terms such as "essentialism," "postmodernism," and "feminism." No wonder my uncritical "reverence" for a polyphonic stance is controversial and suspect to you. Nevertheless, I'd like you to know that I'm not saying that all feminist and polyphonic texts are equally valid. Sure there are differences between language-focused texts and some of them are more imaginative and thought-provoking than others. You will see more of the critique later in the thesis, but just to give you an example I'll refer to Betsy Warland's writing. Initially I was very impressed by her etymological language games but today I find many of her stylistic strategies simply not as fresh and inspiring as several years ago. She relies too heavily on such stylistic features as words divided internally with slash marks and

ubiquitous punning. It is possible there are still readers deriving pleasure and insight from such literary devices, but they may become irritating. It's true that language has been declared "slippery," unable to convey fixed meaning, but I believe that contemporary writers need to look beyond the postmodern theory that renders our pursuit for meaning meaningless. Warland's language aerobics, although valid in itself, tends to become familiar and mundane. I am more attracted to the writing of Erin Mouré as the vast range of her techniques keeps surprising me. Her interrogation of language is never predictable. It's true that some of her poems do not work, but such flaws are necessarily part of her concept of writing as a "search procedure." Note that I use the phrase from the title of her latest book of poetry *Search Procedures*. Mouré creates a language that has not been coopted by the media. Her celebration of language is not limited to its somatization but it is also its cerebation. She strives to sustain simultaneously the interplay and interdependency of the possibilities of language as metaphor explaining some "truth" and language as fragmentation, the making of many meanings. Her writing may be difficult, but it is because, to use Bernstein's words about language writing, its "point is not to display imagination but to mobilize imaginations, those imaginary nations" (Bernstein "Robin" 120). Nevertheless, in

spite of the controversy about language writing in general, I still think that it is essential in our advertising culture whose official language and images are expected to be accepted uncritically.

DS: But isn't it important to bring this type of complex avant-garde writing closer to women readers and thus raise an awareness of the problem of language and the way it has been used to oppress women? The writing isn't really popular and I can see a big problem here.

AS: I agree that the lack of popularity, especially in the case of feminist texts, can be a problematic issue. A difficult experimental work can exclude many women readers, and as Luise Flotow argues in her dissertation, it can "address itself primarily to critics versed in contemporary theory, or to certain feminist 'critiques synchrones' whose political solidarity also often meant critical solidarity" (124). Such experimental texts alone might affirm Peter Burger's argument that avant-garde art cannot have a substantial revolutionary political effect on daily life praxis. Sooner or later it is always recuperated as art by various institutions and therefore treated as separate from daily life. Nevertheless, I'd like you to take notice that it is the women's involvement in other professional activities

and artistic and cultural events that brings their writing and ideas closer to women readers. I refer here to the popular aspect of feminist activities which prepare readers for reception of non-traditional texts and lead to integration of avant-garde art into a daily life praxis. A dialogue between the two cultures has been encouraged by a number of initiatives. Women have come to an awareness that "[t]o be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends.... Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin *Problems* 252). Bowering points to 1979 as a year which marked the beginning of a dialogue between writers/artists in English Canada and Quebec. Nicole Brossard edited, in both Canadian languages, an anthology of avant-garde Canadian writing, *les stratégies du réel* which Bowering calls her "first significant gesture to English-speaking Canada" ("Language Women" 101).

Since then, as I have already mentioned, there have been exchanges between women writers from English Canada, Quebec and the USA fostered by national conferences, literary collaborations, and editorial collectives. The result of the dialogic orientation of the Canadian literary scene is the development of personal friendships and discussion groups which foster theoretical and critical awareness, and allow the writers to evolve through their dialogues, conversations, and

letters.

DS: It's all very fine, but you speak in very general terms. What about contributions of Tostevin, Scott, Mouré and Warland?

AS: In fact there is an important dialogue between Gail Scott, Nicole Brossard and other Quebec women writers (Louise Cotnoir, Louky Bersianik, France Théoret and Louise Dupré). Friendship between Tostevin and Kamboureli, Scott and Mouré, and Mouré and Bronwen Wallace has affected their mutual development as theoretically aware writers who form the avant-garde of the Canadian literary scene. A series of letters exchanged between Mouré and Bronwen Wallace, and Tostevin and Kamboureli, was published in order to bring to the attention of the general public the kind of discussions taking place among contemporary women writers. The collaborative writing of Warland and Marlatt and their public reading/performances of love letters and poems also point to a collective effort aimed at creating a sense of sharing within the community of women. Warland, for instance, was active in organizing the Toronto Women's Writing Collective (1975-81), a poetry festival for Toronto women writers. She was also involved in promoting a women's reading series, Writers-in-Dialogue, and in developing the West Word Women's Writing Retreats.

DS: You also mentioned conferences. How relevant are they for the development of language writing?

AS: I think that they are very important! A series of conferences, for instance, developed a close relationship between English Canadian and Quebecois women. The "Dialogue Conference" organized by Barbara Godard in October 1981 at York University, brought together anglophone Canadian and Quebecois feminist writers and critics. The Learned Societies conference in Halifax 1981 marked the beginning of a friendship between Scott and France Théoret. The Women and Words/Les femmes and les mots Conference (Vancouver, June-July 1983), initiated and coordinated by Warland, strengthened the ties between the two writing communities. Daphne Marlatt, and those who focus on language-centred writing, found support and understanding among Quebec writers, and what is most important "a tradition" firmly rooted in an analysis of language and culture, tradition which for Marlatt is "part of that necessary dialogue that we need to grow on both sides" ("SP/ELLE" 8). The conference gathered over 1,000 anglophone and francophone women involved in traditional and alternative forms of literary activity. It was a cross-cultural forum which focused on new directions in women's writing and criticism. The "Women and Words" conference was a turning

point for Mouré's literary career. After meeting Quebecois women writers she was drawn to reading essays by Irigaray, Kristeva, Spender, Cixous, Derrida, Spivak ("any just" 42). Later she became an organizer and moderator for the League of Canadian Poets' AGM panel discussion on "Women and Language" in 1985. Papers read at the panel were published in *Illegitimate Positions: Women and Language*, as was the correspondence between Mouré and Bronwen Wallace.

Marlatt and Warland were involved in the organization of "Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures Conference", Vancouver, November 1983, a "conference organized within an academic structure, but designed as a non-academic, community-focused conference, or rather communities-(in the plural)-focused" (Marlatt "Introduction" 12). It embraced the largest groups of marginalized women in British Columbia - the Native Indian, Asian Canadian and the lesbian communities.

There were many more conferences, workshops and discussion groups. All of them provide a space for dialogue between academics, writers, and audience, women of different backgrounds striving to discuss their differences. During such meetings the emphasis is on the ability to listen, to listen actively and thus engage in a dialogue celebrating cultural diversity. The dialogue bridges differences between the academic textual critics and the grass roots movement - they

learn about each other, converse, communicate and together work towards effecting changes in society.

DS: I understand that there are also publishing projects which have helped to popularize experimental Canadian writing.

AS: Absolutely! One of the initiatives of the 1981 "Dialogue Conference," for instance, was a decision to found a magazine which would allow a dialogue between the two groups of Canadian women. The idea for the journal developed through conversations and letters between the original editors Barbara Godard, Kathy Mezei, Daphne Marlatt and Gail Scott. First there was a special issue in *Room of One's Own*, then *NBJ*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine* ("Fiction Theory"), *Contemporary Verse*, and finally it was established as a separate magazine whose title has been recurring in our discussion - *Tessera* - ("Tessera, textera" points to the idea of "the patchwork quilt" (Marlatt "SP/ELLE" 6) or a mosaic). *Tessera*, is a bilingual magazine, "a forum for the discussion of the theory, of the criticism, of the poetics or whatever the equivalent is in prose, of the kind of writing being done by women" (Godard "SP/ELLE" 12). It creates a unique space for a dialogue between the two literary traditions. Essays and experimental performative texts generate discussions and pose questions

which lead to a dialogue which in turn engenders new writing, writing which is part of the process of reading writing reading. *Tessera* can be regarded as a feminist version of *Open Letter* or TRG (Toronto Research Group).

Apart from *Tessera* other literary magazines propagate essential theoretical and feminist issues. Important literary and theoretical dialogic activity takes place on the pages of *Open Letter*, *West Coast Line*, *Fireweed*, *Room of One's Own*, and *(f)Lip* (1986-89) (co-founded by Warland). The profile of the magazines is not thematic or sociological but language-centred and text-oriented. Women are invited to respond to the work published in the magazines. Dialogue is encouraged and the conversation goes on. Young women writers are encouraged to join the dialogue. The special Summer 1992 issue of *Open Letter*, edited by Tostevin, is devoted to the new generation of "Canadian women writers articulating the process of their writing" (Tostevin "Redrawing" 5), women whose writing is part of the Canadian "intratextual chorus" ("Redrawing" 7). Moreover, bilingual anthologies of feminist criticism such as Barbara Godard's *Gynocritics/ Gynocritique* (1986) and Shirley Neuman's and Smaro Kamboureli's *A Mazing Space* (1986), and books of essays and interviews like *Language in Her Eye* (eds. Li'by Scheier et al.) and Janice Williamson's *Sounding Differences. Conversations with Seventeen Canadian Women*

Writers provide a powerful explication and popularization of innovative Canadian writing by women.

In general I can say that all the literary, artistic and publishing projects aim at bringing the experimental, alternative writing closer to the public, at popularizing it, and thus allowing it to become part of everyday praxis, instead of remaining the exclusive "property" of academia. The projects can be compared to certain avant-garde practices which aimed at breaking the ideology of elite bourgeois discourse. The unconventional work of feminist language-focused writers is intent on breaking tradition, but for reasons which are different from the historical avant-garde. These women writers do not engage in outrageous public spectacles or the rituals of bohemian leisurely life. In spite of this, however, there is some correspondence between avant-garde bohemian practices and the feminist irreverent attitude toward patriarchal language and ideas during public workshops, conferences and artistic performances. Moreover, some of the language focused texts fulfil a role similar the avant-garde manifestos.

DS: Why do you use the term carnival with reference to "language writers"? I do not associate carnival with linguistic performance.

AS: You are certainly aware that carnival primarily valorizes the body ("carni" means flesh/body), and that the translation of the body into the written text or, in other words, the somatization of script, is one of crucial concerns of feminist writing. The valorization of carnival itself is considered to be the most explicit expression of the "maternal feminine" (Hajdukowski "Bakhtin" 157). But carnival, as well as theatre, also constitutes an independent semiotic system combining virtually all types of signs in both time and space, be they visual, auditory, tactile or kinetic. Moreover, I use the term "carnival" with all its Bakhtinian and Kristevan associations. The carnivalesque in literature, in Kristeva's words, is both "discourse and spectacle," "a spectacle ... without a stage ... a signifier, but also a signified" ("Word" 78). In a carnivalesque text "drama becomes located in language" (Word" 79). What is vital in a carnivalesque structure is that "prohibitions (representation, "monologism") and their transgression (dream, body, "dialogism") coexist" ("Word" 79) and hence they form a typical Bakhtinian ambivalent text "both representative and anti-representative" (Word" 79). If writing is carnivalesque, then it can be regarded as spectacle, as theatre, and the actual writing practice can be compared to "a theatre of ideas in which the rehearsal and the final performance are combined" (Nicol qtd. in Lane Kaufmann 226). This is what I want to achieve in my own writing. I consider

it to be a process of discovery that encompasses both my
"search procedures" and the "temptation of conclusions."

NOTES:

1. The example is the anti-essentialist feminism of Monique Wittig and essentialist deconstruction of Luce Irigaray.
2. See Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry and A Map of Misreading*.
3. There is an additional complication here as some of these acknowledged modernists did establish avant-garde groups on a small scale, such as Imagism and Vorticism (Eysteinnsson 158).
4. See Neil Schmitz's "Gertrude Stein as Post-Modernist: The Rhetoric of *Tender Buttons*".
5. See André-G. Bourassa's *Surrealism* and Paul-Emile Borduas' surrealist manifesto *Total Refusal*.
6. Bakhtin's theory is gender neutral, but there have been various appropriations of his ideas by many feminist critics who consider him an ally of the feminist project. One of the most promising rewritings of Bakhtin is Anne Herrmann's female dialogics (*The Dialogic and Difference* (1989)). Her version of female dialogics is imagined as "the dialogue between 's gender-blind theory and Irigaray's deconstruction of a male-biased theory and as a debate within feminist critical theory between the deconstruction of the subject as such (Kristeva) and the reconstruction of the subject as female (Irigaray)" (27-28). Herrmann's appropriation of Irigaray's notion of specularly allows her to imagine a subject as dialogized, representing both a subject and an object position, both self and other. Bakhtin's theory is enriched not only by the concept of "specularity" but also the possibility of "difference as alterity" (Herrmann 23); alterity refers to the radical difference between two subjects which is not dependent on the hierarchy of sexual difference. For other feminist revisions of Bakhtin see: Kate Holden's "Women's Writing and the Carnavalesque" (1985), "Toward a feminist narratology" by Susan Lanser (1986), Mary Russo's "Female grotesques: Carnival and Theory" (1986), *Feminist Dialogics* by Dale Bauer (1988), "The Rhetoric of Marginality" by Laurie Finke (1986), "Dialogic Subversion" by Nancy Glazener (1989), *Honey-Mad Women* by Patricia Yaeger (1988), *Feminism, and the Dialogic* (Eds. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry); also examine critical texts by Patrocínio Schweickart and Tania Modleski and Karen Gould. In English Canada, the critical work of Barbara Godard, Shirley Neuman, Aritha Van Herk, or Maroussia

Ahmed-Hajdukowski in Quebec, effectively use Bakhtinian concepts for their critical analysis of literary texts. Feminists have been using 's work as a theoretical and philosophical basis to deconstruct many patriarchal myths: the Cartesian theory of the autonomous self, mimetic theories of representation and the typical Saussurean binary categories. Bakhtin's dialogical insights suggest "a methodology for analyzing the subversive interactions of dominant and muted discourses in women's writing" (Yaeger 256).

7. See Constance Rooke's Interview with Diana Hartog, Paulette Jiles and Sharon Thesen "Getting into Heaven."

CHAPTER THREE

A FEMINIST AT THE THEORETICAL CARNIVAL

This section of the thesis is a crucial part of my search for the form of writing. It shows how I engage in "constructive writing" myself. The New Critical reading of several feminist language texts turns into a parody of the New Critical method which the language texts invite. I am using the concept of parody or a double-voiced discourse but I try to avoid its standard "negatively marked ethos" (Hutcheon Theory of Parody 57). Following Linda Hutcheon, I believe that the ethos of parody is "'unmarked' with a number of possibilities for marking: ridiculing ethos, more respectful or deferential ethos, a more neutral or playful ethos, close to a zero degree of aggressivity towards either backgrounded or foregrounded text" (Theory of Parody 57). My intention is not to ridicule or satirize this way of reading, but to use it as a benchmark for establishing alternative ways of approaching feminist language texts. My discourse oscillates between playful and deferential.

The second part of the chapter is conceived as a carnivalesque per(form)ance in which I examine my own reading position. I use Scott's "spaces like stairs" as a springboard for the reflection on my reading position. Through a carnivalesque discourse that oscillates between the academic and personal and between prose and poetry (an essay-in-verse in the manner of Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption") I situate myself as a bilingual reader of the feminist language texts. The manipulation of language performed in this section is deliberate. I try to pattern the text both syntactically and visually: I try to escape "the illusion of the invisibility of wordiness and structure" and I opt for "the movement ... toward opacity/denseness - visibility of language" so that "writing becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating" (Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 70-71).

There are codes you have to learn.... Society trains us to assimilate values and games of those who are in power. Deprogramming ourselves from values which colonized our mind is essential but in order to do so we have to know how the other thinks and plays the game.

(Brossard "Poetic Politics" 85)

Literary theory is "a game system, a supergame with many subgames".

(O'Neill 29)

All writing is a demonstration of method; it can assume a method or investigate it.

(Bernstein "Writing" 590)

In a world dominated by diabolical powers, in a world of everlasting transgression, nothing remains comic or carnivalesque, nothing can any longer become an object of parody, if not transgression itself.

(Eco *The Role* 7)

It has been argued that "every literary text is a game played by an author, a game with 'multiple subgames'" (O'Neill 123). A game, as everybody knows, presupposes rules and reasoned moves. It is a strategy the player takes in order to achieve certain goals. If a literary text is a game, my role as a reader is simply to decipher its rules and hence the secret of the writer's success. I am only a passive observer standing in awe of the skilful player. But what if the writer starts transgressing the rules and decides to play with them? Can the reader engage in a playful reading? Wouldn't such a reading generate only multiple questions instead of crucial

answers?

Naturally, in the context of this Ph.D. thesis I need some answers and I must find a model of reading or a theory which will guarantee the proper and the ultimate meaning of the texts that I plan to read. This kind of statement undoubtedly points to my idea of literary aesthetics, but cannot such a phrasing of my supposed literary philosophy be read only as parody, or at least as a sentence with a "loophole", with "a sideward glance" (Bakhtin *Problems* 196)? These are the 1990s! Surely, I have learned something from the lessons of poststructuralism!

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

(Carroll *The Annotated Alice* 269)

When you are writing who hears what you are writing.
That is the question.
 Do you know who hears or who is to hear what you are writing and how does that affect you or does it affect you.
 That is another question.

(Stein *Four in America* 121) (emphasis mine)

Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy" insist

that "[c]ritical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (79), that the literary work is an ontological whole, complete in itself, an autonomous verbal artefact.¹ I have to remember this. Naturally, the work itself can reveal its meaning to a competent reader who easily recognizes the conventions/rules of the literary game. My objective gaze then has to focus on the work itself, not on the writer. I cannot forget that "the work of art is a system of norms" (Wellek "The Mode" 84), "an object of knowledge" (Wellek "The "Mode" 83) which can be analyzed in an objective fashion, and I cannot allow myself to ignore René Wellek's warning against "insidious psychological relativism." I will try to avoid all psychological interpretations, which, as Wellek convincingly argues, "must always end in scepticism and finally mental anarchy" (84). Naturally, I want to avoid mental anarchy, especially when I am writing the thesis. I am glad that I need not worry in this section of my dissertation about my tendency to resort to psychoanalytical interpretation, as here I will focus only on some of the essays by Gail Scott, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Betsy Warland and Erin Mouré. I understand that I have to reject any inclination to substitute another discipline for the study of literature itself. I will just elucidate the "unique" analytical capabilities of the writers and I will scrutinize the technical features of their "artfully constructed" works.

As a reader I should be confident about the New Critical approach, because what other model of interpretation can better elucidate the inner working of a work, its structural/organic unity, and the meaning of the whole? What theory of reading better combines the formalist and structuralist approaches than New Criticism? The concept of aesthetic wholeness, coherence and unity is very appealing. In order to discover the "correct" interpretation I just need to lay bare the operation of various literary devices, the conventions of the literary game. This should not be a problem as a good work of literature is a "well-wrought urn" (Brooks), and if I follow the approach I just need to find the principle of unity through analysis of the "stratified system of norms" (Wellek "The Mode" 81). It is so encouraging to know that literature can be read in such an objective scholarly fashion! And it is thanks to the systematic linguistics of Saussure that I can account for the "literariness," of the texts, this essential aesthetic value that mysteriously puts them above all other ordinary, banal writing. In Poland I was impressed by the theories and practical criticism of Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum and Jakobson. The formalist readings were all the rage during my undergraduate studies and no wonder - they provided such excellent scholarly techniques of literary analysis. I will always remember the analysis of "skaz" in Eikhenbaum's "Jak Zrobiono "Plaszcz Gogola"" ("How Gogol's

'The Overcoat' Is Made"). It was so refreshing after Marxist readings and their critique of bourgeois ideologies. No longer did we need to focus on a narrow aesthetics and ideology of socialist realism. Finally we had a technique of reading that insisted on the autonomy of art governed by its own internal laws and not by the ideology and social and economic factors of society. I guess it was natural for me to become attracted to the New Critical theory that shares the belief in the autonomy of art and focuses on the verbal aspect of literature. It was reassuring to know that every good writer proceeds in the manner of a craftsman and does not worry about foregrounding the political implications of literature:

He may start with a personal experience as yet uninterpreted, a general vague feeling, an episode, a metaphor, a phrase - anything the comes along to excite the imagination at the same time that he is trying to envisage the poem as a whole, he is trying to relate the individual items to that whole. He cannot assemble them in a merely arbitrary fashion; they must bear some relation to each other. So he develops his sense of the whole, the anticipation of the finished poem, as he works with the parts and moves from one part to another. Then, as the sense of the whole develops, it modifies the process by which the poet selects and relates the parts, the words, images, rhythms, local ideas, events, etc.....It is an infinitely complicated process of establishing interrelations.

(Brooks and Warren *Understanding* 526-7) (emphasis mine)

Brooks and Warren discuss the process of creation with reference to a poem, but doesn't every good writer proceed in

a similar fashion working with other genres? What is important here is the sense of the whole, the anticipation of the finished work and the necessary selection of devices to achieve unity and coherence. In the case of an essay, it is a question of finding the logic of the form (exposition, argumentation, description, narration), the rhetorical figures, the method (inductive, deductive) in order to show the effectiveness of their use in a unified, coherent, logical structure. An essay is expected to be written in literary prose, so consequently I can focus on the figure of the narrator, the point of view and imagery. And it does not matter which model of essay writing the writer follows, be it the Montaignian personal, reflective, meditative and associational or the Baconian objective, impersonal, rational, and argumentative. Both models presuppose inner logic and unity and a writer proficient in the art of essay writing can certainly be admired for technical virtuosity.

I will test the New Critical model on the writing of Scott, Warland, Tostevin and Mouré. Surely these writers can pass the test of the New Critical aesthetics!

In Gail Scott's essay "spaces like stairs" the speaker/narrator starts with a question: "what's real?" (107). This philosophical question is certainly a good start

for a promising work. At this stage the writer "envisages the work as a whole", the "finished product." Scott must have thought about the question and rehearsed her thoughts in private. Now she is just presenting the argument to the reader through one or a series of possible devices and techniques. The narrator of Scott's text identifies the problem as related to the concept of space; no definition of space is given, but I, as a reader, can easily find many possible connotations of the word: physical space, mental space, distance, area, volume, "a blank area separating words or lines" (*Webster*). Nevertheless, the narrator proceeds by giving an example of "rape" "as normal product of patriarchal logic" (107) and hence there is a suggestion here of a female space, female reality described as "chance bad luck" (107). The theme seems to be established: the female "real" or female reality. Now the writer will certainly focus on the development of the theme through a choice of effective strategies.

How is the argument being developed? Is there any argument here or rather description and reflection? I am looking for a method. Is it induction or deduction? I am not really sure. There seems to be no conclusions here. Nothing has been resolved. The last words of the essay bring me close to its beginning: "she's repeating herself again the problem is in the space she's glad" (111).

If this is not argumentative writing but a meditation or reflection, who is the reflecting self? Who is the narrator? There is a reference to the plural "we", but there is also "she" and there are other voices speaking ("a voice says," "now asks the text" (107)). It seems to be impossible to define a coherent point of view; although there is a third-person "she" speaking, there is no hint of omniscience. It is rather an interior monologue, but the traditional categorization of direct and indirect interior monologue does not really fit here either. A dialogue among many voices is perhaps a better description of the structure. Does it not problematize the New Critical concept of the unity of the work as reflecting the unity of self, of individual identity and of the universality of essential human values? The essay writer should be an all-knowing and knowable "I," a fixed identity, whose opinion and ideas may be traced to a singular identity, but this essay denies such a position to a writer. Moreover, one of the vital rhetorical strategies of a traditional essay - rational logic - is missing because of the number of voices interrupting any attempt at a unified discourse. I wonder if there is a different "logic" at work in this text?

Furthermore, I am no longer sure that I am reading an essay, a genre traditionally written in a form of a balanced prose which makes use of multiple rhetorical strategies. I can identify some of them, for instance the rhetorical question

and repetition of several phrases: "she's repeating herself" and "the problem is in the space" (107-111). I wonder if they are the unifying elements the New Critics talk about. Nevertheless, apart from the reflective sections in the essay there are elements of other genres, and hence other literary subgames, introduced here: there is a story in the section called "prologue (working material)", a story which does not develop, however, along the traditional lines. The rudiments of plot are interrupted by a voice questioning or reflecting on the words used in the narrative. The prologue section is located in the middle of the essay which again bothers me, as that is not the right place for the use of such a technique. The "epilogue (reworked material)" at least finds its right place at the end of the work, but I remind myself that both forms originate in drama and their use in the essay is rather disturbing. But what is most striking is that the whole text reads like poetry, but poetry "devoid of imagery"! Every attempt at creating an image is interrupted by a voice questioning the words being used. There is an attention to language itself, to its materiality. I scrutinize each word, rejecting any reference to cultural and historical setting. I want to believe in a New Critical fashion that this is language and no matter who uses it, it will show the play of irony, paradox, ambiguity, contradiction and complexity in general. I find myself, however, pondering on such words as

"new culture", "Nicole's utopia," "the shadow of the phallus", "pleasure of two lips", "hysteria", "the phallic symbol", "two postmoderns". Don't the words beg interpretation which would cross the boundary of the text? I am reminded, however, that the text has a meaning of its own entirely separate from explicit or implicit context. Even if there is surface ambiguity of meaning I have to assume that the text is a unified and coherent whole. Otherwise the text is a failure or I, the reader, have failed in a proper analysis.

I also scrutinize each phrase and sentence ... or a grammatical structure I would like to call a sentence, but which defies the traditional grammatical categories of the "hypotactic and complete" sentence (Silliman "New Sentence" 79) I was taught to use:

(daddy daddy cries the little girl in the new coat jumping up and down beside the smiling man while a camera draws the line between acceptable (what you see) and unacceptable seduction.

(109)

There must be a reason for this kind of sentence structure, and also for the many gaps and spaces in the essay which indeed trouble me. If this is an outpouring of feelings and emotions, it is not done aesthetically; aesthetic art entails a "conscious objectification of feelings" and moreover, "[t]he artist corrects the objectification when it is not adequate" (Curt Ducasse qtd. in Wimsatt and Beardsley "The Intentional"

82). What is an adequate feeling for Scott?

But perhaps I am not reading the text properly? Robert Con Davis observes that "a work properly read will always be unified by a set of tensions, as expressed in paradox and irony" ("Formalism" 48). Irony indicates "recognition of incongruities" (Brooks *The Well Wrought Urn* 209), but it is also, in Richards' words, "the bringing in of ... opposites" in order to achieve a "balanced poise" (*Principles* 250). Irony is therefore this magic strategy which forges together the multiplicity and variety of a literary work into an organic whole of harmony and complete identity with itself.

There is certainly irony in some of the voices, and the paradoxical nature of woman's life is addressed but I don't think that irony or paradox is the controlling principle of structure in this essay that helps reconcile all opposites in the text. Irony functions here rather as a disrupture principle. There seems to be a different concept of irony at work in Scott's text, irony as the sign of lack of coherence among the parts of the text or as the discrepancy between signs and meaning, verbal irony rather than the situational one privileged by New Critics, or as Linda Hutcheon argues, irony as "a trope of doubleness...the trope that works from within a power field but still contests it" ("Circling" 176). Scott's stress on the undecidability and the general breakdown

of meaning can mean two things: her work fails as it is not a "well wrought urn," or . . . it functions within a different paradigm of game whose rules are not compatible with those of my theoretical game.

I only hope that the essays by the other writers in this study will pass the test of the New Critical approach. Surely, the markers of aesthetic achievement such as "integrity," "relevance", "unity" (Wimsatt and Beardsley "The Intentional" 82) can be found in their texts. In concurrence with the assumptions of Saussure's unitary system, if the focus of my analysis is the "langue," I can be positive about finding the linguistic unity of the texts, and by extension, the unity of the speaker/narrator and her experience.

Warland's "cutting re/marks" and Tostevin's "A Weekend at the Semiotics of Eroticism Colloquium Held at Victoria College" aim at presenting their particular experiences. Warland presents a fragment of her life, a period of her hospitalization and surgery (laparotomy and hysterectomy) and Tostevin writes about a university event, a colloquium. Both texts indeed function as an analysis of their experiences but do they develop the "sense of the whole, the anticipation of the finished [text]"? Do the writers select and relate "the parts, the words, images, rhythms, local ideas, events, etc. . . . [in] an infinitely complicated process of establishing

interrelations?" (Brooks and Warren *Understanding* 526-7).

Warland's "cutting re/marks" baffles me because its space is filled with a variety of texts: fragments of prose narrative about hospitalization, memories of the past, current and past thoughts, dictionary definitions focusing on the etymology of words, mother's letters, a fragment of an unpublished journal by Daphne Marlatt, newspaper clippings on the number of hysterectomies performed each year, a list of hospital instructions, fragments of conversations, songs, of citations and references to many other texts (Cixous, H.D., Bersianik, Freud), fragments of scientific discourses (quantum theory), and of medical, psychoanalytic and mythical (Persephone myth) ones. How can I find unity in such a multiplicity of fragments? Each of them is written in a different discourse! I recall Brooks's words about a literary text as "a simulacrum of reality" where the analysis of experience focuses not only on "breaking it up into parts" but finally on its unification, as the writer "must return to us the unity of the experience itself as man knows it in his own experience" (Brooks "The Heresy" 251) (emphasis mine). In Warland's work there is only the breaking-up stage and no attempt, or perhaps no ability to unify the experience. Does it mean that a female experience is disorderly and chaotic or perhaps that the women fail as writers because they cannot

unify their experiences in their creative acts? But I can see now that I must have made a mistake here already. When I want to follow the rules of a New Critical game I cannot make any specific references to the individual writers. I must sever the speaker from her words. I am interested only in the system of language, in the Saussurean "langue". The study of the individual "parole" would certainly be an ineffective project. Doesn't "parole" contaminate the purity of "langue" ?

Warland seems to laugh at linguistic purity and unity. The literariness of the text shows in sections where there is a close attention to language, where the poeticity of the text is revealed. Again, I remind myself that essays are expected to be written in prose, but, I guess, literary prose allows for elements of poetry. Jakobson suggests that "[p]oeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion" ("What is Poetry" 378). Yes, there is poetry in "cutting re/marks." Even the title brings attention to language, but again I recall the New Critical rules: "there is the fault of writing the personal as if it were poetic" (Wimsatt and Beardsley "The Intentional" 82). If the personal cannot be poetic, and here I mean that it cannot be translated into poetry, the whole history of literature would be questioned! Don't Wimsatt and Beardsley confuse writing as a direct expression of the personal with writing as translation

of experience?

If the poetic elements of the essay are hailed by New Critics, what about the contamination of the whole work with fragments of ordinary language and scientific discourses? Linguistic unity is not what Warland cares about. Moreover, I cannot even decide who the speaker/narrator of the essay is, and which model of essay writing does the author follow? Furthermore, I wonder if I can call the text literature at all. Literature is supposed to have a language all its own. Nevertheless, I find myself pondering on the definition of the concept of literature as having a special language and distinctive "devices" that would, as Russian Formalists claim, "estrangle" or "defamiliarize" ordinary language. Terry Eagleton reminds me that "that there is more metaphor in Manchester than there is in Marvell. There is no 'literary' device - metonymy, synecdoche, litotes, chiasmus and so on - which is not quite intensively used in daily discourse" (*Literary Theory* 6).

After all these frustrations I am eventually encouraged because I can find the principle of irony in Warland's text. The juxtaposition of the fragments frequently produces an effect of irony, as for instance in the juxtapositioning of medical and psychoanalytic discourse on hysteria or penis envy. But again it is not the unifying concept of irony the

New Critics espouse. Moreover, the text raises several theoretical questions discussed in contemporary critical theory which the rules of my New Critical game urge me to discard. There are elements of a narrative here, rudiments of plot, attempts at creating imagery, but the budding narrative is constantly interrupted by etymological explorations of words and phrases, and also by quotations and meditations. The word associations derived from the etymology of specific words break the flow of the narrative and turn it into a new area of exploration or a different conceptual space. Individual memories of events and perceptions are continuously broken up and no narrative continuity is allowed to develop. It looks as if the reader was invited to process many logical gaps and associative links that proliferate between words and sentences. Have we not been taught that a good writer cannot leave gaps? Warland must unify all the fragments into a harmonious whole, and I, the reader, should only reveal her artistic virtuosity. What kind of logic is there in the text? What kind of reality is presented here? Many words through phonetic/sound associations lead to other words; each word becomes a threshold for the creation of another word, another sentence, another thought, another reality. This is certainly not a literary game that New Critical reading can master or appreciate.

In contrast, Tostevin's text, "A Weekend at the Semiotics

of Eroticism Colloquium Held at Victoria College," at least at the first reading, seems not to present bigger problems. It looks like a straightforward narrative of the colloquium. I can easily trace the speaker and the situational irony so much valued by the New Critics. The text seems to fit the category of the so-called subjective essay which is an expression of the writer's experience and thinking, both of which eventually reveal unity and harmony, as "man knows it in his own experience" (Brooks "The Heresy" 251). I am puzzled, however, by the last paragraph and the final sentence: "Doesn't care much for the average Joe anymore, for as Lois Lane says in the movie '... you're a hard act to follow Superman'" (63). What kind of relationship do these lines have to the earlier sections of the essay? Where is the famed unity of experience? The writer is supposed to triumph "over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new patterns" (Brooks "The Heresy" 252), but I cannot find the unity or any "equilibrium of forces" (Brooks "The Heresy" 247). I can only conclude that the writer is unable to "come to terms" with her experience.

Although there is no disruption of sentence structure in this text and the gaps between paragraphs do not really attract attention as carrying additional meaning, the sentences themselves seem to carry a double meaning. Unfortunately, I cannot account for it, as the New Critical

game does not allow me to consult the intentions of the writer or any other external sources. If I approach a text as a system of norms, a "langue", and analyze it from a linguistic point of view by focusing on the syntactic and lexical-semantic characteristics, I can easily miss instances of double-voicing, be it parody, stylization, internal polemic or hidden dialogue.

Erin Mouré, a poet, will certainly know how to write a good essay. She chooses the form of a letter in "To Speak of these things." I am not surprised by the use of the form of an epistolary essay. Of course, it is not a traditional essay form, but at least it is a form from which I can expect a certain internal logic, a certain message, reflection or communication of ideas. I am not disappointed here, as the text seems to be a coherent exposition and reflection on language, memory and theory. Nevertheless, I wonder if there is anything striking in the fact that the letter writer is signed as "Erin," the addressee is Erin, and the text itself is written by Erin Mouré? It is not entirely unlikely that both correspondents carry the same name, but here, Erin, the letter writer, seems to be talking to herself, to "Erin of 10 years ago" (133). And when she says "I looked at my memories, OUR memories" (134) she certainly implies that Erin, the letter writer, and Erin, the addressee, the letter reader, are in fact one and the same person. Is there a suggestion of a

split personality here or perhaps of a different concept of self? Psychology would be helpful in understanding the problem but the New Critical theoretical game rejects any external discourses, and, moreover, the speaking "I" is naturally unified and this kind of consideration is out of the question.

I know I should not be disturbed by the problematic nature of some of these texts, because from a New Critical point of view "the reader is left neither puzzled, nor irritated by ... vagueness, but impressed by the richness, complexity and ambivalence of vision" (Selden 28). But I am puzzled and irritated! When I compare the New Critic's definition of the poet or a writer which suggests closeness to Keats's "negative capability"- where "a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (399) - I notice that the texts of these four Canadian language-focused writers absolutely refute the principle. Instead, there is an insistence on self-consciousness and on the questioning of every word and sentence. These four women writers undoubtedly negate the principle of impersonality first hailed by T.S. Eliot and then adopted by formalists and New Critics. They choose to play a different literary game. I have been wondering about the New Critical objective approach which supposedly has "a way of deciding whether works of art are

worth preserving and whether, in a sense they 'ought' to have been undertaken" (Wimsatt and Beardsley "The Intentional" 84). In the context of the objective search for fixed norms English-Canadian women's writing would not be worth discussing.

My impersonation of a New Critical reader makes me realize that I must be more careful in choosing a reading position. I must admit, however, that I enjoy the critical cross-dressing, the carnivalesque performance in "robes of stunning irony" (Scott "A Feminist" 134). It allows me to oscillate between the position of actor and spectator. Do I wear other selves like carnival costumes or break down the frontiers of my own self in order to perform both roles? Or is the Other already within?

It seems that I have already changed the game paradigm into the paradigm of play, carnival and performance in general. In an irreverent fashion I even allow myself to question the title of one of essential New Critical texts, *The Verbal Icon* by W.K. Wimsatt. If a text is an icon, it should be treated as sacred, as an object of uncritical devotion, to be worshipped like an idol. The texts by these English-Canadian women writers defy the rules of the New Critical theoretical game; they lose the status of the icon and enter the sphere of the profane. Carnival always has been a complex

socio-historical event, and its translation into literature should revitalize the socio-historical dimension of texts, or as Bernstein argues, it should recall "literature from its long critical banishment to the nether world of free-floating texts" (*A Poetics* 177).

The carnivalesque ambience allows me to reject any search for serious-minded scientific answers, invariable rules and explanatory models. Roman Jakobson's and Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous study of Baudelaire's "Les Chats," as Cassedy has cleverly observed, reads today, "almost like a parody of the structuralist method. It combines semantic, grammatical, syntactical, phonetic and prosodic methods of analysis to provide a ridiculously complicated set of organizational schemas - all for the purpose, the authors say, of giving the poem 'the character of an absolute object'" (122), and I would add here, an object to be venerated like a fetish. It seems that only a complete whole can achieve the status of the holy. The Structuralist belief in the underlying structure is similar to the New Critical belief in the unity beyond the ambiguity and diversity of its elements. Moreover, the absolute confidence of both theories that poetic literary texts are more literary than prose texts, and consequently, "more the object of reverence and awe" (Cassedy 33) is also questionable. The monologic theories of original purity may be

appealing, but it is both Gertrude Stein and Gail Scott who remind me that,

In the beginning there really was no difference between poetry and prose in the beginning of writing in the beginning of talking in the beginning of hearing anything or about anything.

(Stein Narration 27)

The end of genre, say the postmoderns. Yet we keep writing the (poetic) story, the (poetic) novel - further imbued with a little theory: i.e., commentary signifying that place where our writing processes consciously meet the politics of the women's community.

(Scott Spaces 106)

Gail Scott's statement would sound like a blasphemy to a New Critic. She identifies several aspects of writing which do not fit into the New Critical arsenal of values. Scott not only points to the intentions and the politics of women's writing, aspects of texts which are of no interest to New Critics, but she also shows that women relish hybrid writing, that they consciously choose strategies that would contaminate the purity of a "verbal icon." But weren't the New Critics and other formalists con/structing false unities and totalizing conceptualizations? Weren't their theories carrying specific ideologies? It is true that in their analysis the text, rescued from author, reader and their social and historical contexts, showed tensions and paradoxes, but they were always resolved into a harmonious whole. Terry Eagleton succinctly

summarizes the New Critical achievement: "Literature was a solution to social problems, not part of them" and therefore it was "plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it". Literature "was to be the new organic society in itself, the final solution to science, materialism." No wonder there was no real interest in the process of textual meaning, but in the text as an artistic whole which was a perfect "recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo" (Eagleton 48, 49, 50). Feminist writing, on the other hand, has a definite political agenda that aims at subverting the social, political and literary status quo. Women's texts are no longer pure autonomous objects, but texts where "a variety of writings ... blend and clash" (Barthes *Image/Music* 146).

Feminists engage in a different kind of literary game, a game whose rules can be transgressed and changed. Perhaps it is not a game any more, but a play, not Derrida's free play, though, which is another recipe for inertia. Derrida replaces the ideal of organic unity by one of infinite free play or self-referring indeterminacy. His notion of play can be compared to an "impersonal, random movement" or "involuntary energy" (Wilson "In Palamedes" 195) which contrasts with a concept of play inscribed in the Bakhtinian theory of carnival as "voluntary, intentional human action," "freedom and

creativity" (Wilson "In Palamedes" 195). The notion of carnival translated into literature allows for desacralization of inherited concepts and ideas. A work of literature recognized as a sacred "verbal icon" is no longer venerated but profaned both by the writers and readers who transgress accepted conventions and contaminate the purity of the verbal artefact. And although, as Umberto Eco argues, a carnival is not an instance of "real transgressions" but rather an example of "law reinforcement" that "reminds us of the existence of the rule" ("The Frames" 6), the carnivalesque in literature, I believe, has a different kind of existence. First and foremost it is not an annual event condoned by those in power. Those who engage in acts of carnivalesque transgression do not ask for permission and certainly do not respect any time boundaries. They do not limit themselves only to the monitored, temporary artistic transformative acts, but also aim at metamorphosing the status quo through writing with a definite political dimension. A sceptic would say that "Art cannot change the world" but Marcuse reminds us that "it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world" (Marcuse 32-33). Or better, in the words of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, the American Language writer: "If consciousness must change, if social forms must be re-imagined, then language and textual structures must help cause and support, propel and discover

these changes" ("Reader" 105) (emphasis mine).

When literature is understood as a carnivalesque space, it is no longer a pure, unified and harmonious verbal artifact but it instead constitutes a whole field of discursive practices. It combines, transgresses boundaries and plays with various semiotic systems, visual, auditory, verbal and nonverbal. Contemporary carnivals are multi-media performances, and so are many texts of Scott, Mouré, Tostevin and Warland. Such texts can be read as examples of Jakobson's intersemiotic translation as "*transmutation ... of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems*" ("On Linguistic" 429). They experiment with interartistic comparisons, and they do not avoid questions of contextualization, be it personal, social, literary, psychological, or philosophical questions excommunicated by New Critics and other formalist schools. These texts most probably would not be called literature any more by those who respect the rules of monologic systems. Don't they contaminate the verbal icons? Verbal icon turns into a verbal performance or verbal carnival. The contamination is of the type that Charles Bernstein describes when he talks about tainting his own writing:

I want to taint poetry if only so you can see it better -
taint in the sense of *staining*, giving *tint*; poetry not
 as transcendent but as colored: *of the world.*

(*A Poetics* 162)

The statement pronounces "contamination" of literature with the discourses of external world or rather a different approach to literature altogether. If "'pure' literary theory is an academic myth" (Eagleton 195), so is a "pure" work of literature. I agree with Eagleton that "the texts now dubbed 'literature'... [must be] returned to the broader and deeper discursive formations of which they are part" (213). Writing is "a whole field of what Michel Foucault has called 'discursive practices,'" and the whole field of practices must be "an object of study ... rather than just those sometimes rather obscurely labelled 'literature'" (Eagleton 205). The search for the divine, for the "absolute mystical authority" (Eagleton 77) of texts is over. I, as a reader, must also enter the sphere of the "profane." I no longer focus on the homogeneity and uniformity of the "langue" but on the impurity of "parole," on the discourse in all its multiplicity, on productive contamination in which "differences have been brought together so they make contact" (Tostevin "Contamination" 13). The carnivalesque space implies a "flight from Eden" (Cassedy), from a utopian paradise into textual, social and historical realities that do not presuppose unity, oneness or wholeness.

Texts of this nature require new reading strategies. Are meanings not produced "through the theoretical frames brought to bear on texts"? (Godard "Canadian" 8). I thought I could

play the New Critical and Formalist critical game. Have I not mastered the lingo of the New Critical club?² I "secretly" joined the club and followed the rules of its game. I rejected all personal, socio-historical and political contexts, and I realized that the words *author*, *agency*, *self*, *experience*, *identity* deserve excommunication if my reading of literature aims at aesthetic wholeness. But now I can see that in order to be able to read the feminist English-Canadian language- and theory-oriented texts "properly" I must avoid formalist or structuralist readings. I need to join another elitist academic club - the society of poststructuralists.

To be poststructurally correct I must say "*text*, not *work*; *subject*, not *self*; *scriptor*, not *author*" (Friedman "Post" 474), and I must look for such words as *humanist*, *essentialist*, *pragmatic*, *empirical*, *experience-based*, or *expressive* (Friedman "Post" 478) as definite signs of texts which do not pass the test of the norms established by the masters of the club. I wonder if there are any good computerized theory programs produced by the poststructuralist cops policing the discourse of the uninitiated. A poststructuralist program would immediately erase such words as "*self*, *author*, *work*, *experience*, *expression*, *meaning*, *authority*, *origin* ... *reference*," words which are tainted with "a bankrupt, defunct and hopelessly naive humanism" (Friedman

"Post" 473). Substitutes would be provided, old theories would be rewritten and new masters would reach the echelons of the divine. Derrida has certainly reached such a status in the "culturally 'naive' former colonies" (Friedman "Post" 474).

I said I wanted to be poststructurally correct, but isn't it true that "[e]very politically appropriate position is dangerous because one can be appropriated by the position" (Van Herk *In Visible* 131)? Yes, I need to be on guard, I need to doubt and question if I don't want to be blinded by theoretically sophisticated terminology. Why does poststructuralism erase the author and the empirical? Are the texts really as "disembodied as the angels" (Christian "Race" 230)? Don't we need a theory that would recuperate an active and engaged subject, especially when we read texts written by women? The texts may be webs, but they also have weavers who are situated in history. Shouldn't we look at women's writing as "'works', as 'texts' that do the work of reinventing culture" (Yaeger *Honey-Mad* 29)? If we do, a modicum of woman's agency would be recovered. A post/poststructuralist or "responsible poststructuralist" stance would certainly be more relevant here as it recuperates an active and engaged subject. As Friedman argues, post/poststructuralism is a poststructuralism in dialogue with theories that stress the agency of the self/subject, such as Bakhtin's, Peirce's or

Foucault's. Their theories are appropriated by women for specific political and aesthetic ends. The post/poststructuralist position allows for negotiation between other theories, terms, and concepts, and such negotiations are dialogic. In post/poststructuralism we can observe "the return of the repressed" (Friedman 474):

The *author* is being resurrected; *agency* is once more on the agenda. *Self* and *experience* may even one day be rehabilitated- but ...now ...they have a different, more self-conscious and self-critical texture, one that weaves aspects of poststructuralist discourse with other threads.

(Friedman "Post" 475)(emphasis mine)

I am working with a new vocabulary now: *re-vision, reconstruction, strategy, project, intervention, insertion, positioning, situating and negotiation* (Friedman "Post" 481). The words point to the techniques/tactics used by women writers who self-consciously engage in the interruption of discourses which traditionally have been denying their agency or even their existence altogether. The re-invention and negotiations can occur through a subversive translation of existing forms of writing. In the spirit of carnival - the translation could be not only subversive but, in the words of Douglas Robinson, it can also be reversive, aversive, perversive or conversational (203). Translation can be playful, a diversion, as for instance a parodic translation,

which transgresses accepted conventions and rules. Subversive translative acts affect the text but also mock the expectations of the reader who is drawn into the translative act, whether she wants it or not.

The post/poststructuralist reading can be regarded as carnivalesque, in the sense of being ambivalent, or Menippean³, as it creates a cultural space allowing for play and interventions between contradictory theories. Also, it valorizes the bawdy/body acts - and hence, once translated into writing - the somatization of the writing practice itself. My post/poststructuralist position allows me to notice the writers' continuous negotiations between writing theory and theorizing a mode/form of its writing. In fact, the writers who are the focus of this study explore a theory of writing through the practice of writing itself. The texts reveal the confluence of the critical and the "creative" - the theoretical and the literary - one of the aesthetically undesirable contaminations! The generic impurity goes "hand in hand" with linguistic "pollution," and with the disruption of the unitary concept of the self.

II. PRIVATE PER(FORM)ANCE

The ambiguous carnivalesque space of the texts I read invites my entrance into the sphere of the carnivalesque. The texts themselves do not offer me a stable reading position and consequently I cannot be a passive observer of the literary game any more. I may be equipped with knowledge of formalist and structuralist literary theories and be familiar with their concepts of artistically and aesthetically successful literary works, but once I impose my preconceptions on the texts I do violence to artistic creations which happen to function within a different artistic paradigm. Carnival attracts, lures and entices its observers into participating in the festivities - and so am I tempted/seduced into co-creation of the texts I read. Gail Scott's essay "A Feminist at the Carnival" suggests a position for me as a subject who "keep[s] dividing into actor, spectator. But divide[s] to recompose again" (Spaces 134), a subject "dressed in her robes of ambivalence, in her mask which is a comment on her current grasp of meaning" (Spaces 135).

Because of the linear constraints of writing it is impossible for me to present the multiple carnivalesque elements of the texts which function in simultaneity. Therefore any order imposed by me on the text is artificial and mocks the unruly and disorderly nature of the carnivalesque. The actor/spectator division, or rather the continuous actor/spectator interaction, as I slip between the roles, refers to my multiple voices and hence subject positions - be it academic, personal (autobiographical), carnivalesque or maenadic/wild. Similar to the writers of the texts I will shift among stances and genres and thus reveal the "play among the subjectivities contained in my 'I'" (DuPlessis Pink 105).

All aspects of my text are examples of conscious strategies/tactics, as I believe that "[a]ll writing is a demonstration of method; it can assume a method or investigate it" (Bernstein "Writing" 590). I am inscribing myself in the spaces/gaps left in the texts. The texts formally involve the process of response. They call me to "action, questioning, self-examination: to a reconsideration and a remaking of the habits, automatisms, conventions, beliefs through which, and only through which, we see and interpret the world" (Bernstein "Writing" 595).

My initial aim was to position myself as a white, heterosexual, middle-class female reader. But wouldn't such a positioning stabilize and fix my "identity" which, in Kristeva's terms is always "in-process," or as Judith Butler claims, it is an act of performance (Gender Trouble). So whatever position I take it will be a wilful temporary choice occasioned by the texts which I read. I cannot posit a unified identity and I cannot even experience my gender as pure, especially when I view gender not only as anatomy, but as a position from which to speak which naturally is always mediated through other categories like race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, sexual preference or historical era. Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Teresa DeLaurentis call not only for gender ambiguity but they also critique the concept of feminine difference as a basis for gender theory. Conceptual schizophrenia? Or perhaps I just need to learn to be a performer? In the context of current feminist theories, identity, gender, subjectivity are performative strategies within a specific historical context. I know I cannot dismiss my real position, but carnival allows me to cross-dress and try on different identities and positions. Return to the carnival!

"what's real?" Scott asks in "spaces like stairs."
 yes i wonder what's real for me. I guess my "real" is different from her "real" or the "real" of the English Canadian women in general. Aren't all women different? hasn't the concept of the "universal" been blinding us/me for years? the problem 's in the space (cultural space?) she says i have transgressed spaces i am a borderland person/woman what about my identity? what is my real? Canadian "real" or Polish "real"?

i question every word i use she questions every word she uses

what language do i write? the British English I learned in Poland? but i am in Canada! yes, it is still english although i can hear different voices in it. i know all grammatical rules of patriarchal logic? i did learn the "langue," the structure of language and i donned a british vocal "coat" first first performance? British English is superior, everybody knows ... she tells me that it was the language of colonizers, the upper class RP received pronunciation, whatever that means. why this hierarchizing? similarly in polish - i learned a silesian dialect first i was made to feel ashamed of it! always one better than the other

the problem is in the space

i am looking for my own space but isn't it inconsiderate of other women? how can i have a private space? nothing is private in a dialogic universe my words inhabit the words of others

If language creates me, which language?

do i need to perform "rituals of presence"?²
has polish or silesian created me differently?

if there is a basic dialogism in any word, whose voice am i speaking? My "i", is no longer singular, unitary my voice is a polyphony of voices ... i need to find a way to negotiate my position between the voices/points of view which create me

i have not been raised in a society of women only ... so how can i silence the other voices and contexts which have become a part of who I am? I have never thought about my "self" as unitary, and the vast area of the theoretical discourse on female subjectivity perplexes me a lot. I learned that it is language which affects our cognition, and that the Saussurean dyadic theory imposes enslaving dualism on our thinking. I also learned that language is a patriarchal creation and does not offer a space for a woman's voice. But perhaps there are differences between languages, and some of them are more open than others and create a different reality than others? Polish grammar is different from English; it recognizes the female gender in the endings of verbs and adjectives!

