

A FEMINIST QUARTERLY
FIREWEED
OF WRITING, POLITICS, ART & CULTURE

language

LOST & FOUND TONGUES • IMPERIAL STORIES • "TOLERANT"
LANGUAGE • SILENCES • CROSS-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION • DREAMS
& MEMORY • PERFORMATIVE LECTURING • VOICING DIFFERENCE
Kyo Maclear • Silvana Hernando • Nancy Chater • Frieda Forman •
Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood • Marusya Bociurkiw • Zaffi
Gousopoulos • Mehri Yalfani • Ana C. P. dos Santos • Rozena Maart
& MORE

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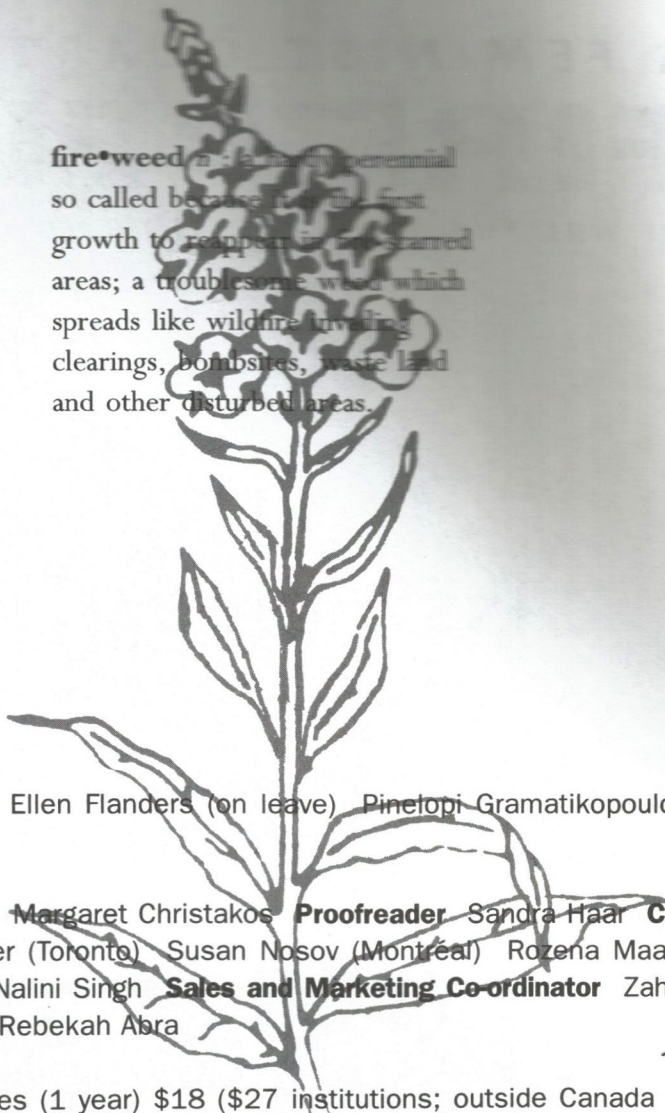


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Issue 44/45

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fireweed is a hardy perennial
so called because it is the first
growth to reappear in the scarred
areas; a troublesome weed which
spreads like wildfire invading
clearings, bomb sites, waste land
and other disturbed areas.

FIREWEED Collective

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Front cover

Photograph of graffiti on Queen Street West, Toronto by **Sandra Haar**

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Editorial

In our original notion of this special double issue on Language, we wanted to move away from essentialist conceptions of “women’s language” that we believed such an issue title would inspire, as well as expectations that such an issue would be dedicated to pure “language play” and literary experimentation. A focus on language for us was about power and silence, translation and hybridity, the “tongue” as a body positioned steadfastly in relation to society.

We publish in English, and as such, we wanted to examine some of the meanings of English as a language of dominance and domination. Our call for submissions focused upon immigration, acculturation and colonization, especially the context of English as a language of imposition. We also expressed interest in receiving work that explored intricate forms of language-resistance that women practise: codes, “dialects,” syntaxes and silences.

This issue’s cover image is a fusing of two political applications of language. The street graffiti “They say gun charge, we say murder charge”—in reference to the Sophia Cooke shooting by a Toronto cop—emblemizes the language of protest, which redefines official namings and makes an audible call for accountability. When feminist consciousness scratches its way onto the walls of accepted realities, the storyline of public space changes. What it “is” is not what “they” say, but on its way to becoming something else, something named and contentious, something “real.”

The second image—a popular survey form requesting people to identify as subjects of one particular language group—is shorthand for language as an arm of government, an organizing principle that reduces our complexity instead of inviting multiplicity. The form is in English, so it is clear who’s behind Door Number One. And countless languages are not mentioned—“Other” is a vast orchestra of voices and experiences and bodies. What it “is not” is reciprocated, heard, received, and accounted for.

Staring into the face of these two brick-hard surfaces—the public domain and the texts of bureaucratic society—the works collected in this issue reflect an understanding of language based on relations of power: a personal inquiry into dreams and memory by Marusia Bociurkiw; the poems and stories of learning English as a refugee by Mehri Yalfani; Cathy Daley’s suite of paintings punning advertising culture and women’s commodification; an interview with Frieda Forman on Yiddish and its significance as a woman’s language; Michelle Alfano’s operatic study of emotional bilingualism; Ana C. P. dos Santos on the space between colonizer and colonized; Zaffi Gousopoulos’s poems and fiction by Myriam Chancy and Claudia Gahlinger reflecting on two-tongued histories; Silvana Hernando on the politics and practice of cultural interpretation; Kyo Maclear on the strategic pitfalls of silence.

In addition, we present works that deal with the use of language and power in various ways: Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's investigations into performative lecturing as a way of interrupting the authority of academe; Nancy Chater's critique of The Body Shop's appropriation of storytelling as a new-age marketing strategy; a deconstruction by Rozena Maart on absence/presence and whiteness/Blackness; Rachel Kalpana James's double-edged visual discourse on the notion of language barriers; Sandra Haar on the limits of "tolerance."

We invite you to read this multilingual meditation; and to listen to your own uses of language as you do.

Issue 46 will be an Open Writing issue; we are still inviting submissions for issues on Collectives and Feminist Practice.

—Sandra Haar and Margaret Christakos, for the *Fireweed* Collective

Letters

Dear *Fireweed*,

I've really been enjoying your publication the last year. Thanks for such a vital, nervy feminist statement.

Sincerely,

Judy MacDonald
Toronto, Ontario

Dear *Fireweed*,

Warm greetings from the Philippines!

A dear friend of mine attended a book fair in Europe and brought home a copy of *Fireweed* (Lesbianics). I was thoroughly enthralled because it showed the possibility of living in dignity, respect, humour and love as a gay person.

I would like to know more about gay and lesbian literature from North America, particularly Canada, because I plan to visit your country sometime in 1995.

Thank you for publishing *Fireweed*. More power to you!

Sincerely yours,

Lia B. Moran
Philippines

Not in So Many Words:

translating silence across "difference"

KYO MACLEAR

ARTICULATIONS OF RESISTANCE

The feeling of being an "inaudible minority" is one I have entertained often in mixed educational settings. For many years, I believed that if I spoke loud enough and often enough, someone might listen, and hear. Often they did. But more often, they didn't. I clapsed onto a very liberal (and literal) notion of "coming to voice" that equated "voice" with the ability to speak (which in turn was equated with the ability to participate and be represented). My urgent need to speak and be heard was shaped in part by high-school years spent in enforced silence (of being made to feel that I had nothing of value to contribute). Racialized and gendered constructions of Asian women had functioned to serve up my silence as "good 'n' natural"—as emblematic of my docility and obedience. My silence, once interpolated in the context of white-dominated classrooms, was often flattened. Muted. Thus, while my silence did not perforce signify submission or compliance, it was often reductively perceived as such. Unlike the "strong, silent" white male protagonists that figured so prominently in romantic Hollywood narratives, my reticence was seldom interpreted as an expression of pensiveness or fortitude. Silence or terseness did not bring me any closer to being compared to the likes of Bogart, Wayne, Bronson or Eastwood; it simply reinscribed my position *outside* dominant processes—and definitions—of communication and articulation. A simple review of the reading list for my high-school Canadian Literature course serves as a small reminder that the "power of the word" was never ascribed to people "like me."

Ruminations over my taciturn high-school years led me to choose a course of decisive action. University would be different, I decided: I would have my say. Yet in the mad rush to make up for "lost time," I failed to fully recognize the barriers to listening that were impeding my full involvement even when I was speaking. I wasn't being "silenced" as much as *unheard*, which I believe to be a much more subtle and insidious form of exclusion.

I don't believe I am exceptional in having placed a premium on speech as a means of articulating dissent. The movement towards disassembling and reversing historically produced *voicelessness* has been a component of many feminist and anti-oppression projects. Activist sloganeering has stressed the importance of renouncing silence, and has valorized "coming to voice" as a means towards challenging power relations, debunking stereotypes and retrieving "muted" voices. This focus on empowering the participation of marginalized peoples in arenas of public discourse, literature, the arts, has no doubt had a critical impact on the political and cultural landscape of Canada. My intention here is not to diminish the importance of these significant achievements, but rather, to negotiate with some messy questions I have encountered as I attempt to communicate for social change in educational settings that are still profoundly white dominated. Central to this discussion is an interest in delineating the possibilities *and* liabilities of silence as a language of resistance and expression.

Drawing on my experience as a graduate student and activist, I have identified several recurring ordeals that we, as "non-white" people, may encounter as we attempt to speak across historically produced "differences." The experiences range from the frustration of being passively and paternalistically listened to¹; to feeling like a freak sideshow whose stories are used to satiate curiosity, or worse, uphold the myth of inclusion²; to carrying the burden of having to "disclose more" for the purpose of educating.³ What has been made markedly clear for many non-white students is that the notion of the classroom as a "safe" space is a dangerous illusion. Guarantees of "safety" and "respect" unfortunately do little to mitigate what, for marginalized students, can often be emotionally harrowing attempts to be respected as critical participants in conversation. For non-white students, wholly unequal power dynamics can, in fact, make the classroom a decidedly uncomfortable and risky place to be. In settings where story-swapping or recounting "insider's accounts" are the privileged means of "grounding" theory, matters can be even worse. Tempted by the lure of finally having our material realities centred, we often find ourselves instead re-marginalized as sociological phenomena: or, raw data. And once again, power relations that have historically delineated those who "experience" oppression from those who "theorize" it, remain intact. And within this dichotomization, white supremacy is left unmarred.

In this context, "coming to voice" for racialized students means recognizing that there is an economy of power in which our voices and stories circulate, are received, appraised and engaged with. Our efforts to destabilize these normative power relations may involve taking on the theorizing of our own multiple experiences. It may also mean examining the efficacy of speaking "from experience" in some settings. Fashioning effective strategies is not a simple task. For many of us it can mean negotiating gingerly between two prevailing forces: the censoring of non-dominant dissenting voices; and the often equally marginalizing coercion to speak. These complex deliberations about whether to speak or not to speak cannot be fully understood if we continue to uniformly accord a higher value to speech/literal "voice." Speech *and* silence can be *both* effects of power and coercion—and means of articulation and resistance.

Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha⁴

While recalling my own past classroom experiences, I began to reflect on another dimension involved in working across “difference”—the varied interpretations of silence. I felt closer to understanding the dynamics of domination that filter our voices when they *rise*, but had greater difficulty naming what happens to them when they *fall*.

“Coming to silence,” unlike “being silenced” or “un-heard,” in certain situations has often felt active. Sometimes it meant an active decision not to participate at a particular moment when I felt that the “risks” were too high, and other times, it was a wholesale refusal to enter my “voice” into the marketplace of bidding, non-communicating voices created in certain settings. (The competitiveness I have experienced in the University—evinced in fast and flashy attempts to prove intellectual mastery and competence—has often left me literally speechless. I have sat in classes where theory that has the potential to productively unsettle our political investments and subjectivities has had the staying power of a laxative.) Yet despite my elevated appraisal of the value of silence—as a conscious process of radical disengagement and rule-breaking—during these moments, I have found that this is not how my silence was often understood. The view of silence as “lost voice,” “voicelessness” or “lack of social identity from which to act”⁵ seems to hold wider currency. That resistance and subversiveness are qualities seldom attributed to “minority” silence should come as little surprise if we reflect for a moment on one of the central tenets of Western “democracies”—freedom of speech. Here, the reductive equation would read: speech=agency=freedom. Leaving aside the often violent operations of censorship and oppression that continue to take place despite, and sometimes in the name of, “freedom of speech,” this undergirding fiction has also resulted in the all-too-common belief that democratic participation and representation is ensured through “speech”—and that, by extension, “silence” can only ever signify tongue-tied inaction and non-participation.

My experience within the University has borne witness to the fact that how we hear, or don’t hear, silence can vary according to how we are positioned and position ourselves. Being one of a handful of non-white students among a disproportionately white, but predominantly female, student population has made me very attentive to the ways in which racialized students are invariably positioned to speak and be heard as speaking from a voice of “difference.” Material relations within the institution (which would include the material fact that out of approximately two hundred faculty members, only three are non-white) combined with dominant academic discourses (which, with the exception of a few “enchanted” pockets here and there, seldom theorize “race” and colonialism) function to marginalize us even before we open our mouths. The authority to speak, or, as bell hooks would have it, to “talk back,” is seldom stacked in our favour. And despite our commitment to participate in politically engaged intellectual projects, there are times when for one reason or another we are battle-weary, or suspicious of the way we are being set up to speak, and we allow our voices to fall into a stubborn silence. I have experienced these stock-taking moments occur on occasion among several non-white students simultaneously. Yet while the shared silence during these moments has resonated for me with a weightiness that

seemed to rupture the domination of spoken language, a rude awakening has often followed: non-dominant silence is normative, a palimpsest, an aphonic absence. It would seem that just as "writing disappears unless there is a response to it,"⁶ voices fade, and silences go un-noted. In grappling with the hazards of silence, I am brought to ask: Can silence only be meaningful when openly recognized and supported—or challenged—with words? Can silence ever be understood as something more than the mere absence of voice? Can we afford to be silent if we want our resistance to be understood? How tenable is our "right to silence"?⁷

SEEPING SILENCES

What kind of educational project would redefine the silence of the unknowable, freeing it from the "the male-defined context of Absence, Lack and Fear," and make of that silence "a language of its own" that changes the nature and direction of speech itself? —Elizabeth Ellsworth⁸

In May of 1992, I attended a Japanese Canadian Educators' Conference sponsored by the National Association of Japanese Canadians and the North York School Board. During the conference, I attended a workshop on the use of "Oral History in the Classroom." The group was made up of seven "Asian Canadians" and five white Canadians. A well-known filmmaker in the Japanese Canadian community was screening a video oral history he hoped to introduce to Toronto-area school boards. Watching the video, I found myself moved to tears by the slow and sparse testimony of an older Issei (first-generation Japanese Canadian) man who was describing his experience in the internment camps. It was not his words that compelled me, for they were methodical, almost clinically detached, renderings of his memories. What moved me and drew me in over and over again was the slight, and almost imperceptible, quivering of his upper lip and the accompanying silences. His emphatic pauses, which often lapsed into un-edited silences of several minutes, gave form to his testimony. These silences made me reflect on the lapses and disjunctures attendant in processes of remembering. They guided me to what he was not telling and reminded me that some things will always remain unspoken—and unknowable.

The discussion that followed the video was a disturbing reminder that silence may be encoded differently for people coming from different social locations and political subjectivities. The first comments were made by a white male high-school teacher who felt that the video wouldn't be appropriate for "educational purposes" because it was "too drawn out, too slow" and had "too many silences." He concluded his remarks by stating that he didn't get "a sense of any feeling from the story." Another educator, a white woman, expressed genuine concern that her students "might not understand the grave nature of the internment and the immense psychological suffering it caused" in viewing this oral history. Judging from these two reactions, it became clear that silence had been read negatively as an absence—a lacking of sentiment and depth of reflection. Implicit was a view that a fully

fleshed-out verbal account would somehow provide a transparent, authentic window to the past.

My immediate response was to point out the context of the “telling”: the video camera mediated the oral history. Despite the fact that the interviewer was close to the teller, the testimony was given with the understanding that it would be shared with strangers in non-intimate spaces that could not be controlled. A few other Japanese Canadians made note of his quivering upper lip. An older Japanese Canadian woman eloquently described the “suppression of emotion as an emotion in itself.”

I reflected on my own ability to *hear* his silence as much more than mere verbal restraint and then considered that perhaps my understanding had also been filtered through another highly specific—but perhaps equally suspect—reading. I had focused my attention throughout the screening on the minutiae of gesture, rehabilitating each and every movement—from the blinking of an eye to the shifting of weight to the quivering of an upper lip. I had read in this sequence of “suggestive” movement an annotation of trauma and resistance. In this context, silence was antithetical to passivity. Where earlier comments had closed down possible readings of his pauses by introducing pathologizing themes of repression, I found myself foisting my own static and romanticized interpretations onto his silences. *Forbearance. Reflection. Restraint.* Absent the Zen, and my reading was coming dangerously close to reinscribing stock images of Orientalized silence and quietude. This in itself, in retrospect, alerts me to the need to be constantly attentive to the perils involved in aestheticizing silence and reifying it over speech. Orientalist constructions of “Japanese reticence,” for example, which, needless to say, occlude the actual range of responses and potential meanings attributed to silence in any given context, have had lasting appeal. These petrified constructions have been given modern-day inflection through contemporary trade seminars in North America, which promise prospective clients that the key to their corporate success in Japan will be delivered once they learn to de-code Japanese patterns of “non-verbal communication” and “indirect speech.”

My own interpretation, thus, did little with respect to demystifying this canonized notion of “Oriental” silence. What would have been more interesting would have been to discuss how the past, one’s memory, is not only mediated through language but also by silence—and how this is often an *effect* of power. Rather than attempt the impossible and, I would argue, unproductive task of filling in the gaps in oral testimonies, we might have focused instead on the problems involved in reconstructing history. We might have considered how silence can, paradoxically but productively, *amplify* the sociopolitical tensions and contradictions that produce these fissured narratives.

As I left the workshop that afternoon, I continued to contemplate the varied responses to the video. How would its silences be received by students in mixed classroom settings? Would it abet stereotypes of Asians as unfeeling, inscrutable, passive? When later asked by another conference participant about my response to the workshop, I expressed my confusion. Our discussion resulted in several more questions: Can silence ever be a self-evolved form of expression for people from oppressed groups? Given the material realities of racism, sexism and other forms of institutionalized oppression, can we ever separate silence from mechanisms of domination that force us to "be quiet" or that "silence us"? Can we ever freely choose silence?

In grappling with the possibilities and problems with understanding silence as a "language of its own," the first step may be to build the basis for recognizing its constitutive presence in communication and mis-communication when working across "difference." Although we depend on words for communication, we should not let this beguile us into neglecting moments when words are not a bridge of contact. We might then become sensitized to silence as a "way of saying."

NOTES

1. Sherene Razack, "Story-telling for Social Change," Gender and Education 5, no. 1 (1993): 65.
2. Ibid., 66.
3. Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," Harvard Educational Review 59, no. 3 (August 1989): 316.
4. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Colour, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1989), 373.
5. Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?," 312-13.
6. Ibid., 305.
7. Razack, "Story-telling," 67.
8. Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?," 321.

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Illustration by Cynthia del Rosso



O
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MICHELLE ALFANO

n. A form of drama in which music is
a dominant factor, made up of arias,
recitatives, choruses, etc . . . with
orchestral accompaniment, scenery,
acting, and sometimes dance.

I have always known opera to have two meanings in our home, one in its traditional sense and the other meaning was used in the following fashion, as in “*Che é ‘sta opera?*” Translation: “What is this drama/noise/chaos?” This was yelled at us by our parents or aunts and uncles whenever we were being particularly loud and disruptive. Which was often.

made up of arias

My mother’s favourite opera was *La Traviata*. She would put on the 1958 live recording on the old stereo of Maria Callas singing in Lisbon when she did housework after a shift in the factory. She worked in the cotton mill and rushed home just after dawn to wake and feed me. My crib was in the small bedroom next to the backyard. When I stood on tiptoe I could see the tomato plants from my window and old Mr. Mathews sometimes sleeping on the

grass of his backyard next door in the afternoon. My parents' bedroom was on the other side of the house. Sometimes I lay on the bed between my mother and father after she got home and before my father went to work for the city, fixing roads.

My earliest memory is that of my mother dusting and singing to me between arias of *La Traviata*. Pink feathers tickled photographs of our family and large cubes of zirconium on brass disguised as knick knacks. Here is my mother in a shiny black bun and stiletto heels with blood red lipstick and a beautiful beaded cocktail dress. Here is my father, still lean and handsome then, in a dark suit and thin tie, his arm over my mother's shoulder.

"Do you hear that cough?" she asked as she spoon fed me some mashed banana after she put on the record. "That means she's going to die. Always listen for the cough Lilla, that's always a sure sign that they'll be dead in act three." Personally I preferred the "Drinking Song" in act one or the gypsy dancing at the end of act two, something fun and lively. Better than that tired old Violetta and her cough dying of some unknown disease at the end of act three. When she finally took me to see the opera I told Mama I couldn't understand how a 250-pound woman could die of consumption but she just told me to keep quiet.

"I love this part," she said when she put on the record for the first time. In act one after Violetta's soirée in her salon, Alfredo begs to see her once again. She finally agrees after much flirtation. He asks when he can see her, and as he says this, Mama took a plastic rose from a vase on the TV and handed it to me and said *Take this flower. You shall bring it back when it has withered.* Violetta and her white camelias. Alfredo is thrilled because that means he may return tomorrow. I clapped my hands, my small mouth full of banana, awaiting the next aria.

We lived on Paradise, not Upper Paradise on the mountain, just Paradise. Hamilton "mountain" is actually a hill and has streets which extend upwards from the downtown core. They run roughly the same direction. Generally the houses on "Upper" were newer, nicer, bigger. Ours was a three-storey brick house built before the war and we lived behind a giant billboard. This is a picture of me on my tricycle in front of the billboard. That's my brother Joey standing on the back. When I was small I used to think we owned the billboard because it was on our property. Kids on the streets thought we did too, they said we were rich dagos. I asked Mama if we were and she smacked me and said "Don't you dare walk around saying we're rich!" I don't think she was sure what dago meant but she understood rich.