I am thinking of the word "self" understood as "the union of elements (as body, emotions, thought, and sensations) that constitute the individuality and identity of a person"^j. In Polish, for instance, the word has no equivalent. Instead of the noun we use such reflexive pronouns as "sie", "siebie" (myself, oneself, herself, himself, etc.) which never appear in the nominative case. They are always in the form of the suffix "sie" at the end of reflexive verbs. The word seems not to be stable enough to exist as a noun; it functions only in context and as context. It suggests being in a position and being conscious of it; it also implies an inner dialogue and acting upon the words I use. In fact the language implies a possibility of a dialogic relationship with myself. The self is then a relationship, and not a fixed being/essence; it is always in the process of becoming. The Polish concept of self presupposes self-reflexivity and a dialogic relationship with myself; the self is not an entity but a dynamic structure. The other is already within! I have been wondering whether Bakhtin's dialogic theories originated in the dialogic character of the Russian language itself which also has a similar grammatical and semantic notion of "self" in the form of "sebia," similar to the Polish "sie."

have i just adopted a position of an academic? have
i donned a different coat? is it a different

performance?

the problem is in the space?

she did not question every word she used

she must question the words she uses

i do not claim power over my words I am traversed
by the words and discourses of others by memory by my
unconscious what is discourse? what is unconscious?
language is not a fixed system it is a discourse it is
an utterance what is an utterance? "utterance is
dialogic ...it is always an answer to another utterance
that precedes it"⁶

am i not just responding to canadian feminist essays?
what about the competing centripetal and centrifugal
discursive fields how do they affect me? do i have
any say here? can i respond?

i question every word i use she questions every word she
uses

am i thinking in polish or in english?

if language is "the true practice of
thought,"⁷ how is my thinking different

in both languages? and how does the language affect my thought? in english there are no verb endings signifying the gender of the speaking person gender ambiguity? in polish my gender is heavily marked in language in verbs and in adjectives

i try to position myself, position means responsibility -

i use quotations as a deference to the writers?
but i assimilate their words they become part of my utterance part of my dialogic response

"[t]he limits of my language means the limits of my world"³ for a bilingual person the limits are perhaps stretched a little isn't the boundary between languages a space of unfolding, a productive space?

the question is in the space

At school I was told that "God is the opium of the people." In Church I learned different lessons. I was confused. Slogans of the type: "the Communist Party and the Nation are one," which I could read on every wall,

were substituted for in Church by "God is always with the Polish Nation." Where was the truth about "reality"? what was the "real"? Play a double game! use a different language at school, in church and at home! speak silesian!

silesian is perhaps closer to my mother tongue
 closer to my body a different gesture language
 as a child i needed to suppress it learn "literary Polish"!! power struggle between languages
 between the world views the semantic positions inscribed
 in both languages "literary Polish" and communism
 the ideology of the state the state schools the
 curriculum influenced by a different communist vision of
 history and literature the marxist approaches

Memory stored in my body? "body as an archive"?² a
 different memory the vast history of polish literature
 read from the ideological perspective? no! double-
 voiced teachers/performers carnivalized the system

what is my real? she is repeating herself

feminist theory? i never heard about it
 in poland. the word itself evoked

connotations of excessive radicalism
with reference to women who hated men. i did not know
any woman who called herself
a feminist. feminism was the disease
of the west. liberated women divorced
their men, neglected their children
and what was worse - practised "free love" - the biggest
sin in the catholic country!
but wasn't poland communist?
communist and catholic at the same time! many performed
a double game - communist at work and catholic
on sunday slipping between
the roles wearing masks playing roles

who needs feminism in a communist country?! in Poland
"everybody is equal".... although some people are "more
equal" than others. who needs feminism in a catholic
country where the virgin mary is venerated in every
catholic home! woman is placed on a pedestal! "what does
a woman want?"

nobody bothered to study feminist literary discourse, and
we did not have much access to most recent feminist
publications. we studied Russian formalist critics, we
read and practised structuralist analyses of many texts -

boring analysis of russian folk-tales, structuralist analyses of the bible -counting words, making diagrams -- literature was a science. the analysis of english and american literature was both thematic and structural, with a focus on freudian and jungian interpretations. freud, however, was taken off the curriculum many catholic students felt offended by the overtly sexual orientation of his theories

i used to play roles - i wore different masks at school/university and different ones at home. was it the structure of the polish or silesian language which presupposes self-reflexivity that made the slippage between various roles possible and did not allow us to be completely brainwashed by the competing ideologies?

even if the structure of language implies self-consciousness, the limited context can produce limited selves. two major ideologies affected the process of my "becoming," the communist and the catholic. it was only later, in the university, in the english department, a place of radical thinking (radical by polish standards) disguised in the form of british and american cultural

studies, where another stage of my "becoming" was initiated. now in canada, other discourses have been dialogizing my thinking, and hence my languages. i am not a passive subject in the process. dialogue is participation, response, responsibility...

I am speaking from a position of the feminine (Polish) "sie"/ the relational self, the dialogical self i am conscious of various languages which traverse my body my relational self is multiple heteroglossic it is also nomadic where is my home, my territory?

the question is in the space space knows no borders

I am forgetting here the word territory because every territory has its barbed wires and men of arms: sooner or later you have to give the right password or bare your fangs.

(Brossard *La Nuit* 37)

NOTES:

1. New Critics foreground poetry in their theorizing but they derive general pronouncements about literature from this genre.

2. I know I need to look for the figure of the icon, a well-wrought urn or a perfect scientific structure/design, for work as a finished product or an organic whole, for concepts of unity, harmony, aesthetic wholeness, (be it generic, linguistic, structural or with reference to the concept of "self"), for signs of impersonality, for objectification of feelings, for ambiguity, irony and paradox as unique principles of structure.

3. According to Kristeva "[m]enippean discourse is ... structured as ambivalence, as the focus for two tendencies of western literature: representation through language as staging, and exploration of language as a correlative system of signs. Language in the menippean tradition is both representation of exterior space and 'an experience that produces its own space'" ("Word" 84).

4. Nicole Brossard in "Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness," p.179.

5. The definition comes from the *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, p.1064.

6. Michael Holquist in *Dialogism. Bakhtin and his World*, p.60.

7. In Kristeva's *Desire in Language*, p. 65.

8. In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6.

9. See Betsy Warland's "the body the archive" in *West Coast Line* 10. 27/1 (Spring 1993): 55-58.

CHAPTER FOUR
CARNIVALIZATION OF LANGUAGE

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing ... It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms.

(Cixous "The Laugh" 883)

Being { a woman } is a { political } act
 Being { a writer } is a { poetical } act

(DuPlessis *Pink* 154)

I use the form of a journal that is devoted entirely to my search into the linguistic and theoretical problems of feminist language writing. The form is a record of my reading of the texts and a simultaneous exploration of a theoretical discourse that the texts invite and consciously inscribe. It incorporates the voices of the writers and critics and my own voice that interacts dialogically with the texts. I choose the form of journal entries in order to emphasize that my writing is a process of discovery, and like the writers themselves I work within "a constructive theory of writing" as theorized by the American language writer and critic, Charles Bernstein:

In constructive writing, the outer structure or parameter, or the method by which the work is generated, is made visible, for example by its 'typographicity,' or audible, for instance by its 'syntaxophony,' or both.

("Thought's Measure" 73)

In a "constructive writing," as in visual art, the whole process of the text's construction is foregrounded and assumed to be its integral part. Through the reading process itself I realized that the historical avant-garde

idea of the Total Work of Art is an important intertextual element that links both groups of writers. And although there are considerable differences between the writers, the general idea is worth pursuing. The following entries show the process of my discovery and reveal that the process of writing becomes part of the content of writing. The journal compiles ideas from many sources. It is cumulative rather than linear in structure. The principle of parataxis operates frequently at the level of structure itself. The form of a journal is traditionally fragmentary and constructed by associative rather than logical connections. Nevertheless, what follows is already a partially organized selection of the journal entries. In order to fulfil the requirements of traditional academic writing I decided to organize the entries into three major segments:

- I. Feminist language writing and its dialogic nature
- II. Somatization of writing and semiotization of the body:
Intersemiotic translation between the verbal and nonverbal
- III. Synaesthetic writing: a vision of the Total Work of Art

The entries reveal a tension between traditional and unconventional writing, a tension that is also inscribed in the texts by the feminist language writers. The books are read as embodying the idea of the Total Work of Art. My reading of the cover graphics (an illustration of the process of intersemiotic translation as discussed by Roman Jakobson) is woven into the structure of my writing in all of the chapters of the thesis. The graphics translate many of the textual and structural processes explored in the language texts themselves.

SCEPTICAL READER*¹

Your use of the form of a journal as explained above is debatable. The form of a journal is one of dated entries - it has the spontaneity of something freshly written at

the moment, not revised - thoughts as they come at the particular time, that particular day, an immediate reaction to something one has just read, for example, which may later be contradicted, challenged or added to.

CONCERNED WRITER

I realize that journal is associated with spontaneity, but isn't it just one of many rules that a carnivalistic writing dares to reverse? Any carnival situation establishes "an upside-down world ... in which fish fly. birds swim...bishops behave crazily and fools are crowned" (Eco "The Frames" 2). So why not transgress the dictates of a journal and "contaminate" it with academic entries? The richly-ambiguous word "ENTRY" can suggest not only an entry to the body and its association with "body writing" but also an entry to the mind and hence a "cerebral writing." Hasn't Kristeva said that in a carnivalesque discourse "two texts meet, contradict, and relativize each other" (*Desire* 78)? In my journal both the traditional academic and the personal are brought together. The language used can only try to reject "its role in representation" but still it "remains incapable of detaching itself from representation" (Kristeva *Desire* 79). A carnivalesque text is always "ambivalent," "both representative and antirepresentative" (Kristeva *Desire* 79), both representation by language and a play with language. Even if I try to divide the entries into academic and personal I don't succeed in this rigid division; both discourses are intermingled as my writing is both cerebral and corporeal. Nevertheless, in order to emphasize my carnivalization of the form of a journal I dramatize it by introducing a dialogue between a sceptical reader and a concerned student. The dialogue deals with problematic issues that are not addressed in the entries of the journal.

I. FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING AND ITS DIALOGIC NATURE

E N T R Y

WOMEN LANGUAGE WRITERS?
WOMEN AND LANGUAGE? WHOSE LANGUAGE?

Androlect : "the language of men or Andros" : "the language that impresses/impregnates, expresses, excludes. It is wholly founded on the assimilation/exclusion of a female-gendered subject...Her real presence being invalidated by her symbolic absence."

(Michele Causse "L'Interloquée" 80)

language makes women nonexistent, obliging us to perform rituals of presence which exhaust the most vulnerable, while electrifying the most audacious among us. Thus to write I am a woman is full of consequences. (emphasis mine)

(Brossard "Writing" 179)

I have been wondering about the concept of language advanced in texts of feminist language writers. Betsy Warland gives me a clue:

Eve and snake
the first dialogue

(Warland *serpent* turn 2, no pagination)

WRITING AS A DIALOGUE ?

Each word might appear authentic
 if we heard it in isolation;
 together, each stamps the other
 with the sign of borrowing
 (if not theft)

(Todorov qtd.in *Double* no pagination)

your word
 against mine

will you take my word
 for it *that particular*

forêt *les arbres*

as arbitrary as (Tostevin "to speak two"
 definite choice no pagination)
Double

Tostevin's poem written in collaboration with bp Nichol, and also Tzvetan Todorov's words that precede it, seem to function as an excellent example of the dialogic nature of language. In the poem the phrase "for it" calls the French noun "forêt" (a forest) which again leads to "les arbres" (the trees and hence to a close association with a forest); the noun "les arbres" phonetically seduces the adjective "arbitrary." The text stages a linguistic dialogue between the phonetic and semantic aspects of the words. It also enacts a dialogue between the writer/reader and the context, between the two speakers and the bilingual Canadian context of their text. If language is considered dialogic the focus of analysis is on forms of

"utterance":

It is the forms of the utterance, not the forms of language, that play the most important role in consciousness and the comprehension of reality.

(Bakhtin *Formal Method* 133-134)

Utterance is "always an answer to another utterance that precedes it, and is therefore always conditioned by, and in turn qualifies, the prior utterance to a greater or lesser degree" (Holquist 60). As Todorov says, "each [word] stamps the other / with the sign of borrowing." If writing functions as dialogue, it is also a translation and interpretation: a typical triadic Bakhtinian or Peircean paradigm. Why translation? First, because language is not "a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather ... a world-view" (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 271). And moreover, because it is not an abstract "langue" but an utterance, it is "a sign of someone else's semantic position" (Bakhtin *Problems* 184). And this semantic position must be interpreted and translated by the responsive participants of a dialogic event. I think the dialogue between French and English in Tostevin's text has political implications and is a clear testimony of her semantic position: it acts as a symbolic verbal image of the desired dialogue between the two cultures.

E N T R Y

But Saussure claims that language is "a sum of impressions/ deposited in the brain of each member of a community, almost like a dictionary of which identical copies/have been distributed to each individual" (Warland *serpent* turn 2). Does it mean that there is a unitary language, a universal grammar, or Saussurean "langue," a pure, abstract or ideal language separated from actual speech ("parole")? If I agree with it then I would need to accept the concept of a "unitary subject" and pure discourse! I know, however, that the Saussurean notion of language is also a system based in binarism or the logic of opposition. It always privileges one term over the other. Isn't Saussure's "dictionary" male and the worldview masculine?

Activity/Passivity
 Sun/Moon
 Culture/Nature
 Day/Night
 Father/Mother
 Head/Heart
 Intelligible/Sensible
 Logos/Pathos

(Cixous "La jeune née" 90)

Such a system indisputably prescribes and dictates the masculine/feminine contrast and has obvious sexist implications:

binary thinking, hierarchical thinking. Thinking to the end. The tyranny of the a priori category.

(Mouré "Poetry, Memory" 67)

In any binary system everything is already valued and "the *parole* is coded by the dominant culture to despise the body from which it springs" (Scott *Spaces* 131). Warland explains:

code exclude/include. privileged men's values,
"linguistic economies" (Walter J.Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*). quietly encoding, enforcing their dominance.

("The Body" 56)

Obviously a dyadic system does not allow women a full participation in language. The triadic system, on the other hand, such as Bakhtin's and Peirce's, allows for no evaluative delusions typical of binary constructs. It embraces a contextually-sensitive model of communication. It explores a link between text, author and recipient/reader. Even "[t]he word as minimal textual unit...functions in three dimensions (subject-addressee-context)" (Kristeva "Word" 66). In such a model "language signs do not have a static nature but form a dynamic event, and ...language cannot be adequately studied from the perspective of *system*, but only from the perspective of *process*" (Noth 46).

WHAT CAN WOMEN DO WITH A CODED CLICHÉD
LANGUAGE?

They must break open the dominant binary code of language. They must recognize and unlearn the codes that structure language and shape reality. They must CARNIVALIZE THE CONVENTIONS OF AUTHORITY AND POWER because:

the code of our language is about POWER, and power is about ELIMINATION of correspondences, because it requires one thing to dominate ...Our alienation from the body and from correspondence gives us racism, sexism, homophobia ...It makes war possible as a "logical" action, encoded in the parts of speech. (capitalization mine)

(Mouré "I'll speak" 14)

There is then a close connection between the codification of language and the current politics, "[b]ecause the way we remember, have remembered, structures memory, *is mediated by language*, by the conceptual frameworks buried in language: and if we are not careful, the structure of our works reinforces heterocentrism, classism, racism, as well as sexism" (Mouré "Poetry, Memory" 67). Mouré acknowledges Bakhtin's social conception of language, and the "role of linguistic exchange in the construction of the social," as "a cause and effect of social formation" (Hitchcock 8). She also believes that a responsible use of language that challenges its monologic.

centripetal tendencies can facilitate changes in society. Nevertheless, her references to sexism and heterocentrism suggest that she expands Bakhtinian gender blind dialogics with feminist concerns.

SO FINALLY WHAT IS LEFT FOR WOMEN IS:

The practice of language. The anguish of language. The anger of language.

(DuPlessis *Pink Guitar* 165)

When I read Mina Loy's words about Gertrude Stein, in the epigraph to her article "Gertrude Stein":

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
 she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
to extract
a radium of the world

(305)

I immediately think of Betsy Warland and her poetics of *open is broken*: her desire to liberate language and consciousness from the curbs/restrictions of patriarchal logic, desire to liberate the energy of words: the "anger of language," the "practice of language." Both the process of destruction of the rigid structures and the creation of alternative ones ("a

radium of the world") are essential for her creative processes, and for her desire to create a linguistic space for women, a woman's language.

E N T R Y

A woman's language?

there exist no legitimate grounds for classifying any particular style of writing as uniquely or specifically feminine, and that it is therefore not possible to justify the classification of literary forms along gender lines or the study of women's writing as an autonomous and self-contained aesthetic body.

(Felski 19)

It's true that in view of a dialogic theory of language, in the world of "heteroglossia" it is impossible to create an entirely new and virgin language. There is no pure unalloyed speech, no pure monologism. Even the "concept of language as masculine ... authoritative, monologic, phallogocentric ... does not hold true" (Hohne and Wussow ix-x). Language in its pure form ("la langue") exists only in the imaginations of theorists such as Saussure! Tostevin, for instance, does not "believe in a pure space of language anymore than ... in a 'pure race'" ("Contamination" 13). It is the concept of contamination that appeals to her as "[c]ontamination means differences have been brought together so they make contact" ("Contamination" 13).

The language writers explore the creation of what Pamela Banting and others call an "interlanguage," "either or both between languages and texts and within a single language and text" ("Translation" 26).

Warland makes it very clear:

in my writing
 i seek a dialect
 an *intercourse, intercurrere, to run* between the oral and
 the
 written
 a provocative relationship

(*Proper* 32-33)

E N T R Y

I think of my language. How could I define it?
 Can I own a language?
 If not, how can I use the possessive pronoun "my"?
 So many languages have impacted on me
 So many ideologies, so many lies, so many truths
 Silesian, Polish, British English and Canadian English,
 French
 Are they languages of my body or of my mind?
 Is my Silesian body violated by foreign languages?
 Am I deluding myself that I mastered any language?
 Am I being mastered by foreign languages?
 Am I being controlled by them?

SCEPTICAL READER*

There is a gap between your original ideal evoked by the concept of "carnival" - joyous celebration, excess, the maenadic - and the jargon-ridden abstract style of some of your sentences. There is a tension between the "academic" parroting the jargon and you, the private individual, the playful cross-dresser and experimenter. You are see-sawing back between the two extremes.

CONCERNED BUT UNABASHED WRITER

Isn't this oscillating "between the two extremes" expected from a carnivalesque discourse? And as for the jargon - how can I talk about a complex experimental writing using a language that does not recognize this complexity? My explanation probably does not mean much, but maybe the words from Stephen Scobie, a recognized critic, will justify my use of certain specialized words:

I make no apologies for literary criticism's having a specialized and complex vocabulary: if language is the most complex of human activities, and if literature is the most complex mode of language, then it would be absurd *not* to expect that a serious and sophisticated discourse on literature would need a very complex vocabulary. It seems to me very naive for readers to suppose that an advanced discussion of a literary text would be any less difficult than an advanced discussion in nuclear physics and dentistry.

("Position Papers" 243)

Theory has enabled me to think about writing and language in new ways...it is now part of our experience of literature; to ignore it is not only stupid but impossible

("Position Papers" 245)

E N T R Y

HOW IS THE DIALOGIC (and at the same time triadic)
CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE TRANSLATED INTO A PAGE?

1. I look at some lines from Warland's *open is broken*:

"involve
 revolve
 evolve
 vulva"
 (x)
 inhertextuality

(*open* 15)

The text is enacted on the page visually. One word attracts another, phonetically, graphically and also ideographically. One idea seduces another; it opens new semantic fields: the verb "involve" eventually evokes the notion of "inhertextuality" and its connection with the female text and the idea of involvement, and by extension, of responsibility, both at the aesthetic and political/social level. The dialogic enactment of the words on the page signifies a symbolic enactment of the politics of gender. Warland's text questions what Jonathan Monroe discusses as "the still prevalent dichotomization of aesthetics and politics" and the presentation of "these two categories as a dialectical interpenetration" (15). Here the POLITICS AND AESTHETICS ARE

INTERDEPENDENT/INTERLINKED.

2. In another example:

slippage in the text
 you & me *collābi*, (*to slip together*)
 in labialization!
 slip(ing)page(s)
 like notes in class

o labialism o letter of the lips
 o *grafting* of your slips

(Warland and Marlatt in "Reading" 136)

Again the structure of language epitomizes the erotic idea of seduction. Daphne Marlatt's words which point to the dialogic notion of linguistic eroticism explain such a unique operation of language:

sounds will initiate thought by a process of association, words call each other up, evoke each other, provoke each other, nudge each other into utterance a form of thought that is not rational but erotic because it works by attraction.

("Musing" 45)

It is obvious that "words are not containers of meaning but/ multipliers" (Mouré "Corrections" *Sheepish* 10). The utterances reveal a semantic position of the speakers - two women involved in a collaborative project challenging the rigid standardized language, shifting its structures in order to find a place for themselves to speak from.

3. Tostevin:

point of repère refathering remothering the
 landmark/as the text in transit in translation from
the writer/to the reader remarks in passing the sign
 where myth/and place no longer meet (emphasis mine)

("re" no pagination)

*si l'oeuvre s'ouvre encore une fois c'est pour mieux
 se faire entendre*
 if the book opens itself once more (reopens itself) it's
 to make itself to be better heard (translation mine)

the double movement of intention and extension of a
 closed book reopened regenerates word for word

("re")

I read the lines as inscribing a dialogue between French and English, a dialogue between the two world-views, and between the writer and reader. French engenders English: 'repère' leads to 'refathering' (le père = father), and the change occurs in the process of translation which leaves a mark on language; the French line referring to the reopening of the book brings about the English line about the regeneration of words; translation itself is generative, it is a kind of metamorphosis, the creation of marks on the body of language. Tostevin writes between two languages. English, the language of power in Canada, intermingles with the marginal French. Both languages rely on each other. There is no power struggle, but a situation of a dialogic responsibility. Tostevin, a bilingual writer, "a writer as self-translator"

(Federman "The Writer") allows the reader "to listen to the dialogue which [s]he entertains with ...[herself] in two languages" (Federman 16).

There is a constant tension between languages in Tostevin's texts. In her novel *Frog Moon* the tension is not only between French and English, but also between other discourses (medical, journalistic or camp lingo) and other writing systems (hieroglyphic or ideographic). The tension is invoked on both thematic/semantic and syntactic levels of the text. Similarly Scott's novels relish the multiplicity of languages and discourses, the "incredible, fantastic CHORUS. The voices of women coming home from textile factories, shops, offices - women who are multilingual" (Scott "a very rhythmic" 251-2). Also Warland's *serpent (w)rite* abounds in multifarious discourses (biblical, scientific, feminist, etc.) in a position of dialogue with one another.

What I can see now is that the dialogic paradigm expands beyond the level of word and sentence to the level of discourse. It is Bakhtin's concept of polyphony which, similar to "dialogism" and "heteroglossia," calls attention to the coexistence of the plurality of voices. They "do not fuse into a single consciousness but exist on different registers,

generating dialogical dynamism among themselves" (Stam 229). This is also a vision of writing of the contemporary American language poets : a vision of a "constructive" writing practice, of "a multi-discourse text, a work that would involve many different types and styles and modes of language in the same 'hyperspace'" (Bernstein "Writing" 591). And naturally, the method of such writing is dialogic/polylogic.

There is a polyphony of voices in all language texts. The writers adopt voices of others for various reasons, albeit the parodic and ironic stance is prevalent (a subject I will explore later). And when I read Warland's and Marlatt's manifesto I am convinced that polyphony is the essence of language for feminist writers and that dialogue can be initiated not only with other individuals but also with words themselves. For Warland, even "(t)alking is a kind of collaboration", writing is "collaborating with ... writers, and with the etymology of words" ("Betsy" 46):

<p>we acknowledge that all writing is collaboration here we question the delineation between the collectivity of conversation and the individual's ownership</p>	<p>of the written here we affirm our spiralling dominoing wandering she-speech in the talking we do between the sheets between the lines between the writing that</p>
--	---

(Warland & Marlatt "Reading" 87)

I think that the political potential of such dialogism cannot be ignored. Individual words and discourses function as "a

little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents" (Volosinow/Bakhtin 41). The dialogic textuality inscribes a power struggle among competing discourses and hence ways of conceiving the world; it reveals that monologic authoritative positions are untenable. Bakhtin celebrates difference, alterity, multiplicity, the process rather than product. His theory can serve as a tool for exposing and analyzing all hegemonic practices. And what is important, the exploration of textual dialogism allows for reconnection of the text with its writer and the world. This aspect of dialogical reading is especially attractive to feminist writers/readers who desire to combine linguistic discourse with socio-historical one.

E N T R Y

Silesian and Polish - two languages, two ideologies,
 two societies, two histories
 Poland of the 1970s and early 1980s
 communist government, catholic religion
 two education systems
 Marxist ideology, catholic doctrines
 My language, my reading, my interpretation
 impacted by both
 Where was my body, my free mind?
 Did I allow for a dialogue between both languages?

E N T R Y

IS THERE ANYTHING NEW IN A DIALOGIC CONCEPT OF
LANGUAGE?

I examine some texts written by the historical avant-garde.

before us language was required to be: clear, pure,
honest, melodious, pleasant (tender) to the ear,
expressive, (vivid, colorful, juicy).
we could easily carry on in the perennially playful tone
used by our critics to expand further on their view of
language, and we notice that their requirements (oh,
horror!) apply more to womanhood as such than to language
as such.

(Kruchenykh "From *The Word as Such*" 60)

The blatant misogyny of the statement is astounding, to say
nothing of the following declaration:

*because of a foul
contempt for
women and
children in our
language there will be
only the masculine
gender*

(Kruchenykh "From *Exploidity*" 66)

Such misogynist attitudes resulted from a blind association of
the feminine with the irrational. But to put the misogyny
aside, I must point out that, in general, the premise of early
avant-garde writing was to create a subversive dialogue with
earlier writing (and hence translation as "transformance" in

Barbara Godard's terminology; the word emphasizes a process of translation, of constructing meaning through the transformation of discourses which always entails the re/reading and re/writing and in a sense, enacting, of the already written ("Theorizing" 46)). Their language experimentation was a protest against a stale language of bourgeois culture and its epigonic literature. Their aim was to force readers "into new patterns of perception and expression" (Russell *Poets* 8-9) and eventually "to new states of consciousness and action" (Russell *Poets* 13). This was also a revolt against the clichés of Symbolist love poetry which was replaced by the poetry of the word, of the "transrational language," of the "swift language of modernity, which has annihilated the previous frozen language" (Kruchenykh "From *The Word as Such*" 61). The function of art was to revive perceptions that had become automatized in everyday life. Such formalist terms as Skhlovsky's "making strange" (*ostranenie*) and "making difficult" (*zatrudnenie*), or "renewing perception," "deformation," "frustrating expectations," apply well to the Cubo-Futurist experiments in poetry (Eagle "Afterword" 295). Theirs was "the art of the word" and before, as they claimed, there were only "the pathetic attempts of servile thought to present everyday reality, philosophy and psychology" (Kruchenykh "New Ways"

70).

In all of these endeavours the concept of language espoused by the historical avant-garde is inherently dialogic. Their experimentation performed at various levels of language and discourse is an exploration of the dialogic and polylogic principle as discussed by Bakhtin. Their alternative voices and discourses resulted from a dialogic intervention/interruption of the language they questioned and challenged. As for contemporary feminist language writing, they consciously adopt the dialogic notion of language as a crucial element in their struggle with the dominant discourses of the time.

II. SOMATIZATION OF LANGUAGE AND SEMIOTIZATION OF THE BODY

INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION BETWEEN THE VERBAL AND NONVERBAL

SCEPTICAL READER*

Here are more ugly, horrible jargony nasty words. What are you trying to say here? Isn't there a simpler and less jargony way of expressing this?

CONCERNED BUT UNABASHED WRITER

Would it help if I say "a form of language influenced by the body and the body impacted by language understood as a sign system"? And "Translation between various sign systems"? Where is the boundary between jargon and a serious specialized vocabulary?

E N T R Y

Avant-garde writing can be read as A REINCARNATION OF THE SPIRIT OF CARNIVAL. The statement is quite convincing when one thinks of Bakhtin's theory of carnival. In his history of culture, carnival as a social practice decays at the beginning of the modernist period and passes over into literature as "the carnivalesque and the carnivalization of literary and other forms and practices" (Rutland 131). The spirit of carnival is reincarnated and lives in subversive art and literature. Such avant garde literary and aesthetic movements as cubism, futurism, dada and surrealism indeed reenact

carnivalistic practices. What is most interesting to me in this theory of "carnival" and the "carnavalesque" is that it is not confined to a verbal language but is concerned with semiotic operation. It investigates and compares different sign systems: verbal, visual, musical, tactile, olfactory, and gestural. The concept of carnival analyzed as a semiotic phenomenon "covers the whole nexus linking discourse with spectacle and gesture and with the signifying possibilities of bodies in space" (Pechey 69). Carnavalesque discourse translated into literature allows for inter-artistic comparisons between its component semiotic systems. Many carnalesque texts can be regarded as experiments in verbal synaesthesia. Moreover, carnival valorizes the body and the erotic, and on the linguistic level it epitomizes the spirit of transgression; it liberates language from strict patriarchal norms.

E N T R Y

My attention is drawn to Tostevin's statement about her use of language in *'sophie*:

the book's language moves beyond the linguistic order of the symbolic toward musical allegory.

("A Reading" 112)

I search for the meaning of allegory:

The basic characteristic of allegory ... is ambiguity, multiplicity of meaning But the richness of this ambiguity is the richness of extravagance.... always the opposite of clarity and unity of meaning.

(Hermann Cohen qtd. in Benjamin *The Origin* 177)

THESE STATEMENTS HAVE SO MUCH IN COMMON WITH THE BAKHTINIAN CONCEPT OF CARNIVAL! I'm thinking of the ambiguity of a double-voiced discourse, the "menippean ambivalence ... that of representation by language, and that of experience in language, system and phrase, metaphor and metonymy" (Kristeva "Word" 85). Even the definition of the LANGUAGE OF ALLEGORY reminds me of carnivalesque transgressions:

language is broken up so as to acquire a changed and intensified meaning in its fragments In its individual parts fragmented language has ceased merely to serve the process of communication.

(Benjamin *The Origin* 208)

FRAGMENTATION OF LANGUAGE? This seems to be conducive to the process of challenging the conventional rule-ridden syntax of language. Moreover, allegory is said always to reveal a "crossing of the borders of a different mode", and advance of the plastic arts into the territory of the "rhetorical" arts" (Benjamin *The Origin* 177).

THIS CROSSING OF BORDERS BETWEEN DIFFERENT MODES OF WRITING,

BETWEEN DIFFERENT ARTS AND DIFFERENT AESTHETICS - ISN'T IT
WHAT THE LANGUAGE WRITERS ARE DOING?!

the synthesis of all arts. For this is precisely what is
required by the allegorical way of looking at things.

(Benjamin *The Origin* 181)

AND HENCE THE IDEA OF A TOTAL WORK OF ART OR
"GESAMTKUNSTWERK"! TRANSLATION BETWEEN THE VERBAL AND
NONVERBAL, VISUAL AND AURAL, PHONIC AND GRAPHIC!

E N T R Y

The books of Canadian feminist language writers are not commodities "to be acquired, consumed and discarded . . . in a single linear duration" (McCaffery *Rational* 62). (I'm referring here to McCaffery's general observations on books as objects). The books are not "great machines of consumption" (62) but rather art objects. The cover pages themselves create an awareness of "a visual, tactile unit with its own very separate potential" (63). They are designed and created in cooperation with the writers themselves. I must admit that the books are not as experimental as Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* or McCaffery's *Carnival* but they do work within the same tradition.

When Tostevin comments on her use of Baldung Grien's painting, or rather the reproduction of the painting as the cover for her text, she interprets it as "an allegory for music announcing the process of becoming a book" ("A Reading" 106). The whole book (including the covers) becomes involved in the translation between the verbal and nonverbal. I'm thinking here of Roman Jakobson's intersemiotic translation as "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" ("On Linguistic" 429). The covers then become an additional element in the books' general ideogrammatic/conceptual construction. The shape of the book itself can also be part of the textual meaning/sense.

When writers use reproductions of original paintings on the cover pages of their books, or when they invite an artist to create an original art cover, they approach the page as a canvas. Such a deliberate choice of art designs makes the cover art a part of the whole textual space of their books. It seems to me that the writers are carrying the self-conscious art practice begun by Duchamp with his "ready-mades." The books become hybridized constructs, both writing and painting, writing and photo-collage, writing and installation. The reader emerges as an active co-creator of the book art.

E N T R Y

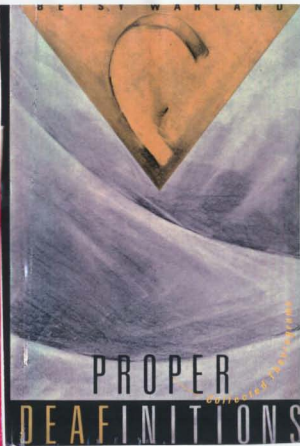
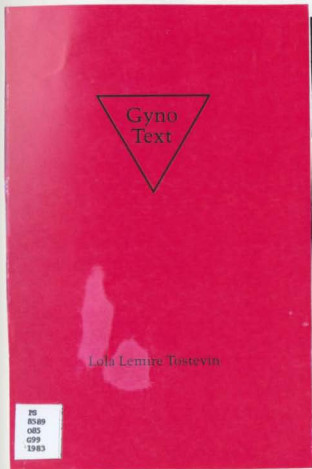
I look at the cover graphic in Warland's *Proper Deafinitions*. How do I read the image? An ear placed in a triangle between the folds of the body. Is it an ear or a stylized image of the entrance to the vagina? The triangle with its unspecified mark is painted yellow/brown and so is the colour of the first four letters forming the words DEAFinitions. Is there a suggestion here of being deaf to the call of the body or rather of language's deafness to woman's desire to speak?

There is also a triangle on the cover page of Tostevin's *Gyno-Text*. This triangle is no longer marked by a sign of woman's muteness/silence. The word "gyno-text" fills the icon: *gyn- or gyno* from Greek: woman or a female reproductive organ: ovary. A woman's text then or writing as translation of female sexuality. The impossible is accomplished: "the muses have learned to write" (Tostevin).

TRIANGLE (apex down):

1. the Greek letter D (delta) is a triangle. As in India it was similarly described as "the letter of the vulva" and also as the Holy Door (of birth). Demeter was also a trinity represented by the female triangle (Walker *Woman's* 40);
2. an emblem of Wisdom in Pythagorean philosophy, a sign of a creative intellect (Critchley *Silent* 198);
3. in alchemy and in astrological systems of elements, it represents water, the passive element;
4. in Sanskrit, triangle is an icon of Yoni Yantra - a

meditation sign. This "yantra of the yoni" was one of the oldest and most meaningful concepts centering on this reality: creation, birth, love, motherhood, sexual attraction, fulfilment, cyclic time, kundalini force, the mystery of conception, the Goddess within, the Shakti, and so on (Walker *Woman's* 40).



(Plates 1 & 2)

Unmistakably, the triangle is a female sign, both an icon and a symbol of woman's morphology/biology and her intellect: "The brain and the womb are both centres of consciousness, equally important," says H.D.² The visual images translate intersemiotically the interrelationship between writing and body and between language and intellect, the major preoccupation of the texts: "the dance of intellect among words," the dance and its bodily connections, the dance of words and their intellectual reverberations. The Cartesian mind/body split is for the writers an unproductive and misleading concept.

E N T R Y

Another series of cover graphics. This time in Warland's *open is broken* and Tostevin's *'sophie*. Two naked bodies, but not two nudes. Two different representations or I should rather say translations of the female body.

A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude....Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.

To be naked is to be without disguise...
The nude is condemned to never
being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.

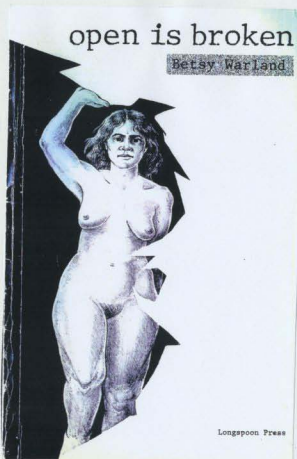
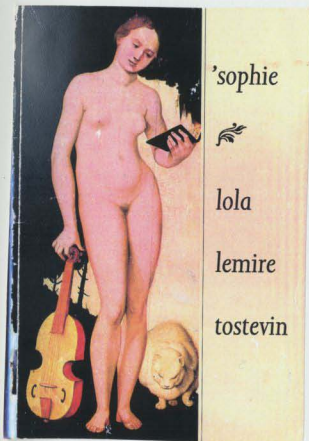
(Berger 54)

Tostevin uses the image from Baldung Grien's sixteenth-century original painting "Musik." The image of the woman is

idealized. She has a slender, beautiful, girlish body. Her hair is bound, neatly combed; the pubic hair nonexistent.

Hair is associated with sexual power, passion. The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimized so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly for such passion.

(Berger 55)



(Plate 3 & 4)

The female body is on display and is meant to appeal to male

sexuality: "[w]omen are there to feed an appetite, not have any of their own" (Berger 55). This is a typical image of woman as muse, as the source of "'in-spiration," literally breathing in "I-deas: or Goddess-spirits within" (Walker *Encyclopedia* 701). As befits a muse, the woman holds a violin in her right hand. She actually supports her weight on the instrument. Strikingly her attention is focused on a book she holds in her left hand. Why does Tostevin use the conventional image of the a-sexual female naked body as an entrance to her text, her verbal art?

Warland's woman is not idealized; this is nakedness "without disguise." The woman's hair is dishevelled, her eyes are wide open, directed toward the spectator. The body is strong, dynamic, muscular and sexual. One hand is raised as if lifting something heavy: it looks like an edge of a broken structure. The image of the body is mediated by a verbal "construction": "open is broken". It refers to the breaking of the patriarchal code of language. It suggests the body in the text is not only an icon of sexuality but also a symbol of active participation in culture. It is an energetic, dynamic and thinking body. There is power, control and authority in the air. The ideal spectator is certainly not male. This image is not designed to flatter him or appeal to his sexuality. The cover graphic is

by Claire Kujundzic (1983): doesn't she create a woman's image mediated by woman's desire?

Warland's woman is strong and powerful and she does not hesitate to break the codes of language by whatever means:

BREAK THE HEADLOCK

wrestle your way out of passivity
 through deconstruction
 word play
 etymology
 invention
 through colloquial contextualizing

(Warland *Proper* 26)

unstop every proper deaefinition
 question every word
 investigate every letter
 dis-cover every grammatical rule

(Warland *Proper* 28)

E N T R Y

Can I really perform such a simplistic translation of the nonverbal into verbal?

In her excellent study *The Colors of Rhetoric* Wendy Steiner points out that interartistic analogies must be used with caution. There are certain classical distinctions between verbal and visual arts which make a lot of sense, but only

with traditional texts. I think here of G.E. Lessing's concept of verbal arts as temporal and visual arts as spatial. Experimental contemporary writing challenges such distinctions. Even Joseph Frank's theory of modernist writing as spatial, atemporal and ahistorical is questionable when applied to the new texts (Steiner *Colours* 38).

But Gail Scott, for instance, clearly states that she craves for other than traditional verbal means of expression:

I envy people who work with visual images (performance artists, film makers, installation artists). The audience seems to accept that visual images can "slip", may have multiple meaning, whereas writers, especially those working in prose, can easily be trapped in the preconceived notions ascribed to words by ideology.

(*Spaces* 89)

Scott envies visual artists but her texts, and also the texts of Mouré, Tostevin and Warland, successfully employ strategies usually associated with nonverbal arts including music. And if I still wonder how such transcodings can be accounted for, again Wendy Steiner offers an explanation. She claims that semiotics provides a most fruitful framework for inter-artistic comparisons. It is useful to approach literature and other arts as semiotic sign systems, as different languages; and such Peircean categories as symbol, index, icon (further subdivided into image, diagram and metaphor) are most fruitful

categories for the comparative enterprise. Moreover, it is also possible to compare the verbal and nonverbal in terms of such linguistic categories as syntax and semantics (*Colors* 19-32). Peirce's theory is indeed valuable for interartistic interpretations as it shows that all sign systems are irredeemably mixed. The semiotic model demonstrates that the "work of art is ... both a sign of the thing-world and a part of the thing-world. It thus points to itself and to the world" (Steiner *Colors* 183). It can also reveal an interplay of iconicity, indexicality and symbolicity at the same time.

In terms of this theory the image of woman on the cover of Tostevin's *'sophie* is an icon in the form of an image and it is indexical of the sixteenth-century convention of representing the female as muse. It is also symbolic of the ambiguous attitude of men towards real women in the society of the time (idealization versus disrespect). In other words, the conventional representation of woman is the rigid syntax of the earlier painting. It can be questioned and shattered, or in other words, it can be carnivalized. Translated into writing, the standardized syntax, and here I mean the linguistic syntax, or what Kristeva calls the symbolic, can be broken by language that translates the rhythm of the body, and hence it is somatized by the body's internal processes.

SCEPTICAL READER*

"iconicity, indexicality and symbolicity"! Here are more jargony words. Language "somatized by the body's internal processes": WHOSE body? Do you mean YOUR body? How does this work?

CONCERNED BUT UNABASHED WRITER

These are terms borrowed from Charles Peirce. I use them because they fit the framework of interartistic comparisons and they were conceived for this purpose. It's true I can use other words, but if I refer to a specific theory how can I keep changing the original vocabulary used for a specific purpose? Moreover, I'd like you to know that I am not committed to one language but to many languages. I enjoy the multiplicity. And when I refer to the impact of the body on language I mean both the writer's and the reader's body, and I envision the body as encompassing the mind as well. My reading is different from your reading as my body is different from yours, from your socio-historical condition. My socio-historical body is translated into writing. How? The text that follows will explain this issue.

E N T R Y

For feminist language writers the connection between body and writing is of utmost importance.

Mouré:

I write because words have a physical connection with my body and help make possible a sense of place-in-the-present

("And just" 40)

What I write comes out of the ends of my arms, my hands

("Interview" 39)

Scott stresses that she has always been interested in "[t]he body's possible imprint on form" (*Spaces* 66). She is aware of "what her internal grammar does to the sentence, the paragraph, how the paragraphs 'slip,' and the sentences, to reflect this turbulent inner resonance" (*Spaces* 89).

Tostevin's speaker wonders

how she came to this place between writing as body
and writing as erasure of the body
('sophie 22)

Warland's texts are full of references to her awareness of body in the writing process. In "cutting re/marks" for instance, she points to the whole text as "marks" of "the writing body" (121), the body which "says 'write this'" (102, 103, 114).

This interest in writing the body is accompanied with worries about limitations of the alphabetic notation. Mouré laments:

my body remembers, I know it through the sense of body,
but the language won't permit me to speak
straightforwardly of it . . . the word system does not give
me the language to remember.
(emphasis mine) ("I'll start" 13)

The delicate articulation of the hands. The bones of. The
small comb I hold in my hands . . . Are there in fact any
meanings that can be written down? (emphasis mine)

("Articulation" *Sheepish* 110)

"the code, must be broken in order to
speak"

(emphasis mine) (Mouré "I'start" 14)

E N T R Y

BODY? DESIRE? WRITING?

Language is a translation. It speaks through the body.
Each time we translate what we are in the process of
thinking, it necessarily passes through our bodies.

(Cixous "Conversations" 151-2)

B O D Y:

How does one inscribe the body into writing?

The body can be depicted or represented in writing, but it can
also be translated into a written text.

1. Warland:

the text is full of holes
mouth cunt ears urethra
nostrils anus eyes
infinite constellation of pores

(*serpent*)

 text the tissue one long
sentence no period we are menses flow
period: "sed- to go, exodus"
 are exodus

"going around in circles"

("induction" *open is broken* 14)

2. Mouré:

From the red end of the hands sings
 signs
 This motional alphabet
 not alphabet
 the limbs cry out our arms leak
 terrible truth we can't read or say

speech so linear the voice fails
 the syntax & spatial oddity

(*"Articulation" Sheepish 110*)
 the woman's arm. The seam. A portrait of the seam.

Page as border. A seam between the real. which is not.
 Which is not as it seems. It seems real. You read it & it
 seems real. The border visible to sight, touch, this
conscious, presentable

(*"THREE SEEMS" Sheepish 58-59*)

3. Tostevin:

I am not a woman I am a poem
 feminized by my parts femoral
 to carry my own weight ephemeral

(*Double no pagination*)

I am not a woman I am words
 on the prowl

*et je laisse roder à travers la parole
 le mémoire de mon corps*

I am not a woman I am a sequence
 dismembered each organ fastened
 to a verb the mouth to speak
 the ear to hear the eye to see
 I am not a woman I am a woman
 a space in space"

*au sein du vide
 autre chose s'annonce*

(*Double*)

In all of these examples of the inscription of the body into writing there is a tension between the semantic and syntactic economies of language. The SYNTAX TRANSLATES THE BODY AS OVERFLOWING, EXCESSIVE; the poetic line is broken and words flow freely on the page. Warland says that her "text is full of holes." In an unrelated text Mouré explains:

the poem must remain "full of holes." As if the leaks, that absorb matter, are the places where the real poem is. We create the representation in language not to mirror reality but as a physical relation by which the leaks are visible.

(*Sheepish* footnote 17)

These are not typical/stereotypical images/representations of the body I know from patriarchal texts, but examples of explorations of the body as text, as a linguistic sign. The traditional image is deconstructed and substituted by the word as image, by the visualization of word on the page and also by the change of the focus from image to syntax or "in Poundian terms, the turn is from *phanopoeia* to *logopoeia*. 'Making strange' now occurs at the level of phrasal and sentence structure rather than at the level of the image cluster" (Perloff *Radical* 78).

In Tostevin the speaker is the language itself, a somatized language, an icon of the body; the woman is no longer depicted

as muse; her body is not a subject of male gaze or desire; this is a linguistic body, a subject of its own desire. The body translates itself into the page through notation which exceeds the alphabetic one and is close to the older ideophono-graphic systems. The text inscribes a tension between the visual and the musical or the phono/graphic: between the play of alliteration and rhyming (feminized, femoral, ephemeral), and the ellipses, or "pregnant pauses" as conceptual breaks (the spatial configurations of the body in language); "space prescribes gesture" says Tostevin (*Double*), and hence it brings out the gestural in the writing. The use of italics for the lines in French adds to the dynamics of the space, but it also contributes to the rupturing of the semantic level of the text. The words are "on the prowl"; they do not obey any fixed rules. They enter the discourse of carnival.

E N T R Y

The translation of the female body into writing gives feminist writers a chance to challenge the masculine conceptualizations and representations of the female body. Nevertheless, the whole idea of writing as a translation of the body is perplexing. It took me a long time to comprehend it. I have gone through many pages of critical literature on the topic

and I think that now I am closer to the understanding of the issue. Tostevin and the other women achieve in their texts what Freeman in her discussion of Cixous refers to as "textualization of anatomy and corporealization of textuality" ("*Plus corps* 62) or, in other words, the semiotization of the body and the somatization of writing. Freeman points out that in Cixous the body is not "prior to writing", but "already in operation *within* it" (63). The relations between writing and the body are "homologous" (63), "[b]ody and text are co-constitutive" (63), and the "corporeal relations are at the same time linguistic (and vice versa)" (63). And the feminist language writing, like Cixous's textual practice, "demonstrate[s] and en/corp/orate[s]" (Freeman 63) their thinking. The above fragments of poems show that the texts and the body are used in a way that shows their mutual substitutability: "I am not a woman I am a poem / I am not a woman I am a woman / a space in space" (Tostevin *Double*). If the terms are substitutable none of them can be privileged. The usual cause/effect relation between body and writing is deconstructed. Instead there is a dialogic relationship between body and writing, not a hierarchical one.

Many feminist language-centred texts may be accused of vulvocentric/vulvomorphic logic based on anatomy. But the

writers, in Irigaray's or Cixous' fashion, use the vulvomorphic metaphoric paradigm for their own subversive purposes and for "deliberately strategic ends" (Freeman 66). When Warland talks about text as being "full of holes," about text as "mou-h cunt ears urethra" or about women as "menses flow *period*," she deliberately assumes male metaphors of women (the insistence of connection of women with body and its functions). Nevertheless, similar to Irigaray, she is performing a strategic metaphORIZATION, or "tactical mimesis" (Whitford 72). She is transgressing, decolonizing and hence carnivalizing the dominant discourse; the act of appropriation of male metaphors of women is empowering on its own. Irigaray's term "*mimétisme*, usually translated mimeticism, comes from the domain of animal ethology and means 'camouflage' or 'protective colouring'" (Whitford 72). But this is not only a camouflage. It is also an appropriation of the masculine metaphors by women in a protest against their "(re)assimilation and destruction by the masculine economy" (Whitford 72).

SCEPTICAL READER*

You say that you want to deal with the translation of female body into writing. I am surprised by your sentence: "I have gone through many pages of critical literature on the topic..." -- but Mouré, Warland and co. are urging you to experience your own body - read the text through your own "lips" in every sense of the word.

Sensual rather than intellectual" return to your body, not to "critical literature" to tell you what to think. They're pointing to somatic knowledge, not "intellectual" understanding - that there is "wisdom" in the body, if only we had the courage to "read" it, be in it.

CONCERNED BUT UNABASHED WRITER

I agree with you that I should read the texts through my own "lips" only, but all the time I'm constrained by a thought that the text I'm writing is supposed to be a dissertation and I fear that if I chose it to be a totally creative project, when I let my body "leak" into it, it will not be treated seriously. I know I need to pay more attention to what is happening in my body, but I cannot forget about my mind. Isn't it a vital part of my body? Moreover, the language writers themselves never differentiate between the body and the mind. When Warland talks about "writing a new kind of theory - fiction/theory," she emphasizes that in this kind of writing there is "[n]o mind and body split," that "the text embod[ies] the viewing" ("far as the i can see" 76). And when Marlatt comments on her use of the line she points out that for her it is "a moving step in the process of thought or, as Denise Levertov puts it, 'the process of thinking/feeling, feeling/thinking'" (Marlatt "The Measure" 91). I know that the writers have a different conception of thought; they conceive of it as "not rational but erotic because it works by attraction" (Marlatt "Musing" 45). I also want to achieve the ideal and that is why the connections between the entries to my "journal" are associative rather than logical. And as for the "wisdom" of my body, maybe I'm not courageous enough; I have only started my journey of uncovering/unhiding the "wisdom"; maybe I fear the whole idea of the body as hologram with no mind/body distinction. Are we "beings without borders" (Talbot 60) ?

SCEPTICAL READER*

I also want to return to your statement about Betsy Warland. You say that "she deliberately assumes male metaphors of women": does she? Period/menses were unmentionable, thus the female body was silenced. Although patriarchal discourse connected women with body,

the flesh (world and devil, the devil's gateway), women were disconnected from their own bodies and not even taught the names of their female parts - vulva, clitoris, labia, etc. - hence the radical reclaiming of the female body and naming of parts was an important step in feminist writing. The body is sung and celebrated and becomes central to the enterprise.

CONCERNED WRITER

I agree, but I'm talking about feminist writing in the 1980s and 1990s when women, after learning how to celebrate their female parts, choose to invent new metaphors for them. After appropriating the vocabulary used by men they re-metaphorize it as a protest against the masculine "ownership" of language.

E N T R Y

I find the idea of the feminist metaphORIZATION of the body crucial to understanding the process of intersemiotic translation of body into writing. The conceptualization of the body no longer obeys the dictates of masculine discourse; the body is no longer conceived as a trope of similitude, but it is metaphorized and hence semiotized:

METAPHORIZATION = "a textual tactic or strategy ... [which] insinuates difference"; it contrasts with the concept of metaphor which "may (or may not) assert similitude" (Freeman 70).³

The act of translation of the body into writing involves two processes simultaneously: the SOMATIZATION OF WRITING and the SEMIOTIZATION OF THE BODY. The body translated into writing

somatizes the process, while the body itself is being semiotized, read as a linguistic sign or structure. In such an approach "WHAT TAKES PLACE BETWEEN A WOMAN'S BODY AND HER WORDS IS NOT REPRESENTATION BUT A FLUCTUATING PROCESS OF INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION" (Banting "Rethinking" 230) (capitalization mine). The body is no longer reduced to its biology (the essentialist stance), but it is approached as a material, conceptual and linguistic unit. The essentialist reading of the female body is certainly monologicistic when not used strategically. The non-essentialist approach to the body entails the exploration of the process of metaphorization or re-metaphorization in the manner of Irigaray or Cixous. Both women suggest such new metaphors for the female body as the "threshold", "espacement" (space) (the image of two lips), "an interval," a "process," "becoming," a "mediation," "love," the "mucous or mucosity," the "between," the "angel," "air," "singing," "dancing" (Whitford 159, 164). The new metaphors imply a change in sexual hierarchies and a focus on "nonphallic sexuality" (Gallop *Thinking* 99). The crucial point in the new "poetics of the body" is the fact that it is not "an expression of the body but a poiesis, a creation of the body" (Gallop *Thinking* 94), not a representation of the body but its intersemiotic translation.

I think that one of the most useful metaphorizations of the body is Pamela Banting's concept of the body as "pictogram." This time the metaphorization involves a return to the earlier conceptualizations of writing itself. The metaphor of "pictogram" is not only metaphor but a picto-ideo-phonogrammic figure (Banting "Translation" 28-9). Banting thinks of the body "not as outside of or as a pre-existing either alphabetic writing or the voice but as perpetually translating, distributing inscriptions, sounds, vocalizations, touches, excitations, flows, emissions, pressures, pulses, weights, liquids, thoughts, surges, pangs, glances, gestures, movements" ("Translation" 28). This definition encompasses the concept of a complex semiotized body, both at the site of text production and text reception. The concept of pictogram can be used as an umbrella term for all the other metaphorizations of the body. So just to summarize:

SEMIOTIZATION OF THE BODY: the body is read as a linguistic sign, as an icon (image, diagram, metaphor) or as a picto-ideo-phono-graphic figure; body is "back into semiosis, from which it has been exiled from dualist, metaphysical philosophies and theories of representation" (Banting "The body" 228).

SOMATIZATION OF LANGUAGE: language is read as body, body of language; the characteristics of the body are translated (intersemiotically) into the syntax of language:

The concept of the body as a picto-ideo-phono-graphic figure

may suggest that it is a purely linguistic construct, but such a body is not severed from social, cultural and psychological reality. The body is constantly translating between the inside and outside. Cixous' words about the interrelationship of the body and writing succinctly outline the process:

Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the "fundamental language" is spoken, the body language into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labour of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book. (emphasis mine)

("Coming" 52)

When Gail Scott asks "What is the relationship between writing and the rhythms, pulsions, memories of my Protestant body...mediated by an English-language inscription in-the-feminine?" (*Spaces* 16), she is not thinking of the essentialist biological body but about the Bakhtinian "chronobiological body" (Jaeger 38); This concept clearly dissolves the biology/culture opposition as it posits the body as being in dialogue with the external, social context. In the words of Braidoti this is a body as "an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed" (219). The body, as theorized and inscribed in the text of these women writers, is a body

situated in a particular social, political and cultural situation, and a particular place and time: Canada in the 1980s and 1990s.

E N T R Y

The concept of feminist metaphorization is an example of rethinking/re-visioning of metaphor. Feminist writers are not only interested in re-writing the dominant conceptualizations of the language tropes, but also in their genderization.

I think it's useful to compare the traditional concepts of metaphor and metonymy:

<p><u>Metaphor</u> is based on a similarity of terms: "a trope of similitude"; it subordinates difference; figured as a vertical structure metaphor is based on a hierarchic system of substitution which represses one term and substitutes it with another. Irigaray suggests that metaphor is the central trope of the dominant masculine symbolic which relegates the feminine to the not-masculine and hence inferior.</p>	<p><u>Metonymy</u> is based on association by contiguity. In contrast to metaphor it is structured as horizontal, with no hierarchical points but as a chain of connected elements. Metonymy preserves context and foregrounds interrelationships and it also serves as "a generative and even dispersing force" (Hejinian "Strangeness" 38-9). It "maintains the intactness and discreteness of particulars" and "its paratactic perspective gives it its multiple vanishing point" (Hejinian "Strangeness" 38). Such features of metonymic operation as "deduction, induction, extrapolation and juxtaposition" (Hejinian "Strangeness" 38) are considered essential for the process of making connections.</p>
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The binarism between the metaphoric and metonymic axes was first posited by Roman Jakobson, and later reinscribed into psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan. Jakobson went so far as to claim that the "principle of similarity [is] associated with poetry, [and] prose is forwarded by contiguity" ("Two Aspects" 113)! I wonder how he would define genres which mix the categories of prose and poetry? But I'd rather go back to the problem of genderization of metonymy and metaphor. Both tropes have been theorized as gendered by such post-Lacanian feminists as Gallop, Grosz, and Whitford. Metaphor is

considered to be male as it is a figure of substitution and hence repression of one term for another. It is, in fact, a "ruthless subordination of difference in the name of a single unified focus" (Murray 11). The substituted term becomes ideologically more powerful (like the Lacanian phallus substituting for the penis!); and the feminine becomes simply not-masculine! No wonder metonymy is theorized by Irigaray as connected with a maternal genealogy. The relation between metaphor and metonymy, as noticed by Wallace, can be posited as a "relation between the symbolic and the imaginary" (Wallace 135). And naturally it is metonymy that accounts for the eruptions and interruptions of the imaginary into the symbolic, the domain of metaphor. The symbolic and the imaginary are, in fact, interactive and interdependent (Whitford) and one cannot separate the operation of metaphor from metonymy. In such a case the opposition between metaphor and metonymy does not really hold and it must be displaced. This is what Cixous, Irigaray and others have done when they define "the metaphor that is not a metaphor as a metonymy" (Binhammer "Metaphor" 76). In fact another term is more adequate here: "Metonymic metaphors" (MacGillivray xxv). Such tropes do not simply replace the missing term, but they produce an excess of meaning. This contamination of metaphor and metonymy, and transgression of the codes of both tropes can be regarded as another instance of carnivalization of

literary strategies.

SCEPTICAL READER*

When I expected an "entry" into your own body, you present instead a textbook schematization in two columns. Is there some denial going on here? A retreat into more (phallic) columns of metaphor and metonymy? For me "ENTRY" = entry into the body. "Vulvocentric" writing - writing from the lips/labia. You are intellectualizing rather than "somatizing". To follow these writers' enterprise, you need to write from your own (female) body.

CONCERNED WRITER

i know i must listen more to the signs my body gives me my body speaks its native tongue which perhaps is still foreign to me how could this be? is it the effect of living in several cultures being bombarded by various languages and ideologies? everybody insisted on mastering the strict patriarchal grammar first the tongue of the father did it make me deaf to the "tongue of my mother, less language than music, less syntax than song of words" (Cixous "Coming" 22)? i must learn to be more aware of what is happening inside me in my reading i must let myself to be traversed by the writing of another woman forget the urge to rationalize but how can i say in a dissertation: "I claim the right to repeat the word until it becomes dry orange-skin, or until it becomes fragrance" (Cixous "Coming" 128)? maybe i am haunted by a vision of a conservative orthodox reader who am i writing for? i continuously translate between various languages between theories but i cannot translate my own body what kind of imprisonment has it suffered? i can only keep on trying let the writers speak through me or perhaps i should accept the various voices traversing my body and rejoice in them perhaps dialogize them let the academic dialogue with the personal let the languages undergo a fertile "contamination"

E N T R Y

In her translation/transformance of the "song of songs" Tostevin explores the genderization of metaphor and metonymy. The speaker of the poem (a woman) mimics male language and hence its predominantly metaphoric structures:

a palm of carnelian
a cuff of fine silver
a mouth of faraway

("song" 70)

Only when "the muse has learned to write," when the body of her voice is "distinct from the metaphor", when "she is no longer spoken for" (74) is there a move in the text from metaphor to metonymy, from a repressive substituting of words and ideas to a flowing motion of the text translated into long lines:

we belong to everything that spoke to us/ unspoken drew
us into each instant that moved us into saying/each
saying moving in to everything that came to us
unspoken/back and forth back and forth into saying

("song" 73)

In *Double Standards* Tostevin's speaker emphasizes that she:

speaks of lyrics that move
into the moment.....
of squeezing the diamond so hard
it turns back to coal
I like that

language bled

lampblack
 black lead
 choke damp air

(no pagination)

Diamond is metaphorically substituted for language here: work on language = squeezing the diamond and going to the pre-diamond= coal stage (bleeding of language); squeezing of the diamond is a metaphor for the pre-symbolic = semiotic stage of language, and hence there is a suggestion of the return to its musicality; from metaphor to metonymy, to a metonymic operation of language: to "language bled/ lampblack/ black lead." Words "suggest one another phonetically, musically, visually, at once metonymically and metaphorically, rather than on a level of a hierarchy linking sense and symbol" (MacGillivray xxiv). They produce a surplus of meaning. Similarly in a fragment of the "song of songs":

apple *un appel une pomme*/ a poem the gold red rind of
 rhyme *a rimmon* a garnet/ the bony pulp of a pomegranate
 the acid taste of crimson the/ sensuous pleasure of seeds
 that speak to the tip of the tongue.

("song" 74)

An apple phonetically "seduces" (calls for) the French word "un appel" (a call, an appeal); it functions as a metaphoric substitute for an apple, but at the same time it suggests the French word for an apple, *une pomme*. The word by "listening" and "responding" to sounds, creates the English word: poem: an

apple through a metonymic generative chain calls for a poem. Words associated with an apple interweave with those connoting a poem. Words suggest each other both metaphorically (through substitution) and metonymically (through association); "an apple" functions as a metonymic metaphor. And again the "contamination" of English with French has a positive generative character; there is a creative intersection of both languages and the question of ideological struggle between both languages is momentarily deflected.

Moreover, such an operation of language certainly does not translate a masculine desire based on lack. It translates the female desire as a positive force of production, an economy of plenitude, "a force or energy which creates links between objects, which makes things, forges alliances, produces connections" (Grosz *Sexual* xvi). Language is seen not as lack but as presence. A poetic practice of this kind coincides with Cixous's vision of writing the female body:

What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meagre desire.

("The Laugh" 891)

Feminist laughter is transgressive. It is laughter at the reversal of accepted norms and hence a profanation and desacralization of sanctioned rules. The legitimization of

female desire as generating alternative linguistic structures
carnivalizes the dominant Oedipal scenario.

E N T R Y

The preliminary discussion of texts by Canadian feminist language writers shows me that the writing operates within a linguistic model of translation, and that in order to translate the complex nature of the picto-ideo-phono-graphic body it experiments with the notation system itself. The traditional alphabetic phonogrammic system is not capable of translating into writing the functions of the thinking body, speaking body, writing body, gesturing body, performing body, body touching another body or body traversed by desire.

I find it useful to look at some of the features of the phonetic system as enumerated by Karl Jirgens:

- 1) our notation system is logical and linear and thus appeals directly to the left hemisphere of the brain rather than the (creative, emotive) right hemisphere,
- 2) the system can only approximate the thoughts it carries,
- 3) it is a representation of thought, and not thought itself

(65)

Such a notation can only approximate a translation of a rigid rational thought! In order to translate the picto-ideo-graphic body, writing must return to earlier notation systems, to early writing practices that still have traces of the gestural

and kinaesthetic. The phonetic alphabetic notation must be transgressed or "carnivalized" by codes deriving from other writing systems.

THE JAPANESE IDEOGRAM:

It has freedom for both vertical and horizontal writing (Makui 66); it is associated "not only with the visual but also with the sense of touch, physical sensation, colors and even smells" (Mukai 65-66). In other words, the Japanese ideogram incorporates "painting, poetry, music, sculpture and even gesture in their original form in the words" (Mukai 66). In everyday life the Japanese often write characters in the air. When learning traditional calligraphy with brush and ink, the Japanese learn not only to write the character but also to incorporate the empty background as an additional carrier of meaning in the text (Makui 66-7). There are also so-called "empty brushstrokes," "the movements of the paintbrush which have become invisible to the eye, which leave no trace on the paper" : "The Japanese read and attend to even these muscle movements which have vanished into emptiness" (Mukai 67).

HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING:

"the writing in which phonetic elements are coordinated to visual, pictorial, and plastic elements" (Derrida

Writing 240); "the organized co-habitation, within the same graphic code, of figurative, symbolic, abstract, and phonetic elements" (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 81).

In other words, it is writing that is "at once plastic art and language, spatialized and nonlinear, functioning by agglutinations, joining together in one graphic code figurative, symbolic, abstract and phonetic elements" (Ulmer *Applied* 271).

In the old notation systems writing is "an intensely physical art, one that activates several senses at once" (Young 5). The phonetic alphabetic system has standardized and desensitized both writing and reading. Contemporary Roman and Gothic typography is based on a way of thinking that reduces letters to an endless horizontal line. Ron Silliman, the American language poet and critic, refers to the phenomenon as "an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive and narrative capacities" ("Disappearance" 10). In other words, this is a "reification" or "commodification" of language which presents itself as a neutral or transparent medium for exchange of objective ideas. In fact, it subordinates sense and emotions to traditional fixed patterns of grammar or rhyme and meter, and eventually produces standardized emotions and thoughts.

Erin Mouré is distinctly aware of the commodification of language, and realizes that "[e]ven disruptive strategies are reabsorbed at some point, usually sooner than later" ("Acknowledging" 128-9). Her tactic is to "use strategies that aren't absorbable by continually shifting strategies" ("Acknowledging" 129). Phonetic standardized language produces a standardized highly reproducible discourse. Readers become "serialized language consumers" (Silliman "Disappearance" 15). Standardized orthography and standardized spelling suppress "the sensations of inner and outer ear as well as the organs of speech." They take "the sensuality out of language" and "reduce the sense of fluidity and magic" (Young 22). THERE IS A NEED TO RETURN TO WRITING THAT "ACTIVATES SEVERAL SENSES AT ONCE" (Young 5) - AND THIS MEANS A RETURN TO A SYNAESTHETIC CONCEPT OF WRITING, TO THE WRITING AS AN INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION OF THE BODY, TO THE PICTO-IDEO-PHONO-GRAPHIC NOTATION THAT EFFECTIVELY CARNIVALIZES THE PHONETIC ALPHABET.

E N T R Y

The earlier writing systems seem to embody the concept of a Total Work of Art. The historical avant-garde writers revived the idea of the "Total Work of Simultaneous Art" or Gesamtkunstwerk as a combination of visuality, musicality and literarity. They achieved it through their experiments with sound, simultaneity and automatism in the form of phonetic or

sound poetry, bruitist poetry, simultaneous poetry, or
optophonetic poetry (Ericson 74-97):

We started to endow words with content on the basis of
their graphic and *phonic characteristics*

(Burliuk "From A Trap" 53)

I do not understand poets who ignore the aesthetic life
of all those

~ + x = >, etc.

(Burliuk "Poetic" 83)

Language became an object, a material of creation and not just
a transparent medium. Cubists introduced words into paintings,
Dadaists manipulated words and letters, Futurists exploited
sounds and graphemes, Surrealists manipulated semantics. In
order to release language from control of reason and syntax
and to allow the intervention of chance, and of the irrational
in the verbal creation, the historical avant-garde created
phonic, visual, syntactic and semantic interventions in the
narrative continuity of language imposed by Latin syntax; and
everything was done in the hope of radically changing society.
All such experiments were an attempt at bringing the gestural
and kinaesthetic aspects of language back to the written text,
and make it "an intensely physical art, one that activates
several senses at once" (Young 5):

Poetry cannot be separated from the visual arts.... it is
in the nature of the words formed to retain the
representation found in the glyphs; even as the glyphs

themselves become phonetic or alphabetic.

(Fernandez 264)

AURAL POETICS, VISUAL POETICS, PERFORMANCE POETICS ?

The age of the poem-object, the kinetic poem, the poem-food, the poem-odor, the touch-poem; the body reinserts itself not in terms of Dominance over the mind, but as a total expression of the poetic. Perhaps through Poetry it is possible to imagine a world not divided between mind and body?

(Fernandez 270)

The historical avant-garde linguistic experiments were inherently political. They aimed at forcing the reader into new patterns of perception and expression and, consequently, to new states of consciousness and action. Similarly, the feminist exploration of language is politically motivated. But this time it is gender politics that matters. Rupturing of dominant codes of language is a protest against the "formal and social embeddings of gender" (DuPlessis *The Pink* 141).

SCEPTICAL READER

I think you use too many quotations. Don't you compromise your identity as a writer?

CONCERNED WRITER

I don't think my voice is overshadowed by other voices, but then I do not claim to have a singular voice only. I enter into a dialogue with other voices. I create a textual environment that enacts an erotics of reading and writing; both work by attraction; one voice seduces another and the dialogue continues.

III. SYNAESTHETIC WRITING: A VISION OF THE TOTAL WORK OF ART

to hear to see to smell to taste to touch

(Tostevin "re")

THERE ISN'T A GOOD LANGUAGE WITH WHICH TO SPEAK ABOUT LANGUAGE...Language, even if you think of it as a tool of perception, is problematic in a way sight or hearing are not. In fact, it isn't a sense in a way of the five conventional senses are, which all seem fairly irreducible. We seem to hallucinate a lot more readily through language. IT'S PREY TO THIS ALMOST PSYCHEDELIC SYNAESTHESIA, CONTINUOUSLY CONTAMINATING THINGS LIKE SIGHT AND SOUND. (capitalization mine)

(Hejinian "An Exchange" 6)

E N T R Y

The historical avant-garde notion of "synaesthesis involvement" as "a tactical recovery of oral, tactile and olfactoral traditions back into domain of written procedures" (McCaffery, bpNichol *Rational Geomancy* 173) is being revived in feminist language texts. The synaesthetic understating of art is common to the whole avant-garde. It is sufficient to read some representative statements of the historical avant-garde to see the intensity of their synaesthetic strategies:

Breathlessly he will assault your nerves with visual, auditory, olfactory sensations, just as they come to him. The rush of steam-emotion will burst the sentence's steampipe, the valves of punctuation, and the adjectival

clamp. Fistfuls of essential words in no conventional order. Sole preoccupation of the narrator, to every vibration of his being.

(Marinetti "Destruction" 98)

Such a revolutionary dynamics of the historical avant-garde aims at "a wholesale revision of artistic, cultural and political values" (Zinder 1). Language is no longer treated as an expression or representation of reality; painting abolishes illusionism in favours of constructivism. Both in verbal and non-verbal arts the compositional strategies are foregrounded. The "aura" of the work of art disintegrates (Benjamin).

In the end, a result of this conscious constructing is that of "making strange", the "alienation effect": To be able to see and feel the force and weight of formations of words, dynamics that otherwise go unnoticed; to feel it as stuff, to sound the language, and in so doing to reveal its meanings.

(Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 74)

Canadian feminist language writers also engage in a complex process of subversion of the dominant representational and expressive writing strategies. Similar to the historical avant-garde they explore synaesthetic qualities of language through the examination of earlier writing systems. In contrast to the earlier avant-garde, however, their experiments are motivated by gender politics and a desire to find a writing space that allows for a dialogic interaction of both the marginal and the dominant discourses and their ideologies.

CONCERNED WRITER

How can I write about the synaesthetic nature of writing? How can I write about texts that engage in the intersemiotic translation of the body (Pamela Banting's picto-ideo-phono-graphic body) into a written script? Can I inscribe the Bakhtinian concept of carnival as a spectacle that allows for the interaction of various signifying systems - the oral/aural, visual, olfactory, and even tactile? I know that only a holographic writing could do justice to such a complex phenomenon, but how can I perform it on a flat, one-dimensional page? I am constrained by the linear nature of alphabetic notation but I must transgress it. I must decide on a format that is "not a fixture but an activity" (Hejinian "Rejection" 275). I choose to divide the strategies of the texts into those that appeal to the curiosity of the eye, the ear, and those that entice the sense of touch and smell. The format is necessarily artificial as all of the strategies are interdependent and none of them is prioritized. How can I make my writing synaesthetic? Can I surrender to the poetry in a somatic way? Can I combine the somatic and the cerebral?

E N T R Y

I. "COM (OP)POSING" (Bernstein *Content's* 51)

working with words is somewhat like working with canvas
or working with paint and light and stuff

(Mouré "And just" 47)

There is no syntax in poetry, either, Mr.
Auerbach. Anything can happen on the page & you can't
foresee it. No one even wants to.

("Visible Spectrum" *Sheepish* 34)

Texts inciting the curiosity of eye and ear:

These are texts whose "textual intensifications we cannot help but 'hear with eyes,'" a "a writing - audited by the 'earsighted view' of readers" (Stewart 283).

1. Warland:

WHERE ARE WE?

andro(gynous)
(fe)male
(wo)man

()

(we are here)

(an open mouth)

(*serpent* turn 4)

on one page there is only: (?)
and on the other:

an open mouth

()

(turn 4)

we have all been fe(male)

"a feminine plural" + "a masculine singular"

X X + Y

yet he remains ADAMant
using Garden Grammar he writes an opposite story
names the *clitoris*

and later the only signs on the page are:
()

O

X O X O X O X O X O X O

(*serpent* turn 4)

"fluid slanguage"

sss-lang

this is how we read

I/s movement
serpent movement

(*serpent* turn 5)

What words can describe best such a practice of writing? Is it
visual, aural, kinetic?

It is evident that the text calls attention to its own
composition in the space of the page. The words, letters and

punctuation marks are dispersed and animated on the page. The non-phonetic and gestural material is grafted into the phonetic notation. The orderly and predictable relations of sequential language are disrupted (and subverted). The ideogrammic principle is invoked. I, the reader, am invited to generate the meaning. The act of reading becomes "an ideogrammic act of discovery" (La Charité 108). The visual text disrupts the apparent stability of the acoustic pattern. It shows the illusion of pure meaning. The eruptive capitalization in "ADAMant" and in "I/s movement", is an intentional wordplay. My eye is caught in the double movement. I must trace patterns of meaning back and forth. The tension between the visual structure and the oral medium is significant. How do I read: "XOXOXOXOXO"? Is it a verbal construct or a silent visual image? The interaction of sound and silence generates intensities and subtleties of meaning and it foregrounds the materiality of language. The achieved effect is similar to that accomplished by the materials of visual art. In McCaffery's words, such a text can be defined as a writing of excess, as "it cannot be spoken about but only participated within" (*North* 150). The thought inscribed in the text is mobile, undecidable, and full of contradictory meanings. I am invited to ponder the complexity of language and to differentiate and choose between contradictory ideas

that the language inscribes.

WARLAND 2

I am particularly interested in the multiple strategies the writers use to mobilize the space of writing, to dynamize the page; writing as affirmation of life, movement. Cixous reminds me: "(b)ecause a text is printed one often forgets that it is mobile. It is in movement. One should always bring back the movement of the text" (*Reading with* 101).

I look at Warland's poem:

```

]
[
]
[
]
[
no words
]
listen
[
wind: of our
]
being
[
"air"
]
"aura"
[
"wing"/each
]
a wing
[
riding
]
our own wind

```

(*open is broken* 51)

I think that Warland may be responding to Cixous's call:

Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything!
Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters.
Listen: nothing is found. Nothing is lost. Everything
remains to be sought. Go, fly, swim, bound, descend,
cross, love the unknown, love the uncertain, love what
has not yet been seen...*dare what you don't dare.*

(*"Coming"* 40)

The movement of the text on the page is an indication of the writer taking the leap and falling "not like a stone, but like a bird" and discovering "herself to be a swimmer of the unlimited!" (Cixous *"Coming"* 40):

And a word arrives like a bird plummeting in the text. It alights with quotation marks like a little bird. The word is detached, liberated from its familiar obligations through its appearance. It appears only as word...a signifier, a verbal thing to be used. (emphasis mine)

(Cixous *Reading with* 73)

The use of open brackets in the silence of the space is disturbing. How do I read the brackets? The graphic signs mark the space of the page and I wonder if they are just indexical of the courageous leap Warland takes in her text, or perhaps they have also a symbolic connotation. Again the topography of the page and the paratactic combination of the words suggest multiple possibilities for reading. Writing functions here as a spatio-temporal phenomenon and Warland exposes the senselessness of such standard practices of conventional

The poems "Everything" 2) "& Saw" 3) "The Cortex" (*Sheepish* 30-32) are laid out on different sides of the page. There is an option to read them either horizontally or vertically. About "Everything" Mouré says: "it's made like knitting. I actually wrote it across" ("Any just" 45). As for "The Cortex" she states that it "is virtually impossible to read if you read it the way you want to read it, that is, down. But if you read it again and read across it, then it comes together at the end" ("Any just" 46). When I read the texts I experience the conflicting dimensions of the written and the spoken. The conventional linear structuring of thought is deconstructed. The poem translates the working of the brain, the process of thinking, the interaction between the right and left hemisphere.

Similarly in "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" Mouré plays with the graphic layout of the text and its vocalization. Here she breaks the "surface of the page," "the cast the culture offers us" (*Furious* 90), and she "plays with the fact that there are two sides to the page ... with the visual proximity of that" (Mouré "Any just" 46). On one side of the page there are poems ("Harsh Metallic," "Bank Hill," "Inner Mutiny," "Unicorn Ear," "Blister Split,") which are subtitled "(photon)"; on the other side there are poems of the same titles, but this time they

are subtitled "(scanner)"; the photon [a quantum of radiant energy, a unit of intensity of light] is scanned/read by the scanner, and both sides of the page are totally interdependent. Again Mouré explores the working of the left and right hemispheres. The nature of human perception does not allow me to read both sides of the page simultaneously and absorb the play of their visual proximity. No wonder, the poem "loses a lot when read aloud" (Mouré "And just" 46). Maybe I should focus on the middle of the poem, on the space between both sides of the page: "Eventually all poems fall into their seam or *gutter*" ("Blister Split" 92). The empty space between the two sides of the poem can signify the split between the body and thought; and it is only when the bonding between the pages is effaced that I can engage "the hemispheres' simultaneous noise, this *consciousness*/ where thought & the body are one" ("Blister Split" 92).

It is actually only a silent reading which allows for a multidimensional experience that the synaesthetic quality of the texts or their picto-ideo-phono-graphic nature can be approached. A silent printed text explores a simultaneous "relationship between seeing, hearing, interpreting and understanding poetic form" (Bradford 49).

The text reminds me of the notation of "inner speech." I find it extremely difficult to find connections/sense in the fragmentary use of phrases on both sides of the page, but I must remember that inner speech works "not according to the laws of grammar or logic but according to the laws of evaluative (emotive) correspondences, dialogical deployment, etc." (Volosinov 38), and that it can "operate with extreme forms of abbreviation, condensation, image equivalents or fragments of image equivalents, [and] extraordinary syntagmatic distortions" (Wileman "Cinematic" 139-140). What is most fascinating about inner speech is that it is a "'frontier' discourse", "the place of overlap and contamination between the inner and outer dimensions, between the imaginary and the symbolic" (Ulmer *Applied* 294).

The placement of the "photon/scanner" poems on the two sides of the page also shows the graphing of polyphony. Different voices are laid in columns but they interact with one another. The space between them becomes increasingly audible. It is like in Warland's and Marlatt's collaborative texts where voices are intertwined, not distinguished as individual but showing the working of dialogism: "women's way of thinking" ("Reading" 142):

you and you (not we) in me
 and all of us reading, which
 is what we do when left
 holding the floor, watching
 you soar with the words'
 turning and turning their
 sense and sensing their turns
 i'm dancing with you in the
 dark learning to trust that
 sense of direction learning to
 read you in to where i want
 to go although the commo-
 tion in words the connota-
 tions you bring are different
 we share the floor the ground
 floor meaning dances on...

whirling out to include...

are you trying to avoid the
 auto-biographical? what is
 'self' writing here? when you
 leave space for your readers
 who may not read you in the
 same way, the autobio-
 graphical becomes commu-
 nal even communographic
 in its contextual and narra-
 tive (Carol Gilligan) wo-
 men's way of thinking - and
 collaborating?

(Marlatt and Warland "Reading" 142)

In the text the voices are not distinguished. Two identities
 are blurred becoming dialogized selves, or nomadic selves,
 wandering from one voice to another. They are also "specular
 subjects" (I borrow the term from Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of
 the Other Woman*) as both self and other, neither one nor two
 - the feminine as "the simultaneity of the subject and object
 in the state of reciprocity" (Hermann *The Dialogic* 24).

It is in this text and also in Mouré's "The Cortex",
 "Everything" and "& Saw" that I can see that "the word is the
 means by which we not only speak but also hear and understand"
 (Patterson 133-4), and that speaking and hearing "do not take
 place strictly at the poles of listener and speaker but occur
 in the between, in the event of dialogical interaction"

(Patterson 134). The reading of the text involves both listening to it and looking at the shape of writing; both the epireading and graphireading must be involved. Epireading is named for the epos (Greek =speech, utterance); it "interprets experience in terms of voice, speech, utterance, *logos* understood as action" (Donoghue 151); it also pays attention to the question of intentionality. Graphireading, on the other hand, is interested in graphic signifiers and in a continuous deferment of meaning (Donoghue 151). The text enters its own dialogue. The words cross the white space and engage in a dialogic play. The white space functions as a threshold, but the silence is "forever haunted by the word on the threshold of utterance" (Patterson 133). The texts inscribe Bakhtin's concept of dialogism as a condition of responsibility: every word I utter makes me capable of response and hence of responsibility.

E N T R Y

Lola Lemire Tostevin:

Carrouches is another text which evokes the curiosity of eye and ear simultaneously. Tostevin examines here the concept of verbo-visual writing. The title of the book draws attention to hieroglyphic writing and it may suggest that Tostevin's

explorations will be limited to typical Derridean grammatological tricks, to his arguments regarding the priority of writing over speech; Derrida criticizes the flaws of the alphabetic phonetic system and hails early writing systems as free of the fallacies of phonetics.⁴ It has been determined, however, that "[t]here is no purely phonetic writing" and that "alphabetic writing in the West wrongly claims to be like speech" (Wesling 109).

Transmuted, hieroglyphs
live on within our own
small daily alphabets.
Anubis, you ain't nothing
but a hound dog.

(Tostevin *Cartouches* no pagination)

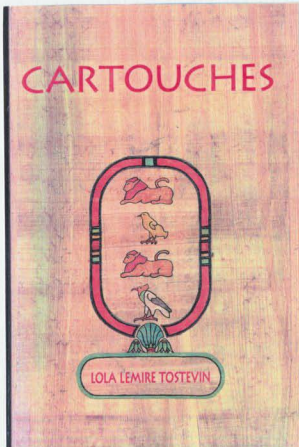
Tostevin is not interested in debating the priority of writing over speech or vice versa. She is attracted to the hieroglyphic system but her preoccupation is with finding a dialogic connection between various signifying systems operating within the graphic code of hieroglyphics: the "figurative, symbolic, abstract, and phonetic" ones (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 81).

Tostevin chooses the word "cartouches" as the title of her book.

CARTOUCHE - the oval ring framing the names of kings - or those recognized on the religious level (those involved in the cult of the sun)

(Quirke 19)

She focuses on the concept of cartouche as it contains a visual/graphic inscription/translation of the phonetic sounds only, sounds of a name, and language for Tostevin is both "word and name" ("Is this" 69), both a representation and signification of "reality"; naming is performative and creates new semantic universes: "A name is as much/ a part of the a person/as the soul" (*Cartouches*).



a cartouche
puts into play
the bodies
of my name

a lion
a dove
a lion
a vulture

(*Cartouches*)

(Plate 5)

In the hieroglyphic system certain picture signs were assigned for the inscription of a sound: "the sound of the first letter in the name of an object was given to the picture or character which represented it, and henceforward the character bore the phonetic value" (Budge 30).

On the cover page of the book there is a cartouche of Tostevin's first name LOLA. Here the hieroglyphic characters are used not as pictures (icons) or ideographs (ideas or symbols) but only as phonetic sounds. The pictures signify the sounds of the letters forming her name. In the text Tostevin translates the pictures into verbal/phonetic images: a lion/a dove/a lion/a vulture. It is not a simple, literal translation, but a "transformation" resulting from her skilful exploration of the space of the page. The placement of words on the page conveys the vertical type of a hieroglyphic script (the writing in columns in contrast to the one in horizontal lines) (Budge 10). It also shows its operation according to the ideogrammic principle. The ordinary imagist thinking, becomes transformed to conceptual thinking (Eisenstein *Film Form* 31). She pays attention to the interaction of the symbolic and the iconic nature of the translated signs when she refers to them as "bodies" of her name and as "All this I am and want to be: at the same time lion, dove and vulture"

(*Cartouches*). The hieroglyph functions as "an allegory of signification itself"; it "undermines fictions of identity, unity, linearity, priority" (DuPlessis *Pink* 97). The graphs of the animals can signify then Tostevin's belief in the polyphonic nature of identity, or the "polyphonic presence of the self, where we have many versions of the 'I', many stories to tell" ("Sounding" 34). And naturally the hieroglyphic inscription challenges the linear character of alphabetic writing.

The hieroglyphics are translated into alphabetic notation which, however, encompasses the picto-ideo-phono-graphic features of the old system. The visual side of the system can be perceived in the many fragments of the text that imitate/translate the vertical nature of the hieroglyphic script. This non-phonetic element of writing is balanced by the exploration of the sound structure in her text. It is here that Tostevin differs with Derrida and his claims about the importance of "spacing as the reversal of the phoneticization process" and about "giving new importance to the nonphonetic element of writing, putting speech back in its place" (Ulmer *Applied* 179). For her all of these elements are important!

And again there is an interaction between the iconic/symbolic

and phonetic, this time at the level of image (both verbal and acoustic). The following fragments suggest a structure that works like a verbal counterpart of a non-verbal response to reality:

symbolic:

a reading walk
into the open
the history of it
all - an inlaid eye
phonetic: inscription of many voices:

iconic:

Crouched inside
the museum door the jackal
Anubis guards the dead

who calls?
I meant to tell
Fred when he asked
what does it mean
Qu'Appelle?

This morning outside
my window a cicada
recited in perfect Arabic
an entire shahaada
while a frog teeming
with recollection sang:
"I am the daughter,
I am the resurrection."

*et toi osiris
dis-moi
es-tu l'os
de la fleur
ou es-tu l'os
dans l'oeil?*

The sound and rhythm are very important here:

"rhyme becomes the only reason for living"

And there is a suggestion that in the beginning of writing, when words were chiselled in stone, "The toc toc toc of her hammer" and "stanza really/ was all echo and toccata"

(*Cartouches*). It may seem that the phonetic element is given emphasis here, but the placement of the short poems on the page, the spatial configuration of the text with its dynamic multi-directional space, interrupts the uni-directional phonetic/discursive structure. There is a lot of empty space in *Cartouches* and "Against so much empty space, anything/ could blossom." The empty spaces are an important part of the conceptual structure of the text. The pages of silence neutralize the noise of phonetic notation: "she can no longer bear to look at words....Print dead,/she says. I dream that I am a fish: ancient Egypt's symbol/of silence." The pages of silence create "the space between/that writers try to write through. Broken rhythm between/breaths; *a starting over a writing down*, a new becoming,/ ongoing till the end." Writing is an ongoing process and not a fixed event or a product. Silence engages the sound and the dialogue goes on, the writing continues.

The whole text is constructed ideographically. Tostevin moves beyond repressive metaphoric constructions and uses an ideographic method that operates on the principles of collage (Gefin 75). Complex ideas are the result of association and juxtaposition. All sequential or causal principles of discourse are ignored. The layout and typography

of the printed page is crucial. Space interrogates lexical and semantic meaning, places syntactical principles in doubt; it interrupts and distorts. It is writing which "differs in space and defers time" (Tostevin "Afterword" *Gyno-Text* no pagination). "Nothing is communicated *through* language but *in* language" (Tostevin "This is where" 69).

E N T R Y

I look at Tostevin's *Gyno-Text* again and I also notice that the spatial configuration of the text on the page is very close to a hieroglyphic inscription, to the vertical column structure so typical of one type of hieroglyphic notation. Tostevin describes the book as an experiment in writing at the ridge of Kristeva's *phéno-texte* and *géno-texte* ("Afterword"), or in other words, of the symbolic and semiotic level of language. Rachel DuPlessis, the American language poet and critic, sees "in the semiotic realm, a plethora of 'hieroglyphs,' of signs, of 'signets' - jewels of the unnameable, that in the maternal (and sometimes elsewhere) is incipience and listening, a waiting" (*Pink* 100). It's surprising how well the statement fits Tostevin's strategy:

thick
trunk
unleashes
leaf
limb

voice
boxed
in
ears
echo

bud
tender
lotus

deeper
pounding
tympa
tym
 panic
rhythm
of a
heart
some
w)here

(*Gyno-Text*)

This is writing which defies the logic of the linear alphabetical notation and explores the picto-ideo-phonographic principles of earlier writing systems. It is then a verbo-visual/ opto-phonetic writing which inscribes tension between the visual and phonic and does not neglect the ideogrammic nature of such a notation. The words inhabit more a pictorial/visual than a syntactic space. Words are separated and hence any subordination or a hierarchical structure is avoided. All of them are equally important. Words and line are conflated, the linear articulation and the grammatical desire for connections is avoided.

The mother I speak has never been subjected to the
gramma-r wolf. In me she sings and muses.

(Cixous "*Coming*" 22)

The focus is on rhythm, the beat of the heart, permeating the vast open spaces of the page (considering that the text translates the body during the period of gestation and later birth). It is writing which deconstructs the logical order of

language and relishes in phonic, rhythmic, graphic and paraverbal interventions.

E N T R Y

I have been referring to Kristeva's concepts of the semiotic and the symbolic, and it looks as if I have been subscribing to the current trend of interpreting any instance of rhythmic or melodic traces in language as the eruption of the unconscious, of the semiotic. Is such an analysis acceptable in view of the self-conscious and self-reflexive character of feminist language writing?

In *Gyno-Text* Tostevin consciously chooses to work with Kristeva's concepts. She conceives of the text as operating against the ridge of *phéno-texte* and *géno-texte* ("Afterword"). These are Kristeva's terms for the explanation of the semiotic operations of a text: "genotext," the language of the unconscious can erupt into "phenotext," the language "that serves to communicate ... [and] obeys the rules of communication" (*Revolution* 87). Such a process results in the subversion of phonic, semantic and syntactic structures of "phenotext" and consequently of a fixed meaning and a unitary subjectivity. Kristeva's *semananalysis* generates its own unique understanding of the text as the dialectical interplay

between the semiotic⁵ and the symbolic,⁶ as an intrusion of the semiotic in the symbolic.⁷ For Kristeva the whole process of semiosis has a decidedly somatic dimension as it originates in the maternal chora, a zone of vocal production that precedes articulation. Its language has not yet succumbed to the laws of grammar and sense/reason but it is "stored as sonorous, visual, tactile, olfactory, or rhythmic traces" (Kristeva *In the Beginning* 8-9).

Tostevin's focus in *Gyno-Text* on all of the above-mentioned aspects of language does not necessarily mean that she is exploring Kristeva's "chora," exclusively. Tostevin states that in her text "language moves beyond the linguistic order of the symbolic towards musical allegory...in the endless cycle of metamorphoses, natural sound tends towards rhythm, cadence, music" ("Reading after" 67). Nevertheless, her account of avant-garde practice contrasts with that of Kristeva, in which the semiotic completely disrupts the symbolic function of the text. An investigation into "genotext" alone would mean just a focus on a re-discovered underside of male logic, the opposite of rationality, and as such it would continue to be a language of the oppressed, a language with no authority (Nye 211). Tostevin moves beyond Kristeva's theories. Following Cixous and Irigaray, she

abandons the patriarchal logic of absence/presence that clears a way for a new kind of positive feminist thinking. Feminine sexuality as a positive presence provides now a new model for feminist thought and writing. In the place of paternal authority Cixous, for instance, introduces the possibility of the maternal. Cixous believes in the revolutionary power of "l'écriture féminine" as a springboard for transformation of social structures.

E N T R Y

Why is Kristeva superseded by other theories?

In Kristeva it is unclear "whether one chooses the semiotic, or whether the semiotic is simply a *symptom* of some unresolved psychological disorder" (Mills 94). Moreover, Kristeva's discussion of syntactic disruption does not take into consideration other interests of the texts. Her philosophical account of language is limited to a bodily space (Middleton 84). She denies the existence of cognitive positions "beyond the totality of propositions"³ (Middleton 85), and she is not interested in the content of the texts, which she simply describes as radical because they disrupt the symbolic order (Middleton 93). Kristeva's theory cannot account for a difference "between poetry which attempts in a conscious way to undermine assumptions about power relations and

signification, and poetry which ends up critically reinforcing them" (Mills 107). In Tostevin, on the other hand, the cognitive aspect of the text is foregrounded. Notice her notion of the "pregnant pause as conceptual break". It is true, as Pauline Butling points out in her analysis of *Gyno-Text*, that Tostevin's difference from Kristeva is in "foregrounding the interstices of meaning, the gap, the interval between the binaries, the heteroglossia of the word" ("Textual" 109). Nevertheless, Butling does not take into consideration another crucial aspect of Tostevin's writing, or, for that matter, of other language writers who investigate multiple registers of language. The writers do not simply privilege voice or spacing, or slippage between them; they take "into account the social and linguistic condition (which means the edges, folds, contradictions" (Mouré "Anti" 21): "We can't just speak of the slippage of 'meaning', but slippage of the whole structural relationships" (Mouré "Anti" 18). As Mouré points out:

[p]oetic structure does not come solely from the semiotic, from some undifferentiated place related to the mother; the relation of the speaker to social order is also part of poetic structure. The entry, the flash of the mirror. Poetic structure has to reflect it too. Even if it can't stop it, hold it. It's there as a fold. (emphasis mine)

("Anti" 16)

For Tostevin it is her own cultural situation on the literary

map of Canada, her relation to both English and French that becomes "part of poetic structure." She inscribes the tension the bilingual speaker experiences socially, culturally and psychologically. Her texts are utterances (and hence the importance of context) and not just exercises in sonic or spatial patterning. Even in the text that translates gestation and birthing, the political aspect of her use of both English and French is foregrounded. Both languages are interwoven, and the pauses, gaps or interstices of discourse create not only "a slippage of meaning" but also aim at shifting the political or social order (a "symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic" (Jameson *Political* 76-77)).

Tostevin and other language writers explore the tension between the semiotic and the symbolic levels of language, but they do it in a conscious manner. I can't read the rhythmic features of their conscious use of language as the trace of the semiotic chora. And if I agree with Charles Bernstein that "all writing is a demonstration of method" ("Writing" 226) and hence it is always reflexive, always making a claim about representation and language, I can't read any interruption of referentiality characteristic of new poetry as "disruptive of the symbolic order." If "reflexivity is a possibility," as Middleton argues, "then the idea of a thetic boundary between

referentiality or propositionality and the fluidities of the semiotic ground, a boundary which linguistic radicalism can shatter, is itself untenable" (87). The semiotic and the symbolic are nothing more but "moments of linguistic process" (Middleton 87)! So if the writers explore musicality in their texts, it is their conscious choice, a deliberate strategy to investigate the semiotic or the symbolic "moments of linguistic process."

E N T R Y

I've been talking about the "mutual contamination" of the verbo/visual writing, but I must stop here and focus on the spatial configuration itself and its importance for women writers. Feminist writers talk a lot about finding a textual space for themselves. Shari Benstock argues that women writers choose to work with "a textual space of loss and oversight" (Benstock xvii), which is, with forms of rhetoric, grammar and punctuation that escape laws of representation. She suggests that "apostrophes, ellipses, footnotes, and certain epistolary forms, orthographical conventions and alphabetical signifiers" create a textual space that can be coded "feminine." A space used by such signifiers suggests a margin of difference and it overlaps a cultural space (xvii). I believe, however, that a better name for this kind of space would be "a space of difference." In this way I avoid essentialist connotation.

The "space of difference" could be useful and valuable not only for women but also for those whose difference cannot be accommodated in language "coded masculine."

Space for these women writers means problematization of the blank white page and problematization of page filled with linear alphabetic writing. They expand the conceptual limits of the page by making it more active and dynamic. Traditionally a page is a flat, unidimensional rectangle. It is a fixed framework with imposed margins that limit the amount of words and lines the page can hold. But the limits are broken when the writers use different type sizes and different fonts, and break the margins. Warland is expert in such strategies. She constantly uses italics: *light lower-case italics* (*sentence, tissue, hymen*) and *bold lower case italics* (*pre-text/tonguetext, scentext, telatext, tissuetext, etc. (open is broken 13-15)*). The *lower-case italics* are usually used for her etymological wordplay. Italics are closer to script and perhaps more personal, closer to the body, but Warland also uses signs drawn by her own hand and thus she expands even more the gestural quality of her writing. In *serpent (w)right* she uses many type sizes and different fonts:

BOMB - WOMB
 OM

The traditional margins are no longer fixed. They are destabilized and disrupted. Warland establishes an open space for her texts where "anything can happen." Similarly Mouré in *Sheepish Beauty*, and Tostevin in her books challenge the conventional page format: "anything can happen on the page & you can't foresee it. No one even wants to" (Mouré *Sheepish* 34). Tostevin frequently uses italics for her French language poems (the italics signify her difference, the "color of her speech"), but this strategy of difference and transgression is frequently carried to anglophone texts which mix both languages and use the italic and roman type interchangeably: retracing/ retrieving /à la source / à la dérive (*Color*). McCaffery describes this operation of language as "a kind of surface eroticism" ("The Scene" 90). I would refer to it as a dialogue between both languages and between their graphic inscriptions.

Scott in *Heroine* also experiments with the type size, font style and interline and paragraph spacing. Diary entries, song lyrics, dream captions, important concepts, and numerous graffiti and slogans are rendered in capital letters or italics. The dispersion of the words on the page is undeniably visual.

The writers are very courageous in the sphere of textual disruptions, even in the manipulation of the space of the page itself.

The page is no less than *the sign for attention itself*.
A geographical cipher.

(McCaffery "The Death" 75)

Traditionally pages appear as verso (left for even number) and recto (right for odd numbers). But Warland refers to "*verso, the left hand page of a book or the reverse side*" as if it was "*a leaf ... the page one sees when the leaf is turned*" (*serpent* turn eight). This line is placed on the left hand page but the numbering of pages in the whole text is discarded/abandoned. The page functions then more as a leaf, as something alive and struggling against restrictions and constraints. I think here of "the original sense of page as trellis connoting a vertical support for organic growth, organic activity" and its connection to "the language-tree relationship" (McCaffery *Rational* 109). In *serpent (w)rite* Warland alludes to it saying: "each page The Tree" (turn six). Tostevin also rejects pagination in *Gyno-Text*, *Color of Her Speech*, *Double Standards*, and in *Cartouches*. The writers do not intend to direct the reader through a regular sequential pagination. The books are not standardized constructs but demand an active participation of the reader in their

creation.

E N T R Y

A page can be used as a metaphor for space

(La Charité 65)

In Warland's *serpent (w)rite* there are eight empty/blank pages that are covered only with a graphic sign that reminds of a spiral, of a "creative spiral" as it rises in a clockwise direction (Cirilot 305). Such a sign is strongly associated with water, power, independent movement (Liungman 168). It also has an association with "primitive dance of healing and incantation intended to induce a state of ecstasy" (Cirilot 306). In ideogrammatic configurations the spiral is a sign illustrating movement (Liungman 168). Warland uses the shape of the spiral as a substitute for the titles of chapters/sections of the book. She refers to the sign as a turn which points to other associations, particularly adequate in a text concerned with an exploration of language: a linguistic turn, a trope, perhaps a metaphor. Beneath the spiral there is a picture of a wavy line that is a sign used for water or the surface of the sea. But there is an eye drawn on one side of the wavy line which turns the sign into the image of a serpent, the oldest symbol of female power, the

power of life and embodiment of enlightenment and wisdom (Walker *The Woman's* 388). Both signs combined create an ideographic structure that demands from the reader a conceptualization of the elements involved and of their reference to the book. All meanings suggested by the spiral and the serpent are explored in the book. I particularly like the reference to the ritual dance and hence to language and rites (the rituals of presence that Brossard talks about in "Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness"), to women's power of writing and (w)riting. Imagist thinking becomes conceptualist. And this is exactly what Warland aspires to do in her texts. Although she plays with the visual character of writing she does not think of it in terms of representational painting but rather in terms of collage or montage of scripto-visual techniques: in *serpent (w)right* it is a collage of quotations from various sources and of her own verbo-visual writing. In this way she is better able to present the conditions and causes of woman's oppression, instead of simply reproducing its appearances.

In other texts Warland also explores the concept of verbo-visual writing. In "cutting re/marks" for instance she uses a punctuation sign, a comma, in an open space of the page, to suggest an erasure of memory during anaesthetics; surgery

signifies being in "com(m)a":

,

and this is where the damage is held
condensed on this page
like a tear in limbo

("cutting" 113)

The comma functions as an image/icon of her memory - "condensed on this page" (113). Here Warland explores the pictographic features in the phonetic alphabetic system of writing. In another instance, in "mOther muse:/«mousa, mosaic», " a text exploring the relationship between mother and daughter, she uses a question mark as a sign of "half a bleeding heart" (?) (43). The placement of the sign on the space of the page and its juxtaposition with the verbal text highlights the pain inscribed in the poem:

she had *kids* didn't she

question mark
half a bleeding heart

?

It is Tostevin who stresses that "Transmuted, hieroglyphs/live on within our own/small daily alphabets" (*Cartouches*). She employs in her writing techniques that foreground the visual

side of the alphabetic script: apostrophes, pauses or diacritical signs ("accent aigu, accent grave, accent circonflexe" (*Color*), signs which signify a "difference" one "can touch and taste" (*Color*).

E N T R Y

APOSTROPHE

As a mark of difference apostrophe "announces the silences within speech, providing in the announcement graphic evidence of the power of that silence" (Benstock 84). For Tostevin apostrophe is a sign which epitomizes woman's linguistic condition "the suspension of presence" ("*Apostrophe in Mid-Air*")(*Double Standards*). It is her disembodied voice, the language itself which says: "I am not a woman I am a poem / a space in space" (*Double*). An apostrophe marks the title in '*sophie*. The sign also works as a title, or a substitute for a title, in all of the individual poems of '*sophie*. Here apostrophe invokes the discourse of philosophy; it signifies both the turning away from the abstract arid masculine philosophical discourse and an invocation to the alternative, different philosophy which would not omit the "philo," the discourse on love, the amorous discourse and its exploration of human relationships.