I can still hear her singing to me in my high chair in the kitchen on Paradise Street, especially the "*Croce e Delizia*" aria. Sometimes the roles were reversed and I was her Violetta, she was my Alfredo. She held her duster like a sword. She leaned into my face passionately, her cotton housecoat bunched up in little seams around her heart to which she clutched the duster.

O, amore misterioso
Misterioso altero
Croce
Croce e delizia
Croce e delizia
Delizia al cuore

In the opera a rich young man falls in love with a courtesan who is beautiful and pure of heart but is considered an unacceptable object of his desires by his father because of her many affairs. After having had this aria sung to me so many times I soon came to see myself as both the cross and ecstasy of my mother's life. Usually the cross.

Another time, I sat in my chair eating a piece of cheese she had given me to nibble on as she showed how Alfredo had flung the gambling money he had won in Violetta's face in front of all of their friends.

"Oh this is the best part" she said, acting out all the roles, soprano, baritone and tenor for me. He thinks she left because she wanted to return to her older, wealthier lover but really it's because his father convinced Violetta that she would ruin Alfredo's life if she stayed with him. My mother clutched some Canadian dollars impersonating francs and threw them at me and said

*I have called you here as witnesses
that I have paid her all I owe.*

Then Mama crumpled to the floor, Violetta fainting in Flora's arms. I gave her a standing ovation from my high chair.

with orchestral accompaniment

My earliest memory as a social being was being a flower girl at my youngest aunt's wedding. I think by the time I was ten I must have attended about a hundred weddings. If there's one thing my family likes to do, it's to get married. I was five and Mama made me a floor length peacock blue chiffon dress with matching gloves. Mama put my hair in little ringlets and a bun and I got my first pair of pantyhose. They were white because "nice little girls didn't wear nude pantyhose," Mama said.

There were six hundred people at this wedding and it was held in a hall near our church, All Souls. I distinctly remember three older girls standing in front of the church before the ceremony saying how cute I looked. Well I guess all the attention got to me because somehow I got it into my head that I was getting married. Since I was the star of the event I decided that I would or wouldn't do certain things.

For instance, when the small orchestra started playing I didn't want to dance with the ring boy for the first dance. Needless to say my cousin was devastated. When they wanted to take pictures in front of the fountain outside, I hid in the salon with some other cousins and spent the next hour adding salt to unguarded glasses of red wine. Over the years this evolved into the favourite sport of small children at weddings. At the end of the night I wouldn't take off my dress because I looked so good in it. I didn't want the day to be over. And when my mother finally forced me to take off this dress at three in the morning so she could get some sleep, I screamed at her that I never wanted to get married again for the rest of my life.

a form of drama

One time my brother Joey and I walked all the way to the Center Mall to ride the kiddie cars which we had seen the day before. We walked hand in hand to the mall. It had small fire engines, trucks, convertibles, everything. And miniature stop signs with a cut out policeman holding up his white gloved hand to stop the cars. We had neglected to tell my mother and spent an hour or so looking longingly through the wire fence at the cars because we forgot it was a Sunday and that the mall wasn't open. I thought we had only been gone for an hour.

We made our way back to the house. On the way home I bought Joey some candy strawberries and mint leaves from Turner's Variety. My mother was standing on the porch, her white knuckles gripped around the broom, her face a tomato red.

"Where have you been?" she screamed, already making her way down the steps of the porch. Joey grabbed the hem of my dress and pulled it hard, his little knees knocked together.

"I . . . we . . ."

WHACK! The bottom of the broom landed on the top of my head and then hit Joey in the back. He jumped forward and cowered a little closer to me. I pushed him away looking for cover. Of course there was none. I thought about running around the billboard that sat in front of our house but I knew it would be worse if I ran. Besides I'd have Joey dragging from my ankles.

"I said, 'Where-WHACK-were-WHACK-you-WHACK?'"

"I . . . I . . . I."

"Ayayayay, I'll give you ayayay!"

She dragged us both by one arm and pulled us into the basement. We had a wine cellar where my father kept barrels of homemade wine and preserves that my mother made each autumn. There was no electricity. It was cool and pitch black. She shoved us into the wine cellar and bolted the door from the outside.

"This will teach the both of you to wander off without telling me where you're going!"

Then we heard her stomp upstairs into the kitchen above. At first, Joey and I just sat on the concrete floor and cried quietly, trying to catch our breath. His little chest heaved up and down and his lower lip trembled. I could tell because when she pushed us and Joey's head ended up on my lap. Eventually he snuggled closer and buried his six year old head into my dress. I was too miserable to push him away. After all it had been my idea, Joey just came along for the ride, so I let him lay there. After about ten minutes Joey started wailing again, loudly. I couldn't help it, then I started too.

So we both kept crying and calling out to her to come and let us out. We thought she couldn't hear us so we kept getting louder and louder. Later she said she was trying to teach us a lesson. She just turned up Verdi's *Macbeth* a little bit each time. Joey kept saying "Sorry, sorry, sorry" in this blubbery voice. I said "Shut up stupid!" after awhile because I was so mad.

About an hour later, we heard my father come home from the Trinacria Club, a social club for Sicilian men that he went to on Sunday afternoons. He heard the screaming from the front door. He burst into the house, slammed the door and yelled "*Che é 'sta opera?*" My mother finished her coffee and then came down and let us out. I heard him screaming at her but she just stood there and said "*Tutto e finito*" like *Macbeth* to his wife after he

stabs Duncan. That shut him up.

We spent the rest of the evening sulking in our rooms. My father was in the backyard working on the garden and my mother was in the living room. I could hear *Macbeth* coming from downstairs.

recitatives

Breakfast was the best time of the day, after Mama's shift but before she started the housework. We had to have an egg every day for breakfast. Sometimes with something but always an egg. Some days she stood humming over the stove and prepared an egg *frittata* for us. It was like a big round omelette with ricotta cheese. Or we ate soft boiled eggs. She cut thin strips of bread we dipped into the yolk. Or she slipped us an egg in our milk. We'd say "My milk tastes funny Ma" and she'd say "Never mind my little chick, drink up" and plant a big kiss in the middle of our foreheads. If we were good we could have *ciambelle* or lady fingers with Nestlé's Quik.

I guess she had listened to one too many records because she started talking to the three youngest, Joey, Carla and I like they talked in operas between arias and choruses. These are called recitatives.

"Would you like some cer-e-al?" she sang in Italian.

"Thanks Ma."

"With milk or creeeeam?"

"Milk please."

"How about juuuuuice?"

"Uh, no thanks."

Carla and Joey still loved it, but after all I had been hearing it since my highchair days. Then Joey and I bundled up and trotted off to Our Lady of Perpetual Agony, the local grade school presided over by Sister Musselle, A.K.A. Sister Mussolini.

Sometimes I'd forget and as I left I'd yell "Goodbyyyyye!" and Mama would glance up with a puzzled look wondering why I was talking so strangely.



and sometimes dance

Usually we fought between ourselves so much about what shows to watch that we had to have TV days assigned. I got Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Joey got Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, except Saturday afternoon. Nonna, our father's mother loved wrestling so we had to watch that. Her other favorites were *Wild Kingdom* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* She didn't understand a word of English but she loved those shows. Sunday was "family day" which meant we had to "shut up one day of the week" and let Mama or Papa decide. Papa always watched *Tiny Talent Time* on Channel 11, produced right here in Hamilton. He said he wanted me to be on the show because I was such a great dancer, and I was.

I would close the living room door and dance with a long chorus line of men, preferably on a ship. I could hear my mother vacuuming upstairs, my Papa would be at work, Joey was playing on the lot in front of the house. In my dance sequence, I was tall with bright red lipstick and legs up to there. I think I saw this woman, the one I was trying to imitate, on a Saturday matinee. I took my mother's lipstick and painted a big red circle on my lips. Then I got a red crayon and coloured my toes and fingernails in. I wanted to use real nail polish but I knew I wouldn't be able to destroy the evidence quickly enough.

The only thing was, I was much too shy to dance for anyone other than my father. When guests came he would tell them how wonderful I was and there I'd be wrapped inside the curtains which separated the living room from my parent's bedroom. So Papa would end up shaking me out of the curtains like a flea from a dog, trying to get me to sing and dance for the company, but I usually ran into their bedroom and hid under the bed as the adults talked and cracked walnuts and drank vermouth. After a while my Papa gave up on grooming me for a show business career.

scenery

Our neighborhood was so nasty that the girls used to beat each other up as well as any boy who tried to intercede. Once, there was a fight in front of McDonald's and one girl in a halter top got it torn right off and she kept on fighting until a man finally pulled her aside and wrapped his jacket around her.

At Our Lady of Perpetual Agony, there was a girl named Ellen in grade eight who kicked everyone else around. She followed Joey and me one day into Turner's Variety and called him a sissy who wore girl's shoes because he was wearing little white shoes from Italy. I couldn't do anything except repeat "They're not girl's shoes!" in this squeaky voice over and over hoping she wouldn't beat us up until she finally got bored and left us alone.

But still I liked Ellen. She looked kind of like a cat with her vague grey eyes and pretty hair, may be that's why I liked her. I embarrassed her by telling everyone one day that she was my second best friend after Theresa. Of course the rest of her gang loved that. They followed her around the school yard and teased her until she finally threatened to kick their heads in. But sometimes if some of the other girls were bothering me she'd joke around and say they'd better leave me alone because I was her second best friend.

One night in the summer of that year, my sister Katerina, cousin Lianna and I were sitting in front of my house on Papa's old bronze-coloured station wagon. Our parents were in the kitchen drinking espresso and talking. I could hear the low murmur of their voices from where we sat in the street light. Ellen came by with two girls I didn't know.

"Look at the wops siting there, greasing up that car!" one tossed over her shoulder like a discarded candy wrapper. They all laughed, even Ellen.

I recognized Ellen but she pretended she didn't know me. I looked at my cousin Lianna; she wasn't from the neighborhood. My sister Katerina knew better, we both went to the same school. She knew all about Ellen. And her friends.

"Look at the sluts that just walked by," Lianna said loudly and lay back on the car. I saw the three heads freeze then turn around.

I slipped off the car and made my way to the house. I wanted to tell one of the parents

that we were all going to be killed. I could hear slapping and scuffling. I stood at the kitchen table trying to say something but I couldn't. I knew that either my cousin was going to be killed tonight or that I was going to be killed tomorrow at school for having told. So I stood there and said nothing.

Later Lianna and Katerina came in and told our parents that the girls had tried to slap them but my cousin slapped them right back. My aunts and uncles asked me why I hadn't said anything to them about what was happening, but I just stood there, kicking the table leg until they finally got bored and resumed talking and drinking. Even Lianna and Katerina left, probably disgusted with me too.

choruses

Choruses are, in opera, as in other forms of music, a "simultaneous utterance of words, cries, etc. . . ." This perhaps explained my mother and father's "parenting style." It is also a concise summation of my teenage years.

"I'm going out now," I'd say and grab my coat to go out the kitchen door.

"She's going out now?" my father asked over his copy of *Il Corriere*.