Perhaps apostrophe is one of the gestures of writing, "the artless accident/of the *sumi* brush" ('*sophie* 31); it encodes movement, the trajectory of the body "from one representation to another," "the curve described in space as a body travels through the air" (Tostevin "subject" 106) that is so important for Tostevin's verbo-visual writing. As an empty space, apostrophe "invites the occupancy of what is different" (Budick and Iser xvi-xvii). Apostrophe signifies also "a place of passage, a threshold" (Budick and Iser xv), a space and place of important decisions. As an interruption of space apostrophe creates "an opening for the unpredictable to take place" (Budick and Iser xviii). I think that in Tostevin's case the apostrophe accentuates the difference of the female speaker/writer and it creates a space for her subversive practice of writing.

PAUSE, AN EMPTY SPACE, A BREAK IN DISCOURSE

pregnant
 pause
 as
 conceptual
 space

interval
 between
 inner
 outer
 folds

(*Gyno-Text*)

A break in discourse is for Tostevin, and for many other language writers, a space particularly fitting to signify difference. Shari Benstock in her theory of "psychoanalytic" that "investigates the sexual organization of textuality and the textual structuring of the psyche" (xvi) refers to such gaps/holes in discourse as "psychosexual-textual structuring devices" that signify "a permeable textual boundary" between Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic or Derrida's "hymen that confuses borderlines between textual interiority and exteriority" (xix). Tostevin conceptualizes such a gap as the "between," and particularly the Heideggerian "break as between" ("Pregnant" 74). There is a suggestion here of Heidegger's sense of break or boundary as "that from which something begins its essential unfolding" ("Building" 332). For Tostevin that "something" is a space in writing that marks the female body and its translation into writing in the form of "écriture féminine"; "the break," "the between," "the pregnant pause" and other concepts mentioned before are the new metaphors of the female body (re-metaphorization of the body!). The new writing, "écriture féminine" is "a writing of excess" that "exceeds and subverts usual linear (phallic) writing" and "[b]reaks the hard exchange value of language, its greedy economy of retention and gives in to abundance and spending" (Tostevin "Pregnant" 74).

Warland's use of empty spaces not only challenges the use of standard punctuation but also visually suggests the lack of space for women in the dominant language. Warland leaves the gaps between words as signs of a space that can be used/appropriated (conceptually or otherwise) by women. She also opposes the "greedy economy of retention" (Tostevin "Pregnant" 74) and celebrates a writing of excess:

father language
 written learned closed
 dissembling differentiating sequential
 linear sight exclusive

(Warland "the breasts" 30)

mother tongue
 oral original open
 mnemonic repetitious clichéd
 spiralling sound integrative

(Warland "the breasts" 29)

Mouré refers to pauses, gaps or empty spaces in language as leaks of discourse, seams, or folds. These are both visible and audible gaps, gaps with seams. They do not signify a space of "maternal non-sense" ("Poetry, Memory" 72) nor do they show the "Lacanian gap between desire and expression, where 'something' is lost" ("Anti" 14). For Mouré a fold is a "[p]lace of memory and desire" ("Anti" 14), of female desire which sees language not as lack but as presence. She sees the gaps as "stresses that appear to the eye as torn edges or disruptions, where you can't grab on but have to listen"

("Anti" 17), listen to the visible and audible traces of the body, to somatization of writing that disrupts the linear logic of the alphabetic system.

Tostevin also uses graphic signs, "empty tactile signs" that, as McCaffery points out in his review of *Color of Her Speech*, "refuse in any way to name the texts which follow" ("Scene" 90). The graphic sign used as a substitute for a title in this book is a diamond or the rhomb. A similar technique is used in other books. In *Double Standards* it is a "four square" figure. In *Cartouches*, the icon represents the amulet of heart; in *'sophie*, as already mentioned, it is an apostrophe. The choice of particular visual signs is certainly deliberate. It is a language of silence which decomposes the dominant discourse. And moreover the graphs participate in the creation of a new verbo-visual space. Although the graphs do function as signs traditionally associated with the Goddess or Mother Earth, the space is not necessarily female, not necessarily "gynocography," as McCaffery suggests ("Scene" 90). A diamond is "emblematic of the female sexual organ" and it is said to be the sign of "the Virgin Earth" (Walker *The Woman's* 50). But a rhombus is also "an early form of note sign in music, a sign for tone" (Liungman 311). Doesn't the sign suggest the appeal of the text to both the eye and the ear?! The four-square

figure is, in fact, the earth sign (four corners, four quarters, four directions, and a centre point marked by a cross (Walker *The Woman's* 51)), but it can also be a sign of field or ground (Liungman 294). Perhaps there is a suggestion here of the page as an open field, as a place of possibilities. The silent graphic sounds, in fact, allow for all of these interpretations. I am reminded by Bradford that silent poetics "is probably the final point of resistance to the process by which critical writing has systematically catalogued and colonized the language of poetry" (Bradford 201).

Silent poetics is not a system. It is a state of awareness of how systems work and it manifests itself in individual texts by preying upon and disrupting our sense of expectation.

(Bradford 202)

In *Cartouches* I find a graph of the amulet of the heart:

it was the seat of intelligence, the originator of all feelings and actions, and the storehouse of memory... [it] retained the memory of the owner's deeds upon earth ...It was the heart which was weighed in the balance in the Underworld to ascertain whether the owner was worthy to enter the Egyptian paradise.

(Andrews *Amulets* 72)

In a book that explores the memory of her dead father and of the Canadian poet bp Nichol, Tostevin chooses the graph of the heart amulet as one of her gestures towards writing that

balances ideographic and phonetic elements. If "[t]he art of memory is like an inner writing" (Ulmer *Applied* 71), the alphabetic script itself cannot translate its complexity.

There are many other examples of the creative use of space which aims at killing a ready-made discourse, at vibrating the text and bringing out the gestural quality of writing. And I think here of the writers' use of the dash, the slash, brackets, and parenthesis.

Slashes and brackets and dashes are abundant in Warland's texts. They are a part of her paragrammatic play that aims at multiplying meaning, at finding a polysemy of words, or in general, at carnivalizing the dominant discourse and showing the working of heteroglossia within the words themselves: "lov/hers," "cutting re/marks," "re-member," "(w)rite," "las(s)," etc.

There are long dashes in Scott that signify unfinished thoughts, or leaps of mind: "Likely not even waiting for that guy in black----- (for the younger generation, the sex has been displaced)" (*Main* 17); "Then in came chaos. Time in strips-----" (*Main* 71). Dashes are also signs for missing words. Don't they invert "the cubist play in the visual medium

when words are pasted or painted onto canvases as signs of themselves" (Brogan 25)? But Scott also relishes the use of parenthesis. The parenthesis adds information, offers an alternative reading, but it also inhibits the flow of the sentence. It is a visual mark of the complex working of the mind, of the polyphonic nature of thinking itself.

And all of these strategies are used to challenge a standardized writing that induces standardized, desensitized reading. Standardized orthography "reduce[s] the sense of fluidity and magic in language" (Young 23). Feminist writers do not reject standardized orthography in the manner of Bill Bissett, who opts for intuitive spelling in order to return "poetry to its oral base" ["the readers must work out the words with their organs of speech to be able to read the poem at all"] (Young 23). Nevertheless, the women play with spelling aiming to achieve their own political and aesthetic ideals. I recall Tostevin's modification of spelling of "color" (*Color*) or such words as "mouthes" "texte" (*Double*) through which she inscribes her difference in writing as a bilingual female. And when the writers opt for silence "the work does not exist in an aural vacuum - silence is potentially sensuous condition of mind and internal or external ear" (Young 24).

E N T R Y

HOW DO THE EXPERIMENTS RELATE TO THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE'S USE OF LANGUAGE?

The historical avant-garde is famous for their exploration of the verbo-visual field of writing through such strategies as "parole liberta" (words in freedom), collage, performance, various techniques of plastic arts and experimentation with the topography of the page. I think here especially of their manifestos which promoted the new typographic format drawn from the world of advertising, posters and newspapers. Such texts foregrounded the "images of sound, color, and kinetic motion" (Perloff *Futurist* 89), and the use of white space or blanks for conventional punctuation, different print faces, large type, or the plus and equal signs. All of these strategies aimed at presenting a "graphic image of [their] thesis" (Perloff *Futurist* 96) and at challenging the flat language of bourgeois writing.

There certainly are analogies between the use of writing techniques by the historical avant-garde and the feminist language writers, but again the objectives, and especially the political aims of both groups of writers are different. In feminist language writing there is a challenge to patriarchal discourse, to language that does not allow for a female

presence. Here the writing translates the female body and desire and engages in a dialogue with current critical theories and concepts of writing.

The writers expose and subvert formal conventions of language. The exploration of the visual features of their writing: the use of white space, interest in the actual typographical elements (including different typographical fonts, unusual line and word spacing, unexpected irregularities in punctuation and capitalization), and experiments with the materiality of language itself, reminds me of cubist, dada or futurist inspired experiments motivated by their concern with visual form. This highlighting of the visual side of feminist language writing, the frequent use of the space of the page as a dynamic canvas for fractured verbal images can be read as an intersemiotic translation of the techniques of cubist and futurist painters who aimed at destroying the illusion of realist art.

Our dynamic distortion in painting will be used to fight:

Any tendency towards the "pretty," the "tender," the "sentimental" (BOTTICELLI, WATTEAU)

Any tendency towards the "bourgeois" or the "academic" (RAPHAEL, LEONARDO DA VINCI)

*Any tendency towards "harmony," "equilibrium,"
"symmetry," the "decorative," "pure
illustrationism" VERONESE)*

(Carrà 205)

Women writers appropriate silent visual poetics for their own subversive ends: for eroding linear and syntactic notation and hence for breaking the centre and undoing hierarchies. They in fact re-claim the traditionally female silent space. Their "open texts," in Hejinian's words, are "by definition ... open to the world and particularly to the reader" ("Rejection" 272). They "[invite] participation, [reject] the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies", and what is more important they resist "the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material, turn it into a product; that is, [they resist] reduction and commodification" (Hejinian "Rejection" 272).

SCEPTICAL READER

I am not sure that verbo-visual writing is an effective feminist strategy. I think it is a wishful thinking that texts that reject "the authority of the writer over the reader" can empower the reader to challenge social inadequacies. Can language really reshape our lives?

E N T R Y

MUSIC/ VOICE

I see with ears, I hear with eyes

A text has to be read in its entirety...we have to perform an act of listening to something that is not simply contained like a bird in a cage, or in a phrase. But we also have to perceive a different kind of text in the text itself, made up of all the combinations of audible and visible forms. This is where one can speak of a TEXTUAL UNCONSCIOUS. A text says something very different from what it is supposed to say or thinks that it says. (emphasis mine)

(Cixous *Reading With* 101)

One should be able to write the way one sings. Through Rossini, Lispector, and Kleist, we can meditate on the language of words and on the ensemble: language, silence, music.

(Cixous *Reading with* 29)

How audible is feminist language writing? How important is the sound quality of language or the oral quality of speech? Is it as important as the graphic, the silent poetics so crucial for these women?

The historical avant-garde paid much attention to the sound quality of language, to the oral quality of speech. It is enough to recall the French Surrealist practice of sound-based imagery, their interest in phonetic echoes and repetitions aiming at destroying the presence of rational content in language. Sound images occur in texts with coherent syntactic constructions but they are powerful enough to destabilize the

orthodox conventional structures of meaning. The historical avant-garde perceived sound in new ways "relating ...to graphic, textual, spatial/static, conceptual and corporeal forms. Important in this respect were Russel's novels, Duchamp's ideas for conceptual sound, Marinetti's documentary onomatopoeia, [and] Apollinaire's writings" (Kahn 73). Some of the writers were interested in "actual phonographic realization" and had "aspirations to develop a stenographic audio montage" or "phonographic alphabet of all sounds" (Kahn 73).

Since the late 1970s many writers and critics (in Europe and America) have been going through a period of a "widespread 'phonophobia'" (Stewart 3); Derrida's attack on Logos or phonocentrism and celebration of writing makes everybody cautious about listening to writing again; we are no longer "encouraged to hear the phonemic counterpart of the spaced lettering of a text" as we fear being accused of subscribing to "a myth of an originary Voice before the letter" (Stewart 3). Derrida has declared "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (*Of Grammatology* 158) ("There is nothing outside of the text") and we are expected to obey him:

Big Brother is a deconstructionist, working at the Ministry of Dissemination.... Derrida's lesson is that we must imitate *him*. If there is nothing outside the text,

it is impossible to go beyond it: we can only mime Derrida. But in truth, feminist knowledge is creative, not mimetic.

(Brodribb 87)

Tostevin brilliantly addresses the problem of the excommunicated voice of writing in *'sophie*:

I write because I can't sing I am the book exiled
from my voice in search of a melody but like the woman
who is blind because her eyes are filled with seeing
and like the woman who is deaf because her ears are
filled with hearing I am mute because my voice is filled
with words and unlike music I can only be understood
and not heard

(10)

Feminist language writers have been challenging Derrida. They do not prioritize the written/graphic aspect of their text. Voice/sound/speech are as important as writing for them. The slippage between the oral and the written becomes an important feature of their texts. Feminine writing and the voice, says Cixous, "are entwined and interwoven and writing's continuity/voice's rhythm take each other's breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspenses and silences, make it loose its voice or rend it with cries" (Cixous and Clement *The Newly Born* 92).

Mouré openly criticizes Derrida's derision of voice:

I think the *voice* means something different to women; we more readily use the voice as dialogic or polyvocal . . . more relational than constitutive of a univocal meaning or self.

("Watching" 3)

Voice embodies the dialogical principle as it is not "just as an articulation of the self" but also a "link or thread with those others whom we inhabit, who inhabit us, who caress us with their voices and bodies" (Mouré "Watching" 3).

The difference in women's writing lies in its attention to sound and voice as it is suggested by the title of Janice Williamson's book *Sounding Differences* or by Mouré's statement:

there is meaning value in sound ...There's semantic value in sound, and that sound is part of what has been called by many people (Charles Bernstein, quoting someone else) the "meaning complex" of poem or of a text.

("Any just" 43)

The reference to Bernstein is particularly significant here as he is one of many language writers who challenge Derridean ideas about the value of sound as merely differential. Sound, Bernstein argues, "is not simply a neutral mechanism for designating differences" (*Content's* 365); it also has a semantic dimension. He does not agree both with Saussure and Derrida that "the relation between sound and mental image is arbitrary" (*Content's* 442). He claims that the relation of the "semantic and the sonic" is not limited to onomatopoeia: "we fail to *hear* the inflection of the other variables - associational, iconic extension of mouth shapes, psychogenic,

sociogenic" (*Content's* 365):

For the power of sound "itself" is
as great as sound's ability to evoke
an image

(Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 46)

Contemporary American language writers oppose the poststructuralist thought of "Derrida and company" (Reinfeld 52). They resist Derridean separation of aesthetic concerns from political engagement and ideological critique. Canadian feminist language writers adopt a similar political position which, however, results from the political nature of the feminist thought itself. Charles Bernstein opposes Derrida's anti-humanitarian theory and deplores his indifference to social and literary history which in fact is very close to the New Critical theoretical stance. He articulates the views of many language writers who find a more conducive philosophical base in the writing of Ludwig Wittgenstein; in his "accounting, one is not left sealed from the world with only 'markings' to 'decipher' but rather *located* in a world with meanings to *respond to*" (*Content's* 181). Language writers are interested in the poetics of presence and politically engaged discourse. They value writing that is not only aesthetically interesting but also socially meaningful.

SCEPTICAL READER

I still doubt the social value of language writing. Who on earth but academics and graduate students are interested in language as physical experience? And moreover I have no time for politics associated with this kind of writing. Literature should exceed the political.

CONCERNED WRITER

Language writing appeals to a much greater reading public these days than you might think. And as for the politics of poetry or writing in general, are you suggesting that, let's say, the language used by Harlequin romance writers is beyond politics? Do you think that it's nothing more but a vehicle of reference to the world? What image of reality does it really support and advance? Isn't it simplistic, conservative, a-historical, anti-feminist? Doesn't it turn the world into a great fiction, and with it all our social, political and religious institutions? Have you bought into the current language of business and politics about uselessness of serious literature and arts? The corporate, advertising culture is not a solution to the problems of the world. It's very reassuring that there are still writers who question the corporate agenda and use language in a way that defamiliarizes customary language patterns, disrupts accepted meaning and speaks for those who are disadvantaged in our society. I am focusing here on the analysis of synaesthesia in language writing that not only foregrounds aesthetics of an "open text" (Hejinian "Rejection" 273) but also its politics. The value of the writing lies in the fact that it cannot easily be turned into a product and reduced to the status of commodity in this world of greed and corruption. And because it is generative and open to the reader's participation it can resist prevailing cultural tendencies of our society.

E N T R Y

Sound is a powerful meaning generator. And women writers have known it for ages: "sounds will initiate thought by a process of association, words call each other up, evoke each other,

provoke each other, nudge each other into utterance a form of thought that is not rational but erotic because it works by attraction" (Marlatt "Musing" 45). I am deliberately repeating Marlatt's words to underscore their relevance to feminist texts (but I also know that "there is no such thing as repetition" (Stein)). The foregrounding of voice in the feminist writing does not mean only a focus on the sound itself, but also on its contextuality. This contrasts with "'a postmodern'" that "refuses to examine the context of the 'voice'- subject and its relationship to the reader, and to the Law" (Mouré "The Anti" 13):

The sounds unlock the memories which precede the Law. The sounds that precede the words....But we can't speak of sounds without the speaker, the "self," that socially structured being, the subject, who enacts it! (Ignoring the social structure of the mediating act is one thing that marks mainstream, i.e. male white post-modernism...).

(Mouré "Anti" 15)

When Mouré explores the semantics of the noun "seam" and the verb "to seem" and "to see," she does not perform a ludic play on the sound of the words only, but she also engages in a serious examination of the social connotations evoked by them. The words are repeated in numerous contexts until they acquire exceptional resonance and radiate multiple meanings. Denotative, connotative, associative and even etymological significations are evoked (activated). The focus however is on

the social problem, on the stigma attached to the lesbian sexual touch ("the touch is not what it seems" (51), to the touch of the female bodies ("she smiles, she folds back...She & she. Who who is. Or seems/...She is here. & sees her. Seize no seems" (52) (emphasis mine). This slippage of meaning aims at "slippage of whole structural relationships" (Mouré "The Anti" 19). The words fold, enfold, multiply. It is important to notice the "cadence in the sounds of words, in their interlinkings" ("The Anti" 19). By foregrounding sound Mouré revives the original concept of the "Aesthetic" that comes from the word *aisthetikos* (of sense perception); it "had ties to the word that became, in Latin, the root of the word 'audible'" (Mouré "The Anti" 18). Mouré mourns the loss of "the sense of 'sound' in the sense of 'aesthetic'" and she points out that "[i]f we are not perceiving the audible ... we are anaesthetized. By which, citizens of the Republic" ("The Anti" 18). Any "Platonizing drift toward the centre" always "requires the suppression of certain noises, pulses, beats, that cannot be located or identified as 'in' or 'out' of the body" ("The Anti" 19). They may be regarded as "'flaws' in expression," but they are only "flaws according to the Law, which seeks to uphold the Republic" ("The Anti" 19) or, in other words, the dominant social order that privileges certain ways of speaking and excludes others.

Mouré also inscribes the problem of translating the intimacy of female bodies onto the page. The page itself is presented as:

a seam between the real, which is not.
Which is not as it seems. It seems real. You read it & it
seems real. The border visible to sight, touch, thus
conscious, presentable

(59)

Page is then a palpable reality and the words and the way they are structured on the page relate "to our bodies and physical presence, and thus to social order" ("The Anti" 14). Mouré always stresses the importance of structure and its relation to "physical presence, and thus to the social order" ("The Anti" 14). The dominant logical language of power is challenged in her texts by the conscious and deliberate manipulation of syntax and semantics which is an attempt at creating an alternative space in writing and, by extension, in society for the disadvantaged women. Her writing privileges "voice" but it also takes into account "the social and linguistic condition [of the 'author'] (which means the edges, folds, contradictions, that feminism, radical feminism, blacks, lesbians, working class, the poor are talking about), especially the dynamic between the mainstream, and the marginal or minority" ("The Anti" 21):

What I long for is the gaps, folds, stresses that appear to the eye as torn edges or disruptions, where you can't grab on but have to listen, *it makes the body present as a reader.*

("The Anti" 17)

E N T R Y

Betsy Warland:

showing "our sexts"

women's texts subtext
between

the

lines

context pretext text:

"in the original language, as opposed to translation
or rendering"

(open 13)

"tongues torque way into vortext
leave syllables behind

sound we are sound
original vocabulary
language: 'lingua, tongue''

sentence: "sent, sense, presentiment, scent"

scentext

(open 13)

Sounds do initiate new words and new concepts through a series of associations, metonymic slippages or dialogic responses: sexts, suntext, context, pretext, text; torque, vortext; sentence, sent, sense, presentiment, scent, scentext; sound similarities are used to generate associative ideas which the grammatical sequences by themselves do not carry. All of the associations are connected with writing and with the translation of the body into the text; sound itself is regarded as "original vocabulary" - the foundation of language, the medium/agent responsible for the creation of words. And again the text explores not only the sound quality

of words but also the visual effect of juxtaposed lines and words which underscore the ideogrammic character of Warland's writing. The pauses, gaps or the holes in the poem (sexts/women's texts / between / the / lines) emphasize the importance of silent poetics in a poem engendered predominantly by sound - what is between the lines: context, pretext, text? It is the gap in discourse, the "silent break" that evokes such sound associations. This seems to be an extreme form of dialogism: silence engenders speech.

TOSTEVIN:

language moves beyond the linguistic order of the symbolic towards musical allegory...in the endless cycle of metamorphoses, natural sound tends towards rhythm, cadence, music.

("Reading after" 67)

Tostevin's statement implies a close association of language with music. But can I really talk about music in poetry or music in writing?

"Music is nondescript."

(Stein "How to Write" 30)

Words are words. Music is beyond words, nondescript because not to be described.

(Quartermain "Syllable" 18)

There are irreconcilable differences between the codes of

music and codes of language. First and foremost music is self-reflexive and non-referential in contrast to language traditionally understood as a referential means of communication. But when language is used in a way that challenges the notion of referentiality then maybe such comparisons are viable.

&	fluttering
belly	flinch
bells	inch
in	by
abdominal	inch
dome	into
	invisible
	vise
wells	
inside	
out	

(Tostevin *Gyno-Text*)

Tostevin does not work within the representational or referential model of writing here. The music analogy is acceptable as the writing draws attention to its own materiality. I am enticed by the sound of the words, words generating other words through sound associations, but these are not only nondescript sounds. They have a semantic value resulting from the power of sound to evoke images and concepts. And the images evoked in *Gyno-Text* are associated with pregnancy and birth. Tostevin listens to the body and translates it intersemiotically into writing. I can say that the writing is rhythmic, that it explores such traditional

devices associated with music in writing as rhyme, assonance, alliteration, echoes, etc. Nevertheless, the text is not mellifluous in the manner of traditional rhymed metrical verse.

I am reminded by Peter Quartermain that "the music of verse is not a matter of mellifluousness of the writing, it is a structural matter. The sounds of music are not the sounds of language, but the orders of music may well be the orders of poetry" ("Syllable" 18-19). Lyn Hejinian, an American language writer, points out:

Music is a compositional method, a form of argument, and one possible investigative shape. This for me is its relevance to poetry.

("Exchange" 9)

I find Quartermain's term "musicating" very useful for my reading as it allows me to avoid the confusion between the music in poetry and the music in music:

By this term I mean giving the arrangement of words (language, then) as poetry something of the qualities of the arrangement of sounds as they occur in music. It refers, then, to patternings, and to sorts of patternings. These may of course be sonal; they may also be visual, lexical, and syntactic. It is a use of language that foregrounds such patternings. (emphasis mine)

("Syllable" 19)

Musicating then is a compositional method that foregrounds patterns or structure, be they sonal, visual, lexical or

syntactic. In view of such a definition the earlier discussion of the recurrent visual elements of the language texts can also be regarded as an instance of "musicating." Quartermain points out that "musicating" occurs when there is "a deliberate exploitation of phonetic, semantic and lexical elements for the sake of pattern/s" (21) (emphasis mine). In the case of the feminist language writers there certainly is a deliberate conscious exploration of sound and musical patterns of language as there is a conscious examination of the conceptual character of writing itself. They agree with the American language writers that even "[t]he best of the writing that gets called automatic issues from a series of choices as deliberate & reflected as can be" (Bernstein *Content's* 46-7):

Whatever gets written gets written in a particular shape, uses a particular vocabulary & syntax, & a variety of chosen techniques. Whether its shape, syntax & vocabulary result from an attraction (or ideological attachment) to the organic & spontaneous, or to some other look, it is equally chosen. Sometimes this process takes place intuitively or unconsciously.... Sometimes it is a very conscious process. Any way you 're responsible for what turns up.... One technique may be used because a decision is made to use a subconscious material. Another may be used to limit the vocabulary of the poem to words not self-generated. In either case, various formal decisions are made & these decisions shape the work. (emphasis mine)

(Bernstein *Content's* 47)

CONCERNED WRITER

Where is the Sceptical Reader?

E N T R Y

WHAT ARE THE WAYS OF MUSICATING A TEXT? AND
WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR IT? ARE THEY ONLY
AESTHETIC?

Peter Quartermain gives an excellent insight into the problem of musication of writing which, as noted earlier, does not necessarily have anything to do with traditional rhythmic devices producing harmony and melody. I will just mention some of the basic features of "musicating" as discussed by Quartermain:

1. vowel leading, repetition, recurrence, weaving (22) ("evidence of vowels working as agents of discovery in the compositional process, vowels in arrangement. Vowel leading, repetition, recurrence, weaving: these are not..a matter of aestheticizing the surface, but of furthering the work" (22-3).
2. consonantal shifts and consonantal play, "generating multiplicity of meaning and resistance to meaning" (28). Like in the vowel play, "inviting and at the same time inhibiting semantic production" (28).
3. recurrence of syntactic, semantic, lexical and phonetic patterns or musicating of structure; like in music a structure itself can resonate: e.g. repeated infinitives can "create overtones in the reader's head" (22).
4. simple formulaic repetition of fragment, phrase, clause, sentence.
5. use of simultaneity and the aleatory: chance (23) "they undermine the linear clarity of meaning" (28).
6. transegmental drift e.g. "to read 'as well' as 'a swell.' Again, resonances and overtones. Music" (24).

What is important in this theory of musication based on the practice of language writers is its insistence on language not only as a linguistic phenomenon but as "a social construct, an 'exchange' with 'the world,'" and moreover, "[m]usication at times involves exophoric (extra-textual) gesture" (Quatermain 23). This is perhaps what Bernstein talks about: the semantic values of sound resulting from allusions that evoke cultural knowledge or material exterior to the text.

E N T R Y

Even a preliminary look at or listening to some of the texts of the language writers shows that "musicating" is an essential part of their structure.

Tostevin:

I is wise /spins smiles that lie like beauty/in the eye
of the beholder

(Double)

The fragment uses vowel leading (wise, smiles, lie, like, eye) and at the same time an internal rhyme, alliteration (spin, smile; lie, like).

cri de coeur
cri cri cri
unlike the dig-day cicada
hissing the missing story

(Double)

katydid will she still?
katydid will she still?

carries her own reply

but sometimes gives way to a lie/to clear her throat/knows she
can say one thing/mean another/

katydid will she still
whiles away the time
while she always will
as time will tell weighs heavy

(Double)

Again, there is vowel leading and consonantal shifts (hissing,
missing, will, still, whites, time, while); repetition and
recurrence of syntactic structures ("katydid will she still"),
internal rhyming and echoing, drifts and echoes of sounds. Is
it a music of words or a music of thought?

For Betsy Warland music is also "a major part of [her] life"
("a language" 314). She refers to her play with language as
"grammatical jazz" (Heinrich C15). Her texts abound in
instances of musicating of both sound and structure.

each page The Tree
take two
Par-a-dice

snake eyes!

LOST

CHAOS

OS

SOS

S(O)S

SSSS

(serpent turn six)

come womb-wóoing
 tongue bloom blooming

(open 36)

on the tip of your tongue you flick
 me leaf: "lift" up
 to tip tree top

(open 37)

Isn't it a striking accentuating of sound structures, alliteration and vowel leading? And the semantic values of sounds evoke multiple cultural and social connotations - the issues relating to women (the cry of a woman in a contemporary world: "SOS"), to language, to metaphorization of the body, and to the symbolism of the tree and the snake.

E N T R Y

Tostevin's "re" immediately evokes musical connotations:

THE SYLLABLE "re":

1. (n) ML, fr the syllable sung to this tone in a medieval hymn to St. John the Baptist: the 2nd tone of the diatonic scale in solmization (the act/practice, or system of using syllables to denote the tones of a musical scale)

2. "re" : prefix ME, L back, again, against; again, anew (retell), backward (recall)

(OED)

The syllable has both linguistic and musical connotations and it is used for the exploration of simultaneous operation of

the codes of music and codes of language in a written text. Tostevin is fond of Kristeva's word "transposition" which applies to the "feminine economy of language. Trans: a moving through on to the other side. To transpose: to write or perform a musical performance in a different key" ("Breaking the hold" 391). The word signifies then an operation of language as both verbal and nonverbal, as both writing and musicating, and as interweaving of the linguistic, graphic and musical codes/rules:

writing as reading (the past?) would only be writing
 without breathing a word while writing as rereading
 doubles back to recall to hear again the resonance as
 re tears from the rest reenters the mouth with quick
 motions of tongue rolls liquid trills laps one
 syllable to the next

and later:

the urgency of writing with a vengeance revenge
 it's only human you said an eye for an eye a word
 for a word writing that repels the peels of laughter
 rebels bell-mouths to bellow to howl in the hollow
 the holocryptic cipher that gives no clue to the reader
 with the missing key the second name of ré riding
 on do's back close to the heels of mi up and
 dothe diatonic scale of C to see the tune to which the
texts is set to hear the beat the beating hollow
 that allows the verb "to write" to reverberate

(Double)

The technique used here could be called a syllable leading, or a syllable play which functions as a crucial element in discovering new words and in furthering the text. Apart from

syllable leading, Tostevin uses nearly all the other devices of musicating, alliteration, vowel leading, consonant play, internal rhyme and repetition. References to hearing and seeing sounds are repeated ("to hear the resonance", to "see the tune to which the text is set"). The text shifts between visual and oral/aural codes. The punctuation is replaced by a "pregnant pause as conceptual space" and the recurrence of the technique can be considered an instance of musicating of structure. Phonetic echoes build metonymic associations not only between English words but also between French and English ones: e.g. "*cuisante de remords qui mordent*" leads to "her lingual position from/ dormant to mordant," or "the might of mote" to "*le mot* that place" ("re"). The sound associations are more stressed than the traditional syntactic or semantic associations, but Tostevin also foregrounds the semantic value of sound. The words evoke recognizable images and concepts that augment the effect of sound. The text inscribes self-reflexivity about the process of writing and reading, about the erotic nature of the process, about translation between both systems and between both languages and their worldviews.

The act of reading becomes a sensual act as I can literally feel the words rolling on my tongue. The words are touching, brushing, knocking against each other causing in me a

"peculiar dance of the speech organs" (Shklovsky qtd. in Peter Steiner's *Russian Formalism* 151). The sensual, the kinetic and the gestural return in Tostevin's writing which in fact aims at evoking the original synaesthesia of language:

to hear to see to smell to taste to touch

("re")

The text can be read as an enactment of female desire, of female economy of language, the economy of plenitude, translated into the never ending process of eroticization of language:

as the re of
desire reverses into the erotic sequence of a sentence
into the consequential climax of the writer over and over

(once more?)

("re")

The text is not only an intersemiotic translation of body/female desire into writing but also the transposition of writing into music. Tostevin makes reference to the diatonic scale of music, but her use of language is not bound by the rigid rules of diatonic music that always gravitates towards a source of stable meaning. She moves away from a rigid discourse or, in other words, from a purely diatonic framework and representationalism. She focuses more on the relationships between words, or "relationships between tones rather than an

inherent quality in the tone itself" (Heble 56). This shift "from an interest in the relationship between words and things to a fascination with a relationship between words and words" is parallel to a shift "from diatonic music to atonality" (Heble 62). Music itself has shifted "from language as perlocutionary utterance to language as a system of signs. The step to atonality is a revolt against stable meanings" (Heble 64). This is a shift from harmonic, rhythmic framework to melody, from vertical to horizontal axes of language, from metaphor to metonymy. When Tostevin mentions "writing" that "rebels," that "gives no clue to the reader with the missing key," she points to a shift from referential to non-referential writing which parallels the shift from harmony to melody. "Melody is privileged over harmony to the extent that the tune becomes the pattern of the composition" (Heble 63). In "re" "the tune to which the text is set," the pattern of the composition, is the syllable "re." It is at the point of juncture of the vertical and horizontal axes (of metaphor and metonymy) but like Derrida's *différance*, it is neither of these axes; it always slips between them. In Kristeva's terms the movement from the diatonic to atonal compositions would correspond to the movement from the symbolic to the semiotic, to the "realm of female desire" (Heble 65).

E N T R Y

For Scott:

language is more than meaning: it is also music. Music, as our bodies themselves are rhythms, music, so long distorted, muted.

(*Spaces* 131)

Her texts abound in musical effects. Music is translated thematically, phonetically and structurally in her writing. She transcribes songs and instances of speech with the desire to achieve the effect of rhythm by:

a) a repetition of consonants and vowels and splitting of syllables:

Trrryyyy, just a lit-tle bit har-der. Baybeee try try try

(*Heroine* 58)

You look at her, who's slowing down. Who's saying vaguely, accusingly, she hopes at least tonight she'll get a last chance to learn the

Mam-bo

(*Main* 94)

AIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. You start running

(*Main* 94)

b) and by repetition of words and phrases:

ruffle, ruffle (*Main* 149) (repeated in several sections of the text)

Back home your eyes had got in the habit of turning *left and right*. *left and right* walking on the main

(*Main* 82)

But Alberto's leaning over, chatting, chatting The little wagon climbing, climbing...Rising up
(Main 83)

And she, the perfect chubby baby, is smiling, smiling, laughing, laughing, holding her fist forward
(Main 92)

doing the perfect rhumba ...Winding, winding to the floor
(Main 86)

Scott's texts rely heavily on the recurrence of present participle, present tense, and parenthesis. In *Main Brides* the focus is on the present participle, and hence on the incomplete, open-ended nature of thoughts and actions. THERE IS NOTHING DEFINITE, NOTHING FINISHED - EVERYTHING IS OPEN ENDED! The writing refuses the stasis that comes with placing events in the past rather than in the present. The parenthesis adds information, offers an alternative reading, but it also inhibits the flow of the sentence. Many sentences defy the expected grammatical logic. The majority of them are paratactic with clauses/phrases placed one after another without coordinating or subordinating connectives:

Thinking again of winter. When time's imperceptible drift towards dark and back again in layers of white, palest blue, grey, is hypnotic in itself. When nothing happens. Except days of sexual playing in the white light of the room

(Main 129)

Anyway (outside the sky nearly charcoal), now she's feeling as good as she looks. Her lovely profile (fresh

plum lipstick, mole high on cheek) in the window. Leaning forward, tapping to her own internal rhythm. As tropes of various possibilities walk down the street. A woman in white cowboy shirt with black embroidery on it. (emphasis mine)

(Main 130)

In *Main Brides* Scott rarely subordinates and scarcely coordinates sentences. She juxtaposes them. Each event or thought is decomposed into its constitutive elements; the textual rhythm is slowed and a special status is given to all of the events and thoughts. The scarcity of subordination allows Scott to avoid linear causality and linear time. Parataxis (and repetitions) create an internal rime, close to oral poetry; it sounds like incantation. Poetry enters the sentence! THE WRITING IS BOTH VISUAL AND AUDIBLE: "poetic form has moved into the interiors of prose" (Silliman *New Sentence* 89).

Another technique of musicating a text is based on the repetition, and recontextualization of repeated words, phrases, or sentences. The strategy reminds me of Gertrude Stein's writing as "beginning again and again" ("Composition" 23). This is a process of reiteration that does not repeat in exactly the same way.

In "A Feminist at the Carnival":

In old movies, the tragic moment was often signalled by

clouds amassing in the sky. Driving along the highway with huge, black moving clouds banking before the storm. one gets a terrible feeling of human emptiness.

(118)

the stormclouds gather. The black clouds also remind the little Fury that she is afraid. What will happen after the thunder clap explodes? Will lightning strike the house?

(122)

There is an ominous foreboding in the black stormclouds. But the foreboding is also charged with eroticism."

(123)

clouds banking furiously before a storm. When suddenly a terrible feeling of emptiness. What does a feminist do with this? Her mind casts about for the source of discomfort. Patriarchy. The answer seems limited.

(126)

In the jigsaw puzzle you take the clouds gathering angrily over the spacious park of a French chateau. And you find nothing: you're confronted with yourself. (emphasis mine)

(126)

The recontextualized sentences reveal a relationship between the symbolic meaning of black clouds and a psychological reality - from tragic to erotic to realization of the irrationality of such conclusions.

EACH NEW SENTENCE = A NEW INSTANCE OF PERCEPTION AND ESTABLISHING NEW RELATIONSHIPS -- EMPHASIS ON THE

RELATIONSHIP!!

As in Stein, language is considered synchronically here:

simultaneous existence of variations, contradictions, and the apparently random

(Hejiniian "Two Stein" 137)

Similarly in the following fragment:

Sitting, as a girl, on the verandah in the village where I grew up, the angry pink-black clouds were almost a temptation, Beside me, mosquitoes bit at my brother's neck causing huge red welts. I was glad. I hated him. He was my mother's favourite.

("A Feminist" 119)

the little girl, sat on the verandah projecting herself into the mosquito ... raising the welts on the neck of her brother.

("A Feminist" 123)

There is a return to the same image here, but the sentences are permuted; this repetition brings attention to the language. The repeated sentences resemble one another but they are not repetitions - this is a repetition with difference. There is a constant element of addition or extension of the lines/phrases or in Bakhtinian terms, of utterances; as if each line was engaged in a dialogic event and its "active responsive understanding" (Bakhtin *Speech* 75).

The Steinian strategy of "beginning again and again" is also used by Mouré. In "Green Jackets," for instance, sentences are repeated and recontextualized:

2)"thing"

They enter the room with snow on their green jackets, the green for those jackets.

They enter the warm room their necks bowed & folded under the scarf.

They enter the neck of the room their scarves folded

It is winter

The friends enter the room.
The word *Riyadh*.

No one has said any
"thing"
yet.

("Green Jackets" *Sheepish* 24)

The work of language is foregrounded here and although I am continually confronted with the same words, each time a new instance of perception, and new relationships among the words are established. Such technique underscores the arbitrary nature of meaning. It ruptures any attempt at narrative. This is "not a poetry that 'decorates dominant culture' (to cite Michael Palmer) but one which questions the discourses. This situation makes of representation a site of struggle" (DuPlessis *The Pink* 145).

SCEPTICAL READER

You talk about Scott's and Mouré's preference for the use of present tense and present participle, but you don't comment on their reasons for this linguistic shift from the past to the present. Why is it so important for them?

CONCERNED READER

I think the writers' choice of the present tense structures is connected with their conceptualization of language as closely related to the complexity of everyday existence. The past tense creates a static, passive world that is isolated from the dynamic sphere of human life. The present tense, on the other hand, rejects closure and constructs a world that is vibrant and constantly changing. Language in the present is in the process of never-ending metamorphosis and hence it opens multiple new possibilities of meaning. And if Scott and Mouré believe that social and political structures of society are supported by particular language structures then, following their desire for social transformation, they must opt for the present tense and discard language that is rigid and stagnant.

E N T R Y

MUSICATING OF STRUCTURE, recurrence of syntactic patterns is another way of foregrounding the textuality of writing, of making it both AUDIBLE AND VISIBLE:

When you are writing who hears what you are writing.
That is the question.
Do you know who hears or who is to hear what you are writing and how does that affect you or does it affect you.
That is another question.

(Stein *Four in America* 121)

Mouré believes that "[t]he sounds unlock the memories which precede the Law" ("It Remained" 81), and that they "carry a great deal of emotional meaning - so critical to attentiveness" ("A Chance" 80). No wonder she frequently replaces the logical coherence of thought with other ordering

devices: with sounds in the form of musication of structure:

At times we wonder why we are able to kill birds.
 Some of which, were eaten in the truck.
 Some of which were exploded by the shells.
 Some of which streamed onward in the sky.
 They heard everything.

("Visible" 34)

primary loss
 by which we have learned to lose everything
 by which we have become reckless

("Visible" 34)

having pulled the light out of the sky & made it solid
 having absorbed visible & invisible spectra
 having interpreted the beads of light
 having read the light

("Visible" 35)

The cut grain from which we have risen
 the grey light from which we have risen
 the bird branch from which we are rising
 greenly
 the field shimmers
 the lake water shimmers
 the birds take off in a rush of wings
 the birds take off in a rush of beating
 the birds' hearts beating

("Visible"37)

The repetition of similar syntactical patterns and sonal patterns makes the structure of the poem both visible and audible. It is "the length of sentences and the use of the period [that] are now wholly rhythmic. Grammar has become, to recall Barthes' words, prosody" (Silliman "New" 88). Mouré is not interested in creating traditional referential meaning but rather in "breaking up the surface of sense" to "end up with a different kind of surface":

I'm looking at LETTING SOUND AND RHYTHM AND REPETITION OF WORDS CARRY THINGS A BIT, INSTEAD OF SENSE. Part of it is striking at people who ask what a poem means. I want

people to read a poem once in a while and realize it is in the room. MEANING IS A CONSTRUCT, ANYHOW ...YET ALL THE PHRASES MAKE SENSE AS VISUAL IMAGES. (capitalization mine)

("Changing" 44)

I look and listen to the poem "Unfurled & Dressy":

Frontally speaking I am leaning on the hugest boulder
by the wayside
in order to imprint the mountain on my ass
in order to jump into the abyss with my shoes named Kafka
In order to complete the fire escape of my marriage

Frontally speaking my sadness wears another seven
beside your opportunity
It is unfurled & dressy
It is your voice which I am speaking over & over

& forget which one of us I am

Frontally speaking

Frontally speaking

(*Furious* 51)

The recurrence of infinitive clauses and gerundial phrases emphasizes visual, syntactic and sonal patterning. The words are semantically and syntactically unconventional and therefore they must be read materially, like reading music. The referential meaning is devalorized, but the musical sense is foregrounded. Mouré would certainly agree with Lyn Hejinian's observation on the meaning of poetry:

when someone tells me that they don't understand what my poem ... means, I can respond by saying, Well, what does any one of Bach's Brandenburg Concerti or Bartok's string quartets mean, and this may give that someone a momentary insight into my reading.

("An Exchange" 8)

Mouré emphasizes:

I want to write these things like *Unfurled & Dressy* that can't be torn apart by anybody, anywhere, or in the university. I want the overall sound to be one of making sense, but I don't want the inside of the poem to make sense of anything.

(*Furious* 92)

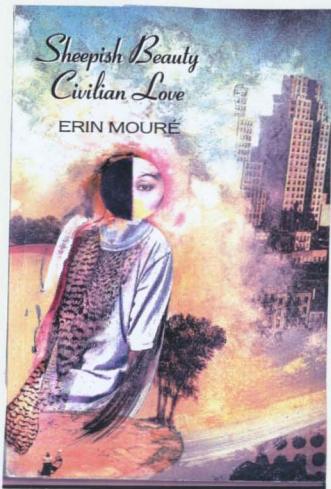
Mouré's strategy in "Unfurled & Dressy" is very close to the surrealist project of writing, and especially to the surrealist practice of sound-based imagery. She builds her images through the exploration of phonetic repetitions of similar phrases. The phonetic echoes create sound associations that perhaps are more important than the syntactic and semantic associations. She uses coherent syntactic constructions, but the images created within them defy the rules of rational logic ("to imprint the mountain on my ass," "my sadness wears another seven," etc.). The surrealist principles of displacement and dissociative juxtaposition seem to operate in such phrases. Moreover, as in many surreal images "the attention of the reader is separated from the movement of the thought to focus on the phonetic similarity," and eventually "sound repetitions cloud the transparent progression of the message" (Mead 47). Sound similarities are "used to generate associative ideas which the grammatical constituents or sequences by themselves do not carry" (Mead 50).

The surrealist image is by no means a simple juxtaposition or collection of lexical items. On the contrary, it is for the most part a clear and unambiguous statement of conceptual relations which shape and control the way the reader perceives and understands these items . . . syntax is more than a neutral framework for imagery: it becomes a contributing element in the real content of the image.

(Mead 113)

E N T R Y

Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love, Erin Mouré; Cover design: JW Stewart; Book design: ECW Type & Art (with Erin Mouré).



(Plate 6)

Mouré was actively engaged in the production of the book. The cover art defies description. First impression: it is surrealist; fragments of buildings (sky scrapers), trees, and a figure of unspecified nature: the torso half human half bird's; the face half dark, half light, no mouth and only one eye; plenty of space, two tiny human figures at the bottom of the page, a man and woman. What does this all mean?

Moure's statements:

Trying to make sense of things is already trying to suppress something.

(Mouré "A Chance" 75)

I've tried to open myself up so that I can accept that some things contradict each other and some things don't make sense. I think that that way you can perceive more.

(Mouré "Acknowledging" 133)

People who are making sense are just making me laugh.

(Mouré Furious 92)

How amazingly similar the statement is to some of the Russian Cubo-Futurist comments!

What is surprising is the senselessness of our writers striving so hard for meaning.

(Kruchenykh "New Ways" 72)

Isn't Mouré exploring a different notion of sense so typical of the anti-rational attitude of surrealism?

all uses of language will have a sense; in surrealist writing there is simply a different notion of what this sense should be. The sense of the surrealist image is in the "rapprochement" it effects ...[and] sound similarities are the means of effecting this "bringing together."

(Mead 47)

SCEPTICAL READER

In your reading of Mouré's "Unfurled and Dressy" and of the cover page to *Sheepish Beauty* you point to similarities between Mouré's work and surrealism. Are you saying that "Unfurled and Dressy" is simply an anachronistic imitation of classical surrealism? I hope there is something in Mouré's writing that lifts it above this level?

CONCERNED WRITER

It's true that I only pointed to Mouré's surrealist practice of sound based imagery and to the principles of displacement and dissociative juxtaposition. I should have mentioned that she uses surrealist techniques to negotiate her own political and social agenda. She moves away from the surrealist focus on dream structure and surrealization of the body; she is more interested in social issues than in the workings of the dreaming mind ("construction of a stadium/in the place where they refused to build/housing for the poor," "the fire escape of my marriage" (51)). The use of irrational imagery, however, helps her foreground the chaotic, trying and sometimes absurd nature of (woman's) existence in the contemporary society.

E N T R Y

Both Scott and Mouré explore the musicating of structure through the exploration of the "new sentence" that brings attention to the level of language; words decontextualized like "readymades" (Silliman "New" 88) and the frequent paratactic constructions empower the reader who can become a co-producer of a text. The texts are patterned visually, syntactically and musically. Language no longer "appears to become transparent, a mere vessel for the transfer of

ostensibly autonomous reference" (Silliman "Disappearance of the Word" 11). Such writing blocks this sort of reference, forcing me, the reader, to observe the particular language in front of me at the very moment of reading, and to ponder the act of writing itself. As in much language-oriented writing, the focus is on the sentence as a unit of composition, but my reading experience, because of the sentence structure, is discontinuous and fragmented. I must use my associative abilities to make connections. In this demanding active reception the text gains a political significance, as "[t]he primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though that may be, but in the attitude toward reception it demands of the reader" (Silliman "The Political Economy of Poetry" 31). I am not allowed to consume the texts passively. There are many important social and political issues thematized in them, and the foregrounding of their syntactic structures precludes any thoughtless reception.

E N T R Y

Playing with sounds is an important element of paragrammatic wordplay challenging the rules of established grammar and usage and foregrounding the polyphonic aspect of words. The slippages of sound or transegmental drifts demonstrate slippages of meaning and point to a deconstructive logic

behind them. This is "the metonymic skid that never allows the signifier to catch up with a fixed signified" (Stewart 116). There are many instances of transegmental drifts in the texts of the language writers:

the languor <i>langue d'or</i>	(Double)
rant rent	(Double)
part art particular	(Double)
to pen a trait - read as penetrate	(Gyno-Text)
<i>sens/et/ sang</i> (sense/meaning and blood)	(Gyno-Text)
et je dis oui au lexique de <u>l'eau là</u> ...ou je <u>le mire</u>	
(notice "l'eau là" "le mire" = Lola Lemire)	
(Double)	

In *Heroine* Scott is interested in the force of homophonic words such as:

DYS- sexion (145) PERESTROIKA= PARIS TROIKA (169), BAZAR = BIZARRE (186), NIGHTMARE= NIGHT MARE (195), or BUTT/BUT (131).

There is an interesting verbo-visual wordplay in Warland:

"wom(b)an words", "country / (cunt)-tree," "It s a man's wor(1)d" (*serpent*)

The verbo-visual puns reveal a play on the polysemic qualities of the verbal terms. These are examples of traditional punning and cross-language punning; pun is regarded as "the most disarming fusion of language and music ... a linguistic push beyond choice and the logic of exclusion towards the polyphony of indecision" (McCaffery *North* 87). The spelling itself inscribes a difference which disappears when the words are pronounced; the barrier separating the signified and the signifier is actually deconstructed, liberating the musical self of the word beyond its meaning.

What I find interesting about puns is that they require aural rather than oral reading, that they make me hear with my eyes, that they inscribe a graphonic tension. Words phonemically encroach upon each other and I need to see them to activate one of their possible meanings:

Words next to each other make a sound to the eye and the ear. With which you hear.

(Stein *Four in America* 125)

In such texts and also in other examples of musicating there is a unique tension between graphic and phonic signification, but the transegmental drift is one of the best examples of what Barthes means by "vocal writing" or WRITING ALOUD which

is not expressive; it leaves expression to the pheno-

text, to the regular code of communication; it belongs to the geno-text, to significance; it is carried not by dramatic inflections, subtle stresses, sympathetic accents, but by the grain of the voice, which is an erotic mixture of timbre and language ... the art of guiding one's body.

(*The Pleasure* 66)

With the concept of vocal writing and the "grain of the voice" Barthes proposes in *The Pleasure of the Text* "an aesthetic of vocalized textuality" that reminds of Louis Marin's work on "restoration of the 'excommunicated voice' of textuality" (Stewart 138). Both the voice and the graph, both the codes of speech and writing intersect in such texts. And they require, as Garrett Stewart argues, a "graphonic reading" or reading according to "a genuine gramphonology rather than grammatology" (Stewart 257). The challenge to Derrida's theory is obvious here. I find in Stewart's theory an interesting counterdiscourse to Derrida's project and a conducive theoretical background to language-centred writing.

E N T R Y

Garrett Stewart's theory developed in *Reading Voices. Literature and Phontext* (1990) works especially well with synaesthetic writing (writing that is simultaneously ideographic and phonetic and which inscribes a tension between the phonic and graphic, between the spoken and written models of communication). The production of meaning in such texts frequently depends on a unique phonemic play. In such texts there is a certain "acoustics of textuality" (Stewart 11) resulting from the counterplay of phonemes against graphemes which car only be enacted in a silent reading, in reading aurally, not orally. The aural reading requires attention to the work of phonemes, as "phonology obtrudes upon script, delays the denotative by the delirious, keeps meaning at bay" (Stewart

23). The texts, however, provide only an occasion for a sound, or in Stewart's words, the material for "visual hearing" (Stewart 279) or "graphonic evocalization" (Stewart 249). The reader's "voice is awakened but not orally engaged" (Stewart 16). It is the reader's body which becomes the site of silent reading and "a theatre of expression" (16). The vocal play takes place in the reader, who undergoes "a sensory overload whose momentary force is a kind of giddy synaesthesia between eye and ear" (Stewart 278). When I read "languor/*langue d'or*", "l'être versus lettre" or "sans/sang" (Tostevin *Double*), etc., I must both see and listen to the text in order not to miss the phonemic play. "Visual hearing" is necessitated not only by texts which explore transegmental drift but also by texts which examine the phenomenon of musication in general.