"You're going out now?" my mother repeated. Funny about that echo in the kitchen.

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now. It's only a few minutes after eight." I scooped a bunch of home grown grapes into my hand and dangled them above my mouth.

"It's almost nine, you can't go out, it's too late!"

"Too late, much too late." my father said without looking at me. He turned the page of the newspaper.

She slammed the iron down onto its holder and grabbed the next set of sheets. She ironed sheets, towels, underwear, even socks. The woman had no mercy.

"I've finished my homework, done the dishes, swept the kitchen, what more do you want?" I counted off my chores on my fingers as I spoke.

"What more do I want? What more do I want?"

"Yes, what more do you want?" I asked, looking out the window for my friend Theresa who lived around the corner.

"More, that's what I want, more!" My mother stumbled over the English. She was frustrated with it because she couldn't get sufficiently angry in English. "Where are you going?"

"Yes, Lilla, tell your mother where you're going." He coughed nervously and changed the page.

"We're going to Burger King on our bikes and then . . ." It was always the hesitation that got me in trouble. "UH . . . then we'll uh just ride around . . ."

"Burger King! Ride around! No! NO! NOOOO! I need you here. Who do you think I am? Madame Butterfly waiting for Pinkerton all my life while you're up to no good?"

Once my mother mentioned Madame Butterfly my father knew I was in real trouble. He went to the living room and turned on the TV, removing himself from the line of fire. I could hear him coughing quietly.

"I need you to water the garden," she said.

"Papa did the garden."

"Then I need you to finish the ironing."

"Ma, you're almost done, what do you want me to do, iron the dish cloths?"

"Then go check on your sister Carla."

"SHE'S SLEEPING!"

"I don't care, sit in her room until she wakes up in case she calls me or wets the bed."

Then she shot me "the look," the kind that every child of an Italian parent knows. The kind that burns holes in your clothes and entrails.

I knew that once again I had met defeat. I stomped upstairs and read a year old, ripped up the copy of *True Confessions* that my cousin Lianna had given me and that I'd stashed under Carla's bed.

in which music is a dominant factor

I remember music was a big part of our life on Paradise. Not just opera but Sicilian folk music. My parents would have parties and stay up late Friday or Saturday night. The bath tub was full of ice and beer, there were bottles of red wine in the kitchen and the stereo blared into the cool night.

After enough wine, the tables were cleared and we danced. Mama was usually the first one to start. She grabbed my Papa and clamped her hands around his waist and shoulder. After several songs they sank into their chairs, sweat gleaming on their arms and my father took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He couldn't keep up with Mama. Then all my aunts and uncles and even some of the cousins started dancing. Sometimes the neighbours would call the police because the music was still playing at 2 or 3 A.M. but more often than not they'd drop by for a glass of wine and a slice of homemade pizza.

acting

That same summer of perpetual parties and get togethers, my father was hospitalized. They found a growth on his lungs in April. Later Mama said "I knew we were too happy." The centuries old Sicilian cynicism crept into her voice. We visited him every night. I told him funny stories about school and Joey brought him crayoned pictures. He got me to hang them up on the wall. Carla sat on his lap and looked adorable, something I'm told she was good at.

I never knew how sick he was. If I was told, I didn't believe it. I thought Mama was doing a pretty wicked impersonation of Maria Callas in . . . anything. Her ranting and arm waving and crying. I leaned over to Joey during one of her rampages and whispered, "She should have gone on the stage . . ." only to find the back of my head miraculously meet the back of her hand. Papa told her to leave me alone, too exhausted to argue about it. I could see he badly needed a cigarette.

At home she flew into a rage if we made too much noise, wrestled, watched the TV too loud. She locked herself away in the family room every night when we came home from the

hospital. She played the music of all the tragic heroines: Lucia di Lammamoor, Aida, Tosca, Anna Bolena and of course Violetta. She sat on the back porch with a cold cup of coffee in her hands every night after the hospital. I tried to put my arms around her once.

"Leave me alone Lilla, I don't feel like playing." She stood up and took a sip of the cold coffee. "He's going to die," she said to me. She looked over the porch into the sunset made a pretty pink and purple by the steel they were making at Stelco and Dofasco. One small tear was running down her cheek and she brushed it away, pretending it was a bit of sleep. I acted like I didn't see it.

I said to myself, "He won't die." I just never thought he would. Then I went inside and back into my room. Joey came in, scared and crying.

"She's just acting Joey, you know Ma." I let him put his chubby arms around my shoulders, which I hardly ever did. Usually I was throwing spoons at him (which were safer than knives), making him swallow pennies or pushing him off the verandah because he was always making me mad. But just then I felt like a heroine in one of Mama's operas. Anna Bolena about to be beheaded, Desdemona smothered by Otello or maybe Tosca pleading for her lover's life. I wrapped my arms around Joey and closed my eyes, the sweet music of Verdi floated over me from the family room.

..

etc . . .

Mama sold the house on Paradise when Papa died. The music just didn't sound the same in the house after he was gone. We all thought it was kind of funny that the new house was on Upper Paradise. She moved there to be closer to her sisters. We see her every couple of weeks since we've all grown and married, even Carla the youngest got married last year. We sit around and drink a glass of wine and listen to her old opera records. We bought her a few CD's but she hates them and always makes us take them back. She loves her old records with their scratches and faded album covers. She says the scratches give them life.

MICHELLE ALFANO IS A TORONTO WRITER WHOSE FICTION PIECES HAVE BEEN NOMINATED FOR THE JOURNEY PRIZE AND THE WESTERN MAGAZINE AWARDS. HER SHORT STORIES HAVE BEEN FEATURED IN LITERARY JOURNALS SUCH AS *ANTIGONISH REVIEW*, *PRAIRIE FIRE* AND *EVENT*.

Language and Consciousness

*that which you do not speak
you will never seek
that which you do not name
you will never claim*

Writing

writing in
the lines the words the act of writing
the process of writing the words the writing
the projection of the self the placement of the self upon the pages
in writing the self in writing in language of domination
in words created through speech to support the selected self
 through speech among those spoken those allowed to speak
 in speech spoken between and among the voices of the spoken
 the spoken selves the selves who speak of themselves
not ourselves not us
they speak in language to describe the self
and so allow the self enable the self
to enter the text to be the text to maintain the text
 to perpetuate the knowledge of the text
 the writer of the text establishes context
 [con]text
cons the text cons readers of the text cons context
establishes consciousness of self consciousness of identity
 consciousness of no identity
 consciousness of invisible identity
 not there but everywhere

whiteness blinking on blank pages pages parcelling white identity
paging identity of white identity the text is about white identity
 the text speaks the words, the written words of white identity
yet does not speak it consciousness absent yet present
 consciousness as knowledge as knowledge of being white
the text kills the knowledge of identities of domination
upholds identities of dominance not dominated
 writes it does not write it
 writes it as an absence

I read my stares
 my blankness everywhere
 my blinking awareness of my Blackness
 not blankness
 not there
 not in textual examinations of thereness/hereness/nowness
 my moments of anticipation
 actively inserting within the text
 inserting the knowledge of my presence
 correcting the text invisibly visibly in my imagination
 in my realness visibly upon my consciousness
 upon my conscious reading of the text
 double trouble the text
 the text is trouble
 sexuality another trouble
 class another trouble
 ageism ableism more textual troubles or genocides
 death murder annihilation erasure
 sequestration of white domination
 so I visually insert within the text
 insert the knowledge of my presence within this absence
 knowledge writing the text
 knowledge writing writing language
 writing consciousness
 language writing
 writing language
 language of domination
 language of the dominant self dominant language of dominant self
 the text of white domination:
 invisibilizes
 debilitates
 destabilizes
 negates/blackens
 erases knowledge of Black self erases knowledge of Black power
 Knowledge Power
 Power Knowledge Power Black

Reading spaces

you

you reading

reading text

reading blank spaces

shifting eyes shifting consciousness

shifting as conceptualization

of words, of phrases, of telegraphic speech

of telegraphic speech as speech

of empty spaces as white spaces

devoid of words

of sentence structure

the words between

the spaces between

they transform sentence to slogan

to chant

to statement

to thought on how to write that which is critiqued

This text is an excerpt from a work in progress.

ROZENA MAART IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR TO *FIREWEED*. SHE IS A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE IN CULTURAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM (ENGLAND) AND CURRENTLY RESIDES IN OTTAWA.

As We Are

The aim of the artwork *As We Are* is to make visually explicit what is commonly denied in the South Asian community: sexuality and HIV/AIDS, with the hope that when we accept the sexuality of our community, we will be better able to understand ourselves and AIDS.

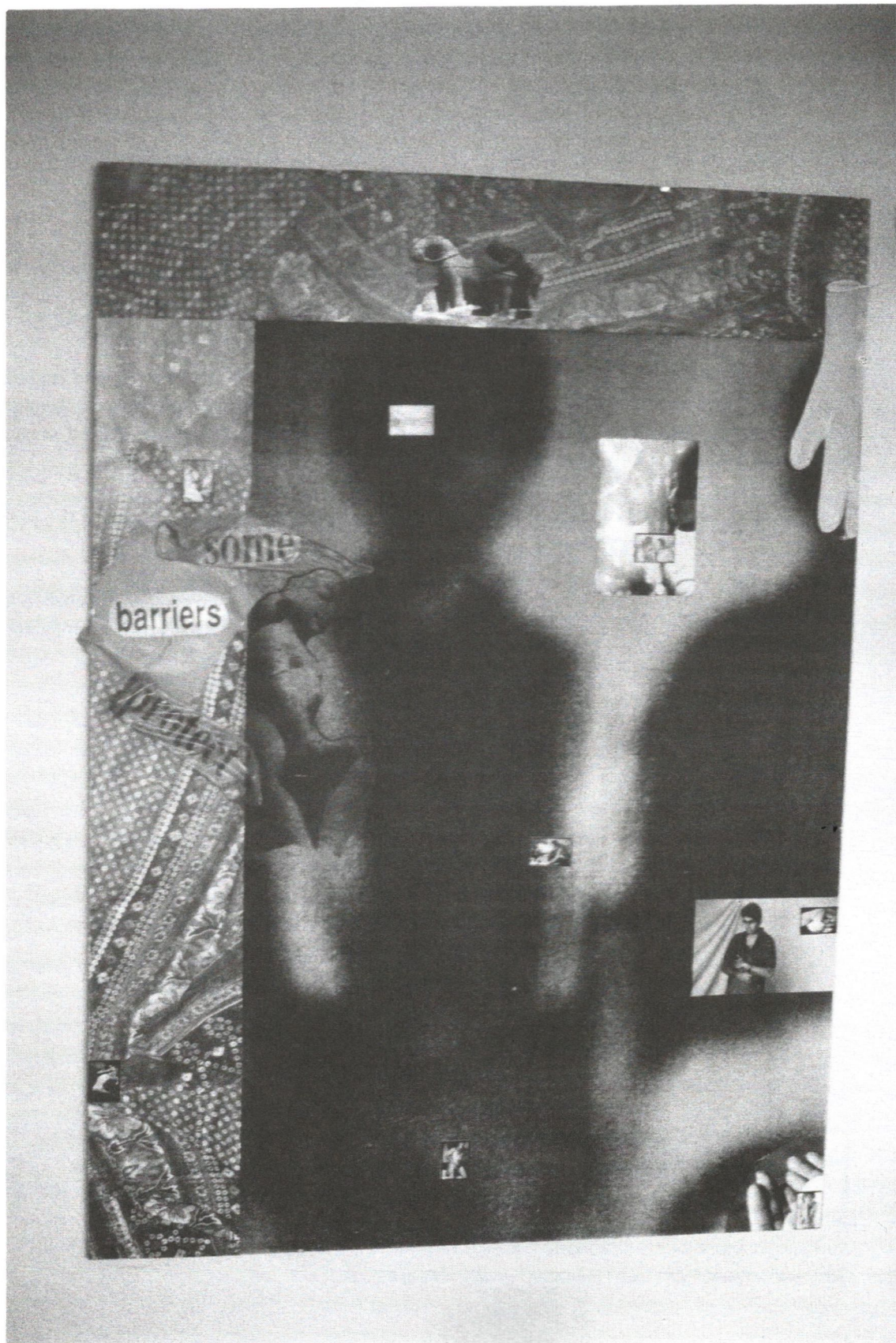
The images in the photo/collage were a collaborative effort by the participants and myself. Many issues and experiences of sexuality are expressed, from menstruation to gender stereotyping, to same-sex partners and mixed-race partners, to sexual abuse and sexual awareness, to safe-sex strategies, to masturbation.