The visual hearing which draws attention to phonemic reading challenges Derridean theories which propagate "phonophobia" by ruling out the presence of voice in writing. Stewart proposes a revisionist approach to Derridean grammatology by highlighting "the recovery of a *graphonic* trace in the reading *effect of textuality*" (248). Derrida's difference in "différance," although much determined by the phonetic alphabet, is reduced by him to the "gramme" of différance. For Derrida language has a spatial or graphic rather than temporal and phonic dimension. He and his followers close their ears "to the silent but effectual *forms of acoustic difference and deferral in literary writing*" (Stewart 117). It is the phoneme which is excommunicated by the grapheme in Derrida's theory, but the phoneme, as Stewart argues, returns when it is "sounded, latently, upon the body of the reader" (Stewart 323). It is important to remember that "phonemes reacquire what the sounds lost in becoming the sounds of a given language they reacquire the topography of the body which reproduces itself in them" (Kristeva "Phonetics" 36). Does it mean that the phonemic play actually inscribes the genderization of writing?

What may sound paradoxical here is that the phonism is involved in silence, in the silent reading in which written words evoke sound clusters not to be manifested orally. Derrida's "excommunicated voice" (Marin) returns in silent reading. Writing then, according to Stewart, is graphonic (292), voice is inherent in graph, and consequently, as he suggests, Derridean "grammatology should be expanded into 'grammophonology'" (Stewart 257). Stewart's theory cannot be accused of phonocentrism as the uttering subject does not authorize the production of the text. The text is produced in inner audition. The inner articulation is decentred, and the "inner audition need not in any sense subscribe to a myth of an originary voice before the letter" (Stewart 3). In silent reading, there is a "continuous inhibition of the oral" (2). The reading body is not the origin of poetic utterance, but rather its "secondary medium" (Stewart 261). In terms of Bakhtin's theory, the reader engages in a dialogic process, but paradoxically, this is a dialogism without voice.

Graphonic writing or gramophonology, has nothing to do with the process of phoneticization. It simply accounts for what Derrida neglected - the place of phonography in the origins of structuralist (differential linguistics) (Stewart 126). Both Kristeva's and Barthes's examples of "vocal writing" have nothing to do with speech but rather with graphonic experimentation at the site of text production and text reception, with the translation of both the writer's and the reader's body into the written, graphonic text. Vocal writing seems to fulfil Artaud's dream expressed in "The Theatre and Its Double" where he pleads for a return of the language of the theatre that was not based on the written word but on the body and the psyche of the performer.

CONCERNED WRITER

I am back at the issue of somatization of writing and the metaphorization of the body. It seems perhaps that my presentation of Stewart's ideas is just a useless exercise. Why perform it at all?

It's not only an excellent example of theory that challenges the ideas of the God and Master Jacques Derrida, but it also encourages me to rethink the concept of the body proposed by Pamela Banting. I think that her original metaphor of the body as pictogram, should be changed into a picto-sono-gram or better, a picto-ideo-sono-gram, in order to indicate the aural and conceptual aspect of the reader's and writer's body engaged in the silent enacting of a text. Banting's translation poetics, similar to Derridean project, claims to reverse the logocentric hierarchy of speech over writing. In a silent reading, however, no such hierarchization is necessary as Stewart seems to suggest. In a silent reading there is an "aural communion" (Stewart 323) between reader and writer; the reader recognizes and enacts linguistic play/experimentation on various levels without a desire to categorize and hierarchize.

E N T R Y

we smell words , all of us, as well as see them; taste words as well as hear them. Because our culture discourages perception of language in terms of sensation, however, these somatic responses to words remain subconscious and therefore often dormant, unused...we

also feel words in the tactile sense—we can feel assaulted or bludgeoned by words. (emphasis mine)

(Robinson 5)

I'm talking about synaesthetic writing but my emphasis has been on texts whose "textual intensifications we cannot help but 'hear with eyes,'" "a writing- audited by the 'earsighted view' of readers" (Stewart 283). What about texts that translate touch or smell into writing? Exploration in verbal synaesthesia was done in the past by Keats and Leigh Hunt, and later by Symbolists and Mallarmé, and Huysman¹⁰ (McCaffery *Rational* 173). The historical avant-garde vowed to "assault [the reader's] nerves with visual, auditory, olfactory sensations" (Marinetti "Destruction" 98). How are the senses translated into the written text? Although the senses of smell and touch are mainly thematized at the narrative level¹¹ of the language texts, they can also be translated intersemiotically into the structure of the texts. What is the property of smell and touch that can be transposed into writing? What is the "rhetoric of scent?" (Benstock 156). Smells are not easily containable; they escape boundaries, they defy any attempts at enclosing them in any fixed spaces, and they are predominantly invisible. Are there any features of writing that could accommodate the rhetoric of scent? In writing, touch and smell must become optical fields. The dominant writing with its rigid rules does not leave much

space for a scent to permeate its structures. It is only writing that challenges such rigidities that can approximate the transformance of smell into a written verbal event. And again it is the picto-ideo-phono/sono-graphic script with its multiple open spaces that is closer to the rhetoric of scent than any other notation. The earlier discussion of spaces of difference or feminine spaces (pauses, gaps or folds in discourse, slashes, apostrophes, ellipses, etc.) can actually be expanded into the examination of the rhetoric of scent. The "feminine" as Benstock argues, "shares an essential property with odors and leaks, whose nature is to escape their proper and confined places" (158).

When Tostevin's speaker says:

*poems of many scents and various hues
beguile me*

even those no longer here
relinquish their perfume as before

(*'sophie* 27)

does she think of writing in terms of signification or osmosis? Does she mean the impact of writing cannot be measured as it is not containable within any confined space? Or does she simply wonder about the tangible existence of such texts? "Does the text exist or is it transformed by these mechanics into loss and discharge?" (McCaffery *Rational* 176).

Is writing with open spaces, pauses and permeable boundaries more truthful/realistic than the grammar and rule bound discourse?

true to their scent
is realism enough

('sophie 27)

Warland also ventures into translating the properties of perfume/smell/odour into the properties of words; smell is enticing, inspiring and so are the words that are attracted to other words by their particular scent or, in other words, by their particular phonetic features. Olfactory dialogism! In *serpent (w)rite* Warland translates the experience of being lost in terms of olfactory event:

we lose ourselves in each other
smell
aeiou
e
i
o
u
last lest list lost lust
lest
list
lost
lust
your smell in/lists me
is pleasing to satisfy ... a desire or inclination
inspiralling inclination
scent/sentence inspiralization (turn one)

circling circling ringing out
aeiou
u lust las(s)
we are "lov/hers" of lost
this the lost manuscript (turn one)

The dispersion of words and letters on the page translates the spreading of scent in the open space: "eyes smell words sprayed in page" (*serpent* turn one). They are experienced more as marks or gestures rather than elements of a semantic exchange. They entice each other phonetically with little concern for semantic value. Scent is transposed into an opto-phonetic domain; spiral configuration of words replaces syntax: "inspiring inclination/scent/sentence inspiralization" (*serpent* turn one). Words spiral as do scents in a whirling movement of air. Both the horizontal and vertical flow of the same letters and words suggests the ubiquitous, all pervasive effect of the scent of the body on the structure of the text - its openness. Slashes and parentheses are not grammatical pointers here but spatial ideogrammic interventions that multiply meaning that spread the scent of the words that acquire polysemic properties. The text incites synaesthesia between an eye, ear (vocal writing) and the sense of smell evoked thematically; and only a silent graphonic reading can give justice to "u lust las(s) / we are lov/hers of lost" (*serpent* turn one).

The rhetoric of smell has no borders, words have no fixed meanings, new words preserve the odour of other words. If this is a space of difference in Warland's case it translates

(intersemiotically) the female body as excessive and overflowing. It translates into a double-voiced language or double-scented language that does not hesitate to question the dominant language of society.

odors coming from the fluids of the body / excess,
overflowing- marking where we have been

"wordsmells"
smell signals scent/ence

serpent language, "forked tongue" / bilingual wordsmells

(*serpent* turn one)

Scott recognizes the importance of the rhetoric of smell in her *Main Brides*, and her exploration of the problem is both at the narrative and syntactic level of the text. She minimalizes plot in favour of an expanded sensory involvement.

The narrator thinks of her portraits as:

History told through smell (since smell's the Queen of senses. She thinks of her "brides" on the roof. If kissed on the nape, the telling odours they'd emit. Nanette, slightly lemon; Adèle of Halifax, violet; the woman who went to Cuba, sandalwood; Z., herbal, yet rigorously exotic; Ivory for the dyke from the West...Her own scent is musk.

She takes out her mirror. To see how "musk" translates into image: something slightly animal.

(164)

She wants to see the smell and how it translates into image. The spatial configuration of the text, a frequent use of parenthesis, dashes and multiple open spaces can be read as visible traces of the olfactory nature of the writing.

E N T R Y

Touch is a gesture, a kinetic movement of the body. Can gestures be written on the page at all? How to translate them into a written text that privileges sight? "[I]t is through gesture that any *form* is constituted," says Pauline Butling ("bpNichol's Gestures" 237), and in the case of language writing such "forms and gestures in writing" are chosen that "generate a perpetual openness," a disruption of rigid structures and at the same time a creation of new possibilities. Such gestures of writing are formed by a paragrammatic wordplay (play with letters) and puns (play with sounds and meaning (Butling "bpNichol" 238-242). A text is paragrammatic when "its organization of words (and their denotations), grammar, and syntax is challenged by the infinite possibilities provided by letters or phonemes combining to form networks of significations not accessible through conventional reading habits" (Roudiez qtd. in Kristeva's *Revolution* 256). I will look at the paragrammatic wordplay as an instance of translation into writing of letters and words that through a contact or touch with each other produce series of spatio-phonetic or a picto-ideo-phono-graphic intensifications. This is a translation of the verbal intimacy onto the page. The verbal touch can be auditory, graphic or ideographic, but it usually encompasses all of these aspects

in one textual event. It is another instance of the somatization of writing, of the intersemiotic translation of body into a written text.

When Tostevin's speaker in *Double Standards* says:

and you/parts my lips and I feels your
tongue/touch upon the words we cannot say/ our secret
cipher /when suddenly/your legs close on me/like a book

She articulates Cixous's manifesto:

Writing to touch with letters, with lips, with breath, to caress with the tongue, to lick with the soul, to taste the blood of the beloved body, of life in its remoteness; to saturate the distance with desire; in order to keep it from reading you.

(*"Coming"* 4)

Both fragments evoke images of the sensuous character of language, of words touching other words, and of erotic encounters between letters and words themselves. Both translate an erotogenic body into script which is, as discussed before, a metaphorization of the bodily processes.

Eroticism between individuals can be translated into the eroticism of writing through showing how words attract each other phonetically, graphically and ideographically:

slippery words this slippery body we tongue between us
comes
between us in the ways a word can sound "slippage" you

said
 slipping in the age it takes the mind
 to turn around its mooring words that bind
 you gave me the slip suggesting you'd slip into something
 more com-
 fortable

(Warland and Marlatt "Reading" 84)

This is a play between sensuality and semantics. The intimacy of words (slippery, slipping, slippage, slip; mind bind; tongue, come, sound) is a translation at the textual level of the private intimacy, of the priority of touch over gaze:

when the eyes give no sense of who we are or where
 except for memory inside the palm that makes of touch
 the test and brings back everything that came to us
 unspoken

(Tostevin "song" 73)

In terms of rhetorical figures the intimacy of words is transposed into the working of metonymy (associative writing). The general movement of such texts is from metaphor (body=writing) to metonymy, or metonymic metaphors as in:

 apple *un appel une pomme*
 a poem the gold red rind of rhyme a *rimmon* a garnet
 the bony pulp of a pomegranate the acid taste of crimson the
 sensuous pleasure of seeds that speak to the tip of the tongue

(Tostevin "song" 74)

or in Mouré "Seams" (*Sheepish* 50-59) where the metaphor of the skin of the body as "a seam," through a series of associations and a paragrammatic play on the sound of the word, leads to metonymical configurations that confuse both the verb and noun

forms of the word: "seams," "seems," "seem," "seam." The text that translates a touch between women into a touch between words, demonstrates that metonymy has "a generative and even dispersive force" (Hejinian "Strangeness" 39). Through a homophonic wordplay the text multiplies its semantic potentiality. The sound has both generative (it creates new words) and dispersive force, dispersive in a sense of allowing the circulation of sound through the borders of the poem that are in a constant process of destabilization and reconstruction:

Page as border. As Seam between the real, which is not.
Which is not as it seems. It seems real. You read it & it
seems real. The border visible to sight, touch, thus
conscious, presentable

& STILL THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY: MEAN SOMETHING!
(capitalization mine) (Mouré "Seams" *Sheepish* 59)

Warland's and Marlatt's "Reading and Writing Between the Lines" explores their gestures of writing through a paragrammatic wordplay of both letters and words. The auditory, graphic and ideographic gestures are involved in their wordplays:

we do write to each other's u/s (90)

u-feminism a strategy against u-thanasia
all our u/s essential (90)

...thinking about the word *euphemism*
eu-, *good* + *pheme*, *speech* u-feminisms
 all our yous (u/s) and all the others (89)

Also similarly in "Subject to Change":

intimate/intimate. (p)art of each other. y-ours?
 generative
 power of our intimacy - this too must have a life on the
 page

(March 16 & 17)

or in *Proper Deafinitions*:

I/s, un(i)dentified,
 I absent in theor ze (77) (notice lack of "i")
 li(v)es,
 the m()ther within (77) , wor(l)d (77)

And again only Stewart's (silent) graphonic reading can account for a sensory overload in "u/s", "u-feminism", "(p)art," "y-ours"; I experience a "giddy synaesthesia between eye and ear," an "earsighted view" (Stewart 278) when the tension between the phonetic and graphic elements intensifies the polysemic character of the words, and hence the ideogrammic content of the text. The concept of writing, as always collaborative (not only between actual persons, but also between the words themselves), is translated into the paragrammatic play of the singular "u" (you) that turns into plural "u/s" (us), and "y-ours" that is both yours and ours; (p)art becomes art and feminism turns into "u-feminism"

(feminism inclusive of all women); The spatio-phonetic play demands an intense conceptualization from the reader and it produces diverse significations that are not available through conventional writing/reading strategies.

The syntax is fragmented, the words are ruptured, but as Bruce Andrews argues, "[f]ragmentation doesn't banish the references embodied in individual words" ("Text" 34), and "[m]eaning is not produced by the sign, but by the contexts we bring to the potentials of language" ("Text" 33). All of the linguistic experiments, once contextualized, evoke serious theoretical and political issues. The word "m()ther," for instance, implies the complex nature of discourse on mother and daughter relations (Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother-Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, the work of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray); the absence of "i" in "theor ze" or the splitting of "I/s" and "u/s" evoke the contentious issue of subjectivity and its monologic/dialogic interpretations. Such texts challenge the traditional categories of authorship and readership, and they offer "the alternative sense of reader and writer as equal and simultaneous participants within a language product" (McCaffery "The Death" 62). Bruce Andrews believes that this transformation of "textual roles might

bring us closer to altering the larger social roles of which textual ones are a feature. READING: not the glazed gaze of the consumer, but the careful attention of the producer" ("Text" 36). Such a political and aesthetic project is certainly crucial for feminist language writers.

SCEPTICAL READER

I have not interrupted your reading of language writing and its synaesthetic strategies as you began surrendering to the poetry in a somatic way, but later, your intellectualizing side has taken over again. I understand, however, that your see-sawing between the two extremes is part of your carnivalesque strategy. I like the way you draw attention to language experimentation and its link with social and political feminist projects, but I think that more emphasis is needed here. Could you expand on it?

CONCERNED WRITER

First, I'd like to say that my priority was to show how the exploration of verbal synaesthesia and of the synaesthetic understanding of book art brings the texts of English feminist language writers close to the historical avant-garde experimentalism. The texts demonstrate that words are not simple windows into social or psychological reality but are themselves embodied through the visual and musical effects that have a powerful impact on the significations we give to them. Furthermore, I think that the texts are like cubist, futurist or surrealist canvases that distort pictorial realism by manipulation of visual, auditory, kinetic and olfactory fragments. They remind me of dynamic futurist "paintings of sounds, noises and smells" (Carrà 111):

On several parallel lines, the poet will throw out several chains of color, sound, smell, noise, weight, thickness, analogy. One of these lines might, for instance, be olfactory, another musical, another

pictorial.

(Marinetti "Destruction" 105)

In language writing, however, the chains of various sensations do not dominate one another but remain in dialogic relationships. The writers translate the picto-ideo-phono/sono graphic body into a written script that requires from the reader an active cooperation of all the senses. And yes, there are important political ramifications of such linguistic experimentation! Language writers believe that political structures are informed and supported by particular verbal structures; when they are questioned and dismantled they open a space for social transformation. The very fact of repeatedly evoking a musical, visual and gestural language disrupts the conventional, standardized language of mass/popular culture. This is not writing that conforms to accepted norms but that pursues new forms and ideas. Even when the writers borrow techniques from the historical avant-garde their borrowing is tactical - they use them for their specific social and cultural critique. They also use them for exploration of issues essential to current critical and feminist discourses. In general, I can say that avant-garde aesthetics validates multiplicity and questions any dogmatic perspective. For American language poets, "writing in this way is an act of rescue, salvaging language from the ravages of capitalist misuse" (Friedman and Fuchs 17). For feminist language writers the act of renewal of language serves a different ideology, but the major characteristics of their writing - the dialogic concept of language, the interest in interartistic comparisons, the notion of art as translation between the verbal and nonverbal, the idea of a Total Work of Art, or in general, the carnivalesque approach to verbal art - challenge the dichotomization of aesthetics and politics that is typical of such politically ineffective theories as the New Critical or Derridean school of thinking. It is not Derrida but Bakhtin and his conception of meaning as "a responsible engaging with 'another'" (Zavala 86) that appeal to feminist language writers.

NOTES:

1. The Sceptical Reader entries that are marked with an asterisk are critical comments from Dr. Roberta Buchanan.
2. Daphne Marlatt adopted H.D.'s words from *Thought and Vision* in the epigraph to *Touch to My Tongue*.
3. Freeman gives the following example: "if the 'mother' is a metaphor,' so too the 'metaphor' must also be a 'mother'. Here the copula is employed so as to undo, not affirm, copularity, for through the metaphoric process the identity of both terms [is] displaced and undone" (Freeman 70)
4. It has been proven, that there are "strong phonetic components" in Chinese writing The fact has been de-emphasized by Fenollosa, Pound and Derrida" (Wesling 111).
5. The term, initially derived from Saussure to refer to the study of signs and sign systems, is used by Kristeva to indicate a pre-oedipal, maternal space and energy subordinated to the paternal law-like functioning of the symbolic. The semiotic can transgress the boundaries of the symbolic and, as a result, it can subvert its operations.
6. Kristeva based her use of the symbolic on Lacan's theory. Lacan opposes the term to the imaginary and Kristeva to her notion of the semiotic. There are three senses of the term. First, in contrast to the imaginary controlled by the figure of the mother, the symbolic refers to the organization of the social order which is dominated by the figure and the law of the father. Second, the symbolic refers to the order of language understood as a rule-governed system of signification. The symbolic is the order of representation. Third, the symbolic structures the unconscious; it is founded on the repression of the imaginary (Grosz Sexual xxiii).
7. It analyses "the confrontation between the unity required by the symbolic and the heterogeneity of the semiotic drives. It is the study of both the constitution and the 'deconstruction' of the text, of the *différance* within the text" (Grosz Sexual 60).
8. Kristeva's theory rests on the assumption that language is fundamentally propositional or referential; scientific discourses as propositional systems uphold the symbolic (Middleton 90); they take the form of knowledge structured as

propositions about the world (it is possible for language to provide a "depiction" of a reality independent of language = referentiality of language), and therefore it does not allow for linguistic reflexivity (Middleton 84-5).

9. Phoneme is the "smallest contrastive linguistic unit which may bring about a change of meaning" (Noth 263); Phonology or phonemics (American linguists prefer the term phonemics) studies the signs of language as functional elements in a system of form and content (langue); phonetics, on the other hand, is the study of the material sounds and their articulation in speech (parole) irrespective of their systemic properties; phones are actually spoken sounds (Noth 299).

10. Huysman's *Au Rebours* is an investigation into color, smell and word.

11. The sense of smell can also be enacted on the page; for instance in "scratch 'n' sniff books" and magazines. In such cases, McCaffery asks, "When reading gives way to olfactorial intervention is the text inside or outside the reader?" (*Rational* 176)

CHAPTER FIVE

PARODIC DISCOURSE AND FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING

The form of this chapter is conceived as an imaginary online discussion group coordinated by a Canadian literature teacher who wants the students to exchange their views on the books studied in class. This is a good opportunity for a dialogue, especially for those students who for various reasons do not participate in class discussions. The format also allows for a broader analysis of critical issues - once the students have the crucial points of various critical discourses in writing their conversation no longer stays at the "I like it very much" level but brings the students to the awareness of the semiotic operation of the texts: how they are structured and for what purposes. The theme of the discussion: parody in the texts of Canadian English feminist language writers. The group is led by the teacher (Adam) but all the students are asked to participate. Consequently, the views exchanged in the e-mail letters reveal different levels of reading and different critical backgrounds, but they also show the gradual development of the students' critical skills. The e-mail structure is very similar to an epistolary discourse with the difference being that here the exchange of e-mail letters is occasioned by the particular topic of discussion which does not encourage an exchange of views on the participants' well-being and private problems, but does not forbid them either. The e-mail/epistolary format highlights writing as sheer process and gives an opportunity for self-reflexivity. It is another form that aims at challenging the dominant monologic structure of academic critical discourse. This fictitious polyphonic discourse in fact reveals various parts of my polyphonic, nomadic subjectivity. The dissenting voice of Eve is chosen deliberately in order to dramatize the academic and non-academic discussions of literature.

LETTER

I'd like to inaugurate our discussion on parodic discourse in feminist Canadian language-focused writing with a synopsis of the general critical concepts which I believe will be quite useful for our reading this semester. I was

relieved to hear in class that you were interested in parodic and ironic discourse. I always feel guilty about imposing topics for discussion. Nevertheless, I want you to know that you are welcome to discuss any problem you feel relevant with reference to the texts we study.

I want to give you some of the concepts which I find relevant for any discussion of parody. You'll notice that I borrow the ideas from various sources, but mainly from Mikhail Bakhtin and Linda Hutcheon. I know, I know, you don't like theories, but I want you to understand that they are not rigid concepts. They can help you understand ideas, and you don't have to, or rather you are not supposed to accept them blindly. After all, as Tostevin says, "there can be no writing act without a theoretical framework, whether we are aware of the framework or not" (Tostevin "inventing" 279). Here are the quotes I mentioned:

PARODY:

1. "an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another" (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 76).
2. "one of the techniques of self-referentiality by which art reveals its awareness of the context-dependent nature of meaning, of the importance of signification of the circumstances surrounding any utterance" (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 85).
3. "Parody ...in its ironic 'transcontextualization' and inversion, is repetition with difference" (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 32).

4. "a means of defamiliarizing automatized literary forms through laying bare the automatized devices and the displacement and violation of customary literary norms" (Perloff *Poetic* 342).

I guess you can see now that when I mention parody I mean such techniques as dialogization, double-voicedness and self-reflexivity. This does not mean that parody is the only example of double-voicedness. Irony is another obvious model of double-voicing, or, as Hutcheon says "a trope of doubleness... that works from within a power field but still contests it" ("Circling 176). These are all strategies for creating tension within multi-discourse writing. And I'd like to direct you to Hutcheon's "The Core Concepts of Irony: The Received Wisdom" in *Double Talking*. It's a very good summary of the modes of "strategic ironizing for ironic effect"; Hutcheon draws attention to "defamiliarizing clichés and stereotypes, re-contextualizing the familiar, revealing incongruity in context, juxtapositioning" (38). Adam

LETTER

I thought that parody was supposed to be hilarious! Why are the opening quotes so heavy and devoid of humour? And Hutcheon's diction - "strategic ironizing for ironic effect" - is so tortuous! It shocks me that this kind of language is used in a discourse about irony. To be honest, it doesn't

attract me to this discussion group at all. Eve

LETTER

I find your reference to parody and irony confusing. It looks as if there was no difference between parody and irony. Aren't they both tropes of double-voicedness? Don't they both question "the notion of meaning as single, stable, complete, closed, innocent, or transparent?" (Hutcheon *Splitting Images* 12). John

LETTER

This is true, but irony itself can participate in a parodic discourse as strategy (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 31). So what is the difference between irony and parody? Well, as Hutcheon explains, both strategies mark difference by means of "superimposition", but irony works "on a microcosmic (semantic) level" in contrast to parody that operates "on a macrocosmic (textual) level." So it is either a semantic (difference between what is stated and what is intended) or "textual superimposition of contexts" (*Theory of Parody* 54). In the last statement Hutcheon refers to parody as a bigger compositional unit aiming at ridiculing or criticizing larger textual strategies (e.g. the choice of style, structure etc.). Such a definition explains the use of irony within a parodic

discourse. Irony is in fact "a privileged rhetorical mechanism." In general it is useful to see irony as refusing "semantic univocality" and parody as rejecting "structural unitextuality" (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 54). I should also mention satire, sarcasm, etc. as tropes of double-voicedness, and point to their interrelatedness, or what Hutcheon refers to as "overlapping, dynamic triple interrelationship of the parodic, satiric and ironic ethos" (*Theory of Parody* 55) (from the mocking ethos of irony to the scornful and disdainful ethos of satire) (56); parody itself is "labelled as 'unmarked' with a number of possibilities for marking: ridiculing ethos, more respectful or deferential ethos, a more neutral or playful ethos, close to a zero degree of aggressivity towards either backgrounded or foregrounded text. Here the lightest of mockeries of which irony is capable is involved in the parodic signal of difference" (*Theory of Parody* 60-1). But it's probably going too far into the theory. Enough of it! Adam

LETTER

I'm still not sure about the major concepts of our discussion. You quote Linda Hutcheon, you talk about a semantic "superimposition" and working of irony on a "microcosmic level" (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 54). That's all

very fine, but you talk about irony as if it was the only prerogative of a feminist discourse. I don't think it's true. I guess you know that there are many theories of irony, and we have to make it clear what we really understand by the concept. Hasn't irony been a principle of structure of literary works for the New Critics? Hasn't Paul deMan theorized the concept too? I think it's crucial to make a distinction between.. the use of irony between let's say the New Critics and the feminist language writers. You see, you are making me read theory, and I think that my resistance is waning a little. Now I know that the New Critics used irony as a way of "forging together contradictions, inconsistencies, and paradoxes of poetic work to an organic whole, harmony and oneness" (Behler 102). You certainly cannot talk about harmony and unity in language texts. I think that their use of irony aims at disrupting the texts or at least challenging their claims for authority. And this has to be made clear in any discussion of irony. Well, now it is me who sounds authoritative. John

LETTER

I have recently read some of the texts suggested for our discussion and, to be honest, I'm not sure what the writers are doing. I am fascinated by their play with language, but you ask me to focus on parodic discourse. Why do you want us

to concentrate on this aspect of the texts? Dick

LETTER

Shouldn't we practise an evaluative criticism that would pay attention both to poetics and politics of language writing? Isn't feminist criticism reductive when it exclusively privileges a poetics of subversion and parody? Eve

LETTER

You wondered why I decided to focus on parodic discourse. Well, I want us to explore certain affinities between language writing and the historical avant-garde. Can we find any? Think about it. Wasn't the historical avant-garde notorious for its use of irreverent parody and irony with reference to the dominant symbolist writing, art and bourgeois ideology? You certainly remember Duchamp's ironic appropriation and "transcontextualization" of such "ready-made" objects as the *Bicycle Wheel* or the mustachioed *Mona Lisa - L.H..O.O.Q.* His brilliant use of the sacrilegious "ready makes" questioned the institution of visual art, "the nature, the status and function of visual art" (Barber 218). It was a repetition not only "with difference" but with a vengeance.

In literature, all the dadaist, cubist and surrealist

experiments questioned the traditional institution of poetry, the novel and theatrical performance. They challenged the conventions of authority through staging a contest of competing discourses. It was just another instance of carnivalization of the dominant ways of thinking and writing. This has a lot to do with what Hutcheon refers to as "the context-dependent nature of meaning" (*Theory of Parody* 85). It was an appropriation of the earlier discourse and exposed them to the current new ideas and concepts.

This was at the beginning of the twentieth century. What happens in the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties? Certainly the priorities have changed! Especially for women writers! The method, however, is still being explored, although for different political and aesthetic purposes. Adam

LETTER

I believe that dry theory stuff takes away any pleasure I have in reading. It will take me years to comprehend theory, and I just don't have time for it. I don't like the jargon that complicates everything. Eve

LETTER

I don't want you to think of my messages as a jargon-ridden academic lecturing. You mentioned your "fear of

theory". Well, you are not the only one. It took me years to battle my resistance! I guess what helped me to look at the problem differently, is a different conceptualization of a theoretical discourse. If you think of the etymology of the word theory (it comes from the Greek verb *theorein*, to look at, to contemplate, to survey, or *theoreticus* as contemplative, but also *theor* spectator, one who travels in order to see, spectacle, speculation and *thea*: sight, view, beholding (OED)), you can see that theory is by definition linked to spectacle; it is not only contemplation of something, but also performance. So think of theory as spectacle or performance. Gregory Ulmer in *Applied Grammatology* even suggests that "theatre and theory merge into one activity (which perhaps could be dubbed 'theorter')" (229). If theory is a spectacle/ theatre, the actual practice of writing can be compared to "a theatre of ideas in which the rehearsal and the final performance are combined" (Nicol qtd. in Lane Kaufmann 226). Don't you find such an approach more palatable? Have a look at Smaro Kamboureli's article in *Open Letter* No 8 (Summer 1990): "Theory: Beauty or Beast? Resistance to Theory in The Feminine." It will certainly elucidate many problems we all have with theory. Adam

LETTER

Listen to what Erin Mouré says: "Theory and writing for me are concurrent. The words, too, lead to the theories. WE CAN'T SELL OUT THAT WORK TO BORING ACADEMICS" (capitalization is mine) (*Two Women* 72). Eve

LETTER

I've just read *serpent (w)rite* and I find it chaotic and fragmentary. It frustrates me. What does Warland want to say? All I know is that she's very angry with the story of Genesis, and this text is rather sacred for me. I think it's a blasphemy to challenge the story! Jack

LETTER

You have a right to have your own opinions, but I don't necessarily agree with you. If we agree with everything where would it leave us as humanity? Have a look at Erin Mouré's statement from one of her interviews:

If you don't deconstruct images or deconstruct ways of speechyou risk just reproducing the status quo, staying locked inside a cultural conceptual and contextual frame that is structured in and by the language.

("Changes" 42-3)

Does it help you at all? Mary

LETTER:

I'd like to remind you that the challenge to the dominant

discourses of the time can be done through such strategies as carnivalization, dialogization, through staging a contest of competing discourses, creating a montage or collage of them in order to reveal their problematic nature and perform a parodic or ironic transcontextualization or defamiliarization of automatized literary norms. Don't forget about these formal strategies. Adam

LETTER

Is this a classroom where a political one-upmanship still reigns? Do you want us to show who the boss is? Why talk about "formal strategies" and not about language as sensuous, erotic and seducing? Eve

LETTER

Jack, you say that you are frustrated with the fragmentary structure of *serpent (w)rite*, that you did not really get much from the text because of the chaotic organization of fragments. Was it really so chaotic? Or perhaps Warland chose a technique that challenges traditional expectations and which in fact allows her to carnivalize the dominant discourse, to dialogize it. And if she chooses the technique of dialogization, you know what that means. The reader becomes an essential part of the operation of the text. You cannot just be a passive consumer of her text. She does

not tell you everything; she respects your intelligence and she counts on your ability to make intelligent links between the supposed chaotic fragments. Even the subtitle of the book, *a reader's gloss*, emphasizes her dialogic concept of writing as interaction with the author, text and reader. Don't you remember our discussion in class? There is a statement in the book which I think encapsulates Warland's technique: "Adam's words name/Eve's words repeat/(lip service)" (turn one). Did you notice it? She speaks of writing as repetition, and hence of writing that works as "mimicry" (I'm using here Irigaray's concept of mimicry, which she advocates as a response to the compulsory masquerade of femininity; she argues for mimicry as a willed, self-conscious, and ironic version of masquerade when women "convert a form of subordination into an affirmation" and "recover the place of exploitation by discourse" (Irigaray *This Sex* 133, 76). I know it sounds complex, but if you translate it into Warland's text, the mimicry refers to her technique of mimicking, or repeating the voices of authority. This is not, however, simple repetition. In her case it is a repetition with a vengeance:

Eve quoting the voice of authority, includes
a few words of her own

(turn two)

Warland moves the monologic, authoritative discourses into the

position of dialogue, and hence responsibility, or what Bakhtin refers to as "answerability" (*Art and Answerability*).

Jennifer

LETTER

Are you teaching Jack how to read the text?! How presumptuous and patronizing! Eve

LETTER

I agree with Jennifer. But going back to your comment on anger in Warland's text, Jack, you are right saying that she is angry about the major biblical story, Genesis. But notice how she articulates her anger. Have a look at the following fragments:

In the Beginning Adam split Yahweh
 yet there is another version
 And God said, Let us make man in our own image, Genesis
 after our likeness So God created man in his own
 image ... male and female he created them.

two versions
 Yahweh's and Elohim's

They have translated a feminine plural by a masculine singular in the case of the word Elohim. They have, however, left an inadvertent admission of their knowledge that it was plural in Genesis I:26; "And Elohim said: Let us make man." Again (I:26), how could Adam be made in the image of Elohim, male and female, unless Elohim were male and female also?

too many

quote

(turn two)

and later:

Yahweh, Elohim, the translators -
who ever was making a play on words
was playing for power

The phallusy of the phalloids

(turn six)

I don't think this is a violent outpouring of angry words. She chooses a different strategy. You can certainly see what she is doing here. She places side by side the voices of authority, the feminist interpreters of the Bible and her own commentary in the form of an observation or ironic riposte to texts that inscribe an androcentric perspective. She leaves open spaces/pauses in the text for the reader's contemplation, interpretation and active conceptualization of the presented material. The technique reminds me of ideographic writing or the cubist collages we've discussed in the class. And you were right about the fragmentation, but this fracturing of writing, typical of the collage method, allows her to expose the ideological underpinnings of the chosen discourses. The juxtaposition of the sacred text with a fragment of the commentary by Mathers reveals the androcentric bias of the translators, it questions their motives and points to an alternative interpretation of Genesis. Warland's glossing of the biblical story of Genesis focuses on fragments of the text whose early translations obscured the original non-sexist message of the Bible. Her strategy is redemptive as she

strives to redeem the text from the patriarchal ideology. And isn't her sarcastic comment, "The phallusy of the phalloids" a conscious ironic wordplay (the fallacy /phallusy: phalloids/humanoids) that aims at ridiculing the patriarchal phallogocentric logic? Bev

LETTER

I think that such a "conscious ironic wordplay" is already an exhausted avant-garde game. Moreover, although it's a clever linguistic play it is not very emotive! Why do you ignore my comments? Eve

LETTER

I've read *serpent (w)rite* and I can see that there is a multiplicity of voices or utterances in it. I guess you also notice that I'm familiar with Bakhtin's theory now (I had no idea about it before our course started!). I think that each of the voices is a sign of specific semantic positions or worldviews. What matters in such texts, however, as Bakhtin argues, "is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth, a presence established by purely linguistic criteria ...[but] the *dialogic angle* at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed and counterposed in the work" (*Problems* 182). And if it is the

"dialogic angle" which decides the tone of the text, in *serpent (w)rite*, the angle has a decidedly ironic character. And I'd like to point out that the whole text is not only a parody of the Bible but also of other major patriarchal discourses. I'm thinking here of the "mocking ethos" of irony, and even a "scornful and disdainful ethos" of satire. And about parody as encompassing both ethical positions. Mark

LETTER

I'd like to add some words to the discussion. I think that, in general, Warland's project aims at exposing the ideological framework of biblical rhetoric which was a result of the early view of ecclesiastical theories of translation as conversion or persuasion. Its objective, as you certainly know, was proselytizing Christians to the androcentric worldview which functioned as the only Truth uttered by God! Warland proposes a different concept of translation - a feminist translation/ transformance of a subversive nature. Today's suggestion in class about the possibility of a dialogic reading within a translation theory is extremely useful, of course once we understand translation as one of "many modes of re-writing, be it imitation, adaptation, quotation, pastiche, parody ...in short, all forms of interpenetration of works and discourses" (Godard "Theorizing"

50). I've just read some of Barbara Godard's articles on the problem and I found them very illuminating. But they are not an easy read! Robert

LETTER

Why is it that critics celebrate the concept of carnivalization but they shun carnivalizing the academic discourse itself? Eve

LETTER

Someone mentioned the concept of "gloss" and its use in Warland's *serpent (w)rite*. I don't think it's a useful concept at all. My *Webster* dictionary says that gloss is "a brief explanation of a difficult or obscure word or expression." So what is this book about? Is it a dictionary? What is its supposed relevance to the feminist project? Dick

LETTER

I don't think I agree with you, Dick. It seems to me that you have not taken into consideration the ambiguity of the term. Gloss is not only a simple explanatory rendering of a word given in a glossary or dictionary but also a comment, explanation or interpretation often used in a sinister sense as a sophisticated or disingenuous interpretation (I guess I

have a better *Webster!*). Think of the word "sinister" here. To "veil with glosses" means to explain away, to read a different sense into; to "gloss over something" means to dispose of it by false or perverse interpretation (*Webster*). So again we are back to the concept of interpretation, as a subversive translation, or to bring things close to *serpent (w)rite*, as a parody of dominant discourses. Warland seems to revel in the perversive aspect of the gloss technique which appeals to her because it reveals the metalinguistic character of language itself, of language being capable of its own critique. Moreover, "gloss" is derived from the Greek word "glossa", "glotta" (*Webster*) which refers to tongue, to the organ of the body, and this association is also explored by Warland in her general project of somatization of language, of inscribing the body into writing, as we discussed it some time ago in the class. Each gloss, each translation is in fact a "version" of a text challenged by the writer. "Version" comes from the Latin word for "to turn", *vertere*, which is close to such words as *transponere*, *transferre*, *reddere*; all of them suggest a disruption or displacement of meaning. I would argue that Warland aims to overturn myths inscribed in the Bible which have affected the definition of male and female roles for ages, and also other dominant discourses which are oppressive for women. She even chooses to name each segment of her text

a turn (not a chapter) which underscores the conscious act of "transformance" of the authoritative texts. Why does she reread and rewrite/re-translate the Bible? Don't we know that for ages biblical authority was allowed to maintain the political and religious subjection of women claiming it to be in the natural order of things? Unfortunately, the story of Eve, the major focus of Warland's text, has been used for years as a theological base for sexism! Many translations and re-writings of the Bible, including John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, presented Eve as inferior and the origin of evil! No wonder, Warland's project is rewriting, re-translating the story to show that such interpretations are the product of the sexism of the translators! Jennifer

LETTER

Wasn't Milton's Eve also a seeker after knowledge? Eve

LETTER

I've been reading some of the recent e-mail messages and what I see surprises me a lot. All of you focus on the biblical aspect of *serpent (w)rite*. You seem to diminish other crucial aspects of Warland's work. I have re-read the book and I'd like to share with you my observations. I agree with you that Warland exposes the androcentric nature of scripture but

you don't even mention that she replaces it with an alternative story of Genesis and of female history in general. Her strategy is then not only redemptive but also compensatory.

Warland rewrites the story of creation. Now I understand that the fragmentary/collage structure of the book allows her to introduce voices that suggest a different interpretation of history and mythology. This heteroglossia, to use the Bakhtinian terms that you like so much, is indeed an excellent strategy to challenge a monological discourse. Now I can see how it allows for a dialogization of the competing utterances and hence worldviews. And I think that polyphony is an excellent artistic method as it allows for an authentic dialogue. And it is striking how much it contrasts with various forms of relativism and dogmatism that exclude "all argumentation," "all authentic dialogue, making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (Bakhtin *Problems* 69).

Have a look at the way Warland juxtaposes Proverbs from the Bible with words and chants of Sabina, with the words of a feminist theologian Phyllis Trible, and with her own commentary. She presents a polyphony of voices that allow the reader an insight into different versions of the creation story:

"I am Wisdom, my neighbour is intelligence,
I am found in [company with] knowledge and thought." Proverbs

"I am the woman wise in words beneath the water, says Sabina
I am the woman wise in words beneath the sea, says"

(turn three)

"nowhere in the [original] narrative does God create Trible
water."

"I am the woman of the great rain, says Sabina
I am the woman of the sacred rain, says
I am the Woman of the Flowing Water, says"

(in the beginning)
heavens and earth, plants and animals created
Yahweh rests

yet there was no rain no amniotic waters
"But there went up a mist from the earth,
and watered the whole face of the ground."
Wisdom's fluency

(it's pissing rain)

Sophia urinating over the face of the earth

(turn three)

I like the way Warland suggests an alternative religion of the Goddess. Isn't that interesting that she uses a typical Christian form of litany to call the names of various goddesses from different religions? She appropriates the form (is it an instance of "mimicry" you were talking about?) and uses it for a celebration of a non-Christian heritage:

Ua Zit/Hat-Hor/Au Set/Maat/Nidaba/Divine Serpent
Lady/Ninlil/Great Mother Serpent of Heaven/
Nina/Ishatar/Tiamat/The lady of the
Serpent/Python/Baalat/ Kundalini/Ma Chinoi/ Per-Uatchet/
Mehen the Enveloper/Nin Hursag/ Rainbow Serpent...

(turn one)

Bernadette

LETTER

I think that Warland's text a very good example of what Godard theorizes as translation for the signified (under the realm of metaphor) ("Translating" 118). This of course contrasts with the translation for the signifier (under the realm of metonymy).

Take notice of the following:

Philo's rewriting "first equated Logos with Sophia, then substitutes Logos for Sophia, until the masculine person of Logos has taken over most of Sophia; divine roles."

Cady
Ronan and
Taussig

it's a man's wor(l)d

Isn't it interesting how these lines tie in well with what we were saying once about genderization of metaphor and metonymy? I think it is evident here that the rewriting is done "under the realm of metaphor," the masculine trope of substitution, of repression and subordination of difference. And moreover metaphor cancels, as Tostevin so eloquently shows in her writing (go back to the "song of songs" and you'll see how a discourse based on metaphor in fact separates both lovers). Warland's example shows how a metaphoric translation allows a discarding of the matriarchal heritage and exposing of the

androcentric worldview as the only truth. At the end of the book there is an excellent illustration of metonymic writing, writing of excess that works by association and that questions all strict rules. And it is even all the more interesting because it is self-reflexive:

these are the words that undo themselves turn
 around on themselves find they're never in the same
 place they began flow through our hands these are the
 words that spiral through sentences the words that
 shed skins never mean one thing or stay in one place
 these are the travelling words with relatives all over
 the world in different cultures....
 in my hands I catch word after word' that hold us
 captive set us free wordsmells wombwords word-
 prints we track endlessly

(turn eight)

Joan

LETTER

After your suggestion regarding the collage structure of the text I found it really fascinating to trace the working of parody in the book (yes, I know now that it always works with the help of irony, satire, sarcasm, etc.). Isn't Warland exposing sexism through parodying, apart from the Bible, many other discourses, and particularly those of science, medicine, biology, and linguistics? Alissa

LETTER

Well, you are absolutely right, Alissa, about Warland's use of a collage structure for a parodic discourse of many discourses of power. But you could have expanded on the topic.

As the book operates on the principles of collage I would even dare to call it ideogrammic. And you can certainly find all kinds of collage ideograms in *serpent (w)rite*. See Laszlo Gefin's *Ideogram. History of a Poetic Method* for a classification of collage ideograms as cumulative, contrastive, fu al or overlapping (108). And no wonder that Jack found the structure of the book chaotic. The ideogrammic method ignores the sequential or causal principles of discourse we are so much accustomed to. The method is extremely dependent on memory and association, and even the layout and typography of the printed page is crucial for the formation of associative ideas. Why did Warland use such a method? Perhaps she wanted to go beyond masculine metaphoric constructions? What do you think? Joan

LETTER

How would you read the following:

"language is of divine origin and hence was perfect in its beginnings, but is constantly in danger of corruption and decay unless it is diligently kept in line by wise men"

Pyles

what a line

"universal grammar is the source of all universals and it gives definition to man himself. Not only all languages but all signifying systems obey the same grammar ... it coincides with the structures of the universe itself."

Todorov

hold that line

(*serpent* turn 3)

Adam

LETTER

Isn't it just another example of parodic collage? This is a feminist collage so perhaps, just to be more carnivalistic, I would use the term "feminnage." Can I use such terms? parodic collage? feminnage? femina + collage = feminnage? I opt for the concept of "feminnage" to emphasize Warland's use of collage for her feminist rewriting/transformance of androcentric discourses. Isn't it an interesting concept? I know that the form of collage is not typical of women's writing. So-called conceptual writing was never regarded as the realm of the feminine (whatever that means). It is rather the working of the maternal chora or the semiotic that we associate with the feminine. I find it fascinating that Warland manages to combine both the conceptual and the semiotic in her texts. I think that the semiotic, in terms of various forms of musicating, operates within the general conceptual structure of the book. She does not choose between both realms, but inscribes a tension between them. And it seems to me that the majority of language writers are extremely adept in performing such linguistic/artistic tricks. What do you think about it? Would you agree? Marie

LETTER

This constant playing with various levels of language, not choosing between them, and by extension, not choosing between contradictory ideas, begins to irritate me. Why is Warland afraid to position herself? Does she think that any position is monologic? Is pluralist questioning enough? Is it the end in itself? Eve

LETTER

I'd like to return to the idea of parody in language writing, not only in Warland, but also in the other texts suggested for our reading. I have finally understood that the writers move the monologic, authoritative discourses into the position of dialogue, which as it has been said here, is a position of responsibility. I have realized that feminist language writing uses the strategy of parody to challenge ideas and concepts which support the dominant androcentric ideology (it silences the voices of difference, of gender, race, class, etc.). The whole question of ideology perplexed me and I had to do some more reading, but now I think I am beginning to discover that ideology is a product of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts) created in a specific historical context of a given society, although it presents itself as natural or self-evident truth (Kress, Jameson). So when the writers expose the dominant ideology

they in fact expose the major images and ideas of particular groups, individuals or institutions. Am I right in my thinking? Rick

LETTER

Now, I guess, I understand Warland's reasons for parodying the concepts of male science: eg. biology:

"From the begettings of scripture to the latest seminal Miller idea for saving the world, the English language tells us that males alone are responsible for new life. According to this biology, the male inseminates whereas the female merely incubates"

"spermomaniac's" phallusy

(turn six)

I think that the first fragment functions like a statement of natural truth, but naturally it is ridiculed by the following declaration that succinctly points out its fallacy. Notice the homophonic wordplay: phallusy. Isn't it powerful?

I think it is evident that Warland is very serious about eradicating the androcentric worldview of institutions and individuals and she does not hesitate to use parody as a weapon. I just mention several more examples which I find relevant to the issue. I find the collage technique very effective.

(Pound, via Gourmant: "intelligence is a kind of con- Blau DuFlessis centrated seminal fluid in the brain").

have you lost your mind

(turn six)

The androcentric ideas are counterpointed either by sarcastic comments (as above) or by feminist re-readings of the male science:

"In a mistaken notion of biology, seed and semen were equated. Male seed then came to be worshipped as a source of prosperity, of grain, animals, and above all children." Fisher

You certainly remember the sections of the texts that deal with the institutionalization of reproduction (surrogate motherhood) and commodification of life:

"Mrs. Whitehead was publicly pilloried for breaking her contract, as though contracts are sacred and not broken every day by businessmen and baseball players." the "natural father's" CONTRACT "giving him right to control her body... "

after the VERDICK

"Surrogate entrepreneur Noel Keane crowed about the judge's validation of 'a man's right to procreate.'"

"the fetus as a commodity"

(serpent turn four)

Notice the homophonic wordplay on "verdict" and "contract". I find it exciting. Marie

LETTER

Unfortunately this wordplay has become predictable and it doesn't inspire me any more. Eve

LETTER

Warland is also concerned about genetic engineering, nuclear holocaust, and the "institutionalized medical practices of defeminization" ("cutting" 118). The feminist ideas that she chooses to counteract the voices of authority are very strong accusations of the androcentric ideology:

"if you had been in a concentration camp in the forties Hilman and the doctors took out your womb, that would be a war crime, wouldn't it? ...Hysterectomies are performed more than appendectomies and tonsillectomies. It's America's favourite operation."

(*serpent* turn four)

I must say that I'm impressed by the effectiveness of the polyphonic method of composition. It does really draw me in as a reader. I like the fact that I am not being lectured to, that the work is so open and invites my conceptualization. My voice becomes one of the many in the text. Warland knows how to avoid monologism; She chooses to work with the complex nature of feminist discourse by allowing participation in her work of many feminist "voices of author-I-ty" (*serpent* no pagination): Adrienne Rich, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Lyn Hejinian, Mary Daly, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Louky

Bersianik, Nicole Brossard and others. Isn't it a good example of intertextuality? I know, I know, I'm losing my focus. I'd better stay with the idea of parody and irony. Could you suggest any other reading on the problem? Bernadette

LETTER

Is polyphony a politically expedient concept? Aren't we trapped in the postmodern condition that celebrates plurality and diversity, and which, in fact, validates the "official cultural space of diversity" (Bernstein *A Poetics* 6)? Is difference really encouraged in our consumer culture? Eve

LETTER

Marie, you are absolutely right about the language writers inscribing the tension between the semiotic and the symbolic in their texts. And Rick, your observations about ideology are certainly acceptable. Well, you've read Kress and Jameson. What can I say? I understand that there is time to move the focus of our discussion onto different texts.

And there is one more suggestion I'd like to make. Instead of using the term parody, let's better stay with the concept of translation/transformance. It's much more comprehensive, it opens up alternative ways of reading and, what is really important, it stresses the generative character

of the texts. Parody then can be read as a subversive translation of one text or discourse into another. And of course I'm not talking about the notion of translation emphasizing equivalence but difference. I understand you've read Godard's articles on feminist translation as "transformance." I suggest you also read fragments of Pamela Banting's dissertation and her critical articles on the topic. She proposes translation theory as a substitute for the conventional representation theories. This is an extremely useful proposition. The new theories of translation foreground the participation of writer/translator in the creation of meaning; and by extension, this self-reflexive element joins the new translation theories with theories of performance (and hence Godard's term "transformance"). Adam

LETTER

I must say I struggled with the concept of translation with reference to feminist writing. Now I think that feminist discourse itself can be regarded as translation, as a double or two-way translation. Why? First, because it translates woman's thinking/body into writing, and second, to realize the idea of the woman-centred discourse, it must translate the dominant patriarchal language that mutes the feminine - hence a two-way translation. Don't you think that the theories of Irigaray (mimesis as a game of repetition) and Cixous ("Laugh

of the Medusa") can be read as an act of playful performance/transformation done on patriarchal texts?

I guess it's a rhetorical question. Grace

LETTER

I've re-read some texts by Tostevin and I love how she deals with standardized images of women and with sexism in language. In a motto to one of her nameless poems in *Color of Her Speech* she emphasizes the word "kedesha" (an independent woman) which in Sanskrit is a synonym for harlot. Isn't it a good example of a masculine operation of language, of metaphor that represses and rejects the traces of difference?