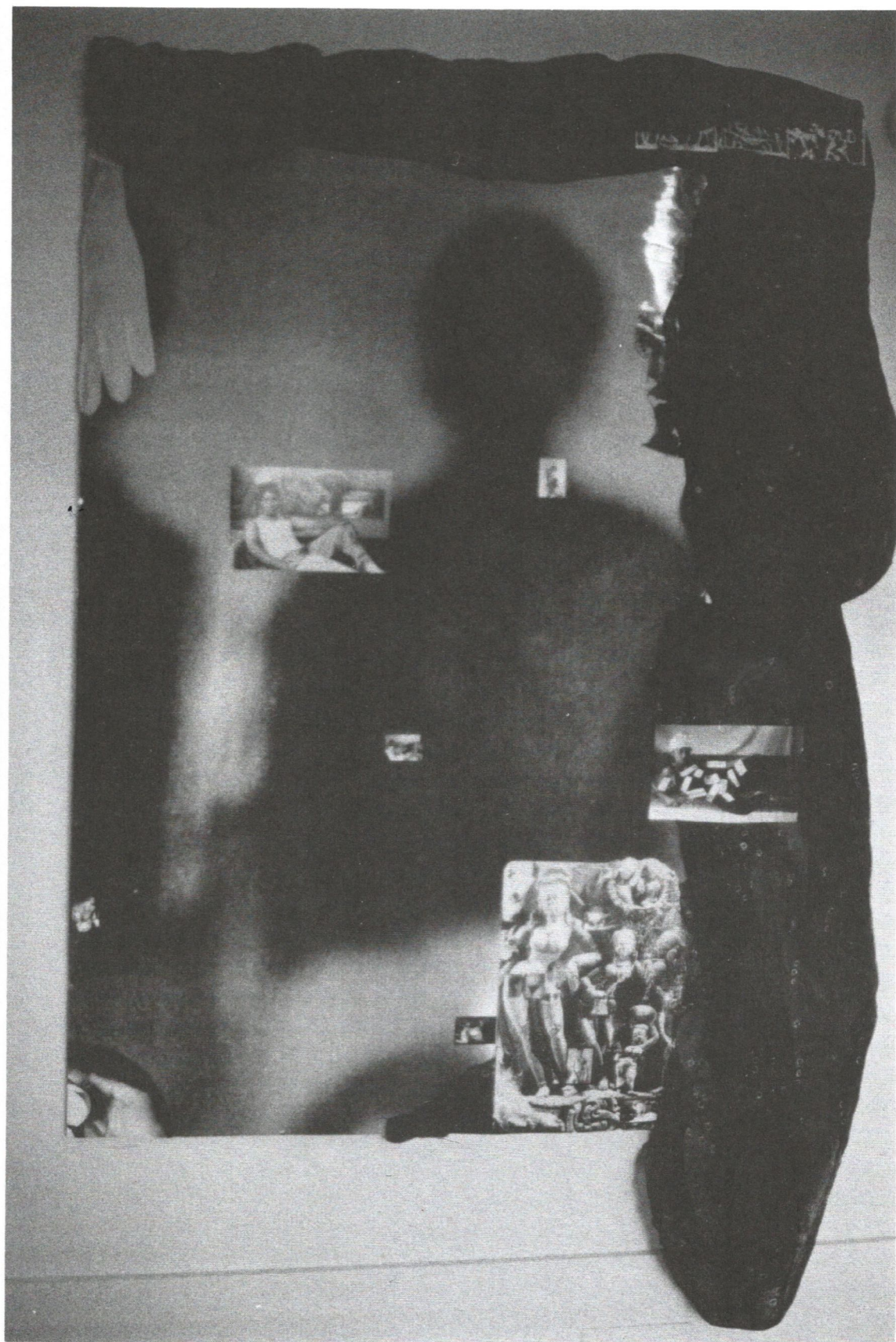
The impact of family and the fact of living in the West are central. The age group of the participants is from 20 to 40 years old.

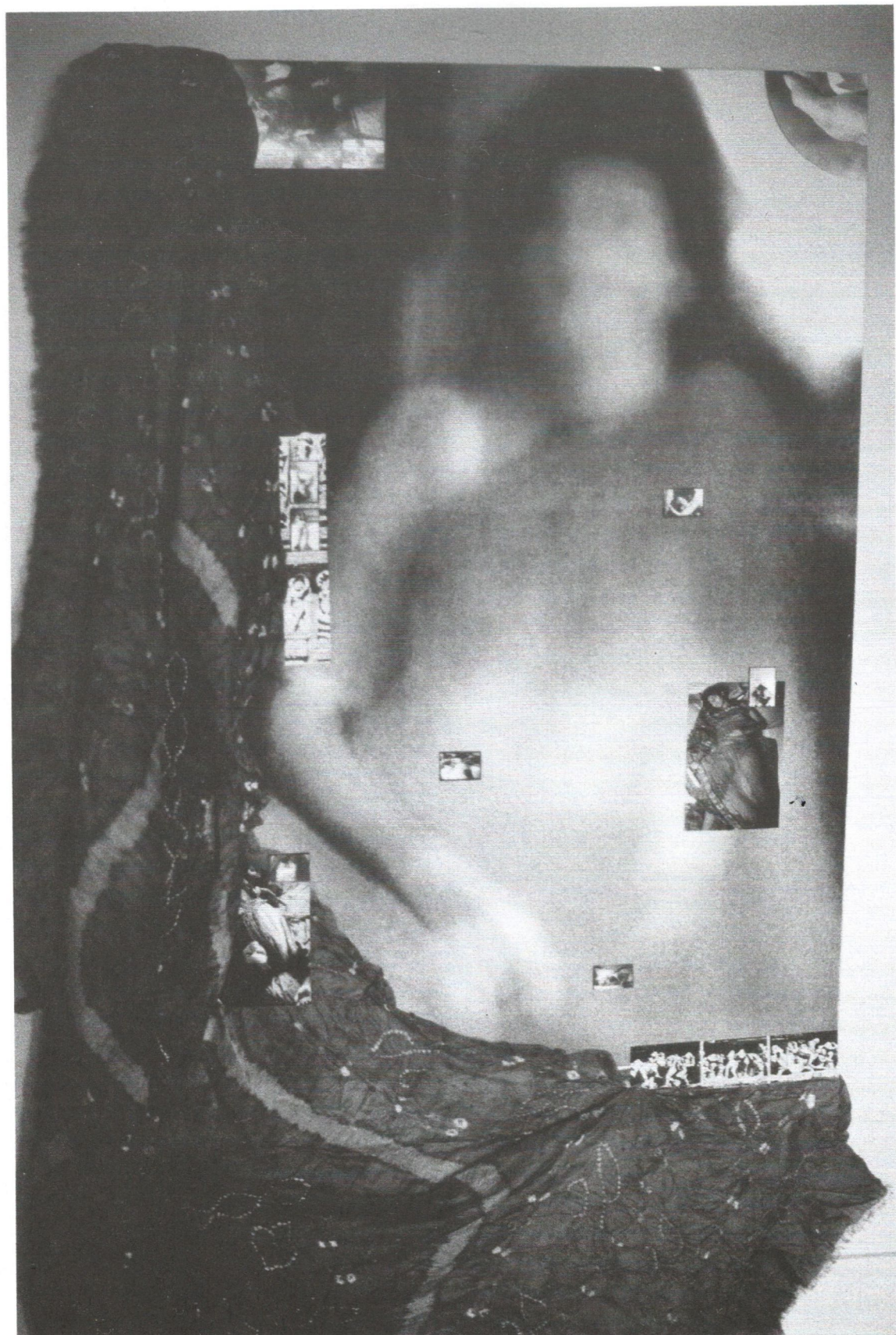
The magnifying glass is to assist the viewer in looking closer at our sexuality, to challenge the assumptions that define family and to discover the diversity that exists within family and community.

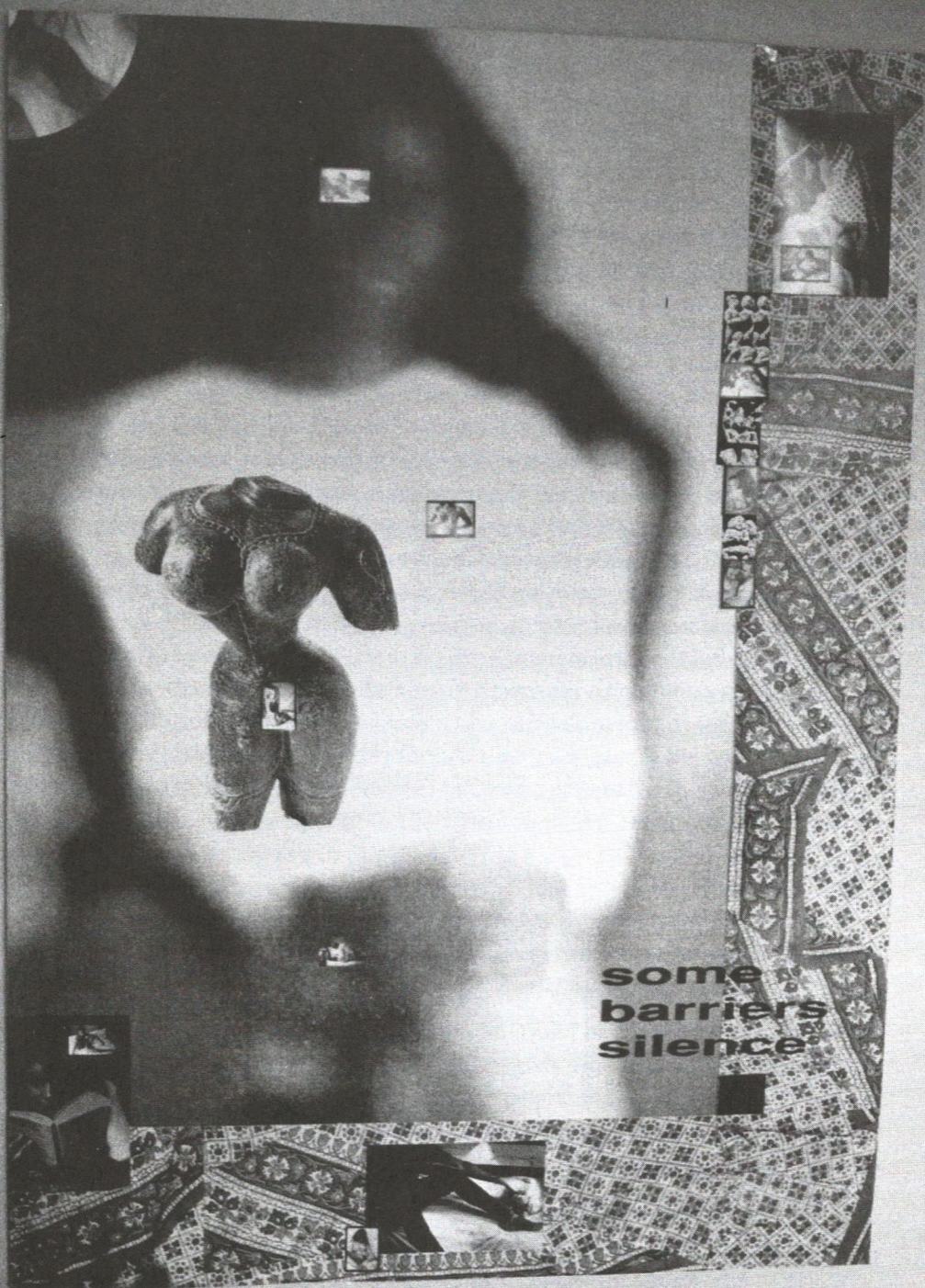
— Rachel Kalpana James

RACHEL KALPANA JAMES WAS BORN IN ENGLAND AND IMMIGRATED TO CANADA WITH HER FAMILY IN 1968. A GRADUATE OF THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART, SHE FIRST EXHIBITED HER PAINTINGS AT THE 1993 DESH PARDESH FESTIVAL CONFERENCE IN TORONTO IN AN EXHIBIT ENTITLED *IN-SIGHT: THE 1ST CANADIAN SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S ART EXHIBIT*. *AS WE ARE* WAS EXHIBITED IN *DISMANTLING INVISIBILITY: ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER ARTISTS RESPOND TO THE AIDS CRISIS* AT A SPACE GALLERY, TORONTO, IN NOVEMBER 1993, AND AT THE 1994 DESH PARDESH FESTIVAL CONFERENCE.









some
barriers
silence

Cultural Interpretation

An Issue of Power and Accessibility

SILVANA HERNANDO

THE LACK OF proper and sufficient cultural interpretation services in Ontario and across Canada has been an issue now for many years for refugees and immigrants. Community activists have been pushing the issue but have not obtained an adequate response from the different levels of the government. The demand for social services and access to the justice system in languages other than English and French keeps increasing, especially in Metro Toronto, and cultural interpreters are key players in enabling refugees and immigrants who do not speak English or French to access those services. The problem is that there are not enough *trained* cultural interpreters and there is also no will to provide adequate funding to pay for the work of cultural interpreters who are already trained.

This article will focus on the legal system because that is my area of expertise as a cultural interpreter. I will refer to services provided in the English language because my cultural interpretation work has been in Spanish and English with the Latin American community. However, given that most services are also provided in the French language across Canada, whenever I use the word English the reader should keep in mind that it could be either English or French. Also, it is important to emphasize that the issues surrounding cultural interpretation are very complex and cannot be addressed in just one article.

WHAT IS A CULTURAL INTERPRETER?

A CULTURAL INTERPRETER (CI) is someone who enables two people who speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds to fully communicate. Usually, the two people involved are: an English-speaking service provider (lawyer, law student, doctor, welfare worker, shelter worker, immigration officer, UIC officer, school teacher, etc.) and a non-English-speaking refugee or immigrant. A CI not only is able to breach the linguistic gap, but helps to break down the barriers which may arise due to cultural and/or institutional assumptions and which may prevent the non-English-speaking client from accessing a service and/or obtaining the correct information needed. For instance, in some cultures it is a sign of disrespect to look someone directly in the eyes, while in Canada you are expected to look at the person you are addressing. A lawyer working on a refugee claim who is not aware of this cultural difference may believe that the client claiming

refugee status is not telling the truth about his/her story of persecution *because* the client is not looking at her/him in the eye while relating the story. A trained CI should be able to assess the situation and explain to the lawyer and the client what is expected from each culture. Therefore, it is not enough for the CI to be fluent in English or French and the first language of the client and to know the linguistic jargon of the service provided (for instance, legal terminology). The CI must come from the same cultural background as the client, and her/his first language should be the client's first language. This is a key factor because there is an imbalance of power between the service provider and the client. The service provider has the power given to him/her by the system. In many cases, he/she has the power to make decisions which will alter profoundly the client's life. For instance, a welfare worker has the power to withhold a cheque if he/she is not satisfied with the client's answers, or believes that the client is not eligible for welfare. In turn the client will find himself/herself unable to pay rent and will be told to leave by the landlord, although the landlord does not have a right to do so before going to court. However, the client complies with what the landlord is telling him/her because of lack of information regarding his/her rights as a tenant.

The CI must be aware of the power dynamics in a three-way communication process and have the skill to maintain the balance to ensure that the client's needs are met. Many service providers do not provide enough time for proper interpretation and it is up to the CI to ensure that the client is given enough time to express her/his concerns and is not silenced during the interpretation process. On many occasions the CI must advocate for the right of the client to be heard.

Furthermore, a CI must be aware of her/his own privileges in this society and must be willing to challenge her/his own prejudices towards other people. Issues of race, class, ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion play a fundamental role during the interpretation process. Although I have been working in this field for more than four years I still find myself making assumptions about some of my clients. This is something that any CI must constantly work on. How can we expect a CI to challenge a racist comment made, for instance, by a doctor if that CI is not able to challenge herself/himself about her/his own racism? How can we be certain that service will not be denied to the client based on a racist assumption? Take this case, for instance: a factory worker (I will refer to him as the client) had an accident at work two years ago. He has had excruciating back pain since the accident, but the doctor can't find the source of the pain. The Workers' Compensation Board is about to cut the worker's benefits because the Board thinks that the client is able to work since there is not enough medical evidence which states otherwise. The client's lawyer sends the client to see a new specialist with a CI. During the examination the doctor says: "All you people are lazy. There is nothing wrong with you. You just don't want to work."

The CI must also be committed to the right of the client to access the service, and have the skill to judge whether or not challenging the racist comment on the spot will jeopardize the chances of the client to obtain the service. Sometimes, challenging the racist comment may backfire and the client could be denied the service. In fact, it is the client's decision whether or not to challenge the service provider, but it is important that the CI is supportive of the decision. The CI takes part in the communication process to empower the client, not to decide for her/him.

Cultural interpretation as a tool of power and accessibility is crucial when we refer to women, especially women in abusive relationships. Women have less access to language training programmes and, therefore, are less able to access services by themselves. Many women depend on friends or relatives to obtain information and services. The story which follows will clarify my point. An abused woman went to a legal clinic in Ontario to seek legal representation on a criminal charge. She had called the police while her husband was assaulting her at home. She spoke very little English. Upon arriving to the house, the police spoke to the husband—who was fluent in English—and spoke to her without providing an interpreter. The police laid charges against the assaulted woman. No charges were laid against the husband. She arrived at the legal clinic with her court date and a male friend who said would act as interpreter for her. The legal worker asked whether the male interpreter was also a friend of the husband to make sure that there was no conflict of interest. Both, the interpreter and the woman—through the interpreter—made clear to the worker that the interpreter was only a friend of the client. Some difficulties arose during the preparation of the case due to what it seemed lack of interpretation skills, especially when talking about the sequence of how the assault had happened. One of the questions that the legal worker asked several times was where the husband was while they prepared for the court date. The response had been that nobody knew where he was but the last information was that he was out of town. Finally, they went to court and the policeman who had laid the charges was there to testify. He talked to the legal worker and mentioned that he had seen the husband in the courtroom a few minutes before. The legal worker said that this was impossible so the policeman looked around until he spotted the husband and pointed him out to the legal worker. The husband was the male interpreter. This is a true story and it happened less than a year ago, therefore I have changed some details to protect the identity of the people involved.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO WORK WITH A TRAINED CI?

THE CLIENT HAS THE RIGHT to access the service and therefore has a right to proper cultural interpretation. When friends, relatives, children, or untrained volunteers act as interpreters these are some of the problems that may arise: deletion of information, lack of knowledge of the terminology used by the service provider, lack of privacy between client and service provider, person acting as interpreter may give legal advice to the client without the service provider knowing it, and lack of confidentiality. In addition, the client may refuse to engage in the communication process due to fear, shame, etc. especially if a relative is interpreting. A woman would be particularly reluctant to tell a service provider that she has been raped, through a relative, if she does not want her family—or her community—to find out. Also the person acting as interpreter may advise the client to withhold information. For instance, in a wife assault case, the interpreter may say: "Don't tell the

lawyer you're planning to go back to your husband." This advice will prevent the lawyer from assessing the real situation and will prevent the client from accessing the information that she needs to have if, in fact, she decides to return to her abusive partner.

I would like to dedicate a special paragraph to children. It often happens that children learn English or French long before their parents when they first come to Canada. Because of the lack of interpretation services, the children can end up doing full-time interpretation when they are as young as seven or eight years old. They are the ones who swallow the insulting remarks from service providers such as "your mom is a prostitute" and do not interpret them to not upset the parent. The children obviously grow too fast and the child-parent relationship is usually damaged. The parent suffers a loss of power and the children become responsible for issues that they should not at such an early age.

VOLUNTEERS

COMMUNITY AGENCIES and many government offices rely on volunteers to provide interpretation services. Because of the lack of funding for cultural interpretation services, community agencies find themselves faced with the dilemma of either providing the service through friends, relatives or untrained volunteers or not providing the service at all. A few community agencies have started a basic training on cultural interpretation for volunteers. Although I understand the urgency to provide the service and the need to do it in an adequate manner, I do not believe that training volunteers is the solution to the problem. Training volunteers only partially alleviates the lack of service and sends the message to the government that it has no responsibility for providing the funding for this service since the communities are doing so out of their own resources. It sends the message that non-English/non-French-speaking people do not have a right to equal access to social services and the justice system by having access to paid CIs. Volunteers are providing free labour for a service which should be funded by government sources. It is not a coincidence that this free labour is mainly provided by the refugee and immigrant community itself.

TRAINING

THE QUESTION of how to train CIs still remains open for me. A couple of years ago I was at a Symposium for trained CIs from different parts of Ontario. I was astounded, and later on outraged, at the racism, homophobia, lack of class analysis, and lack of understanding of systemic discrimination which I encountered. When a couple of other CIs from Toronto and myself pointed this out to some of the facilitators of the different workshops we were told that in Toronto we were "too

politicized,” and that we had to understand where the other CIs were coming from. I found this answer unacceptable because we were talking about CIs who *had* been trained. Does this mean that, if I am a CI in a small town in Ontario, I am not accountable for my own homophobia, for instance, and for the way in which that affects my work as a CI?