Notice the distinct self-reflexive voice of the speaker of Tostevin's poem that ridicules/sneers at/mocks masculine representations of women:

and oh how you love women
 who are sealed
 seek women
 who are nameless
 for nothing quickens
 your imagination
 as a siren without repertory

Hérodiate
 La Belle Dame Sans Merci
 The Lady of Shallot
 breathed into animation

(Color)

I can see a good example of double-voicedness here. Under a serious tone there is a strong sarcastic voice. Is it a

subversive transformance of masculine ideas? Notice also how serious academic language is used for subversive purposes:

Mary Our Immaculate Conception fucked/ in the ear by the
Holy Transcendental Signifier

(Double)

I think there is another instance of the brilliant subversive technique of parodic translation in a poem that is a commentary on Robert Hughes's review of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Again it is a double-voiced text that carnivalizes/parodies Hughes's misogynist review by mimicking /repeating his style and choice of vocabulary, "menspeak." Hughes accuses Chicago of "femspeak" and jargon; he objects to her use of the vagina as a basis of her art. Nevertheless, Tostevin's parody shows Hughes's discourse as a case of masculine meaningless psycho-babble and typical patriarchal presumptuousness:

few months later Hughes tells the Globe and Mail
his favourite art form has always been surrealism
his favourite artist Joan Miro because
"it's adolescent youth-culture stuff ...
and like a baby duck you fixate
on the first thing you see
and that's mom..."

of course
and mom doesn't have a cunt
especially; if she's male surrealist
whose work has been described
as "emblematic ... biomorphic abstraction ...
amorphous shapes floating in ambiguous space..."

menspeak?

(Color)

Jennifer

LETTER

An excessively serious academicspeak is not better than menspeak or femspeak. Eve

LETTER

Would you concentrate on Tostevin's parodic translation of academic discourse, both in "A Weekend at the Semiotics of Eroticism colloquium Held at Victoria College" and in "by the smallest possible margin"? You can find both texts in *'sophie*. I'd like to draw your attention to the cover of the book. It is a copy of an original work, a reproduction of Baldung Grien's painting "Musik." Tostevin says she "appropriates" the image ("A Reading" 116); is it like Duchamp's "ready-made"? Is she playing with it? What does appropriation mean for her? How political is it? Duchamp's "ready makes" question the nature, the status and function of visual art. His appropriation and recontextualizing strategies aim at cultural criticism of the elitist notion of art. What about Tostevin? Adam

LETTER

I'm sure Tostevin's appropriation of the visual image for a verbal translative act also aspires as other appropriations do, at critiquing some aspect of culture. Her use of the image

of a silent muse in the text devoted to an exploration of woman's speech and writing certainly has ironic overtones. Her exploration of language is certainly politically motivated: this is a feminist language game and a feminist intervention into the codified nature of language whose "economy [is] said to be M" [masculine] (Cixous "*Coming*" 150). The character of such language games can be parodic, ironic or dead serious. I have noticed that Tostevin's speaker revels in double-voicedness, in ironic understatements. Grace

LETTER

I agree with Grace, but let's focus on the texts themselves. I must say that before reading both texts I said to myself: this is probably a dry account of two academic events. How mistaken I was! Now I know what it means to master a double-voiced discourse or, in this case, a double-voiced parodic commentary with at least two semantic intentions present!

I would argue that in the "smallest possible margin" Tostevin is ironic about the duplicity of Derrida's deconstructive analysis that claims to ally "itself with the voiceless" (45). Notice her tongue-in-cheek statement: "He is after all, the greatest mind of the 20th century, which leaves very little room for exchange, but then Derrida doesn't seem

to be interested in the economy of exchange" (46). She mimics his speech in a parodic fashion: "A gift is a gift if it's not a gift. He is delighted with his play of words and logic and we are delighted that he's delighted" (46). She reveals how he trivializes and ridicules questions from women, but does not realize that he can also be a target of a scornful ridicule himself (which the text proves). I will stop here as there is an interesting analysis of the text in Smaro Kamboureli's "Theory: Beauty or Best? Resistance to Theory in The Feminine." Why don't you have a look at it. David

LETTER

I'd like to say that the other text also offers an excellent parody of a philosophic academic discourse. It is written in the form of a reportage by one of the participants. A serious form of reportage is, however, translated into a humorous double-voiced ironic commentary on the excesses of the academic event. A philosophical exploration of eroticism turns into a sensational examination of sex. The promising titles of papers: "Beyond Eros," "Fetish", "Male Masochism and Subjectivity," and "Darwinian Erotics" turn out to be empty signifiers; they do not fulfil the promise at all. Speakers trivialize the topic, making it sensational (appeal to the eye - charts of statistics, slides of women in the Brazilian

carnival, explicit slides of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, ads for sexual aids), and in fact "examining the familiar" (61), and stating the obvious ("during carnival time women are objects of the gaze")(62). There is lack of intellectual curiosity on the part of the participants. Nobody asks questions, there is no dialogue; academic discourse turns out to be monologic! The irony is even greater when Tostevin parallels academic discourse on eroticism with sex therapy TV shows. Both are equally sensational and trivializing; both present a limited view of sexuality as obsessed with male organs, penetration and the male gaze.

You've guessed - this is just my reading. Such conclusions are not articulated in the text, but the tone and the organization of the text make me read it in a certain way. I believe that the organization of the reportage as a series of objective observations with open spaces left for the reader (an ideographic conceptual method), is in fact another strategy of the parodic rewriting. I can see that apart from the objective voice of the narrator there is sense of another conflicted voice which sneers at academic pretentiousness. There is an interesting ironic inversion here: the philosophical discourse on eroticism gives way to the sensational discourse on sex (pornography, sex manuals and sex aids). Is it ironic pessimism? I guess so. I wonder what you

think about it. Mary

LETTER

Ironic pessimism? I don't find Tostevin's irony pessimistic. It rather makes me feel optimistic! If such criticism as hers is being done, it can only have a positive effect on the current state of academic discourse. Or ... maybe it's wishful thinking. Eve

LETTER

I've recently re-read some poems by Erin Mouré. There is so much to be said about them; she uses such a variety of techniques! She changes them constantly and once I think I know her strategy she surprises me with a new way of "defamiliarizing" standard writing techniques. In many of her critical articles (which I guess function as manifestos of her aesthetic and political aims), she says: "If you don't deconstruct images or deconstruct ways of speech ... you risk just reproducing the status quo, staying locked inside a cultural conceptual and contextual frame that is structured in and by the language" ("Changes" 42-3). I guess, this has been quoted here already, but I wanted to draw attention to it once again as I believe the statement encapsulates feminist writers' concerns.

What I found particularly interesting about Mouré's

writing is its ultimate parodic double-voicedness and self-reflexivity. I think it's very unusual that she chooses to parody her own writing! Isn't it an exemplary case of self-questioning? But it is also a questioning of the literary strategies and forms that she appropriates from the past. So I guess it's similar to Duchamp's technique of "ready mades." Several of Mouré's poems reveal her ludic approach to many aspects of rigid academic writing. I think that "Ocean Poem" (*Furious* 48) is a satire on excessive and pointless/senseless footnoting. I'm amused to read such footnotes as those to the words "women" and "lie" from the line: "I don't know if there's any difference between men & women /is just a lie." Isn't it ludicrous to say that "The poets who say this believe that the standard of poetic excellence is just excellent & not male), or with reference to "lie": "This should not be done in an poem, accusing someone of lying" (48)? I think Mouré is pulling my leg by saying this. And what about the homophonic footnotes (can I refer to footnotes as homophoni:?) in the lines:

When she puts her arm down, in innocence,
I'll show her

and the footnotes state: "in innocence" = "in no sense"; and "I'll show her" = "Read 'shore.' This is an ocean poem." (48)

The footnotes do not clarify the poem; they confuse me. The

very fact of using footnotes in a poem is unusual, especially when the vocabulary of the poem is not obscure or culturally alien (this is not T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland"!). Grace

LETTER

Are you familiar with Aritha Van Herk's ironic comments on the use of footnotes? I'm referring to Van Herk's *In Invisible Ink (crypto-frictions)*. In this collection of essays you can find the hilarious (carnavalesque?) text "Blurring Genres: Fictioneer as Ficto-Critic." It's subversive and funny! Van Herk refers to footnotes and "their irrevocable interference, their own implied displeasure with the text" as "a *coitus interruptus* of idea" (40)! Footnotes are "vicious traps snapping at the legs of the reader bounding across the page" (35), and "every footnote is a nail in the coffin of criticism" (40). Footnotes suggest "insecurity" and "terror of plagiarism," "someone else has always said it first or said it better" (35). Isn't it really "an inside-out terror of originality" (35)? Hasn't Stein said "there is no such thing as repetition"? Van Herk and Mouré (in "Ocean Poem") laugh at the need of footnoting. They satirize the convention. I think that while Van Herk questions the "narcissism of metafiction" ("Blurring" 40), Mouré challenges narcissism in "metapoetry" (I'm not sure such a term can be used, but it looks like a

right equivalent to metafiction). Her writing in fact blurs the distinction between the writer and the critic; in such a situation, Van Herk asks, "what is left for the critic to undertake?" (39). I guess it is something like criticism of criticism - metacriticism! And what about criticism of metacriticism?! And here I can see a similarity between Mouré's writing practice and conceptual art. Haven't the conceptual artists eliminated the division between the artist and the critic? Jennifer

LETTER

Your linking of Mouré with conceptual artists on the basis of "Ocean Poem" is probably too far-fetched. I believe that in Mouré's case we can just talk about double-voicedness, be it parody, irony, etc. It's true that some of her double-voiced poems are self-reflexive and eliminate the division between the poet and critic, but I don't think that Mouré's poetry can be regarded as absolutely conceptual. In her analysis of conceptual art Ursula Meyer admits that "[c]onceptual artists take over the role of the critic in terms of framing their own propositions, ideas and concepts" (viii), but she also states that "the essential point of Conceptual art is its self-reference; often the artists define the intentions of their work as part of their art ...[and] advance propositions or investigations" (viii). You don't find

such a conscious analysis in Mouré, do you? She does not define her intentions. She wants the reader to figure out what she's doing (a typical ideographic method of writing, remember?). Nevertheless, when I think of "The Acts" in *Furious*, which is a declaration of her poetics, I would tend to agree about the impact of conceptual art on her writing. George Hartley in *Textual Politics and the Language Poets* suggests the intertextual influence of conceptualist art on language poetry. He points to the importance to language writers of such typically conceptualist strategies as "declaration, self-interrogation, performance instructions, documentation and axiomatic proposition" (85). And indeed many feminist language texts use such strategies (*Spaces like Stairs, Proper Deafinitions, Subject to Criticism*). He stresses, however, that conceptualist artists are "carrying the self-conscious art practice begun by Duchamp with his ready-mades" (86). So I guess we are back to our original premise: the impact of the historical avant-garde on language writing. Marie

LETTER

I think you contradict yourself in your last message, Marie. You want to prove that there is nothing conceptual about Mouré's writing and you end up confirming that she is

conceptual. And I would agree with the conceptualist hypothesis regarding not only her writing, but also the writing of the other feminist writers we have been studying this semester. By the way, I've come across Mouré's article which explains what you refer to as her parodic double-voicedness. For her this kind of writing is "a ludic gesture". She says, "I make fun of the poem, and I make fun of me making fun of the poem in the poem. Jokes have a serious element in them, too" ("And just" 47). And when she co-opts the reaction of certain critics she aims at a conscious challenge to the "status or position ...[of] criticism." Poetry is for her "a place of infinite capability" ("And just" 47). Well, your reading was very close to her ideas. Joan

LETTER

I'd like to add some of my observations on the self-reflexive character of Mouré's writing. I think it's about a parody of mindless reviewing. In several poems she dons the mask of a reviewer, but surprisingly she reviews her own writing. She appropriates a voice of a reviewer who represents an ideology, poetics and aesthetics totally different from hers. So you can see how this strategy allows her to engage in a re-reading of her own work, or in other words, in a dialogic moment of translation. I was wondering whether Brian Fitch's theory of "self-translation" as "the repetition of a process"

which contrasts with the traditional notion of translation as the "reproduction of a product" (117) would be a fitting comparison here. It sounds right. What do you think?

But back to the "fictitious reviewer" poems. You'll be amused by "Tucker Drugs" and "Naming a Poem Called Tucker Drugs" (*WSW* 78-79). Look at one of the senseless observations on the poem's meaning:

This is a patent lie. You can't name it this. People who have been to/Tucker Drugs may not be the kind of people who are satisfied to read a/ poem containing the name of the drug store they have been in.

(79)

Through appropriation of voices of those who read poetry as an example of realistic discourse Mouré challenges the status of such inadequate and incompetent reviewing:

"A poem with a dog, a car, a drug store, and a mother in it."
 "A poem in which there is not much weather."
 "A poem proving the writer has been to Calgary"
 "A poem that will satisfy readers who have been to Tucker Drugs"

(79)

I think that the very fact that she does not openly articulate her views on writing makes her criticism even more effective. It is through a parodic double-voicedness, through the ironic tone of her voice which merges conflicting intentions, that she achieves her scathing satire. Jennifer

LETTER

You suggest the concept of self-translation as a "repetition of process" (Fitch 117) with reference to Mouré's poetry. I guess you're only partially right here. I don't think Mouré repeats the process of her own writing, but rather the writing and thinking processes of those who re-read and re-write her. She appropriates other voices for the purpose of cultural criticism. I think that similar to Duchamp who questioned the status of visual art in the bourgeois society she challenges/satirizes the current state of reviewing. She aims at reviewers who use outdated notions of poetics and aesthetics for texts that explore different notions of writing. Rick

LETTER

Talking about self-reflexiveness, I'd like to share my observations on another poem by Mouré: "Executive Suite" and "Corrections: 'Executive Suite'" (*Sheepish* 14-19). I think that the poem, typically for Mouré, deconstructs the notion of image as representation of reality; it not only shows the image as deceptive but in fact it parodies it. The traditional image is replaced by exploration of syntax in the manner of Stein. The poem is a good illustration of what we discussed last semester as a musication of structure, syntax or

semantics. It examines the question of standardized rigid language in a corporate environment (it can apply to other social institutions too):

It exactly stinks.
The luminescent as a way of speaking. Not a stutter. (15)

I have to watch her when I use words, her boss chuckles (16)

Already a lifetime use of the word "small" has worn me out of description (17)

The "Corrections" (Doesn't a correction suggest a right answer/ interpretation etc.?) is a supposedly serious interpretation of the poem, but you can certainly feel a comic verbal tension in the speaking self-reflexive voice; there is a sense of a conflicting voice and the conflict is a result of clashing ideas on the nature of poetical discourse:

The poem lacks simple narrationJokes are improper in poems, even if people know they are jokes, and why should this be a joke....The reference to Bronwen seems to be a personal, private reference to a conversation that did not include the reader. The poem is not a place for E-mail....The spelling of the word "ther" is deliberate and will be questioned in Toronto. The mountain appears as an idiotic parody of A.M.Klein that is deadly serious and not a parody at all.

(19)

I find it an excellent example of Mouré's double-voiced discourse in the form of parody: parody of style, manner of

seeing, thinking and speaking (Bakhtin *Problems* 194). I think of Bakhtin's definition of parody. I'll quote it just to remind myself about the difference between stylization and parody which I always find confusing:

as in stylization, the author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast to stylization parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one ...Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices ...there cannot be a fusion of voices possible in stylization (emphasis mine).

(*Problems* 193)

When Mouré appropriates the voices of a certain type of critics she aims at criticizing them; she brings a totally different semantic intention to the original text - well, I guess it proves that this is parody and not stylization!
Bernadette

LETTER

Why do we focus on aesthetics and poetics all the time? What about the socio-political impact of language writing? The play of linguistic materiality is not purely aesthetic. Doesn't it help us reflect on languages and the way they shape our thinking and acting in the world? How can we allow the media to manipulate our desires? Has language become a commodity that we blindly accept without thinking about ideological consequences of its use ? Eve

LETTER

What about double-voicedness in "The Beauty of Furs" and "The Beauty of Furs: A Site Glossary" (*WSW* 68-69) or "Muddy Thinking" and "Corrections to 'Muddy Thinking'" (*Furious* 66-68)? Think about it. Let's stop our discussion on Mouré at this point and let's make a ludic, carnivalesque gesture of turning things inside out (absolute topsy-turvidom) and move to a different topic. But before we do this, I must tell you that when I think of Mouré's transgressive writing and of her humorous self-examination I recall Umberto Eco's words:

In a world dominated by diabolical powers, in a world of everlasting transgression, nothing remains comic or carnivalesque, nothing can any longer become an object of parody, iF NOT TRANSGRESSION ITSELF.

("The Frames" 7)

Doesn't the carnivalesque world dictate a carnivalesque writing? Think again of Kristeva's definitions of the carnivalesque:

drama becomes located in language...prohibitions (representation, "monologism") and their transgression (dream, body, "dialogism") coexist.

("Word" 79)

on the omnified stage of carnival, language parodies and relativizes itself, repudiating its role in representation; in so doing, it provokes laughter but remains incapable of detaching itself from representation. The syntagmatic axis of language (metonymy) becomes exteriorized in this space and through dialogue with the systematic axis (metaphor), constitutes

the ambivalent structure bequeathed by carnival to the novel.

("Word" 79)

Think of feminist language writing now - I guess you can answer this yourself. I'll leave it for you to decide. Let this e-mail writing be ideogrammatic. Adam

LETTER

I have been bothered by our predominant focus on the ridiculing ethos of parodic rewriting. Don't we know that when the writers use parody their aim is not only to ridicule, deride or scorn? Doesn't Linda Hutcheon point out that parody is "repetition with difference" (*Theory of Parody* 32), which does not really mean that the ethos of parody has to be marked negatively (as ridicule and aggression)? As she explains "many parodies today do not ridicule the background texts but use them as standards by which to place the contemporary under scrutiny" (57). And here she reminds us about the modernist verse of Eliot and Pound as "respectful or deferential" to their background texts (57). In view of such statements parody indeed is just another form of rewriting, another type of translation or transformance. So the ethos of parody, or of transformance, as Hutcheon suggests, can be "labelled as 'unmarked' with a number of possibilities for marking: ridiculing ethos, more respectful or deferential ethos, a more

neutral or playful ethos, close to a zero degree of aggressivity towards either backgrounded or foregrounded text" (*Theory of Parody* 60-1). Finally this is clear for me! Literature is not only a battlefield for aggressive and ludic attacks on contesting discourses! And here, I guess, rewriting of literary conventions would be an appropriate example.

Joan

LETTER

I'm glad you've mentioned this crucial aspect of parodic discourse. I'd like to illustrate it on the basis of Mouré's "Cellular Correspondence" (*Sheepish* 80-83) and "Seebe" (*WSW*). I will focus on the form of litany and description. The first work is a serious poem about environmental damage, the Chernobyl disaster, "cellular perfidy", "tampering of the body's codes," the effect of high voltage lines on people, etc., but the form chosen for the poem - a litany - proves that the structure of writing itself is a crucial element in its meaning. Here, as the speaker of the poem observes, "[t]he litaneous nature of the poem ... releases chemicals that lull the reader, supports individual sadness & a code disconnected from responsibility" ("Correspondence" 82); the form of litany is like "a screen inducing certain chemicals in the viewer, the sonority & bliss of *reverence*. The poem too goes on, as if

the immune system does not exist except as mystery coding, like 'imagination,' the place where all contradiction is beyond question" ("Correspondence" 83). This is a serious observation on the politics of form, and not the usual ludic gesture we've seen in other Mouré's poems. I guess it a "zero degree of agressivity" (Hutcheon *Theory of Parody* 61).

Similarly, in "Seebe" there is another evidence that Mouré's self-reflexiveness is not always ludically parodic. The poem that begins as an attempt at describing of a memory of "a train hitting the boy at Seebe, Alberta" (84) turns into a serious exploration of the technical and conceptual problems involved in description. It turns out that each description is, in fact, a false translation. The speaker points to the impossibility of telling a story as it is always appropriating and muting someone else's voice. She emphasizes the arrogance of the writer claiming objective rendering of events while her voice is only one among many. You can hardly ever find this kind of frankness in poetry! Have a look at her commentary (part of the poem): "The poem has fallen apart into mere descriptionHere we have only assumptions, only the arrogance of Erin Mouré made into the poem" (84). The poem mutes the voice of the victim: "we have no way of entering into his images":

The description itself, even if questioned, portrays the

arrogance of the author...The writer as witness, speaking the stories, is a lie, a liberal bourgeois lie. Because the speech is the writer's speech, and each word of the writer robs the witnessed of their own voice, muting them.

("Seebe" 84)

I think that the exploration of the problem of description serves as a reminder of the restrictive character of certain literary forms with reference to certain ideas. And again the self-reflexive re-writing/parody has nothing to do with ridicule or aggression. There is a deference for the issue written about and a call for a politically appropriate frame for its translating. Marie

LETTE:

I'm really interested in the feminist rewriting of ideas concerning the concept of self, and everything related to it (be it sexuality, desire, etc.). What do you think of discussing the problem here? There is no time for it in class. So much has been written on the subject already. If you do a search under the topic you'll be amazed (look under "theories of subjectivity" and feminist rethinking of them). Such rewriting is necessarily connected with all other aspects of a text. Jennifer

LETTER

I'm glad you've mentioned the concept of self. So many of

my friends keep talking about it and being honest sometimes I'm not that sure that I follow them. All I know is that the old idea of a unified self is no longer valid. Gosh, I don't think of myself as "unified" --aren't all Canadians schizophrenic?

And what about our earlier discussion of parodic discourse? And how does the feminist concept of self relate to the historical avant-garde ideas on the issue? Grace

LETTER

We are not shifting into a totally different area! Feminist rewriting of the ideas regarding the notion of self can be read as an example of parodic translation/transformance, which, as we've learned, does not have to foreground the traditional mocking or ridiculing ethos of parody. And as for the relation of the discussion to historical avant-garde ideas - there is certainly a continuance here in the challenge to the unified concept of self. But mind you, we are talking about feminist writers at the end of the twentieth century. Their texts respond to a different "composition" of the century (Stein). They connect intertextually with the historical avant-garde but certainly not with the misogynist writing of the predominantly masculine group of writers. I'm rather thinking here of Gertrude Stein's legacy, of her parody attacking and distorting the masculine

views of the feminine.

You are right the idea of unitary self of liberal humanism or the nineteenth-century ideology of metaphysical selfhood has been discredited, although it is still held by many. For liberal humanists the relation of the Cartesian self to language is "unproblematic since it exists prior to and outside language" (Smith "Self" 11). So naturally there is no problem of narrating or representing such a pre-linguistic self. Benveniste, however, has shown that it is "language [that] provides the very definition of man" (234) and that "the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language" (226); subjectivity is then linguistically and discursively produced. It sounds simple but Benveniste did not think of genderizing language. Feminist linguists, critics and writers, however, have shown that women do not have the same place of enunciation as men. In contemporary patriarchal culture, the feminine is the spoken subject and not the subject of enunciation. The subject position in language is denied to women. This obviously creates difficulties for a woman writer. The question many women writers ask is: "How to inscribe the feminine subject in discourse and the dominant ideology without being inscribed in its norms" (Masse 75)?

Marie

LETTER

Aren't we in cyberspace where the concept of self is nothing more but a fiction? We can mask, alter and multiply our identities. This is the realm of the protean self. I wonder why most of us choose to act as academics? Eve

LETTER

I have read many critical works on the problem of subjectivity (I would really recommend Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject*, Kristeva's work and Godard's articles on language), and I am amazed by the interest of critics in this area. Well, I guess we have to start thinking about it, too. Don't worry, I will not be summarizing here the vast research on subjectivity. I'd like to focus on Canadian feminist writing and the way it handles subjectivity. And of course I must distinguish here between English Canada and Quebec as the differences in intellectual traditions have had a big impact on the formation of feminist aesthetics in both cultural areas. I think that one of my files could be useful for our discussion. Here it is:

File # 1

In English Canada there is a bigger impact of the American language empirical studies and its concept of woman as "a negative linguistic space", "descriptive linguistics" and the "expressive theory of language (writing regarded as transcription, translation of sensation)" (Godard. "The Language" 45). This theory promotes women's identity and experience based on a conception of the "unary subject," "closely related to traditional concepts of consciousness,

where the self is seen as a homogenous, consistent whole" (Kristeva, *Desire* 19). French feminist theory, on the other hand, originating in the tradition of language-centred philosophy, semiotics and deconstructive theory of language, has had a bigger influence on Québec and consequently on Anglo-Québec writers. The concept of "unary subject" is opposed here to the one of "split subject" and "subject in process"; "[w]riting is not transcription but inscription, a means of resisting language through a foregrounding of process" (Godard, "The Language" 46). Subjectivity is no longer understood in humanist terms; the subject is "a free agent" that is "constructed and positioned within discourse[s] whose codes are legitimated by social institutions" (Godard "Critical Discourse" 275). In the French tradition, language and subjectivity are theorized within an explicit socio-political framework, in relation to power, and existing ideologies. French feminists do not focus on *sexist language* as Anglo-American feminists do in their search for discriminatory words, phrases, grammatical and syntactical structures. Language for them is not merely an empirical object, a system of naming or communication but a powerful generative force. Various schools of feminist criticism have had an impact on Canadian discourse: radical and cultural feminists, essentialists and social constructionists, cultural feminists and poststructuralists. These diverse names simply rename the basic tension between so called Anglo-American and French feminisms, or what Paul Smith refers to as French theory and Anglo-American practice (135). I am using the terms American and French feminist theory to refer to "a grounding in a particular intellectual tradition, rather than simply to the nationality of the individual critic" (Felski 20). I believe that all comments about American and French feminisms are necessarily limited as the current development of feminist discourse precludes the use of such labels. I agree with Elaine Showalter that national stereotypes can no longer be accepted and taking refuge behind national banners in the 1990s is "intellectually indefensible and politically retrograde" (*Sister's Choice* 6). It is interesting to observe that while in other literatures there is an intense conflict between supporters of the two schools of feminist thought, in Canada both discourses form a basis for a productive dialogue and cross-fertilization of ideas.

Paul Smith stresses the need to look for a notion of subjectivity which will "satisfy both the demands of theory and the exigencies of practice" (xxxiii). The theory and practice of feminism have to be reconciled in order to be an effective movement changing women's lives in contemporary society. Here a return to Bakhtin and to his thought is

crucial because it provides a theoretical background for the merging of empirical and textual feminism. All of the key Bakhtinian categories: dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony and carnival embrace simultaneously the textual, the contextual or the empirical. Bakhtin never dissociates textual practices from social and historical processes. Apart from Bakhtin, Charles Peirce's theories also could be used for the new conceptualization of subjectivity.

I guess, I should stop here.

Jennifer

LETTER

Gosh, what a lecture you've given us! It is dry theory stuff, not carnivalistic at all, and one day you talked about carnivalization of theoretical/theatrical discourse. But I guess, the old way of theorizing is so ingrained in us that it is not easy to break the boundary of standard academic writing. I must say, however, that I found the information very useful. You've mentioned such new concepts as "split subject" and "subject-in-process," but I guess you realize that new conceptualizations of subjectivity are being formed all the time, or in other words, the traditional self is being re-written, re-translated into alternative concepts. I'm thinking here of the "collaborative self," and "self as performance" (Judith Butler), "specular self" (Luce Irigaray, Anne Herrmann), polyphonic self, maenadic self (Rachel Blau DuPlessis) or nomadic one (Rosi Braidoti). All of these concepts are attempts at redefining a new feminine

subjectivity and all of them define subjectivity in relation to an/other. They venture at exploring a different vision of "subjectivity as embodied, sexually differentiated, multiple and relational" (Braidoti 276) (see Jane Gallop's *Thinking Through the Body* or Susan Suleiman's *The Female Body in Western Culture*). Wasn't the Cartesian self pure disembodied reason?! We are talking about the concept of self and subjectivity but we seem to forget about its connection with the notion of identity, as constituted by "class, race, ethnicity and other axes of power relations" (Butler 4).

What interests me is the impact of the new "feminist philosophy of embodiment" (Braidoti 219) on the writing itself. The practice of writing becomes sexualized! In the past we have discussed the somatization of language and the semiotization of the body. Why don't we have a look at the way the writers question the traditional Cartesian concept of a unified self? We could also examine how they simultaneously enact an alternative concept of subjectivity. Grace

LETTER

At this stage of our discussion I invite you to present your research and reading on texts that interest you. You have a chance to rehearse your ideas before writing the final paper. Adam

LETTER

This is an attempt at a "subject focused" reading of Scott's "spaces like stairs." Don't ridicule me. This is just a preliminary exploration of some of the ideas I have been reading about.

The philosophical question posed at the beginning of the text is not uttered by a decisive authoritative voice. The voice that ventures the discussion of the concept of reality is hesitant and lacking in confidence. It even seems afraid to pose the question! This indecisiveness is emphasized by the gap between the words "what's real?" (107) and a series of disjunctive noun phrases. This is certainly not a transcendental ego speaking a rational discourse of assertion and possession. It turns out that the utterance is uttered by the pronominal collective female "we."

I find it striking that Scott translates her ideas into the plural "we." Doesn't it smack of a universal female "we," a position ripe for criticism? Nevertheless, the "we," the collective agency, can be read as an instance of what Spivak refers to as "the performance of a certain identity," as "a strategic necessity" ("Rhetoric" 257). The choice of the plural "we" may also suggest a "collective resistance against those structures that support fixed identities" (Spivak "Rhetoric" 257). One thing is certain; the plural "we" as it is presented in the text is not monologic; it does not drown

its constituent voices but listens to them : "but one says...another: ..." (109). The "we" is not in the position of absolute authority, either. The possessive form of the pronoun, "our," is bracketed, which emphasizes its uncertain and indeterminate status in the discourse. It may seem that the text insists on the dialogue of female voices, that it is an attempt at a unitary female discourse, but according to Bakhtin language is never unitary; in such a case the utterances of the text must dialogue with the masculine as well, must speak in conflict with the language of the other. Apart from the masculine "erect I" in "daddy saying do as I say" (110), there is another male voice traversing the space of the text: "you women are excellent at translation" (110). The source of this affirmative voice is not specified but it is likely that it is one of the voices of the marginalized and silenced male groups. The juxtaposition of the male and female voices confirms the dialogic character of the space created in Scott's writing. It is a heteroglossic space full of multiple and conflicting voices. It is also a space of individual heteroglossia which questions the concept of Cartesian individualism. Don't you think the text inscribes the current feminist call for a plurality of voices, for alterity within subjectivity?

The position of the collective "we" is undermined by the pronominal "she" which repeatedly reminds "we" that "she's

repeating herself" (107, 109, 111). I recall Benveniste's observation that the third person singular is the pronoun of the nonperson (*Problems* 251-7). The use of the pronominal "she" emphasizes then the traditional position of woman in language. The sentence "she's repeating herself" when uttered for the first time, is made visible in the text and it seems to be a deliberate citation of a scolding, derisive and authoritative masculine voice. It does not recognize the "we" as having a subject position. Later, however, the "we" seems to appropriate and re-vision the phrase "she's repeating herself." I can hear a different voice speaking in "you're repeating yourself," a voice which is no longer mocking, but accepting and understanding. So finally when "she's repeating herself" "she's glad" (111) as she recognizes repetition as a necessary process of the creation of "standards for a new culture" (108). Doesn't a process of repetition entail "a constant process of recreation" (Braidoti 263), negotiations and transformations? It was Stein who years ago said "there is no such thing as repetition"!

Although the pronominal variation in tone seems to be a facile transformation of the traditional position of woman in language, I think that what Scott is doing here is the exploration of double voicing which allows her to achieve a transformance of woman's object position in discourse. The

"she" is no longer objectified. The discourse itself is no longer masculine. Scott inscribes the female subject, both the "we" and "she" is self-reflexive, being able to reflect on its own position in discourse. The female subject as a theoretical construct seems to have appropriated the position of the masculine, but in fact it is a different subjectivity altogether. It is a re-negotiation of an alternative position.

I would argue that Scott enacts here one of current dialogues in feminist theoretical discourse regarding the alternative formation of female subjectivity. Her ideas are close to French feminist ideas on the subject, and especially to Irigaray's concept of the specular or self-reflexive subject, which is based "on recognition of the other not as object but as 'an/other subject'" (Herrmann *Dialogic* 6). The concept of specularity, "posits the subject as dialogized", as "representing both a subject and an object position" (Herrmann *Dialogic* 27); in short a subject as "gendered in dialogue with itself as other" (Herrmann *Dialogic* 28), and consequently self-reflexive. This is a position which women writers as essayists strive for, as the essay traditionally functions as "a dance of the intellect" although it does not forget to be the dance of the body. I believe that the pronoun "she" in Scott's text functions as "the simultaneity of the subject and object in the state of reciprocity" (Herrmann 24). The self-

reflexivity of the subject is emphasized relentlessly. Nearly every statement is questioned or reflected upon!

It may seem that Scott's focus is entirely on a textual pronominal play. She indeed enacts the Derridean concept of textuality when she allows the text to speak: "what ideas are 'in' now asks the text?" (107). However, she does not allow the text to speak beyond the control of the speaking subject and disseminate meaning in the act of endless textual semiosis: "no, halt this way of thinking" (107). This is another instance of double voicing aimed at ironizing the current interest in Derridean theories which are interested in women only as "floating signifiers." Women's theorizing, on the other hand, as Scott's text proves, is close to their lives. It is not a result of a textual play only but of a dialogic interaction between the phenomenal and textual realities. To emphasize such a stance Scott inserts a fragment of narrative which throws light on the real forces of power operating in the society, and especially in the male-dominated institution of the academy.

In the section entitled "prologue" the speaker points to differences between male and female perception occasioned by watching a melodrama. The focus is on the kissing scene which prompts me to analyze the notion of a cinematic spectator. I am immediately reminded of the psychoanalytic interpretations of voyeuristic male gaze, the masculine position of viewing,

objectification of women and Mulvey's theories about "a 'masculinization' of the spectator position regardless of the actual sex" ("Afterthoughts" 12). In Scott's text, however, there is a female spectator who not only identifies herself with the heroine but manages to maintain her self-reflexivity: "she's herself and Claudette at the same time" (108)! She is neither "too close (absorbed in her own image as the object of narcissistic desire) [n]or too far (assuming the alienated distance necessary to identification with the male voyeur)" (Stam *New* 177). She is both self and other--a perfect Irigarayan image of the specular self!

I know it's been too long a message, but I've decided to rehearse my ideas for the essay I'm writing on the "spaces like stairs". I invite any criticism!

Jennifer

LETTER

Your detailed discussion of "spaces like stairs" has been very illuminating to me. I'm not sure I can offer you a constructive critique. It seems to me that you've grasped the crucial aspects of the new theories of subjectivity, and your reading lets me look at the text differently. Being honest I read it mainly as a translation of a split schizophrenic subjectivity, and I concentrated mainly on the interpretation

suggested to me by the psychological discourse on hysteria. You don't mention it, and I think that it is another perspective you could take into consideration. Joan

LETTER

I don't think that your discussion that focuses on the pronominal play is politically effective. Why not focus on embodied social subjects? Why not discuss the question of Canadian imagination? And I don't like this excessive linguistico-feminist jargon. Eve

LETTER

Jennifer's analysis of "spaces like stairs" made me re-read Betsy Warland's "cutting re/marks" and Mouré's "To Speak of These Things" - this time with a focus on the problem of the self. Isn't it remarkable how many complex issues these texts inscribe? It seems to me that through our reading, writing and listening to each other our understanding of feminist language texts is no longer as limited as at the beginning of the course - or is it wishful thinking ...? The message is also a rehearsal for my essay, so please be patient with me.

At the beginning I have thought that the speaking subject of "cutting re/marks" is a traditional autobiographical self, but the very fact that she presents herself in a lower case

"i" undeniably implies a revolt against the Cartesian concept of egotistic self. Moreover, there are so many other voices allowed to speak in the text that the "i" loses not only its status of the primary speaker but also the command of her discourse. The heteroglossia of the text exposes the circulation of power in the various discourses of society. The voice of the female "i" is intermingled with masculine voices of discourses which have shaped her subjectivity. The authoritative patriarchal discourses of medicine, science and politics are deftly juxtaposed with the autobiographical narrative and a series of performative phrases like "have it out/think it out/ ... cut it out" (96-97). Both masculine and feminine positions can be read in these phrases, but a reference to "you" enacts otherness, the traditional passive position of female subjects. But it is the female "i" speaking here and the "other" is an/other woman, who is not in the position of the "other" any more, but in the position of alterity. The performative phrases can also be read as enactments of heteroglossic alterity within the subject itself. The Other is already within and a space for a dialogue is created. I know that it was Bakhtin and Peirce who found alterity "within the very subject who is himself an open dialogue between the sign and the interpretant" (Ponzio 286), but I also know that female alterity was not on the agenda of both critics. If Warland is enacting any theoretical discourse

in this text it is the Irigarayan concept of the specular subject as both self and other. The concept of specularity allows for the possibility of a female dialogic, as Herrmann argues, "it constructs the subject as gendered in dialogue with itself as other" (28).

Similarly in Erin Mouré's "To Speak of These Things: A Letter," the speaking "I" is not unified. Again a plural "we" is used here, but it turns out that the pronoun refers not to a group of women but to a heteroglossic subjectivity, whose voices constantly shift from the position of "we" to "I" and "you" - "erin of 10 years ago" (133). Again, the other is already within and it is female! Mouré's text enacts the discourse on the processual nature of self and engenders it as feminine: "But you, Erin, can't play this trick on me because you are me, becoming who I am, and I am the one who can question your passing" (134) (emphasis mine). What I find problematic here is that the past self has a life of its own and is not really in a dialogue with the current self. The speaker says : "you are me, becoming who I am and I am the one who can question your passing" (134). The present self is presented as authoritative and condescending. It is a theoretically aware self which is critical towards the "other" or rather an/other self (the other as alterity) which is uninitiated into current feminist and critical literary

discourses. Mouré's text as the study of internal heteroglossia, offers an enactment of the struggle for power taking place between the American and French feminisms.

Marie

LETTER

Marie, don't use phrases such as "it undeniably implies" - nothing is beyond doubt in the language texts and for that matter in the world around us. If I were you I would concentrate on the collage structure of the text and show how such a consciously chosen form of writing denies any unitary notion of subjectivity. And as for your observation on "the struggle for power ... between the American and French feminisms," I think you need to be more specific here. Explain what you mean by the terms. Go back to Jennifer's posting on the problem. You'll find it in the "mail box" under "Jennifer." Joan

LETTER

I think it's fair to say that all of the language texts we've discussed here and in the class resist a unified notion of the self. The form/structure of the texts themselves foregrounds a split, or multiple, polyphonic subjectivity. I'm thinking here of Tostevin's or Mouré's double-voiced poems,

Warland's collage structure of *serpent (w)rite*, or Scott's and Tostevin's novels as open structure texts. All of them make it impossible to form a coherent, unified voice. Listen to what Tostevin says: "The 'I' in my books is an ongoing 'I,' an ever-changing 'I': the 'subject-in-process,' to use Kristeva's term" ("inventing" 274). And here she means "a divided subject of conscious and unconscious drives...the subject [that] operates between bi-physical drives and social constraints" ("breaking" 387). She is also interested in the multiplicity of the selves or, as she states in an interview, in the "polyphonic presence of the self, where we have many versions of the 'I,' many stories to tell" ("Sounding" 34). Doesn't she adopt Bakhtin's concept of polyphony which, similar to "dialogism" and "heteroglossia," calls attention to the coexistence of a plurality of voices in the self? In *Frog Moon* the image of "matroshka" (the Russian doll) brilliantly translates the concept of the multiple polyphonic self:

The child who spoke French is no longer the adult who speaks English. She is the smallest doll in a set of nested dolls ... each doll living within another version of herself, as in a vault.

(24)

The self is constantly changing, nothing stays the same; it is impossible to know another human being, there are parts "that will always be foreign to you" (191). The self is a complex

structure of multiple selves (the childhood self, the imaginary self, the inherited self, the adult self, etc.). The concept of metamorphosis drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* epitomises Tostevin's idea of never-ending transformations of language and subjectivity. Translation itself is a kind of linguistic metamorphosis. Rick

LETTER

We keep referring to the Bakhtinian concept of the polyphonic self, or to the dialogic theory of self, but we forget that Bakhtin's theory is gender neutral and it does not account for the self-reflexivity of a female subject. His dialogics explores a discourse between two subjects; all words and utterances are dialogized as they always contain the words of both sender and receiver. For Irigaray, on the other hand, as Anne Herrmann explains:

the struggle for the female subject begins before the entrance into a language which has already foreclosed the possibility of a female subjectivity, and yet that subject cannot exist outside language. The subject struggles to rewrite itself as a subjectivity by representing both a subject and an object position. For Bakhtin this means responding to and anticipating the word of another; for Irigaray it means being neither one nor two, neither open nor closed, never the copy of someone else's original. (emphasis mine)

(27)

The Irigarayan concept of specularity combined with Bakhtin's ideas allow for the possibility of a female dialogic: "it

constructs the subject as gendered in dialogue with itself as other" (Herrmann *Dialogic* 28). The dialogic is rewritten as "specularity (female subject as dialogized) and as alterity" (Herrmann *Dialogic* 31). I think that Herrmann's female dialogics is certainly more appropriate for the analysis of feminist language texts. David

LETTER

What about the concept of femina semiotica you mentioned in class? I think I understand the notion of the specular subject, but "femina semiotica"? What do you mean by it?

Dick

LETTER

I'm not sure I want to introduce another critical term, a term which, in fact, I invented on the basis of Peirce's theory and its re-reading by such critics as Wojciech Kalaga. It is a very complex theory but it contains useful ideas that I consider crucial for the feminist concept of the self-reflexive subject. As you already know the existent linguistic theories deny women roles as active, self-reflexive subjects in language, although feminist language writing proves them wrong. We've examined many texts and we've decided that self-reflexivity is indeed part of their writing. How do

we account for it? Herrmann's female dialogics is one solution, and I believe that Charles Peirce's theory is another. I've been wondering why his theory has been neglected by the majority of feminist critics and writers. My research shows that only Teresa de Laurentis in *Alice Doesn't* suggests the usefulness of Peirce's theory for the analysis of feminist writing. And this theory provides an incredibly useful theorization of the position of a conscious self-reflexive subject! I will download one of my files for those students who are still patient enough to absorb more theory. What follows is indeed a watered down version of the theory. If you are interested, you can contact me for a reading list.

FILE # 4

First Peirce's triadic semiotics implies the inevitability of interpretation in any cognitive process. His theory allows one to speak in a theoretically justified way about the concept of the subject which not only is dependent on signification but is itself an active participant in semiosis. The notion of interpretation as integral to cognition is entailed in the very concept of his triadic sign - the sign whose meaning is an *interpretant*. The sign involves a mutually dependent coexistence of three necessary correlates: sign (the representamen), the object, and the interpretant. The interpretant is not only the meaning of the sign, but is itself a sign in its own right, and as such it has its own interpretant, "[t]he interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad finitum*" (Peirce 2.303). Representation or semiosis, in this view, is "the capability of the endless translation of sign into sign" (Peirce 2.153).

From the perspective of triadic semiotics no sign can exist in isolation. This is also true of the dyadic sign, the Saussurean unity of *signifiant/ signifié*. However, if for Saussure and the tradition following him, the sign depends on other signs in a negative way and it is defined by the

difference from those other signs, for Peirce the sign's dependence on the semiotic system is positive. The emphasis in the triad is on the fact that the sign exists because it is interpreted in and through other signs: "No sign can function as such except so far as it is interpreted in another sign" (Peirce 8.225, note). INTERPRETABILITY THEN CAN BE REGARDED AS AN ONTOLOGICAL NECESSITY; the sign exists because it translates itself into another sign; sign exists in and through interpretation. INTERPRETATION IS THEREFORE NOT ONLY AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CATEGORY BUT ALSO AN ONTOLOGICAL ONE. If the semiotic nature of subjectivity is rooted in Saussurean tradition it inevitably carries the stigma of passivity. Within the tradition of the semiology of the dyadic sign the semiotic nature of subjectivity cannot be seen in all its dimensions and in particular its active aspect lacks sufficient space and ground for theorization (Kalaga 26-7). Within triadic semiotics, on the other hand, the subject participates in endless semiosis. The subject - construed as sign - is inherently immersed in interpretation.

In Peirce the subject is given an identity (the mode of being as interpretation) and a reflexive status. Kalaga refers to such a subject as "homo semioticus" (34). It is a subject whose mode of existence is interpretation construed as both an epistemological and ontological category, as both *being-becoming* and *knowing-understanding*, or in other words, as the self-interpreting subject, or *homo semioticus* (Kalaga 34). How does the concept of "homo semioticus" relate to feminist theorizations of the subject? There is no specific reference in Peirce to the gender of the subject, and his theory may be another patriarchal hypothesis. His theory, however, does not relate to subjects without bodies and male bodies are not the only presences in the world! It can be argued that Peirce does not exclude a female interpretant, because his concept of habit suggests a "subject physically implicated or bodily engaged in the production of meaning, representation and self-representation" (de Laurentis Alice 183). Habit is a result of a process involving emotion, muscular and mental exertion, and some kind of conceptual representation. If we use or receive signs, we produce interpretants. The significant effects must pass through each of us, each body and each consciousness, before they may produce an effect or an action upon the world. Male and female bodies are different, and they undergo a different production of meaning. Experience, as defined by de Laurentis, is "a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world,' the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality" (Alice 182). The social and the inner reality of women can be

different from that of men. The female subject is constituted in a particular relation to social reality. If we take the concept of "homo semioticus" as being-becoming and knowing-understanding (ontological and epistemological) and try to feminize it, it is necessary to take into consideration a specific historical and social reality of female subjects, and not the alleged privileged nearness to nature, the body or the unconscious. Semiosis, in general, specifies the mutual overdetermination of meaning, perception and experience between the subject and social reality, which, in the subject, entail a continual modification of consciousness; that consciousness in turn can condition social change. Experience and perception of the female subject can be determined by various discourses of society, but the female subject, within a framework of triadic semiotics, is not a passive receptor of meaning, but an active, self-constituting and self-interpreting subject.

With this in mind, I decided to use the term *femina semiotica*. I think that the whole theory is a very good illustration of creative processes in the self-reflexive feminist language writing project. Adam

LETTER

We've been talking too much theory! But then, if I agree with Peirce's concept of theory as both an ontological and epistemological necessity, I must admit that there is no way out of it, unless I decide to work within a totally different concept of language. Honestly, the details of his theory seem to be extremely complicated (I know you only skimmed through major points), but the conclusions, especially about the concept of subject as necessarily self-interpretive and an active agent in discourse are very encouraging. I like the term *femina semiotica*, although I'm not sure how I would react

if someone used this phrase to address me. Sometimes I think that we desperately try to come up with concepts that are just problematic and not really necessary ... but I guess I'm wrong. We need to find alternative ways of conceptualizing our existence.

Gail Scott, for instance, is stressing that we must be "ready to upset the power on which the whole Oedipean drama is based" (*Spaces* 123), and "create a new female subject-in-process through the act of writing" which is also "a process of deconstructing traditional fictions about women" (*Spaces* 62). I'm fascinated by the way she's doing it. She is not only examining Kristeva's concept of subject-in-process, but also the concept of self as performance/ or identity as performance. She focuses on the working of female desire (how inconceivable in the Oedipal scenario!) and how it circulates "through the masks" that we "adopt in our various roles: mother, writer, militant, lover, friend" (*Spaces* 34). What do you think about this idea of adopting masks? Doesn't it suggest power and control? Scott's "heroines" indeed wear different masks, act out various identities. Their subjectivity is definitely not fixed but dynamically created and inherently relational. The self-reflexive process of narration in *Heroine* and *Main Brides* shows the tension between the narrators' desire to maintain rigid individual boundaries

and the conflicting desire to merge across those boundaries into alternative subjectivities. It is desire alternating between a rational, bounded subjectivity and an excessive, unbounded subjectivity. Think of Linda, the narrator of *Main Brides*. She tries to define her "self" and the "self" of others. At the same time, however, she invents characters that question such monologic desire and reveal her craving for a multiple self, or as she says, for a "dispersed, fragmented" self (147). Paradox? Contradiction? Yes, but this is part of the carnivalesque ambivalence and excess that Scott examines in her writing. Her carnivalesque characters (obviously a parody of the unary self!) consciously distance themselves from the roles culture has prescribed for women. She stresses that "her carnival is a performance of subjects of new sort subjects which... keep dividing into actor, spectator. But divide to recompose again" (*Spaces* 134). In such a case identity is regarded as performance, and you certainly remember our class discussion of Judith Butler's ideas on the problem, and Gayatri Spivak's argument about "the performance of a certain identity" as "a strategic necessity, to support collective resistance against those structures that support fixed identities" ("Rhetoric" 257). I have been wondering, however, whether such a concept is only another protest against fixed rigid concepts or perhaps an affirmation that

identity and gender are constructed, learned and not necessarily determined by the body type. Joan

LETTER

There is an excellent illustration of what Joan is saying in Scott's *Main Brides*, in the chapter entitled "Z. WHO LIVES OVER THE SIGN SHOP."

Z. is described as "Female junkie. *Vogue* model. Pisces Woman. Aging Punk" (139); she is a "New Wave Artist," a performance artist interested in cross-dressing; it is the clothing that lets her adopt different personae, "worn like masks" (144): be it a mandarin, Pierrot (145), a drag queen (142), a guru, nurturer (146), a lesbian (148). In a performance called *Dys-sexion* she changes from male to female, from Pierrot to "a woman dressed in sequined green" (145); "on the video screen the body represented as androgynous, bilingual: two halves placed atop, a cross" (146). A constant metamorphosis! You've certainly noticed that many other characters engage in gender acts (Adele in the officer's uniform ("Main Bride Remembers Halifax," or the lesbians in "Night Music" who dress as men to tango). And the narrator's statement about language as "inadequate to synthesize Z.'s essence" (157), applies to all of them. What is their essence? Perhaps it is the self-conscious ability to perform the gender

drama which challenges all heterosexual norms? These women construct their own identity! I think that the portraits in *Main Brides* serve not only as a parodic translation of a stable self and of the essentialist gender norms, but also as an assertion of the alternative concepts of self/ identity/ gender as performative.

Moreover, Scott's focus on lesbian desire is also another way of parodying heterosexual norms, and the traditional Oedipal narrative. Her texts parody Freudian sexuality, and the whole romance of heterosexual love. Both *Heroine* and *Main Brides* can be read as parodic rewriting of the Oedipal drama (and here I'm referring to the journey of the female through phallic phases, penis envy, castration complex to the fulfilment of her biological destiny, reproduction (De Laurentis *Desire* 132)). In *Heroine*, for instance, there is a tension between the obvious strategies of patriarchal romance and a narrative of female desire (see the recurrent romantic clichés: "my love," "I'm sorry my love," or "still, my love, I wonder do I look good because your arms keep me from bleeding all over town in search of love? Like I was before.

Oh Mama why'd you put this hole in me?" (31)

Scott's women explore the possibility of living beyond the law of the father. Once their acts break the heterosexual norms, the question of gender is no longer something definite. The

Oedipal scenario is no longer obeyed, or as Linda Kaufmann says, "when gender is undecidable, the entire psychoanalytic structure which erects Oedipus as the master trope is displaced" (*Special* 111).

Jennifer

LETTER

We've been examining multiple conceptualizations of subjectivity but we seem to have forgotten about the notion of collaborative self. I've just re-read some of Warland and Marlatt's texts. I must say that now that I know more about critical and theoretical discourse I find the texts much more intriguing. Now I would agree with you that carnivalesque writing is very convincing and that it is an appealing revolutionary project, but I must admit that without the theoretical background my understanding would be different. I wouldn't have noticed many crucial points of such writing. Aren't we all accustomed to a comfortable passive consumption of literature? David

LETTER

I agree that language writing is not easy to "consume," but it is a feast once you become a "partner reader" in the "dance of the intellect," body and passion. Do I exaggerate?

No, no, no... But let's focus on the collaborative writing of Warland and Marlatt. Now when I think of the idea, don't we engage in collaboration ourselves? We exchange ideas on specific issues, we respond to each other's queries and we do enjoy, I hope I'm right here, the whole exercise! Obviously our attempts at collaboration are of a totally different nature - let's call them collaborative critical re-reading exercises.

I guess you know that Betsy Warland and Daphne Marlatt started their collaborative writing projects with their individual long distance poems (*Touch to My Tongue* and *open is broken*) which they wrote simultaneously as a poetic, critical and erotic response to their own writing and reading. Later they engaged in the production of collaborative texts in which their individual voices are not clearly distinguished (*Double Negative*, *Between the Lines* and *Subject to Change*). In these texts their selves are dialogized and their identities blurred, but still "*there is not we but i+i*" (*Subject* no pagination). There is a constant tension between desire for a bounded subjectivity and desire to merge with the other. And this is not a heterosexual exercise (again a parody of Freudian Oedipal scenario!). It is lesbian intimacy as art:

(p)art of each other ...generative power of our intimacy...sexing the page lesbian. in our profound plurality

Bev

LETTER

I find it very appealing that Warland's and Marlatt's collaboration is restricted to not only an interpersonal dialogue, but is, in fact, an intra- and inter-textual dialogue focusing on a myriad of issues and exploring various discourses, including the ecofeminist, lesbian, colonial and theoretical. And what is important to our discussion - the act of collaborative writing allows Marlatt and Warland to question and undermine the traditional, unitary voice of authority, to subvert the monological concept of the subject, and substitute it with a "polylogue", with the "plurality" of their voices ("Reading" 80).

They respond to each other in their language-focused texts and they also comment on the experience of collaboration itself. It is a combination then of creative associative writing with a self-reflexive critical project. "Femina semiotica" at work?

you know how hard it is to edit a collaboration - you can't rewrite what you say/ without affecting what i say in response

(Subject no pagination)

we have a different understanding of form & process -- form is more organic for you. for me form is something we make in collaboration with the poem, a 3rd entity which

develops its own process as we continue. for you the poem is the trace of our collaboration for me the poem is something we collaborate in collaborating with.

(Subject no pagination)

Their texts foreground the triadic linguistic process that never overlooks the reader:

everything entered subject to change, subject to transformation in the reader's imaginary, the reader being she, after all, who constructs meaning.

(Subject no pagination)

Rick
LETTER

There is another thing which intrigues me about Warland's and Marlatt's texts: I'm thinking of their homophonic play with language and of their writing as translation of self into a linguistic sign, of the traces of their body in the form of punctuation, of their somatic verbo-visual writing:

yes, i+i. i for an i and i to i. my handwritten i looking very much like a semicolon punctuation indicating a degree of separation intermediate in value between the comma and the period. ii- the Roman numeral for 2 or ; ; a double semicolon, where the separation between the comma and the period is amplified. double ambiguity. doubled possibility.

(Subject)

i abandons her introductory clause for a being between comma and illusory period. she needs their double jeopardy of/discovery more than her differentiating declarations, but she /knows old habits die hard.

(Subject)

The pronouns "i" and "we" are dispersed in language

between words and within words. They permeate language and become part of it. In such a dialogic vision of the linguistic universe "the object transforms into subject and back again. i being part of/ (i)t" (no pagination). The subject, the "i," dialogues with the inanimate universe, becomes part of "(i)t" - Ecological vision! The first person plural pronoun ("we"), normative and prescriptive, once the property of male discourse, is being appropriated by a female collaborative subject. It gives women autonomy and validates the position of a woman as subject of enunciation. Here again I am reminded of Bakhtin's denial of a "single authorial consciousness"; in a polyphonic text there is a mingling of voices which do not belong to anyone, a "*plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*" (*Problems* 6). Marie

LETTER

There is one thing I'd like to add to our discussion. I think it's important to mention that the word collaboration has military connotations and that Marlatt and Warland perform an interesting parodic transference/rewriting of the concept in their "Reading and Writing Between the Lines." They rewrite the military into somatic and erotic "labial imagery." A subversive act of perception allows them to notice the word "labia" in "collaboration." And from here through a series of

such associations as:

labial, that is letter of the lips (82)

labium/ any of the four folds of tissue of the female external genitalia (82)

you & me *collabi*, (*to slip together*) (83)

The term "collaboration" is metamorphosed into "labialization" between "LABILE LOVERS" (83), "'prone to undergo displacement in position or change in nature, form, chemical composition; unstable'" (83).

"Labile lovers" are in a constant change - metamorphosing in the same way as language metamorphoses and transforms the definitive into fluid, unstable and questionable. Collaboration as erotic and not a military exercise! Jennifer

LETTER

And again this linguistic play! How much of it can we bear these days? Is it still effective? What happened to Canadian imagination? Why not explore ideas in a serious manner and not leave everything to the play of language? And as for the social significance of this kind of writing - I start having doubts. The texts may inscribe an ecological vision, a vision of social equality, etc., but does the linguistic play have a real impact on society? I know you are

not listening to my comments, so perhaps I quote David Manicom's opinion about language-focused writing:

The focus on language, the tired fallout of the bombshell insights of Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Cixous, and others, gradually creates a sensation of wild overstatement. More and more one needs to retort that ... linguistic structures themselves are weak things that do not torture dissidents, sexually molest children, rape women, corrupt governments. Sexist diction is caused by sexism, to speak broadly, not vice versa. English grammar hasn't much to do with the Canadian social structure, otherwise women would be freer by now in China, with its egalitarian pronouns, and society more hierarchical in Quebec or Russia than in England because of the central *tu-vous* distinction in French and Russian. The transposition of linguistic terms into social and political terms is usually unsound...lower case letters are neither NDP nor avant-garde, as Bill Bissett proves annually. Stalin could not constrain Russian, and Yeltsin cannot liberate it. Lenin and Sakharov imbibed the same grammar from birth; one was a cynical butcher, the other a great and gentle spirit.

(208)

Eve

LETTER

Since the semester is coming to a close and exams are upon us, I thought we could end up our discussion at this point. Nevertheless, you are welcome to continue the conversation if you feel like it. Some of you have enjoyed the form of online discussion more than others. We expressed our desire for a carnivalesque theory, but we only touched upon it; we still ended up with a serious critical analysis! Old habits die hard! But at least we ventured into a dialogic format. I hope that the additional outlet for presenting and

rehearsing of our ideas on reading was a chance for many of us to engage in a dialogue or polylogue to a degree that the class discussions not always allowed. A written response to language focused writing has generated a serious analysis of many of the texts and I believe that we all benefited from the exercise. I would like to thank all the participants of the online group who have made this event possible. Adam

LETTER

I have been ignored all the time. Even in cyberspace, in this virtual classroom, there is no place for dissent, no place for carnival. Eve

LETTER

Eve, I found your messages whiney, snotty and extremely reductive. You sounded as though you wanted the discussion to cater to your own tastes and interests. You take an extreme position when you sneer at the socio-political impact of language writing. You know very well that language as a medium can manipulate us if we are not vigilant enough. And I believe that language writing can make us recognize the extent of ideological manipulation. I wonder at your question, "What happened to Canadian imagination?" Since when is imagination the only criterion? Are you implying that there should be such a thing as a one trick/measure/standard by which we rate

literature? Some of the most interesting writing being written right now is being written in Canada. In keeping with tradition, however, Canadians will be the last to realize it. If you don't like the writers we've discussed why don't you have a look at a whole generation of young practitioners - Lisa Robertson, Adeena Karasick or Christian Bök. They certainly resist absorption into a lyrical imaginative lingo economy, but it is very much by design that they do so. I'm sure some of your derision is reserved for these writers, but I think that's too bad, "cause they ain't listening." Adam

CHAPTER SIX

CARNIVALIZATION OF GENRE: GENERIC NOMADISM AND
"CONSTRUCTIVE WRITING" PRACTICE

The format I choose for this section of the thesis is a critical ideogram in the form of collage. Various forms of collage structure are used including the cumulative, contrastive and overlapping. The ideogrammatic method is suggested to me by feminist language writing itself. The method implies a view of art as process rather than product or fixed object. It resists closure. It can operate both at the level of word and sentence and at the level of genre. I use parataxis between the entries to avoid the deterministic conventions of succession and linearity. The paratactic construction interrupts sequential and temporal alphabetic writing. Complex ideas are a result of association. The collage ideogram or intellectual collage breaks not only with the notion of the passive description and reception of literary processes but it also inscribes a dialogic interaction between the writer, the text and the reader. In ideogrammatic writing "the reader, like the writer, becomes an explorer" (Gefin 139). Readers are expected to collaborate with the writers.

The ideogrammatic method in the form of collage, montage or *métissage* is used by the writers themselves. It allows them not only to incorporate multiple genres and modes of writing within their texts but it also lets them engage in a dialogue with them. It gives them an opportunity to challenge and expose the conventions of authority (literary, social and sexual) which inscribe patriarchal ideology. Feminist writers use the strategy of collage but because they write from a feminist perspective, they also modify the form. This is achieved within the units or blocks of the ideograms themselves where a greater emphasis is placed on the intersemiotic translation between writing and the processes of the body and mind. The method itself can be regarded as an instance of intralingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation between various discourses. In contrast to Fenollosa's theory of ideogrammatic writing, it does not reject entirely the alphabetic systematic and logical language. It achieves a compromise between "the ideal of ideogrammatic synthesis and the inescapable conventions of English" as "a form of balance must be achieved between a sequential grammar of western language and the visual juxtaposition of the ideogram" (Bradford 166). The method enriches the writing,

making it both spatial and temporal or to use Peirce's terminology: iconic as well as symbolic, pictorial as well as auditory. The reading pattern can be manipulated through the layout or typography of the page in order to facilitate the process of idea formation that is simultaneously perceptual and conceptual.

CARNIVALIZATION OF GENRE:

Another legacy of the historical avant-garde. Contemporary language writing can be read as the "arrière-avant-garde" (it "functions in terms of returns and references rather than the utopian and anarchic transgressions of the avant-garde" (Foster "Against Pluralism" 23). We live in the "age of simulation" (Baudrillard 4), the age of "radical artifice" (Marjorie Perloff) and even the so-called avant-garde text is "always already" a copy (Krauss "The Originality of the Avant-Garde"), not a duplicate but a text which responds to earlier work. The reference to "arrière-avant-garde" is especially pertinent. It points to a continuous dialogue with the past, and "because it is a dialogue, it does not only involve repetition of old forms but also a response to them" (Bernstein *Content* 242).

HISTORICAL AVANT GARDE AND GENRE:

The cubists, dadaists, futurists and surrealists attacked the

traditional institution of art and its ideal of the natural organic work as "an aesthetic construct characterized by an apparent seamless synthesis of various components in a closed totality" (Berman 20). The new ideal was the "non-organic work, which insists on its own artificial character" (Berman 20) with such obvious examples as Picasso's *papiers collés* or Duchamp's ready-mades. The non-organic work allows heterogeneous elements to become part of its structure. There is a blurring of boundaries between artistic media in cubist paintings and cubist literature that encourages the blurring of genres as well (Brogan 6-7). The idea of writing as spectacle and performance and of a Total Work of Art or *Gesamtkunstwerk* becomes popular among the historical avant-garde: *visuality*, *musicality*, *literarity* and *theatricality* are important elements of avant-garde works (Ericson 69). The exploration of the "interaction of modes, genres and media within the covers of a single ... book" (Perloff *Futurist* 142) becomes a signature of the early avant-garde texts. The poetic was grafted into the political discourse in many Futurist, Dada and Surrealist manifestos that questioned the status of traditional genres and media. The manifesto itself conflated verbal strategies from different genres, be it "lyric poetry, the journalistic narrative of everyday discourse and the dialogic mode of drama which acts to draw the reader (or

viewer) into its verbal orbit" (Perloff *Futurist* 111). The popular techniques of collage or words-in-freedom foregrounded the verbo-visual space of writing. Apart from the outrageous Futurist manifestos that aimed at a continual provocation, at disrupting expectations and moving the reader to action, there was also a different type of manifesto that is regarded as a forerunner of the contemporary conceptual art. These were the manifestos of Tzara or Breton; they occupied a space "between lyric and narrative, lyric and theatre, or lyric and political statement" (Perloff *Futurist* 115). The theory was a practice for all avant-garde artists, so there is no wonder that their texts initiated the breaking of boundaries between literature and theory that is so crucial to current critical discourse.

I. FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING, GENERIC NOMADISM-GENERIC WANDERING: CONSTRUCTIVE WRITING PRACTICE

Language writers engage in a process of finding a form through a dialogic interaction with existent genres and modes of writing.

It is the form of the text that becomes a signature of a writer. It is "the contribution every artist and every human being makes to the general treasure of humanity."

(Cixous "Conversations" 143)

Feminist texts embody the idea of "constructive writing", as theorized by Bernstein on the basis of American language texts. In constructive writing as in a cubist visual work of art, the whole process of construction is assumed to be a crucial part of the work, and it is foregrounded.

In constructive writing, the outer structure or parameter, or the method by which the work is generated, is made visible, for example by its 'typographicity' or audible, for instance by its 'syntaxophony; or both.
(emphasis mine)

(Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 73)

TO SEE AND HEAR THE STRATEGY OF WRITING?

There is no escape in writing (or 'elsewhere') from structures/forms, they are everpresent - 'de'forming and 're'forming.' To see them - to hear them - as inseparable from 'content.'

(Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 71-72)

II. FOREGROUNDING OF FRAMES BURIED IN GENERIC STRUCTURES = EXPOSING RACISM AND SEXISM OF LITERARY FORM

Every significant genre is a complex system of means and methods for the conscious control and finalization of reality.

(Bakhtin *The Formal Method* 133)

It has been argued that traditional genres are monological and hence supportive of the socio-political situation. IF WOMEN WRITERS CHOOSE THE STANDARD GENRES THEY ALSO IMPLICITLY AGREE

TO THE STATUS QUO AND HENCE TO THE INVISIBILITY OF WOMAN IN A LITERARY DISCOURSE. To avoid this women writers opt for a dialogue with the patriarchal tradition. They engage in multiple acts of transgression, in multiple acts of subversive translation/transformance. In Scott's words, "the boundaries of genre are only there to step over" (*Spaces* 74).

women are excellent at translation women are skilled at stepping into spaces (forms) created by the patriarchal superego and cleverly subverting them.

(*Spaces* 110)

The choice of the dialogic approach to genre is both an aesthetic and political act:

forms of *literary* praxis are themselves specific forms of *social* praxis, ...TO CHOOSE TO WRITE IN OR ON A PARTICULAR GENRE IS ALSO TO CHOOSE A PARTICULAR MODE OF SOCIAL, NOT JUST NARROWLY AESTHETIC INTERVENTION. (capitalization mine)

(Monroe 32)

Such monologic genres as "the epic, the tragedy, the history, classical rhetoric and the like" (Bakhtin *Problems* 107) are supportive of the socio-political and socio-economic establishment. Bakhtin's central generic category of the carnivalesque refers to genres that are "multi-styled and heterovoiced" (*Problems* 108):

carnivalization constantly assisted in the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles, etc.; it

destroyed any attempt on the part of genres and styles to isolate themselves or ignore one another.

(Bakhtin *Problems* 134-5)

Bakhtin's "sociological poetics" focuses "on genre performance rather than a genre classification" (Cobley 324). Examination of performance of genre frequently reveals a transformance of monologic generic structures.

GENRE TRANSFORMANCE: Women writers not only appropriate genres and modes of writing which traditionally function as an expression of unitary thinking or, in Cixous's words, of "economy said to be M (masculine)" ("*Coming*" 150); they also work with genres that test the limits of generic classification, with forms whose "generic restlessness" (Kamboureli *On the Edge* XIV) opens new spaces for women's subversive practices of writing. They choose to explore such genres as the long poem, novel and essay, genres that are already "contaminated" by various forms of writing. Within those genres they still engage in a search for an ideal feminist space of writing.

THE REASON FOR THE MULTIPLE TACTICS OF GENRE CONTAMINATION:

getting rid of racism and sexism of generic tradition:

RACISM: Now we see genre distinctions practised as a kind of racism. The "characteristics" are learned (&what is worse, taught), strict demarcations are observed to a crippling extent [readers of novels can't read poetry, readers of poetry can't read philosophy, readers of discursive workaday prose can't read anything for very long, etc.] All of this snaps back from the praxis into the shadow of an attitude: "poet" "novelist" "dramatist" "painter" "sculptor" "critic," i.e., SUBMISSION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL DEMAND THAT EVERYONE IDENTIFY THEMSELF IN THE FORM OF A RACIAL OBSESSION. (capitalization mine)

(Rasula "Notes" 103)

SEXISM: Genre codes often intersect with gender codes of society; Susan Stanford-Friedman demonstrates "how the most prestigious genres (like poetry, drama and epic) erected threatening boundaries against women; [and] how marginal or new genres (like letters, the novel, the gothic) invited women's participation" ("When a Long Poem" 10).

III. CONSTRUCTIVE WRITING PRACTICE / COLLAGE (FEMINNAGE) AND POLITICS OF INCLUSIVENESS

I want this to be EXPLORATION, NOT PRESCRIPTIVE WRITING. All language has to be seen as material to work on. (capitalization mine)

(Scott *Spaces* 86)

The choice of the long poem, novel and essay entails an exploration of a bigger generic frame, that of collage or montage. But even this form is feminized by subversive feminist practices - turning into a collage "au feminine." The collage as a distinctly perceptual/conceptual form of writing is modified by feminist language practice that manipulates the linguistic structures dominated by the patriarchal tradition.

In language-focused feminist writing there is a tension between self-reflexivity as embodied in the collage structure and female desire as translated into the texts that explore the body-mind interrelation. The transformance of dominant genres, or genre feminization (ironist, historicist, revisionist or experimentalist (Friedman "When a Long Poem" 13)) "entails creation of a linguistically experimental gynopoetic discourse variously named "l'écriture féminine" (Cixous), "parler femme" by Irigaray, "Gynogrammar" (Warland) and "mothertongue" by Marlatt, and more generally the female "erotic" by Audre Lorde (Friedman "When a Long" 14). Carolyn Burke refers to such writing practice as a "logopoeia au féminin" ("Getting" 106), as a splicing of "feminine poetics with a logopoeic attention to language" ("Getting" 117). I call it "FEMINNAGE" to underscore THE CONFLATION OF COLLAGE WITH WRITING IN THE FEMININE.

COLLAGE: the interruption of spatial and temporal continuity in art, and an affirmation of juxtaposition, superposition, and simultaneity as dominant modes of structuringIn collage, hierarchy gives way to parataxisSuch discourse inevitably involves the viewer or reader in a new way.(renouncing of conventional framing). (emphasis mine)

(Perloff "The Invention" 42)

"Collage" is the transfer of materials from one context to another, and "montage" is the "dissemination" of these borrowings through the new setting.

(Ulmer "Object" 84)

While montage is ultimately founded upon the mental

processes, and the phenomenon of integrating disparate and distracting elements over time, collage is rooted in the icon, itself an artistic product.

(Clearfield 14)

"FEMINNAGE" - exploration of hybrid forms that mingle and confront multiple discourses. All of them operate on the basis of an ideogrammic principle and embrace various modes and forms of writing. They embody/illustrate the idea of A TOTAL WORK OF ART. Both collage and montage can be used in the composition that allows for integration of multiple genres, be they verbal or nonverbal. FEMINNAGE CAN BE REGARDED AS AN INTERSEMIOTIC COMPOSITION that also embraces inter- and intralingual translative practices. It translates not only the techniques of visual arts into writing (intersemiotic practice), but it also translates between verbal genres (prose/poetry etc.) and between languages (the dominant patriarchal one and the emerging "l'écriture féminine" as the inter-, intralingual and intersemiotic translation between body and writing).

IV. FEMINNAGE AND ITS POETICS OF INCLUSIVENESS and SELF-REFLEXIVITY: CUMULATIVE AND CONTRASTIVE FEMINNAGE

Feminist language texts are multi-genre compositions, COLLAGES OF VARIOUS FORMS OF WRITING.

This inclusiveness of collage entails openness to the world of discourses and their use for creative ends. The various discourses are like the "objets trouvés" of Cubism or Dadaism that are examined for aesthetic and political ends.

Multiple modes of writing are embraced in one form that is open to a dialogue with all other forms of writing. Both prose and poetry contaminate each other:

Because I don't believe in a pure space of language anymore than I believe in a "pure race," I find the concept of contamination as literary device rather appealing. Contamination means differences have been brought together so they make contact.

(Tostevin "Contamination" 13)

Feminist books of poetry, novels and essays are, in fact, multi-generic texts, CUMULATIVE AND CONTRASTIVE COLLAGES OF VARIOUS FORMS OF WRITING whose frames/structures (both linguistic and compositional) are foregrounded as they bring various languages and ideologies together.

LONG POEM

Poetic genres and poetic discourse in general, in view of Bakhtin's theory, are monologic and unitary:

The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary,

monologically sealed-off utterance. These ideas are immanent in the poetic genres with which he works.

(*Dialogic* 296-7)

The poet must assume a complete single-personed hegemony over his own language, he must assume equal responsibility for each one of its aspects and subordinate them to his own, and only his own intentions. Each word must express the poet's *meaning* directly and without mediation; there must be no distance between the poet and his word. The meaning must emerge from language as a single intentional whole: none of its stratification, its speech diversity, to say anything of its language diversity, may be reflected in any way in his poetic work.

(*Dialogic* 297)

Feminist language writers certainly do not agree with the monologic theory of poetry. The single voice lyric of early poetry is replaced by hybridized poetic structures. This is not a poetry of a single voice but a poetry of discourse, of "language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics" (Bakhtin *Problems* 181). Language poetry is a realization of "the novelization of poetry" that Barbara Godard argues for in her discussion of the long poem ("Epi(pro)logue" 315). In the place of the monologic voice of the poet there is a multitude of discourses that dialogize any hegemonic claims.

LONG POEM/PROSE POEM: "self-consciously a form of concentrated generic struggle like no other" (Monroe 26). It drags the

lyric into a "zone of contact with reality" (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 39).

LONG POEM, as Kamboureli argues, is a genre whose law is "lawlessness" (xiv) and "*generic indeterminacy*" (204) and it "borders on excess" (204). Such a carnivalesque space of writing allows for subversive practices of many kinds, with parody and irony as preferable strategies for many of the writers.

No wonder the long poem is a favourite genre of Tostevin (*Double Standards, Gyno-Text, 'sophie, The Color of Her Speech*). In *Double Standards* the text oscillates between the examination of prose (an autobiographical narrative) and a poetic investigation into language itself. The text is self-reflexive as it draws attention to its own textuality; it enacts/inscribes the theoretical issues it thematizes:

Prose poem is a genre "of an ongoing utopian self-critique": a critique of the lyric. A critique of the uncomplicatedly linear notions of narrative continuity: a combined critique of the verse lyric and prose narrative, of the self as sovereign subject and of history-as-progress.

(Monroe 31)

There is an emphasis on theoretical self-reflexivity in Tostevin's long poem:

for a long time I couldn't decide whether to be a story
 or poem one voice or many the poem always losing its
 way as it scribbles towards some equilibrium while the
 story
 brackets lives claims them for something it can
 recognize

(Double)

The text conflates the autobiographical with the self-
 reflexive theoretical:

at this point the story would normally take you
 to the first time the narrator went all the way
 important moment in the development of a plot
 a woman's life.

(Double)

The concept of the self as "sovereign subject" is questioned here. This is certainly not a poetry of self-expression; it is rather the speaker's articulation of a theoretical discourse on the complexity of the "novelized" poetry. The movement toward sentence and paragraph integration characteristic of a narrative is constantly interrupted and slowed down by an intrusion of poetic discourse that foregrounds the materiality of language. In the poem "re," for instance, there is a constant drifting towards a sentence interrupted by a poetic attention to the materiality of language itself. So instead of the poetry of the line there is a "novelized" poetry of the "new sentence," "a sentence with an interior poetic structure in addition to interior ordinary grammatical structure" (Silliman "New" 90). Even "the blank space" (Tostevin's

"pregnant pause as conceptual break") is "the locus of literary meaning" (Silliman "New" 93). There is a tension in such texts between the visual structure and the oral medium, and the materiality of language is used to achieve an effect similar to that achieved by the materials of visual art.

The interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic are combined within the feminist practice of language and genre. Such texts embody the discourse of the carnival as theorized by Kristeva as they both examine "representation by language" (the attempt at the narrative) and "experience in language," "system and phrase, metaphor and metonymy" ("Word" 85). It is the legacy of the mennipean discourse, of its ambivalence: "language in the mennipean tradition is both representational of exterior space" and "an experience that produces its own space" ("Word" 84). The notion of the poetic is not, however, exactly what Jakobson considers to be the poetic function (repetition of equivalence units) ("Linguistics" 71): it is rather a subversion of the concept through an introduction of metonymic metaphors (and hence a concept of *différance* at the level of language tropes - sliding between metaphor and metonymy as discussed earlier).

THE CUMULATIVE AND CONTRASTIVE COLLAGE STRUCTURE CHARACTERIZES MOST FEMINIST LANGUAGE TEXTS.

Tostevin's books of poetry investigate multiple genres. In *'sophie* the general long poem composition includes a poetic rewriting of "Song of songs" (hasn't Stein shown that the Bible is an exemplary text of subordination of prose in poetry --Eve and Adam the first poets?), and such parodic essays as "by the smallest possible margin" (parody of Derrida), and "A Weekend at the Semiotics of Eroticism Colloquium Held at Victoria College" (satire on academic discourse); *Cartouches* includes funerary poems ("small amulets") and journal entries interspersed with "small poems":

journal entries take too much time / from seeing Egypt.
 Large meditations that evoke presence but/ resonate loss.
 So I jot down small poems instead

(no pagination)

Erin Mouré's poetry is permeated with prose not only due to her examination of the "new sentence" but also due to her choice of such self-reflexive prose forms as footnotes, glossaries, coda, "corrections," or comments. Self-reflexive writing practice requires from the reader a shift from an aesthetic of semiotic consumption to an aesthetic of semiotic production.

A collage of various genres and modes of writing abounds in Warland's *serpent (w)rite* and *open is broken*. *open is broken* is a self-reflexive poetic and theoretical text that uses citation from many feminist sources and delves into the etymological exploration of language; other poems are "utterances" written in response to Marlatt's poems (the dialogic principle in operation!). All of the texts are written at the interstices of critical theory and lesbian feminism. Warland's and Marlatt's collaborative writing is always self-reflexive - always a combination of theory, poetry and prose. In "Subject to change," short collaborative/dialogic poems ("these short lines, these unpredictable spaces - our riding the currents of one another's associative and symbolic thought" (March 7)) are interwoven with theoretical pieces on the process of the collaboration ("documentary asides in the margin"):

writing in lines: but you say it's not poetry. i'm ok
with that. don't want to be controlled by form.

(March 7)

serpent (w)rite has an exemplary collage structure. Warland appropriates multiple discourses (citations from other writers, critics, psychology and medicine texts) for parodic purposes. She builds her discourse on citation and as Perloff argues:

to build one's discourse on citation is to regard language less as a means of representation than as the very object of representation.

(*Poetic* 12)

Nevertheless, again, a carnivalesque discourse is invoked - there is a dialogic tension between language as representation (as referential construct) and as experience (as poetic exploration) (the performative character of language itself). The illusion of linguistic transparency is disrupted not only through the exploration of language in the form of "l'écriture féminine," but also through the breaking of generic boundaries between the multiple forms of writing involved: hence - FEMININAGE.

All of the multi-discourse poetic genres assume the project Bakhtin assigns to the novel as an "intentional and conscious hybrid" of "all the languages and consciousnesses of language embodied in it" (*Dialogic* 366).

NOVEL:

THE NOVEL is not "one genre among others. It is the genre where genre's autocritique takes place through the parodying of other genres *as genres* and through the exposition of the conventionality of their forms and their languages" (Monroe 25).

"the novel incorporating carnivalesque structure is called polyphonic" (Kristeva "Word" 71). It reveals

"heteroglossic struggles among [different]...languages or genres as social and ideological struggles among ways of seeing and evaluation the world" (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 51). The novel "makes room for the alien word, or the voice of the other, and creates a space where dialogue can occur" (Patterson 36-7).

Although *Heroine* and *Main Brides* are called novels they are not traditional narratives. They indeed parody the standard, closed, linear narrative composition and its transparent language.

IMPORTANT THINGS WRITTEN IN THIS GENERATION DO NOT TELL A STORY. (capitalization mine)

(Stein "Portraits" 185)

The traditional narrative produces closure. Its language is transparent and naturalizes meaning. Such a narrative is "an effective way of communicating ideological knowledge" because "its temporal mimesis masks causality" (Godard "Sleuthing" 19). In ideological discourses "the labour involved in their production is suppressed and they are seen not as a construct but as 'the natural reflection' of the world, as spontaneous expression of their author's beliefs" (Godard "Sleuthing" 45). Once the attention is drawn to the frame of the writing, to its textuality, such illusionist practices are questioned/problematised.

In *Heroine* for instance an attempt at a narrative (creating a

story line) is constantly disturbed by the narrator's self-reflexive ponderings on the process of writing itself, and by her practice of writing which cannot go beyond the exploration of several images and of multiple beginnings of the story (Gertrude Stein's aesthetics of constant beginnings). Many images (the black man and the telescope, the narrator in the bathtub, the grey woman and the "little girl in a yellow raincoat") are repeated in new contexts that are formed by the new permutations of the syntax itself. The recontextualization and the permutation of syntactic and semantic elements does not allow for a stasis of the text and for the creation of a monologic ideological narrative. This foregrounding of structure, and the shift of attention to the framing devices play a crucial role in the politics of Scott's writing.

And again it is the method of *feminnage*, of collage/montage, of the practice of the "new sentence" and of "*l'écriture féminine*" that allows the writers not only to foreground textuality, but also to introduce the external/the social reality into their texts. The collage principle at the level of the narrative discourse shows a collision of languages and power relations.

In *Heroine*, Scott explores such diverse modes of writing as a

diary (and its "cut up, collage style" (*Spaces* 104), life writing, romance, melodrama, tragedy, fragments of revolutionary leftist lectures, poetry, manifestos, and automatic writing; in *Main Brides* - the diary form, surrealist dream narratives, travel narratives, history, and a theatre/film script. There is a constant slipping between the various discourses and hence between their ideologies, which is performed in a conscious way by a self-reflexive narrator. The boundaries between the discourses are frequently foregrounded by a different font and type size. They are meant to be clearly heard and seen like the sharp line and facet and plane in a cubist painting or the very faceted, planar art of Cezanne. Spaces between scenes in *Heroine* or between portraits in *Main Brides*, "spaces where, hopefully interesting things might happen in the reader's mind" (*Spaces* 102), act as an equivalent to the facet structure of cubist art (the geometric faceting of analytic cubism) (Steiner 180).

ESSAY:

Nor is the essay a mixture of genres. It does not mix genres, it complicates them: the genres are, in a way, its "fallout," the historically determined actualizations of what is potentially woven into the essay. The latter appears, then, as the movement of writing *before* the genre, before genericness - or as the matrix of all generic possibilities.

(Bensmaïa 92)

The history of the essay shows that the genre itself was never monologic, that in fact it is a form that is regarded to be "intergeneric" (Haefner), a-generic or even "anti-generic" (Bensmaïa). It is a form that Hejinian would call dynamic "not a fixture but activity" ("Rejection" 275) and generative or "constructive" ("Rejection" 270). Moreover, the style of an essay as an "art of interruption" (Ulmer "Object" 97) seems to fit well the feminist political agenda.

Even the etymology of the word suggests an openness of the form of writing: to essay, "essai" is to try out, to test, to experiment with and thus rehearse reading, ideas, concepts, models of writing, styles, etc., with all its risks and pleasures. The emphasis is thus on the openness of the form and the freedom of the writer to choose, to try out, to explore and to experiment. The essayist's practice is "like a theatre of ideas in which the rehearsal and the final performance are combined" (Nicol qtd. in Lane Kaufmann 226).

THE ESSAY FORM EMBODIES THE IDEAL OF A CONSTRUCTIVE WRITING PRACTICE. Feminist writers have been rehearsing various alternative modes of critical writing, from expressionist to constructivist, from closed to open. Essay as genre is being "contaminated" with other forms of writing. Writers are engaged in the process of multiple translations. Feminist subversive tactics intervene on multiple levels - the

linguistic, theoretical/the conceptual and overtly political. The theoretical, with its all associations with theatre, spectacle and carnival, includes exploration of various discourses. The political is associated with the feminist desire not only to present ideas but also to stimulate response, to "open the way to dialogue and ultimately to action" (Joeres "Passionate" 156).

ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF FEMINIST ESSAYING: essays in dialogue, essays in quotation, essays in poetry, essays in letters (*A Poetics of Criticism* Eds. Julianna Spahr, Mark Wallace, Kristin Prevallet, Pam Rehm) or Scott's "essay in process" as another general term pointing to the form of the essay as oscillating between poetry, fiction, autobiography, letter, diary, etc. Also Betsy Warland's term "theorogram" implies a form of essaying that correlates theory with "l'écriture feminine" understood in its picto-ideo-phono-graphic dimension and its multiple generic structure: CONFLATION OF "L'ÉCRITURE FEMININE" AND THEORY = FEMINAGE.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY: LEGACY OF THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE:

CUBIST ART - both a sign of the thing-world and a part of the thing-world. It thus points to itself and to the world. And the cubist work insists on our awareness of this double relation. Thus, it is BOTH SELF-REFERENTIAL ... AND PROFOUNDLY CONCERNED WITH THE OBJECT WORLD.
(capitalization mine)

(Steiner *The Colors* 183)

It was the historical avant-garde that challenged representational art and returned to the conceptual basis of creation. Cubists, for instance, were interested in "displaying their works, their materials and their craftsmanship simultaneously, abandoning all secrets of workmanship, all mystifying techniques, to be judged purely on their responsibility as organizers of reality" (Daix 94). The abolition of illusionism in painting translated into writing meant questioning of the concept of language as expression/representation of reality. In Cubism "the work of art signifies not reality but the process of perceiving and conceiving of it" - "CUBIST ART IS DEFINITIONALLY SELF-REFLEXIVE" (Steiner 181). (capitalization mine)

FEMINIST "FICTION THEORY" TEXTS AS EMBRACING THE CONCEPT OF
A SELF-REFLEXIVE TOTAL WORK OF ART.

The end of genre, say the postmoderns. Yet we keep writing the (poetic) story, the (poetic) novel - further imbued with a little theory: i.e., COMMENTARY SIGNIFYING THAT PLACE WHERE OUR WRITING PROCESSES CONSCIOUSLY MEET THE POLITICS OF THE WOMEN'S COMMUNITY. (capitalization mine)

(Scott Spaces 106)

"Fiction theory" is "a blend of critical analysis and creative writing, narrative poetry, personal essay, diary" (Godard,

"Critical Discourse" 289). Feminist critics and writers "write with rather than about the text" (Lamy, "Capitalizing" 22); their texts are dialogic and polyphonic. Scott defines the new mode of writing as "fiction that contains within it a feminist examination, even self-consciousness, regarding the material of the text, the language" (Godard, Scott, "Theorizing" 11). Apart from experimenting with the codes of language, "fiction theory" writers subvert codes of fiction (or poetry) [there is no differentiation between the genres] and also the codes of social discourse (Godard, "Theorizing" 10).

FICTION: fiction is what we KNOW: "gno-,narrate." Yet fictions we write are unlike fictions men write. FICTION: "fingere, to touch, form, mold. See dheigh-." DHEIGH-: "clay" ladies. I opener: fiction in our hands is to *touch* ourselves/one another, question the *mold*, the *form*, incessantly interrupting the monologue. We view, we touch, this is an eye for an I-fiction/theory (tissue/text) a total body presence.

(Warland "far as the i can see" 79)

FICTION IN THE FEMININE - it includes a subversive political feminist manipulation of language and conflation of prose and poetry.

PROSE - a noun derived from the French, and in turn from latin - *proversus*, the past participle of "*provertere*," meaning "to turn towards." Thus A SINGLE LATIN VERB LIES AT THE ETYMOLOGICAL ROOT OF BOTH "PROSE" AND "VERSE", verse coming from the root which meant "to turn" and prose from "towards." (capitalization mine)

(Silliman "Towards Prose" 97)

IN THE BEGINNING THERE REALLY WAS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
POETRY AND PROSE in the beginning of writing in the
beginning of talking in the beginning of hearing anything
or about anything. (capitalization mine)

(Stein *Narration* 27)

THEORY IN THE FEMININE:

"But we're writing a new kind of theory -
fiction/theory." No mind and body split, the text
embodying the viewing.

(Warland "far as the i can see" 76)

O stop making it so easy on the reader
who wants nice poetry & the line
to stop before the preposition

(Mouré "Nice Poetry" *Sheepish* 121)

Erin Mouré's "Acts" (*Furious*) originally conceived as theory
"ended up almost being prose poems" (Mouré "can't we" 79). The
text fuses the theoretical with the poetic: the last section
"Surface" is a poetic exploration of theory - questioning of
the concept of "line" in short texts that opt for a paragraph
structure and a sentence ("new sentence").

The line suffers from you. You don't want the ragged edge
any more.

(100)

The paragraphs are linked - the last word in a final sentence
of each paragraph becomes the title of the new paragraph and
the text self-reflexively comments on the operation:

Each note on the page was a refusal, of the end of the line, a refusal of "the title," & a refusal of the "middle" of the poem. You will write again & give up your claim to the surface.

(101)

Scott both thematizes and enacts a theoretical discourse in her (poetic) short novel "There is No Such Thing as Repetition":

She strolls, knowing she's ridiculous. Thinking the narrator can no longer be a single notion. Thinking the "synthesis" required for a work of art involves absorbing the reader into the vortex of the author's vision. (emphasis mine)

(11)

Tostevin translates the body into writing and simultaneously enacts a theoretical discourse on the body and somatization of writing:

I am not a woman I am a poem
feminized by my parts femoral
to carry my own weight ephemeral

(Double)

I am not a woman I am words
on the prowl

(Double)

FICTION THEORY = SOMATIZATION OF THEORETICAL DISCOURSE =
CONFLATION OF THEORY AND "L'ÉCRITURE au FÉMININ":

In fact "*l'écriture au féminin*" has generated TEXTS OF A HYBRID NATURE THAT FEATURE BRIEF NARRATIVE INTERVENTIONS WITH POETIC RESONANCES. IT IS A SPACE WHERE ONE CAN SIMULTANEOUSLY EXPRESS, REMEMBER, QUESTION AND PROVOKE. (capitalization mine)

(Brossard "Energy" 60)

V. COLLAGE AS AN INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION
 (EMBRACING THE INTER- AND INTRA-LINGUAL
 ONE) BETWEEN GENRES AND MODES OF WRITING:

READING OF SEVERAL TEXTS

AS GENRES ARE STRUCTURED IN AND BY LANGUAGE - the manipulation of both the linguistic and generic frames becomes the basis of subversive tactics:

it may be said that geometry is to the plastic art what grammar is to the art of the writer.

(Apollinaire 12)

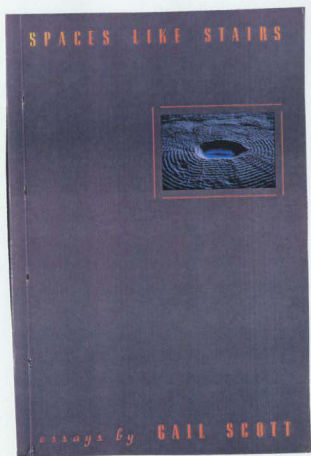
THE MOVEMENT IS TOWARD OPACITY/DENSENESS - VISIBILITY OF LANGUAGE through the making translucent of the medium. To actually map the fullness of thought and its movement.

(Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 70-71)

E N T R Y

The cover art of Scott's Spaces like Stairs contains a detail from Barbara Steinman's multimedia installation "Borrowed Scenery", (1987); it is a fragment of a photograph enclosed in an open frame, a reproduction of a photo enclosed in a graphic form of the alive/dynamic multimedia event. The borrowed scenery/ or the appropriated scenery is an image of a furrowed land; the furrows form a spiral structure with a pool of water in the centre. Why does Scott appropriate such an image for her text? I think that the multimedia concept (the "syntax" of the spiral translated into

writing) may be indicative of the hybrid nature of the texts in the collection; Scott refers to the texts as essays, as "a perpetual work-in-progress" (*Spaces* 9). In fact they are an exploration of various forms of writing including story, journal, poetry, fiction and theory or, in other words, they are "fiction-theory texts."



(Plate 7)

I believe that the use of the image of the spiral is not incidental; spiral movement constantly returns to similar orbits but it moves ever closer to a centre; the centre, however, is empty; the movement recurs; it can turn into a series of repetitions and always remains unfinished and open-ended. Scott translates the spiral movement into the structure of her texts which are open-ended, and demand a participation of the reader.

And it is here where also the concept of installation comes into play. Installation art as a self-analytic art practice employs space as an essential element of its construction. It is defined as "the establishment of a singular set of spatial relations between object and architectural space which forces the spectator to see himself as being part of the created situation" (DeDuve 245). And "these are not just any spatial relations but those which embrace the spectator and distance him at the same time" (DeDuve 255). Installation "neutralizes the space around" and it "gives a sensation of an implosion of space" that "acts like a black hole" (DeDuve 256). If I translate it into a situation of a reader in a text, I can see that the reader finds herself in a unique spatial configuration: she is inescapably drawn into the text; the empty spaces do not allow a passive reading, but at the same time, the self-reflexivity of the text requires a heightened sense of self-reflexivity on the part of the reader. The text "spaces like stairs" is an excellent example of such a construction.

what's real?
the problem is in the space

example rape is a black card deck chance bad luck

(107)

Such self-reflexive markers of the texts as : "she's repeating herself" and references to "prologue (working material)" (108) and "epilogue (reworked material)" (110), and multiple spaces between fragments of the texts invoke my self-reflexivity. I am drawn to the text not only as a reader-critic but also as an active participator in the act of creation itself (see my written response - the feminist at the carnival). I have been not only embraced by the spatial configuration of Scott's writing but I have also been allowed a critical distance.

The image of the spiral structure of the furrowed land also brings out other associations. I think that McCaffery's and bpNichol's comments on verse and prose are relevant to Scott's choice of the cover image:

verse - from the Indo-European root "wert": to turn. from this root derives the medieval Latin "versus" literally to turn a furrow. in subsequent usage the furrow became the written line by analogy; it is interesting to compare this development with the development of book from "beech"; in each case there is a sense of language as originally landscape...compare verbal line as parallel horizon.

(Rational 106)

The association of a furrow with a verse, and the identification of language with landscape become important hints/clues with reference to Scott's texts. Once "the relationship between language and landscape is re-realized then

- a) the ambiguity of signifier and signified (a book about a beech) disappears &

- b) *the identification of language as landscape permits the interchange of dimensions (words can be worlds - worlds can be words" (Rational 106).*

Scott's words are not just empty signifiers. She is very much aware of a semiotic operation of language, language both as sign but also as part of the experiential reality - language as creating a dialogue between the text, writer and reader. The reference to verse in a book fashioned as essays emphasizes a new approach to writing as a dialogue between its various forms, be it prose or poetry.

A. FEMININAGE AS A MANIPULATION OF LINGUISTIC AND GENERIC STRUCTURES

1. COMBINATION OF POETRY AND PROSE - THE EXPLORATION OF "NEW SENTENCE." Distinctive use of syntactical patterns.

POEMS are treated as VISUAL WHOLES; they can be perceived optically. In poetry the page becomes "the frame, landscape, atmosphere within which the poem's own unity is enacted and reacted upon" (McCaffery *Rational* 61).

In PROSE, a paragraph "performs a similar function (optically) to the poetic line" although the optical quality is rather accidental. One can't say this about a chapter. "PROSE STRUCTURES TEND TO BE TEMPORAL RATHER THAN VISUAL" (McCaffery *Rational* 61). (capitalization mine)

Such statements seem to be fine with reference to conventional

texts, but the feminist language writers do not pay much attention to such prescriptive considerations. THEY MAKE THE PROSE STRUCTURES OF THEIR TEXTS BOTH VISUAL AND AUDIBLE.

I. In Scott's "There's No Such Thing as Repetition. A short novel written in Paris" there is no division into chapters unless I consider the short paragraphs as chapters. Some of the paragraphs are as short as lines of poetry, and the optical feature is not accidental but deliberate. Blank spaces, the visual silences, become an important element of the narrative. Scott consciously does not combine the sentences into paragraphs. She manipulates the standardized syntax and uses sentences with multiple shifts which encourage attention to the act of writing itself.

She also wanted to escape.

To read, to write, to dream.

She buys a suit of black.

Reads 19th-century novels.

Haunts cafés with names like La Coupole, once haunted by "exiled" writers of the '30s (rich Americans). Who enjoyed the way Paris offers space for thinking, the sense of dignity created by the graciousness of buildings, of buildings, of people in their clothes and perfume, the excellence of food and wine and books.

Strolls on the Pont Neuf (emphasis mine)

(9)

Misquoting Marx. Who said *superstructure* expresses

infrastructure....signs of economic ebullience under thriving capitalism. Which economics, for Marx, sustained individualistic ideology. (emphasis mine)

(10)

Scott's insistent use of the simple present tense, the present participle, and avoidance of subordinate clauses is one of the textual strategies that break the standard frames of realistic prose. Scott relishes paratactic constructions. The usually subordinate defining or non-defining relative clauses beginning with a relative pronoun "who" or "which," here form new separately standing non-subordinate clauses. The paratactic construction of sentences and paragraphs implies a politics of inclusion. Each sentence, each paragraph is independent and equally important.

Through the insistent use of the simple present tense Scott rehearses a discourse that is certainly not typical of the novel. The simple present tense is a preferable tense for cinema/theatre scripts, and Scott's use of it reminds me of Marguerite Duras' novels as "text-theatre-film" scripts:

He demands that their relations cease.

He confirms the imminent death.

He pronounces for the first time the word
madness.

For the first time the word is pronounced: madness.

(Duras *Le Navire Night* 89 - translated by Susan Cohen in *Women and Discourse* 167)

Silliman claims that "poetic form has moved into the interiors of prose," that "the completed sentence ... has become equivalent to a line" ("New" 89, 90). This is exemplified by Scott's texts that superimpose the poetic function on an extended prose structure. This superimposition produces a distinctively poetic yet anti-lyrical stance: POETIC IN A SENSE OF DRAWING ATTENTION TO LANGUAGE ITSELF, to the textuality of writing.

HOW DOES POETICITY MANIFEST ITSELF? Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality.

(Jakobson "What is Poetry" 378)

Sentences that follow standard grammatical patterns allow the accumulating references to enthrall the reader by diminishing diversions from a constructed representation. In this way, each word's references work in harmony by reinforcing a spatiotemporal order conventionalized by the bulk of writing practice that creates the "standard." (emphasis mine)

(Bernstein "Semblance" 36)

THE NEW SENTENCE refuses the standard, the conventional: it is a sentence with "an interior poetic structure in addition to interior ordinary grammatical structure" (Silliman "New" 90). The "convolutions of syntax often suggest the internal presence of once-exteriorized poetic forms" (Silliman "New" 87).

Scott's practice of writing embraces both the poetic and the prosaic - a literary project driven by a working of female desire:

swinging from a poetic excess of words, context, to a feigned control (deferring to some sort of borrowed narrative)...but with such spaces between the words as to imply another meaning.

(*Spaces* 94)

the notes I take that will later become prose, have ... the sound of poetry.

(*Spaces* 79)

Rhythmic, discordant. I write, but I'm writing round in circles. Often uncut by periods (sentences). I love the poetic confrontation with language.

(*Spaces* 80)

The practice of creating "new sentences" means engaging in a form that dialogues with both prose and poetry. It is an intralingual collage between both discourses. The strategy of "superposition, and simultaneity" are the "dominant modes of structuring" (Perloff "Invention" 42). Both discourses contaminate each other.

In "There is no Such Thing as Repetition" Scott examines a collage of citations, a collage of different styles: textual polyphony (voices of Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, M.Nourbese Philip, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller). The texts of writers who romanticized Paris are juxtaposed with the

narrator's observations on racism and social injustice: multiple perspectives, multiple voices, multiple layers of temporality. This is a process of questioning the status of representation itself.

The literary voices celebrating Paris are contrasted with sentences that ironically contextualize the imaginary/fictional reality with the experiential one:

Still, in bed at night, dreams of autumn light shining on the Seine. So romantic. One's heart skips a beat. Bittersweet. The literature of happy exiles, poètes maudits, postcards. Getting up to close the window to keep out the din of traffic.

On the boulevard, two men of North African origin in the bright green overalls of city cleaners vacuum up the dog shit.

"I wasn't situated outside of time, but subject to its laws, like characters in the novel," another voice (Marcel Proust) complains.

("There's" 9)

The paratactic strategy, both at the level of sentence and structure, allows Scott to incorporate a larger social space, a larger social, politic and economic context. Writing which uses the "new sentence" is ambitiously contextualized. The juxtaposition of sentences (which can switch subjects between them) is a way of incorporating a larger social frame (Perelman "Parataxis" 315). It also allows Scott to rethink

various aesthetic, theoretical and political ideas:

"I listened to people (Stein's voice again). I condensed it in about three words...." (speaking of her portraits).

What about the context? the current writer wonders (9)

"[I shall]... attempt to analyze and understand the role of language and the word from the perspective of a writer resident in a society which is still very colonial - Canada," adds M.Nourbese Philip. (emphasis mine) (10)

The missing context of Stein's writing that focuses entirely on the exploration of language without much attention to its politics is foregrounded in Scott's texts, where the linguistic, the political and theoretical are given equal emphasis (the plight of all disadvantaged groups of society, be it of people of colour, First Nations, or non-heterosexuals).

In contrast to Stein who stressed an aesthetics of wholeness and "synthesis" (11) (in the period of creating portraits), Scott focuses on "breakage" (11), on the aesthetics of collage, that "absorbs the reader into the vortex of the author's vision" (11).

"If I wanted to make a picture of you as you sit there would wait until I got a picture of you as individuals and then I'd change them until I got a picture of you as a whole." Gertrude Stein says louder

(9)

But - in creating the whole, what of the parts remain?
(emphasis mine)

(10)

RE-VISION OF STEIN AND HER POLITICS OF WRITING!

II. Erin Mouré is known for writing poetry, but her practice of writing also reveals COMBINATION OF POETRY AND PROSE THROUGH THE USE OF THE NEW SENTENCE.

the poem's FORM can create "meanings" that disrupt oppressive social structures. Oppressive representational structures that exclude many people.

("It remained" 83)

Much of her writing draws attention to sentences as meaning generating and not as expressing content. This is not a poetry of the line, but poetry of the "new sentence" that refuses referentiality:

I too have worn my famous airplane on my shoulders

("Rose *Furious* 37)

Our displacement is huge & wild & does not see the fish
in their houses under the pavement,
their hair combed

("Rose" *Furious* 37)

The music fell into my boots & I couldn't
wear them, couldn't feel

("Snow Door" *Furious* 19)

their jobs are filling up with their bodies, their jobs
 are the shape of their bodies
 I see their lives
 fluttering, behind

("Snow Door" *Furious* 19)

Mouré in a surrealist fashion uses sentences that are grammatically correct, but semantically absurd. They disrupt semantic coherence. There is a collision here between perceptual and conceptual elements in the process of signification. In other cases the sentences that are grammatically incorrect unsettle the syntactic coherence:

The wind between the towers is nothing but the wind,
 nothing but the.