I am not convinced that a college setting is the best way to go about training CIs. The question of class and who has access to post-secondary education in this country still needs to be addressed when the issue of accreditation for CIs is discussed. The issue of who decides whether we are “professionals” or not needs to be paid special attention. Furthermore, we should take a hard look at why we are trying to be accepted as professionals when being a professional is usually an issue of class, and most professionals I know are helping to perpetuate systemic discrimination, not to change it.

I believe that the training should remain in a community based setting where different immigrant communities will be active participants in the training process and will not just be “consulted.” Also, it will hopefully attract community activists to become trained CIs.

However, none of this will be possible if we do not understand that cultural interpretation is an issue of equal access to services for non-English/non-French-speaking people and that denying such a service is another way of perpetuating systemic discrimination.

The trained CI who presently works as such does it on a freelance basis and has no job security, no benefits, and stressful working conditions. We are front-line workers. When we complain about this we are led to believe that we are “professionals” and as such these are the usual working conditions for “professionals” (lawyers, doctors, etc). Don’t take me wrong. We are consistently professional in the way we do our job, but for the outside world we are only “professional” when it is convenient for the system. When there is no money for funding we are “professionals” and we should expect to work under those conditions. When there is money, sometimes we are told we are not “professional” enough, or that we do not have enough accreditation to do the job. Most of us have one or two other jobs to be able to support ourselves and do cultural interpretation on a freelance basis. Therefore, it is inevitable that, if we are stressed, overworked and underpaid, the quality of the actual cultural interpretation will not be the best it could be.

I hope that this article will encourage people to demand cultural interpretation services as part of their commitment to social change and the struggle against racism.

I would like to thank Anjula Gogia and Lisa Vinebaum for their input and editing skills.—SH

SILVANA HERNANDO WORKS AS A CULTURAL INTERPRETER IN TORONTO.

Speaking Jewish: Women's Language

An Interview

with Frieda Forman BY SANDRA HAAR



Nōt long ago, I went with my parents to a performance by Allan Merovitz, a new friend, and Brian Katz. Before they begin, Allan tells a little story, one of many he tells throughout the evening. First he tells it in Yiddish. The only word I understand is *fargesn*—to forget. Then he recounts it in English. He says,

Before we were about to start, I spoke to a man at the side of the stage. I asked him, in Yiddish, “Do you still speak Jewish?” With a twinkle in his eye and in a perfect Polish-Yiddish, he said, “No, I forgot.” And I should also tell you that there was not even a moment’s hesitation between my question and his answer.

There is a pause before they begin to play. My father turns to me and smiles, with a twinkle in his eye. “That was you?” I ask. “Yes,” he says and turns to look at my mother, “that was me.”

My father came to Canada in 1947 at the age of 15. Here, he was called a “Jewish war orphan.” He spoke Yiddish, Polish and Russian. *Within three months of arriving, I spoke English only and forgot everything else.* Twenty-five years later, in Israel, he converses with shopkeepers in the market. Having no knowledge of Hebrew, he speaks to them in Yiddish.

Frieda Forman is the director of the Women’s Resource Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She has authored a number of books and is also the editor of *The Blettl: The Network for Yiddish Women’s Literature*. I spoke with Frieda about the forthcoming book, *Found Treasures: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*, that she co-edited and translated,¹ and more general questions of the relations between language and culture, adaptation and assimilation.

Frieda Forman: I came from a Yiddish-speaking home. A few years ago I went to Oxford for a summer program and learned how to read Yiddish well. My intention was to research Yiddish women writers. I went through the Yiddish Lexicon, which has about seven or eight thousand entries and I found several hundred women writers. I returned to Canada and I thought, I'm not going to drop this, this is going to be a project.

I had friends who were interested in Yiddish and I said, "What about starting a group that reads Yiddish? But only women writers. Interestingly enough, a few people said, "How can they be so narrow, only to read women writers." Most of these people, I have to tell you, could not, if their lives depended on it, find the name of one Yiddish woman writer. Even among academics, and we're talking about people who are steeped in Yiddish literature, when I asked them to give me some leads on Yiddish women writers, they came up with one, or two, articles. And this is as good as it gets.

Essentially, I was looking for short story writers, or novelists, rather than poetry—which I love. But I wanted to see the material that would be most revealing about the lives of Jewish women, both in the *shtetl*² and as new immigrants to North America (in some cases they made *aliyah*³ and went to Israel)—the move from Eastern Europe, and in some cases the Holocaust was the end.

I came back to Toronto and we started a group. And we've had a steady number of about 13 women for four years; we have people who are eager to get into the group. We can't accomodate that many because we have to sit around a dining room table when we read. It's not a lecture, it's participation. With more people it becomes so impersonal, it's not the same group.

In the process we gathered a lot of material. We met twice a month, every two weeks, and we read new material. And this was new to everybody. It was new to people who had gone to Yiddish schools, who taught in Yiddish schools. In other words, no one had read—they may have known a poet here or a poet there or somebody's aunt who wrote something—but essentially the idea that there were women who wrote, that revealed to us a culture. We don't just read brilliant writers, we don't just read great writers. We read writers to inform us, to let us have some insight, some view on the life people led.

So for the first time, women read about the body, in Yiddish, described by a woman. It was exhilarating in every possible way. Along the way the question came up: maybe it is time to seriously translate these and to bring out a book. There is no book on the subject.

Sandra Haar: Who were the women you were translating? Where was this material to be found?

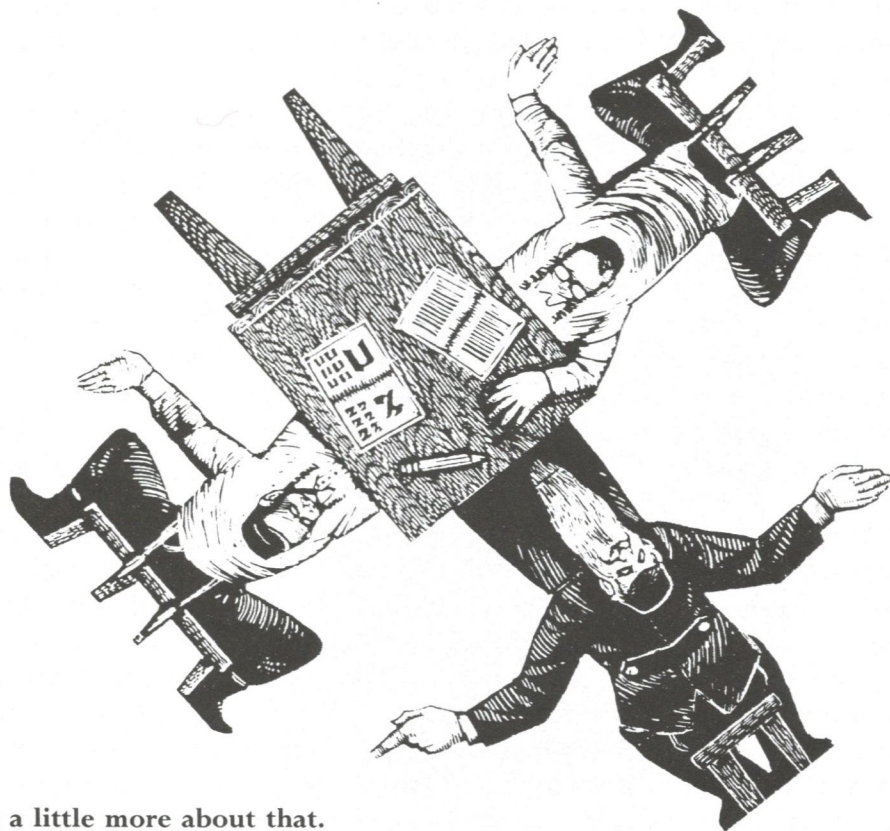
Some of the material I brought back with me from New York, whether it was Yivo⁴ or whether it was the New York Public Library, which has a fabulous Yiddish collection. Everything was published in the age of mass printing, so books exist. To this day there are some books that I have not been able to find: writers who are mentioned in the Lexicon that Yivo doesn't know anything about, the New York Public Library doesn't—who knows where they are. So one has to make the search.

We got a call, for instance—this is a sad and interesting story—from the library at a local Jewish home for the elderly. Unfortunately the number of Yiddish speakers was declining, as you can imagine, and they had a library full of Yiddish books. So they asked us if we would like them. A few years ago, you have the National Yiddish Book Centre opening up in Amherst, Massachusetts, which is a brilliant, brilliant project. Now that's a story in itself, and

I won't go into it. But among the many things that they do, they have collected hundreds of thousands of Yiddish books; in some cases they've kept them from being shredded, they've kept them from garbage bins, they've kept them from being thrown into god-knows-where. So they have established an entire warehouse of Yiddish books, and they send out, periodically, a list.

And people began to find books. One of our members, Shirley Kumove, who also grew up in a Yiddishist⁵ home, brought us the old Lexicon, which is a treasure, that her mother had. I'll show it to you upstairs; we have a whole room—a Yiddish women's resource centre!—upstairs filled with Yiddish books.

We were guided by the biographies. I was very drawn to the biographies of radical women. A lot of them were Bundists; several of the writers we publish were Bundists.



Talk a little more about that.

Well, the Bund is a fascinating movement—the late nineteenth century are its origins. It's the socialist working-class Jewish movement. It had not only a political analysis in terms of a class struggle, but also had an analysis of *Yiddishkayt*.⁶ The Bund was steeped in *Yiddishkayt*. It saw Yiddish as the language of the masses, and saw its socialism and its working-class analysis and its sense of a struggle within the context of the Jewish community. The Bund also had an equality position—equality between men and women. And so a lot of women were drawn to the Bund.

Some of the writers wrote when they came to America. So many of them left Europe, came to America—mostly New York, but not exclusively—and began to write. They began to write for the Yiddish newspapers—don't forget at that time, in New York alone you had, it was either four or five Yiddish dailies; I mean you had millions of Yiddish readers and they

read avidly. Each daily paper expressed a different political ideology. There was also fiction, poetry—it wasn't just political diatribes, it was also a literature. This was still at a time when you had a very rich European Yiddish culture, but you also have the developing and very, very rich North American Jewish culture. Also, some Jews who were Yiddish-speakers went to Latin America—Argentina had a very large Yiddish population and published a lot—South Africa, eventually. So you had Yiddish speakers and readers and writers in all those. The *Kanader Adler* was a Yiddish newspaper which published a great many women. So women began to find venues for their writing.

What you see at this time, also, in many of our short stories is a major shift in family relations. It's the move now—we're talking late nineteenth, early twentieth century—from a very authoritarian family where, as one of our heroines' mother says, "When father spoke, ten children used to shake. Now we have to take a course to be able to talk to our children." So you already have children rebelling against that kind of authority. You have daughters rebelling; and a lot of the stories are mother-daughter stories—an enormous number. And you see the mother not wanting to lose the daughter, disapproving of the daughter's path: One daughter wants to go to Odessa to study, and the mother says, "What do you want to go to study for? It's time to get a groom. Boys don't like girls who are overly learned."