("Rose" *Furious* 37)

Trying to remember, as if
 The music, as if, as if.

("Snow Door" *Furious* 19)

I tell/ you, seems /(swim in it)

("Seams" *Sheepish* 57)

Does the article "the" function as a noun? Does the conjunction "as if" combine or rather separate the lines? Is the third person form of the verb seem ("seems") acting as a plural form of the noun "seam"?

I'm tired of the same old interrelated logic of the signs
 that we insist upon as if it were true.

(*Furious* 86)

This conscious syntactical and semantic play signifies Mouré's resistance to symbolic closure offered by standard referential sentences. Her practice of language cannot be absorbed by any traditional discourses of power. She resists ideological "interpellation of hailing" (Althusser 174) to the orthodox discourse, to "an economy said to be M [masculine]" (Cixous "Coming" 150).

Referentiality distorts more than it conveys, it injects us with the comfortable. I crave instead images that "act" within a context but do not refer to it.

(*Furious* 89)

Mouré brings prose and poetry together through the rhetorical and syntactical. She challenges the original idea of lyric as an "intense, imaginative form of self-expression or self-consciousness, the most private of all genres" (Perloff *Poetic* 16-7).

In feminist language writing poetry is not an expression of self but a discourse - an utterance. Even if there is an "I" speaking it is never a unitary "I" - it is not an expression of the writer's monologic self, but of subjectivity as created by various discourses (social, political, historical, cultural): "'the Poet' - can never be more than an *effect* of discourse" (Easthope *Poetry* 30); "texts and passages" are read "in terms of the discourse they each participate in and

exemplify" (Easthope *Poetry* 17).

THE FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITERS WRITE AT THE INTERSTICES OF THE DISCOURSES OF POETRY, FICTION, CRITICISM, LINGUISTICS, FEMINISM, POLITICS, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PHILOSOPHY. THEY DO NOT ENCLOSE THEMSELVES IN ANY OF THE DISCOURSES BUT DIALOGUE WITH THEM.

In the place of lyrical poetry comes conceptual writing, poetry of collage that explores many discourses. Self-reflexivity becomes an important feature of such writing.

THESE ARE BOTH OPEN AND CLOSED FORMS OF WRITING, BOTH RULE GOVERNED AND RULE UNBOUND. THEIR SIMULTANEOUS PLACING IN ONE BOOK DOES NOT ALLOW FOR ANY ONE DISCOURSE TO CONTROL ANOTHER. THE COLLAGE FORM COUNTERS THE NEED FOR CONTROL AND ORDER. ISN'T IT WHAT DUPLESSIS CALLS AN AESTHETIC "CALIBANIZATION", A "MULTI-POLY-MISHUGANAH SET OF DISCOURSES" (*The Pink* 155)? THIS COULD BE A SYMBOLIC ENACTMENT OF A DESIRABLE DIALOGISM OF CULTURE. SUCH A POLYPHONY OF THEIR TEXTS UNDERScores PLURALITY AND PROVISIONALITY OF MEANINGS AND REJECTS HEGEMONY IN FAVOUR OF HETEROGENEITY.

B. COLLAGE AND INTERARTISTIC TRANSLATION /
 INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION BETWEEN THE
 NONVERBAL AND VERBAL

The texts RETHINK THE VERY NOTION OF VERBAL ART through exploration of visual and aural poetics. Isn't language writing "a major 'inter-art' analysis which does not scant political issues and stakes" (DuPlessis "A letter" 188)?

Cubism and futurism both bear resemblances to cinema insofar as they emphasize an analytic, even, mechanical way of viewing the world. Surrealists, who were among the first to suggest the similarity between dream work and film work, use methods of collage and discontinuity to recall similar methods in cinema.

(Cohen *Film* 6)

the use of interior monologue and the disruption of temporal continuity in plot structure were tied to the movie metaphor and the spatial disruption of cubist painting.

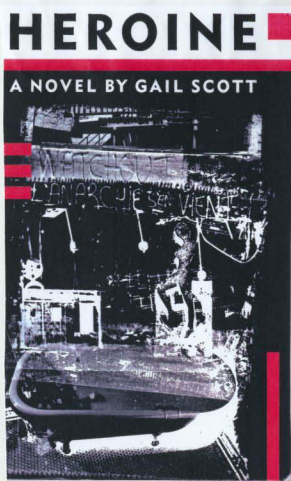
(Steiner *The Colors* 182)

FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING: PHOTOGRAPHIC/
 CINEMATIC STRATEGIES:

E N T R Y

The title page of Gail Scott's Heroine: a black and white photo collage by a feminist Quebec artist Cheryl Sourkes. Sourkes

translates Scott's text into visual art. The visual image is "contaminated" by inscriptions in alphabetic writing. Interaction of the verbal and the visual? Isn't that what Scott accomplishes in her text?



(Plate 8)

DESCRIPTION: The photo collage joins the principles of photography and collage. Several photographic images are pasted into new,

surprising juxtapositions: a bathtub, a window, a blurred figure of a woman, graffiti "WATCHOUT L'ANARCHIE SEN VIENT" (contamination of two languages!), and elements of architecture. All of them are separated by black and white spaces. The "punctum" (the "disturbance", the "shout" of the image) (Barthes Camera 42) of the photo collage, is, for me, the figure of a woman, woman in a dark space between the tub and the walls of the city, between the urban and domestic space. The images in the photo collage are superimposed on one another; the boundaries between the objects and the figure of the woman are blurred; their arrangement in the black and white space defies the laws of logic.

READING: Photo collage language is very much like an ideographic system. It is not a simple denotation of reality but a sign of it. Collage structure distorts any fixed image of reality. Example: a combination of two hieroglyphs corresponds to a concept: as in the ideogram "knife + heart = sorrow, or a mouth + a bird = "to sing" (Eisenstein Film Form 30). The ordinary imagist thinking becomes transformed to conceptual thinking. Similarly, in Sourkes' photo collage the combination of the images of the bathtub and the anarchy graffiti induces a formation of a new concept which is a synthesis of the visual and the phonetic components of the collage.

RE-READING: Sourkes translates Scott's mode of writing - her collage/montage technique in the rendering of several story lines.

Each of the images alludes to a story line. The boundaries between the objects and words are blurred and so are the boundaries between various narrative levels in Scott's text. Scott's writing argues for "metonymy rather than a cause-and-effect" structure ("Interview" 6).

Scott about *Heroine*: "each section is both cinematic and photographic" (*Spaces* 103):

The cinema, like her illusory narrative line, gives the illusion of time passing as in reality, of hence being in control, even when it hurts. The photo, on the other hand is so beautiful, so unreal. Like death.

(*Spaces* 103)

As photography is conceived as "the pure and simple denotation of reality" (Barthes *Image/Music* 28), Scott opts for a photo collage which is not a mere tool of representation any more but a medium for the manipulation/transformation of reality.

The major images of the black man, grey woman, child in the yellow raincoat, woman in the bathtub, and other "images from the exterior (the city)" and "images from memory" (*Spaces* 79) function as photographs but their arrangement in the fragmentary collage-like structure of the text has both political and aesthetic ends. It does not aim at mirroring reality but at transforming it. The fragmented images are juxtaposed with multiple voices and fragmented discourses

(feminism, racism, politics, social problems, violence against women, etc.) that underscore the politics of the text. But although they are fragmented and dispersed they are still embedded in a matrix that is montage-like and hence cinematic: the internal speech of the self-reflexive narrator engaged in the process of writing or imagining the text we read.

MONTAGE AND COLLAGE CAN COEXIST ALTHOUGH THE SUM TOTAL OF THE WORK WILL CREATE THE IMPRESSION OF EITHER MONTAGE OR COLLAGE. (capitalization mine)

(Clearfield 63)

Scott moves freely between the aesthetics of fragmentation (collage) and the aesthetics of synthesis and simultaneity (montage). Both collage and montage coexist in her work:

Montage is an excellent and distinctive technique to present the workings of thought. Internal speech is indeed the basis of the montage structure.

(Ulmer *Applied* 298)

Scott explores various forms of INTELLECTUAL COLLAGE/MONTAGE including THE POLYPHONIC AND MONTAGE BY ATTRACTION. She juxtaposes exterior and interior images without a narrative comment (e.g. in *Heroine* scenes from the present are juxtaposed with those from the past leading to a conceptual merging of time and space); the reader has to derive the third term from the juxtaposed images; such an intellectual montage breaks with notions of a narrative as "passive reproduction"

of the real. It is "not the real but ... [the writer's] attitude to the real" (Barrow 7) which becomes essential in the intellectual montage. In both texts Scott experiments with a POLYPHONIC MONTAGE by advancing simultaneously several converging story lines: the female narrator's story with the one of a black tourist, a grey woman and a child in a yellow raincoat. An excellent example of a polyphonic montage is the last section of *Main Brides* entitled "Night Music" (3 Scenes in 4 Acts). There are four narrative lines in this composition: a woman walking through a town at night followed by a man, Lydia remembering her past, a night radio show, and Lydia imagining surrealist narratives. There are no connections between the lines, they are interwoven; they seem to be separate narrative lines but the final effect is the same - a creation of mounting fear and anxiety in the reader; the book ends when one of the story lines ends with an assault on a woman. A big white space is left for the reader to fill up perhaps with a SCREAM!

All of the portraits in *Main Brides* function according to the principle of MONTAGE BY ATTRACTION; the meaning of one "portrait" is reinforced by the association with another although they are not part of the same episode. The attracting element is the theme of women in urban space and the dangers

they face in the nineteen-eighties.

Writing portraits may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but again Scott performs a typical avant-garde (Steinian) intersemiotic translation. The literary portrait, as Wendy Steiner argues, "is an open invitation to the kind of interartistic experimentation characteristic of early twentieth-century writing" (*Exact* 3). The visual portrait is traditionally a mimetic genre, but the avant-garde portrait "is drawn ...toward both an art for art's sake aesthetics and a call for documentary reference in art" (Steiner *Exact* 4). Consequently "iconicity is unessential to portraiture" (Steiner *Exact* 11). Stein translated her subjects into grammatical categories, but her challenge to standard grammatical rules (her exploration of the continuous present, simultaneity and synaesthesia), meant a challenge to the mimetic rules of representation. Similar to Gertrude Stein's aesthetics of portraiture her portraits are not descriptions, but explorations of the rhythm of personality:

I had to find out what it was inside any one ... make a portrait of that inside without any description of what they are doing and what they are saying then I too was neither repeating, nor remembering nor being in confusion

(Stein "Portraits" 183-4)

I had the habit of conceiving myself as completely talking and listening listening was talking and talking was listening and in so doing I conceived what I at that time called the rhythm of anybody's personality

(Stein "Portraits" 174)

Stein experimented with the genre of portraiture making it "indexical-iconic" or "indexical-symbolic" or purely musical (Steiner). Her portraits are more conceptual than perceptual.

I created a melody of words that filled me with a melody that gradually made me do portraits easily by feeling the melody of any one.

("Portraits" 199)

Scott's *Main Brides* seems to be intertextually connected with Gertrude Stein's idea of cubist portraiture. The key to the understanding of the text is the narrator's desire to write "a book of portraits called *Installation with Muddy Frames* (180-1). Both the genre of a "portrait" and installation are translated into verbal art. The concept of installation underscores the self-reflexive character of art and the crucial participation of the spectator or reader in the creation of the art's meaning. Scott's concept of the literary portrait has close associations with cubist portraiture. The narrator even self-reflexively enacts the idea:

Maybe something kind of Cubist, organized in fragments held together by her present knowledge of the subject.

(164)

her portrait: anecdotal fragments organized - but not too rigorously - with a little space around them to open possibilities. Like Aztec art in the sense that their figures, carved on parapets, seemed projected towards endless blue. Of course, under this dreamlike surface, lay darker, more insidious narratives promising ultimate disaster.

(167)

Stein in the creation of her portraits had a vision of synthesis:

I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of what the person was until I had not many things but one thing.

("Portraits" 176-7)

Scott, on the other hand, has no interest in the whole. In her portrait of Z. she prefers "bits and pieces of the past, tattered flashes of Z., fragmented, with gaps both difficult to grasp and deliciously mysterious" (157-8). She leaves it for the reader to complete the portrait which is part of the bigger concept of the "installation" art that is evoked in the text. Scott is also interested in the context of her portraits. In contrast to Stein, who valued her privacy and aimed at isolating her personal experience from the public sphere, Scott contextualizes her texts. Issues of race, class, and inequity in contemporary culture are crucial for her. She encodes cultural specificity in her language. Allusions to contemporary life are everywhere in her writing:

She refrains from staring at the vast faded emptiness of the sky, reflected in a top-floor window across the way. With a pale sinking flame at the bottom. Calling up the Inuit again. Who was always dreaming he saw his wife's flaming face in the window of a van going down the road. The face clear, though dark, with flames all around.

I still see my little girl running towards me. At the very same minute she was burning in one of those match-box houses the government built up there---

The music (of piano riff) cuts in.

She notices the dykes are staring at one another defiantly.

(*Main Brides* 103)

The strategy of inner speech lets her contextualize the narrative. In all her texts Scott incorporates a larger social space. She insists on emphasizing the connection between her writing, her preoccupation with the process of writing itself, and a larger social, political and economic context. She is not creating large narrative wholes or "fully referential tale[s]" (Silliman "New" 79). It is her use of the collage/montage composition and of the "new sentence" that inhibits the syllogistic movement that binds sentences into traditional narrative or expository forms of writing. Scott engages in a re-visionary feminist dialogue with Stein. She simultaneously inhabits and alters Stein's non-traditional language and generic structures. Her use of the "new sentence," which many language writers consider a legacy of

Stein, aims at evoking a shared social identity and not only a private, idiosyncratic language. The codes of Stein are broken, the *open is broken*, as Betsy Warland phrased it in her re-vision of Stein's political and social vision. The feminist language writers' "feminnage" lets them re-view the historical avant-garde vision of writing.

FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING AND MUSIC

E N T R Y

Main Brides, another text by Gail Scott. Another cover art by Cheryl Sourkes. This time it is a multicolored collage with architectural motifs, music score/notation, and a photo of a writing woman - presumably in a bar. The whole collage is bathed in many colours with the emphasis on yellow, blue and ochre. The motifs are repeated, they overlap; the same fragments of architectural motifs are shown from various perspectives. In the spaces between the architectural fragments and the bar scene there is a musical score, a graphic notation of music, the writing of music with the instructions to the player (*pp perdentosi, ff feroci, poco markato*);

PRAISE FOR GAIL SCOTT'S

HEROINE

The city of Montreal comes into a focus as precise and vivid as Mrs. Dalloway's London. The texture of *Heroine*—dense with the images, smells, and sounds of the city—is the texture of the world absorbed through all the pores of a woman's body.

VILLAGE VOICE

Heroine feels like a rightswing in the chest, as if everything that ever happened in a life has accumulated in the heart.

CANADIAN FORUM

Each page seems with images, echoes, actions and reactions... a magnificent view of a woman's perception of life, love and la belle province.

TORONTO STAR

Heroine pushes past the prescribed limitations of the novelistic form and emerges clearly, cleanly and very convincingly.

KINGSTON WHIP-STANDARD

Scott is one of the most gutsy writers around.

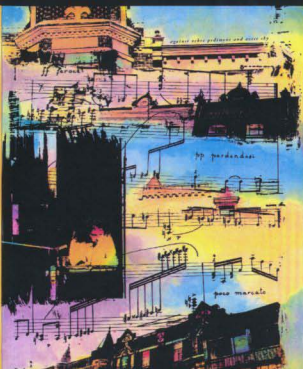
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ISBN 0-88930-456-5



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MAIN BRIDES

MAIN BRIDES
GAIL SCOTT

A NOVEL BY

GAIL SCOTT

(Plate 9)

the music notation is intersected with the alphabetic writing, with the line "against ochre pediment and aztec sky". On the back cover there is an image of multiple blue faces of women; Some of the faces have tightly closed mouths. The majority of them have an expression which reminds me of Edward Munch's haunting painting "The Scream."

READING: Sourkes' collage is not only the translation of the verbal into the visual, but also of the aural/the musical into the visual. Again the image inscribes the ideographic principle. I read the configuration of the ideographic structure as the following: writing woman + fragments of architecture + music notation = woman in an urban space. The text becomes a discourse on the life of women in a contemporary urban environment. Similar to *Heroine* the cover has open spaces free to accommodate the imagination of the viewer/ reader.

I am still returning to the use of color by Scott in her verbal text. I don't think this is only a translation of the visual into verbal. What about the musical structure of her texts? Are there any pictorial and aural correspondences?

According to Eisenstein the visual equivalent of music is colour (*Film Sense* 86-87). Scott is aware of this analogy and she is interested in exploring the concept of a chromophonic montage. Colours signify the mood of her texts. A variety of song lyrics or melodies mentioned or cited in *Heroine* have a general tone of sadness, melancholy and despair. The tone corresponds with the predominant dark vision of the text. But

Scott also uses the rhythmic structure of jazz and blues to expand the significance of discourses explored in several narrative lines. They examine the lives of those who are marginalized in contemporary culture: people of colour, the elderly, lesbian lovers and communist revolutionaries. Scott imagines *Heroïne* "as having the sepia tint of a photograph with occasional touches of colour - like when you paint on a black-and-white photo" (*Spaces* 92): "Black plus white is the colour of the 80s" (32); the predominant colour of the clothing is black and white, with an occasional red sweater and bright red, vermilion or cranberry lipstick (32, 36); There are black and white cafés, "black and white images for the revolutionary newspaper" (112), black bedrooms (75), "black dressed immigrant women" (146), "black clown[s]" (160) and the days are grey "as in the film *Clockwork Orange*" (176). Scott's approach to *Heroïne* in terms of black and white, light and shadow (the chiaroscuro effect) is a translation of the syntax of black and white photographs, photo-collage, or black and white images of early cinematography into a written script. Sergei Eisenstein sees connections between the Chinese yang and yin principles and the operation of a colour in early cinematography: "Yang and Yin - depicted as a circle, locked together within it each carrying within itself the essence of the other, each shaped to the other - yang and yin,

forever opposed, forever united" (*Film Sense* 93). Such an interpretation also fits the general concept of male/female interrelationships as explored in Scott's text.

In *Main Brides* the "sky is all I want" sections can be read as Scott's experiment in creating verbal images of the whole colour spectrum. They give a distinctive rhythmic structure to the whole text. In the whole book Scott creates the effect of sound and music through purely plastic means, through the association of music with colours, and through the repetition of images.

Did one see sound, and what was the relationship between color and sound, did it make itself by description by a word that meant it or did it make itself by a word in itself.

(Stein "Portraits" 191)

The individual narrative lines are associated with specific music compositions: "Dis-May" with a Cuban mambo, and "Night Music" with the tango. Jazz is, however, the predominant music structure of both texts. Scott makes a reference to her novel as "a jazz counterpoint with all those notes floating around in the air and every so often you pick out a melody to help it move forward a little" (*Spaces* 96). The structure of her narratives reveals a translation of jazz into the verbal text. The three properties commonly associated with musical counterpoint - simultaneity, repetition, and autonomy versus

interdependence (*Dictionary of Music*) - are translated into the composition of the text: the simultaneous advancement of several story lines, the repetition of images and beginnings, the autonomous and interdependent existence of all elements of the narrative. In jazz "[e]ach instrument performs its solo while participating in the whole" (Eisenstein *Film Sense* 98). In Scott's text several story lines are developed independently but they participate in the whole, they contribute to the final effect of the verbal polyphonic montage. Jazz music resembles the dynamics of a cubist painting and by extension, of any fragmentary collage or montage narrative structure. The choice of jazz is also adequate for the urban spatial texts; it has been noted that "[t]he modern urban scene, especially that of a large city at night, is clearly the plastic equivalent of jazz" (Eisenstein *Film Form* 98).

The combination of colours and music, of the plastic and phonic in Scott's texts reminds me of futurist experimentation with the intersemiotic translation between various arts - of their painting of "sounds, noises and smells" (Carrà "Painting" 111), their concepts of "musical architecture" (Carrà "Painting" 113) or "chromopony - the colours of sounds" (Prampolini 115) or "a music of colours" (Corra 66).

FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING AS A TOTAL WORK OF ART

The whole book can enact the Wagnerian concept of a "Gesamtkunstwerk" or a total work of art, in which music, drama, poetry and the visual arts would be synthesized into one spirit.

In Tostevin's *Frog Moon* various arts are intersemiotically translated not only at the level of narrative, but also at the level of the book's structure. It is another example of book art, and book as a physical object. The cover illustration (a stylized letter F in a gothic type, with a frog sitting in it) signifies only one level of the text's interest (letters = writing and the concept of metamorphosis symbolized here by the frog).

The section of *Frog Moon* entitled "Le Baiser de Juan-Les-Pins" points to multiple processes of intersemiotic translation enacted in the text.

1. Christine's installation : "six tall diptychs" (198): "half of them are black and white photographs" (198) (details of a classic Roman Venus and shots of street lined with tombs). They are paired with "either a framed

sheet of stainless steel or a sheet of lead" (198). They play out "the relation between past and present" (198).

The concept of installation is translated into the structure of the book: The diptych is the book itself (I'm thinking of a reference to the original meaning of the word: "a two level hinged tablet folding together to protect writing on its waxed surfaces" (*Webster*). *Frog Moon* has two cover pages: the second page is green, and so is the penultimate page of the book. Neither is "contaminated" by any verbal or graphic image. The dark green page of the book is paired with the white (blank) page (like the diptych with photos and the sheet of steel or lead). The page numbering also attracts attention: only one page in the "diptych book" is numbered, the recto page - like in the original diptych where the other page functions as a protective cover for the waxed surface. The reference to six diptychs corresponds with the twelve sections of stories. They also play out "the relation between past and present," with the narrative material of the "Babel Noël" and Chorus sections of the book; the stories of Laura's parents are interwoven with her own narrative, the stories of the past are interwoven with the stories of the present.

2. "Renoir film where almost every shot begins with someone exiting or entering a frame, leaving several frames in between empty" (197). The Renoir cinematic technique of "empty frames" is translated into the blank pages between individual chapters of Tostevin's text.

3. Picasso's paintings and drawings. Picasso's technique of collage is the dominant strategy of Tostevin's book, but she favours a politicized form of collage: METISSAGE ("Distance" 4):

METISSAGE: "a concept of solidarity which demystifies all essentialist glorifications of unitary origins, be they racial, sexual, geographic or cultural."

(Lionnet 9)

metissage is a form of bricolage in the sense used by Claude Lévi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompassed far more: it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature. Above all it is a reading practice that allows me to bring out the interreferential nature of a particular set of texts, which I believe to be of fundamental importance for the understanding of many postcolonial cultures.

(Lionnet 8)

Frog Moon is a fictional autobiography. Elements of Tostevin's life are filtered through her imagination. It is an imaginative recreation of her life. But Tostevin deconstructs the traditional genre of autobiography

(chronological presentation of events, linear narrative, narrative principles of logic and consequence) and opts for a form of collage: "the different sources, history, anthropology, literature, shuffled like a pack of cards arrive at character, human nature" (Tostevin "Distance" 4). What unifies the various sources is the narrator's voice. She translates / re-tells the stories of her parents. The stories are interwoven with her own narrative. There are many genres involved: folktales, tall tales, family stories, expository prose, poetry, etc. The structure of the text illustrates the dialogic project Mikhail Bakhtin assigns to the novel: "rapid collage, as well as more disconcerting strategies of interruption, exhibit a multitude of received discourses and dialogize their hegemonic claims" (Nathanson 303).

4. Roman Polanski's interpretation of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* - a theatrical performance with "a dozen curtain calls" (200). The number of curtains again corresponds with the number of stories. The concept of METAMORPHOSIS is crucial to the understanding of the text as it is suggested by the narrator's interest in two books, Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* - "an encyclopedia of myths whose central theme is the

incessant reshaping of different forms of life" (180). The notion of metamorphosis is explored in the text with reference to such elements of the narrative as story self/identity, language and the form/structure of the novel.

5. The chapter "Le Baiser de Juan-les-Pins" is in fact the beginning of the story the narrator wrote in Paris: "I did manage to write the beginning of a story there" (214). The narrator exposes conventions in the act of using them. The self-reflexive character of the collage/metissage structure is foregrounded. At the end of the novel the narrator states that she "had planned to write a novel about an old woman looking back on her life" (214); the reader has just read the book! The reader is not only aware how reality is subjectively constructed but how it is constructed linguistically.

6. Translation of music into the script. *Frog Moon* can be read as a polyphonic composition of many voices. The chapters entitled "Chorus" illustrate a continuous interweaving of the voices of mother, father and of various selves of Laura. The third person narrator of "Chorus (i)" (the childhood self of Laura) appears in

"Chorus (ii)" again, but this time another voice is added - the first person singular - the voice of Laura as an adult narrator. There is a constant interplay between "I" and "She" / a constant metamorphosis. The repetition of "Chorus" chapters can be read as an example of the musicating of structure as discussed by Quatermain.

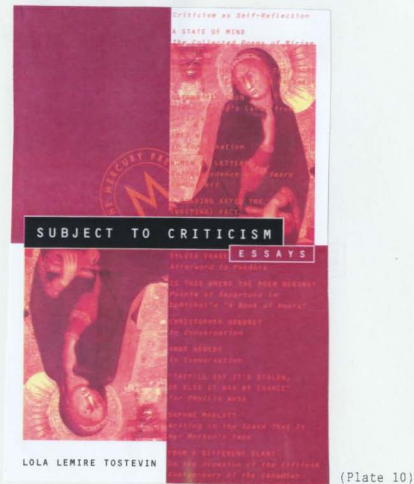
Frog Moon defies the notion of a book as a commodity, as easy material for public consumption. It illustrates the concept of the Total Work of Art that demands an active dialogic response from the reader.

INSTALLATION, FILM, THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE, ABSTRACT PAINTING (COLLAGE), LITERATURE - ALL THESE FORMS/GENRES ARE NOT ONLY INSCRIBED AT THE NARRATIVE LEVEL BUT THEY ARE ALSO ENACTED IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK.

E N T R Y

The diptych structure and its close correspondence to the form of a book is again explored by Tostevin in her *Subject to Criticism. Essays*. This time it is the choice of the cover art that brings this association. It is "The Annunciation," a masterpiece by fourteenth century Siennese painter Simone Martini. Why this painting? Here, as

Tostevin says, annunciation is rather "renunciation" ("From a different Slant" 212); the Virgin is "noticeably resentful" (212).



It is a painting which "must have stood, and still stands, in sharp contrast to the dogma and conformity of that period" (213). Does Tostevin appropriate the image for the purpose of cultural criticism or rather as an identification with a kindred spirit? Is it the painter or the image which attract her attention? Naturally the

image is recontextualized, like the ready-mades of Duchamp. It is also a reproduction of a reproduction (the aura of the original work is lost), but still the impact is immense. What interests me is the particulars of the appropriation. Tostevin chooses to focus on the figure of the Virgin. She totally disregards the figure of the angel. I can't read the words "*Ave Maria grazia plena*". Sister Wendy Beckett in her *The Story of Painting* reads the image as "a sacred encounter in which Heaven and earth become one. Mary and the angel lock eyes, each affecting the other" (51). It is interesting how much our views can be coloured by religion or our social or cultural background!

The painting was painted for an altar in Sienna Cathedral. What is seldom mentioned is that another version of the painting, now lost, is believed to have been a diptych. Only the Angel of the Annunciation, the left panel of the diptych, is preserved. The absence of the panel with the Virgin is striking. Was it demolished? Was it a deliberate act on the part of some unsatisfied church officials? Nobody knows. In Tostevin's appropriation in the place of the angel there is either an empty space or fragments of the verbal text (cubist contamination of the visual with the verbal?). The figure of the Virgin appears twice on each of the covers. If the covers are folded, both horizontally and vertically, the figure of Mary would cover the space occupied by the angel in the original

painting. This concentration on the question of dissent and protest translates well into Tostevin's dissentive and oppositional writing, oppositional in terms of disagreement with conventional standardized forms of language and genre. The subtitle of the book is *Essays*, but the collection of the texts challenges the definition of the genre as it also contains letters, interviews, reviews and a speech; both oral and written genres occupy the space of the book. This is a female polyphonic self speaking/ writing here whose voices range from serious academic to personal.

CARNIVALIZATION OF GENRE?

Genres are not to be mixed.

I will not mix genres.

I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them.

(Derrida "The Law" 228)

For feminist language writers the "pleasure of the text" (Barthes) is, in fact, in the transgression and contamination of genre. Both verbal and nonverbal genres interact in their texts. Such a sono-visual assemblage or conflation of genres reveals a continuous process of multiple intersemiotic translations/ transpositions. It is "generally understood as the manifestation of neo-Dada" (Perloff *Futurist* 92), Futurist

or Surrealist experimentation.

The writers are not looking for a new feminine genre, a new rule governed form of writing, but rather for a new concept of space (unbound by rules). They substitute the traditional concept of genre with a spatial paradigm/model which allows for multi-generic interactions, for a performance of genre, and not its definition. The traditional generic space is expanded or "exploded," to use Karl Jirgens's term from his article "The Exploding Form". Now it encompasses all kinds of forms and allows for an unfettered collision of competing idioms and ideologies that Bakhtin calls carnivalization. In other words, the feminist language- and theory-oriented texts also embody Charles Bernstein's vision of a "constructive writing" practice in the form of "a multi-discourse text, a work that would involve many different types and styles and modes of language in the same 'hyperspace.'" ("Writing" 591). The concept of a multi-discourse text is close to the avant-garde idea of the Total Work of Art, but it foregrounds the notion of a search for form, the process itself as inquiry into various forms and modes of writing, and not the finished product. It foregrounds "the coding operation itself" and hence it "attempts to draw our attention to the way discursive practices produce the reality they appear simply to convey" (Nathanson 305). In general, the idea of "constructive

writing" is another way of approaching the question of carnivalization of genre in the manner of the historical avant-garde. These women writers, however, modify the process. Theirs is a feminist carnivalization with a feminist ideology behind it: their practice of FEMINNAGE combines various forms of a collage/ montage/ métissage composition with the practice of "l'écriture au féminin."

LEAVING LANGUAGE AS IT IS WOULD MEAN AGREEING WITH THE CIVIC ORDER. REMEMBER, IT IS A SURFACE; IT LIES, IT REDUCES SOME OF US TO ABSENCE! (capitalization mine)

(Mouré "Acknowledging" 128)

CHAPTER SEVEN

TEMPTATION OF CONCLUSIONS - DELUSION OF CLOSURE

I am tempted to make general conclusions to the thesis, but in view of the dialogic and carnivalesque nature of the feminist language-focused writing and of the conscious choice of the dialogic format of the thesis, such a decision would be a violation of the method itself. Conclusions suggest completion, resolution, and definitive closure, but my research is only a temporary step in the evolving dialogue on Canadian feminist experimental writing. Instead of traditional conclusions I propose an ideographic format of a dialogic (open) epilogue (Gk *epilogos* - "to say in addition" (OED)) that does not close my argument but substantiates / validates it, and allows me to "say something in addition" to what has been said already.

"Sensual Page Poetics" (Fernandez) =

performance of conclusion

HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE MODERNISM POSTMODERNISM

DESTABILIZING/ DISMANTLING / EXPLODING / RUPTURING OF
LANGUAGE AND GENRE
LINGUISTIC AND FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

MODERNISM

nostalgia for centre and
order, for elitist or exclusive
solutions

POSTMODERNISM

preference for being
apolitical and
asocial

HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE: insistence on merging art
and life, on writing as an intervention in many
spheres of life, the social, political or cultural;

GENDER POLITICS - A PROBLEM for
all movements

WHAT IS IMPERATIVE ?

FEMINIZATION OF THE MOVEMENTS

FEMINIST ARIÈRE AVANT-GARDE

dialogizing with reductive theories and movements

POLITICIZATION OF GERTRUDE STEIN and
of "Gertrude's daughters"

political ramifications of linguistic revolution -
 political structures are informed and supported by
 particular verbal structures

thematic concern with its own aesthetics and politics

TOSTEVIN

WARLAND

SCOTT

MOURÉ

MANIPULATION OF LANGUAGE and GENRE

REVITALIZATION OF "DEAD" POSTMODERN LANGUAGE

feminization of avant-garde techniques:

feminization as dialogization /contamination

synaesthetic writing / synaesthetic écriture/

(f)é(m)criture,

new sentence - new s(c)entence

etymological exploration as productive of meaning

picto-ideo-phono /sono-graphic writing

musicating

femminage,

total work of art

It is the framing process itself, and by extension the process of ideological framing, which is no longer taken for granted.

(Hartley xiii)

interartistic explorations

making writing visible/ audible/ gestural

C=A=N=A=D=I=A=N F/E/M/I/N/I/S/T L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

W`R`I`T`I`N`G

Relation to American Language Poets ?

POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC INTERTEXTUALITY

FEMINIST LANGUAGE WRITING AS OFFERING RESISTANCE
TO THE DOMINANT CONSUMER CULTURE

CRITICAL INTERRUPTIONS

DIALOGIZING THE "SENSUAL PAGE POETICS" WITH DISCURSIVE WRITING

1. SEARCH PROCEDURES:

The phrase encompasses both the writers' and my own way of approaching the process of writing itself. This is not a prescriptive writing but writing as a process of discovery, of finding a form through a dialogue with multiple genres and modes of writing. For me it was a SEARCH FOR AN ALTERNATIVE FORM OF WRITING THE DISSERTATION. For the writers--a search for language and genre that would inscribe woman as an active self-reflexive subject.

2. ENGLISH CANADIAN LANGUAGE- AND THEORY-FOCUSED WRITING AS A CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE: POSTMODERNIST AVANT-GARDE. CONCEPTUAL LINKS WITH THE RADICAL STAGE OF MODERNISM--THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE.

The classification of the feminist writers as a postmodernist avant-garde emphasizes a difference between the apolitical and the politicized writers of the 1980s and 1990s. It also underscores my argument about the interconnection and dialogue between the historical avant-garde, modernism and postmodernism and the contemporary avant-garde. The term avant-garde, when used in conjunction with modernism or postmodernism, points to the more radical, norm-breaking aspects of both movements. In view of Robert Kroestch's and Linda Hutcheon's canonization of postmodernism as a philosophy most adequately encompassing a Canadian condition, both culturally and politically, my exploration of the experimental writing of Tostevin, Warland, Scott and Mouré with reference to the historical avant-garde brings the concept of Canadian modernism back on the critical scene. The innovative feminist writing examines and re-writes concepts and literary strategies of the radical stage of the European modernism (Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, Futurism).

3. INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The experimental writing of Tostevin, Scott, Warland and Mouré is intertextually connected not only with the European historical avant-garde but also with the Quebecois feminist avant-garde and with the feminist branch of the American Language Poets. The linking characteristics between the contemporary avant-gardes are:

1. return to the politics and aesthetics of the historical avant-garde.
 2. challenge to the current depoliticized postmodernist aesthetics.
 3. reaction to the current predominant forms of writing, to the so called "workshop poem" in the United States, and to the realist tradition or, in George Bowering's words, to "anecdotal writing" in Canada.
 4. rereading of the female avant-garde.
4. THE POSTMODERNIST AVANT-GARDE WRITING AS A REINCARNATION OF THE SPIRIT OF CARNIVAL.

Bakhtin's theory of carnival and carnivalization explains the concept of a contemporary avant-garde. When literature is approached as a carnivalesque space, it is no longer a pure, unified and harmonious verbal artifact but it transgresses boundaries of discourses and plays with various semiotic systems, both verbal and nonverbal. Contemporary carnivals are multi-media performances, and so are many texts of Scott, Mouré, Tostevin and Warland. Their texts are read as examples of Jakobson's intersemiotic translation. They experiment with interartistic comparisons; they do not avoid questions of contextualization, be it personal, social, literary, psychological, or philosophical questions excommunicated by New Critics and other formalist schools.

5. SEARCH FOR FORMAL, CONCEPTUAL AND/OR POLITICAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TEXTS OF ENGLISH CANADIAN FEMINIST WRITERS AND THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE.

Tostevin, Mouré, Scott and Warland appropriate writing techniques of the historical avant-garde. They translate them into their own writing techniques, politics, aesthetics and ethics. They use them for their specific social and cultural critique. They also use them for exploration of issues essential to current critical and feminist discourses. They feminize the historical avant-garde practices by experimenting with "body writing" which seeks to valorize women's desire and sexuality.

Similar to the historical avant-garde the texts of English Canadian language writers:

1. CARNIVALIZE MONOLOGIC CONCEPTS OF LANGUAGE AND WRITING: EXPLORE SYNAESTHETIC QUALITIES OF LANGUAGE THROUGH THE EXAMINATION OF EARLIER WRITING SYSTEMS.

This is a carnivalization of the monologic concept of language and of the phonetic alphabet. Alphabetic writing that induces standardized, desensitized reading is discarded in favour of the picto-ideo-phono-graphic features of language. The Saussurean notion of language as a system based on binarism or the logic of opposition that always privileges one term over the other, is replaced by a triadic system of Bakhtin or Peirce. The triadic system allows for no evaluative delusions typical of binary constructs. It embraces a contextually-sensitive model of communication that explores a link between text, writer and reader. It reveals a semiotic operation of language, language both as sign but also as part of the experiential reality.

4. USE PARODY AND IRONY WITH REFERENCE TO PATRIARCHAL TEXTS AND THEORIES.

The historical avant-garde was notorious for its use of irreverent parody and irony with reference to the dominant symbolist writing, art and bourgeois ideology. Ironic appropriation and "transcontextualization" of "ready-made" objects questioned the institution of art. Feminist language writing uses the strategy of parody and irony to challenge ideas and concepts which support the dominant androcentric ideology that silences the voices of difference.

5. CHALLENGE THE UNIFIED CONCEPT OF SELF.

Feminist language writing enacts current dialogues in feminist theoretical discourse regarding the alternative formation of female subjectivity. It explores new conceptualizations of subjectivity. The traditional humanitarian self is being re-written, re-translated into alternative concepts: polyphonic self, subject-in-process, "collaborative self," "self as performance" (Judith Butler), "specular self" (Luce Irigaray, Anne Herrmann), maenadic self (Rachel Blau DuPlessis) or nomadic one (Rosi Braidoti). I propose the concept of *feminina semiotica*, of subject as necessarily self-interpretive and active agent in discourse. All of these concepts are attempts at redefining a new feminine subjectivity and all of them define subjectivity in relation to an/other. They venture at exploring a different vision of "subjectivity as embodied, sexually differentiated, multiple and relational" (Braidoti 276).

6. INSIST ON SELF-REFLEXIVITY OF ART.

It was the historical avant-garde that challenged representational art and returned to the conceptual basis of creation. Feminist language writers engage in a "constructive writing" practice that underscores their agency as self-reflexive subjects in discourse.

7. CREATE BOOKS AS ART OBJECTS.

The writers are carrying the self-conscious art practice begun by Duchamp with his "ready-mades." The books become hybridized constructs, both writing and painting, writing and photo-collage, writing and installation. The reader emerges as an active co-creator of the book art.

8. CARNIVALIZE THE CONCEPT OF GENRE.

The contemporary feminist avant-garde relishes contamination of fixed generic structures. There is a feminist carnivalization of genre with a feminist ideology behind it. The writers explore the idea of FEMINAGE that combines various forms of a collage/montage/ *métissage* composition with the practice of "l'écriture au féminin." These are hybrid forms of writing that mingle and confront multiple discourses. All of them operate on the basis of an ideogrammic principle. They embody/illustrate the idea of A TOTAL WORK OF ART which combines literality, musicality and visuality and hence the fusion of all artistic media. It is then a

rethinking of the very notion of verbal art, a translation of the visual and music aesthetics into a verbal aesthetics. FEMININAGE CAN BE REGARDED AS AN INTERSEMIOTIC COMPOSITION that also embraces inter- and intra-lingual translative practices. It translates not only the techniques of visual arts into writing (intersemiotic practice), but it also translates between verbal genres (prose/poetry etc.) and between languages (the dominant patriarchal one and the emerging "l'écriture féminine" as the inter-, intralingual and intersemiotic translation between body and writing). The new genre of "fiction theory" is a result of the somatization of theoretical discourse, of the conflation of theory and "l'écriture au féminin."

6. THE CONCEPT OF WRITING AS COMBINING AESTHETICS AND POLITICS.

Similar to the historical avant-garde, aesthetics and politics are no longer dichotomized in contemporary feminist avant-garde texts. Language writers believe that political structures are informed and supported by particular verbal structures; when they are questioned and dismantled they open a space for social transformation. The very fact of repeatedly evoking a musical, visual and gestural language disrupts the conventional, standardized language of mass/popular culture. Through the exploration of language the writers reveal the power structures of representation; their writing acts not only as a critique of society on general, but of the patriarchal structures inherent both in language and society. The interest in politics brings the writers into rereading of the female avant-garde. They explore Gertrude Stein's writing strategies but they also aim at re-vision of her political and social views.

CRITICAL READER

What is your reason of combining the "sensual page poetics" with the final linear presentation of ideas?

CONCERNED WRITER

Doesn't the Bakhtinian concept of carnival promote ambivalent texts that allow for coexistence of both the traditional and subversive ideas?

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RESEARCH FICHES

alterity

The concept of alterity refers to the radical difference between two subjects which is not dependent on the hierarchy of sexual difference.

avant-garde

The term refers to work that transcends current artistic conventions in crucial respects, establishing a discernible distance between itself and the mass of current practices; in the 1960s and early 1970s the term applied to "the postwar reemergence of self-conscious stylistic innovation in the arts" (Russell "A Short History" 4) which was later labelled "postmodern."

Bakhtin and feminism

Bakhtin's thought provides a theoretical background for the merging of empirical and textual feminism. All of the key Bakhtinian categories: dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnival embrace simultaneously the textual, the contextual or the empirical. Bakhtin never dissociates textual practices from social and historical processes.

carnivalization

The concept of carnival translated into writing refers to such subversive literary practices as questioning of the monologic concepts of language and genre. The carnivalesque in literature, in Kristeva's words, is both "discourse and spectacle," "a spectacle ... without a stage ... a signifier, but also a signified" ("Word" 78). In a carnivalesque text "drama becomes located in language" (Word" 79). What is vital in a carnivalesque structure is that "prohibitions (representation, "monologism") and their transgression (dream, body, "dialogism") coexist" ("Word" 79) and hence they form a typical Bakhtinian ambivalent text "both representative and anti-representative" (Word" 79). If writing is carnivalesque, then it can be regarded as spectacle, as

theatre, and the actual writing practice can be compared to "a theatre of ideas in which the rehearsal and the final performance are combined" (Nicol qtd. in Lame Kaufmann 226). Moreover, carnival primarily valorizes the body ("carni" means flesh/body) and the translation of the body into the written text or, in other words, the somatization of script, is one of crucial concerns of feminist writing.

collage

The interruption of spatial and temporal continuity in art, and an affirmation of juxtaposition, superposition, and simultaneity as dominant modes of structuring. In collage, hierarchy gives way to parataxis. Such discourse inevitably involves the viewer or reader in a new way (Perloff "The Invention" 42).

constructive writing practice

Practice of writing that acknowledges "the form as materials to be worked with and whose "outer structure or parameter, or the method by which the work is generated, is made visible" (Bernstein "Thought's Measure" 73). Charles Bernstein claims that "[t]here is no escape in writing (or 'elsewhere') from structures/forms, they are everpresent - 'de'forming and 're'forming. To see them - to hear them - as inseparable from 'content.'" (Thought's Measure" 71-72).

contamination

The term is used by Lola Tostevin with reference to hybrid texts that allow for a dialogue between various genres and modes of writing: "[c]ontamination means differences have been brought together so that they can make contact" (Tostevin "Contamination" 13). Contamination is "not just a literary device but also a cultural and even a political project" (Brydon 191).

Derridean

The term is used with reference Derrida's focus on textuality, an endless deferral of meaning,

deconstruction of logocentric ideas and concepts.

dialogism

Bakhtinian concept of dialogism is the name not just for dualism but for a necessary multiplicity in human perception. The dialogic refers to the juxtaposition or confrontation of languages, of social forces and epochs, determined by the socioideological development of languages. In contrast to dialectic it does not move towards synthesis. Dialogic writing calls up a response and creates an immediate community; a dialogic reading looks beyond the poem as text to the poem as cultural product, connecting the voices of the poem to the ideological and social values of words. Dialogism questions the fixity of barriers between literary and extra-literary discourse. It intensifies writing as both subjectivity and intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of a "person-subject of writing" becomes blurred, yielding to that of "ambivalence of writing" (Kristeva "Word" 68).

écriture féminine and l'écriture au féminin

A form of writing written by/from the (female) body; the feminist "bringing of the body into the act of writing" (Marlatt "Between" 99). In language-focused texts the translation of the body into writing is performed through the exploration of the picto-ideo-phono-graphic resources of language. Nicole Brossard differentiates between *l'écriture féminine* and *l'écriture au féminin*. For her *l'écriture féminine* is "the writing of any woman expressing what it means to be female and to be a woman in society - expressing her own experience." *L'écriture au féminin*, on the other hand, refers to "writing with a feminist consciousness, questioning the feminist condition, and therefore being in the state of combat so that women's experience and perspective be validated." *L'écriture au féminin*, Brossard states, "has been produced somehow through a form which we would call "the text". In fact "*l'écriture au féminin*" has generated texts of a hybrid nature that feature brief narrative interventions with poetic resonances. It is a space where one can simultaneously express, remember, question and provoke"

(Brossard "Energy" 60).

feminnage

A form of writing that combines collage and l'écriture féminine understood in its picto-ideo-phono-graphic dimension. Feminnage can be regarded as an intersemiotic composition that also embraces inter- and intra-lingual translative practices. It translates not only the techniques of visual arts into writing (intersemiotic practice), but it also translates between verbal genres (prose/poetry etc.) and between languages (the dominant patriarchal one and the emerging "l'écriture féminine" as the inter-, intralingual and intersemiotic translation between body and writing). The concept also refers to the exploration of hybrid forms that mingle and confront multiple discourses. All of them operate on the basis of an ideogrammic principle and embrace various modes and forms of writing. They embody/illustrate the idea of a total work of art. Both collage and montage can be used in the composition that allows for integration of multiple genres, be they verbal or nonverbal. Feminnage is used by language-focused writers for feminist rewriting/transformance of androcentric discourses.

Heteroglossia

For Bakhtin it is the ensemble of social and historical elements which condition any utterance. It is a way of conceiving the world as made up of a multiplicity of voices.

historical avant-garde

Transgressive writing of such cultural and literary movements as Cubism, Dada, Futurism, Surrealism and Russian Constructivism. The space of modernist practice is usually divided into "high modernism" and "historical avant-garde" (Peter Bürger, Huyssen). "High modernist" art is regarded as formally experimental but politically unengaged and opposed to mass culture; historical avant-garde art, on the other hand, is considered to be politically engaged, highly critical of cultural

institutions, interested in mass culture, and intent on bridging the gap between art and life.

intersemiotic translation

Roman Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation refers to "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" ("On Linguistic" 429). It can also include the inter- and intra-lingual translation.

intertextuality

The concept does not relate to questions of influence by one writer upon another, or to the sources of a literary work. It "replaces the challenged author-text relation with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself" (Hutcheon *A Poetics* 112). Exploration of intertextuality involves attention to the sociohistoric level of the text and to the interaction of various codes and discourses that traverse the text.

language writing

Writing that "places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program or subject matter" (Bernstein "Repossessing" ix). Writing is for them "an investigation rather than an aestheticization" (Bernstein *Content's* 269). The writers explore structures and codes of language and their role in the constitution of our world. Their texts place the reader in a more active role as the coproducer of the meaning.

logocentrism

According to Derrida, logocentrism gives independent existence to concepts, which are no more than an effect of linguistic difference. Logocentric assumptions about language, thinking, reason, knowledge refer to a belief in "a singular and unified conceptual order, one which

seems to grasp the presence or immediacy of things" (Grosz *Sexual* xix).

metaphorization

"[A] textual tactic or strategy ... [which] insinuates difference"; it contrasts with the concept of metaphor which "may (or may not) assert similitude" (Freeman 70).

metissage

Metissage is a form of bricolage in the sense used by Claude Lévi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompassed far more: it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature. Above all it is a reading practice that allows me to bring out the interreferential nature of a particular set of texts, which I believe to be of fundamental importance for the understanding of many postcolonial cultures (Lionnet 8). It is also "a concept of solidarity which demystifies all essentialist glorifications of unitary origins, be they racial, sexual, geographic or cultural (Lionnet 9). The concept encompasses the hybrid nature of experimental feminist texts that do not shun questions of social/empirical nature.

post/poststructuralism

In other words--a "responsible poststructuralist" stance that recuperates an active and engaged subject. As Friedman argues, post/poststructuralism is a poststructuralism in dialogue with theories that stress the agency of the self/subject, such as Bakhtin's, Peirce's or Foucault's.

semiotization of the body

The body is read as a linguistic sign, as an icon (image, diagram, metaphor) or as a picto-ideo-phono-graphic figure; body is "back into semiosis, from which it has been exiled from dualist, metaphysical philosophies and theories of representation" (Banting "The body" 228).

somatization of language

Language is read as body, body of language; the characteristics of the body are translated (intersemiotically) into the syntax of language.

specular subject

Luce Irigaray's concept of the subject that struggles to rewrite itself as a subjectivity by representing both a subject and an object position. For Bakhtin this means responding to and anticipating the word of another; for Irigaray it means being neither one nor two, neither open nor closed, never the copy of someone else's original.

semiotic

The term, initially derived from Saussure to refer to the study of signs and sign systems, is used by Kristeva to indicate a pre-oedipal, maternal space and energy subordinated to the paternal law-like functioning of the symbolic. The semiotic can transgress the boundaries of the symbolic and, as a result, it can subvert its operations.

symbolic

Kristeva based her use of the symbolic on Lacan's theory. Lacan opposes the term to the imaginary and Kristeva to her notion of the semiotic. There are three senses of the term. First, in contrast to the imaginary controlled by the figure of the mother, the symbolic refers to the organization of the social order which is dominated by the figure and the law of the father. Second, the symbolic refers to the order of language understood as a rule-governed system of signification. The symbolic is the order of representation. Third, the symbolic structures the unconscious; it is founded on the repression of the imaginary (Grosz Sexual xxiii).

synaesthetic writing

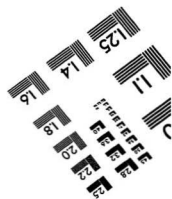
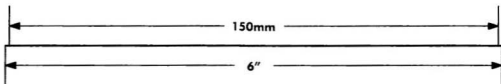
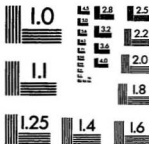
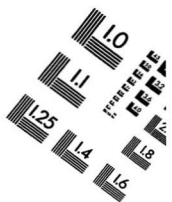
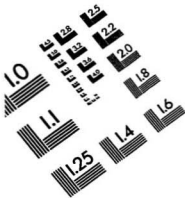
The terms refers to the picto-ideo-phono-graphic nature of writing, to the simultaneous "relationship between

seeing, hearing, interpreting and understanding poetic form" (Bradford 49). It is writing as an intersemiotic translation of the body into the picto-ideo-phono-graphic notation that effectively carnivalizes the phonetic alphabet.

transformance

The new theories of translation foreground the participation of writer/translator in the creation of meaning; and by extension, this self-reflexive element joins the new translation theories with theories of performance (and hence Godard's term "transformance")

TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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