The kind of lives these women led, the daily routine of life, has never been documented like this by male writers. We have stories, a lot, about unwilling brides. In some cases, we have suicides. And you have throughout these stories, longing, longing for expression, longing, in some cases, for a kind of romanticism, longing for education.

One of the stories we're using is by Malka Lee. It starts off, she writes poetry. She describes very movingly what this poetry means to her. It's her companion; it's where she can be herself. Her father burns her poems. Her mother realizes what's happening, salvages them from the oven. And you see the family sitting around the table, trying to put together her poems. They're sort of shards almost but still they're able to do that. And the father's also bewildered: he's not evil; he doesn't know what he did. He just knows that girls aren't supposed to write, girls aren't supposed to read. So to him, this is an act of sacrilege, that she's writing.

Anyway, she ends up in New York. There's a whole rite of passage in these stories. When they go on the ships coming from Europe to America, it's a long voyage. And that voyage allows them an opportunity to think about their dreams. So this is before they hit hard reality, and it's a wonderful opportunity. Friendships are forged during that time. There's a term that developed called a *shipshvester*, that's your ship-sister, the sister with whom you crossed the ocean and with whom you shared these dreams. It's a very beautiful concept.

So Malka Lee, the one whose father burns her poetry, is the only cheerful story, the only happy story we have. She finally comes to America, after one thing and another, she goes to a Yiddish newspaper and they buy a story. So she's now a full-fledged writer.

The emotional range of these stories is between sorrow, grief and tragedy. We have a number of Holocaust stories, but even the ones that are not—that are pre-Holocaust. So we're talking about—in some cases there's struggle—but there's so much grief, so much sadness in all these stories. And there's so much unexpressed and repressed feeling that these writers express beautifully.

We're talking about great social change in the late nineteenth century, early twentieth

century. The world is shifting. The Haskalah,⁷ with all its anti-Yiddish tendency has brought in notions of egalitarianism. Not class struggle, but still the notion of individuals. So you have a move from the collective—which is what the *shtetls* were. They were communities, they were collective. “Individual” was a figure that was suspect. The idea was that you were a member of a community and that’s where your expression came from: as that member. It’s not that you were swallowed up, that you didn’t have individuality, but your life as an individual was really not the issue.

If you look at Yiddish literature, in general, your identity in the world was through the community, through the family and so on. Then it shifts to not so much the individual alone in a solitary world but the individual striking out, in this case women, moving towards some sort of self-realization. Wanting to write, wanting to become part of a movement that was emancipatory, wanting no longer to be reduced to what destiny had in mind for you as either a maid, or whatever it is, or an unwilling bride, or a member of an unhappy marriage.

I want to go back to this whole question of how Yiddish started and where it came from. Maybe you can go back a bit and talk—historically, how did it develop?

I’m not a historian of the Yiddish language, so what you’re getting is what you would get in beginning Yiddish history courses.

It began anywhere from eight to nine hundred years ago in the Lowlands. It was a Judeo-German language. So it was Middle German in terms of the structure of the language and it was a language that was used by Jews because they lived in that part of the world at that time, but it was also a secret language. It was a language in which Jews used a Germanic base, but introduced Hebrew, Aramaic, so that it became their own language. And if you read certain documents, the earlier they are, the more Germanic they are. As they develop and move towards the east, they introduce more Russian, Polish—who knows what was Russian one week was Polish another—that part of the world—Slavic languages, essentially.

That’s the thing. If you’re translating Yiddish, you have to have a Hungarian dictionary, too. All these influences are there. So you definitely have to have a German dictionary; you definitely have to have a Russian dictionary, Polish dictionary, Ukrainian dictionary. They’re not all the same languages and after a while there’s a mix of a mix.

Yiddish develops at that point. It’s spoken and as it moves east, integrates more eastern European languages, it’s the *lingua franca* of the Jewish people—of the Ashkenazi Jewish people, we always have to bear that in mind.⁸ Yiddish was called *mame loshn*, which is itself a very interesting term. It’s not just “mother’s tongue,” the way you say, “English is my mother tongue.” This is also the language that belongs to your mother. So Jews would not say to each other, “Do you speak Yiddish?” They’d say, “*Ret ir mame loshn?*” It was not just an adjective, it was the substantive. Yiddish itself was called *mame loshn*. It was also the language that was called *vaybl loshn*; it was also called “women’s language.”

Hebrew from the expulsion⁹ on remained the language of abstraction, it was the language of prayer, the language of study, the language of scholarly correspondence, responsa, judicial discussions. In a word, it was the language of men who were speaking religiously. Whereas Yiddish was always women’s language, but it was also the secular language; men spoke Yiddish too.

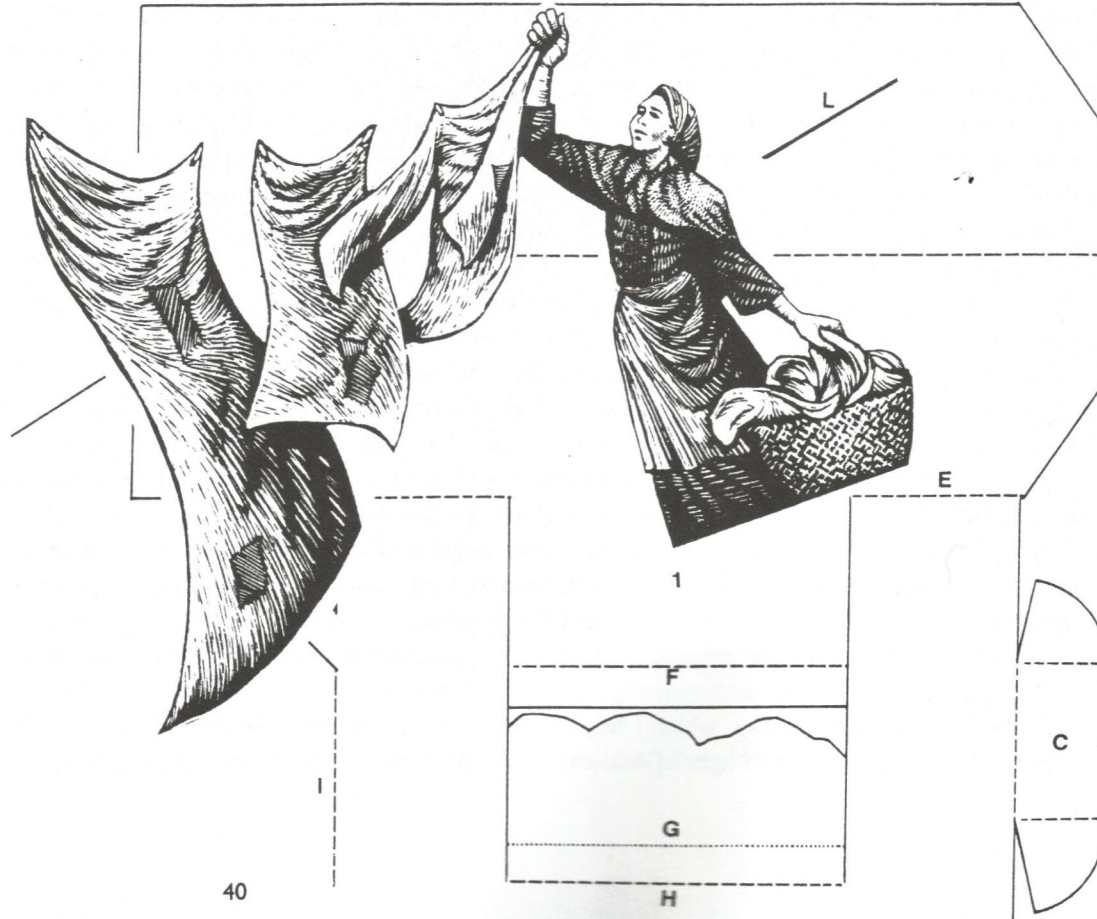
There’s a wonderful essay, which I hope someday gets translated into English written by Shmuel Niger. (The name “Niger” [Yiddish = Negro] is a name he gave himself as an act of

solidarity with Blacks.) He was in New York and he wrote a very central essay in 1928 called "Yiddish Literature and the Woman Reader." He says that Jewish women were the midwives and wet-nurses of Yiddish literature. He traces back and he says that around the sixteenth century, you had the beginning of a literature that was written expressly for women in Yiddish.

For example, the *tsena urena*, which was the weekly portion of the Torah, written in Yiddish, which included legends and moral stories. Every home had one and women read it on *shabbes*. We have stories that actually begin like that: "Shabbes afternoon; father's taking a nap and mother's reading from her Bible." They were sources of great inspiration to women. They took it seriously. In addition you had the moral literature which offered women advice, like what do you do when you have a roving husband? Jewish life tells you to be very modest. There's advice that maybe modesty at this point should be suspended in favour of keeping the husband still interested.

So we know that Jewish women were literate, where in a world where women were not literate, except for the Bluestockings, the aristocracy and the nuns—in a world in Europe, where literacy was not women's lot—you had women who were literate. They could read Yiddish.

Just to go back to this original idea of women being so central. Niger says that Yiddish, to his knowledge, was the only language that had a literature that was expressly written for the woman reader. And that, in a sense, he says, laid the foundation for Yiddish literature. Don't forget: the Yiddish literature we're talking about began in the middle of the nineteenth century. It's not something that's hundreds of years old. Up until then you had Hebrew as the literature, and you had Yiddish as the spoken. You didn't have short stories; you didn't have novels; you didn't have poetry in Yiddish, until the nineteenth century.



Let's go back to the development of Yiddish as a language. It's written with Hebrew characters. I like what you were saying before about how it carries on some of the Hebrew that was no longer being spoken.

Right. This is not my original insight. This is something that Yiddishists have pointed out. Yiddish is written with Hebrew characters but it has its own grammar. It is a distinct language. What it means, is that, first of all, if you know how to read Yiddish—and this essentially, we're talking about women—you already know how to pray in Hebrew, because they're the same letters.

Of course, letters in Jewish life are very important. The letter itself, not only in Kabbalistic thought,¹⁰ carries a certain magic. You already have a certain connection with the figures themselves, the letters themselves. Women, then, knew how to read Yiddish. They also knew the languages around them. They had access, through Yiddish, to German in a certain way, to the Russian, Ukrainian and so on. That makes Yiddish a very rich, delicious language, because it ends up being quite literary. There's a phrase, for instance, for someone who explains dreams. It comes right from the Bible, from the description of Joseph, as a revealer of dreams. In Yiddish—the words themselves carry religious meaning, Biblical meaning, they carry thousands of years.

In the nineteenth century, you have the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment. It said, If you want to enter the modern world—the world of the individual, the world of the person with equal rights—all that the Enlightenment promised, you should give up Yiddish. Now, you have to realize that Yiddish was called by those anti-Yiddishists a jargon, a dialect. Well it isn't; it's a language. It has a grammar; it has rules of spelling; and rules of all kinds. What it also did was demean Yiddish as a language. By demeaning Yiddish as a language, it demeaned women's language. That connection has to be made although it rarely is.

It also attacked the kind of insular community that had been established in the *shtetl*. And that was women's doing. In other words, it attacked Yiddish for the same reasons that women are frequently attacked—small, provincial, intrusive—but also warm, also intimate, also caring. All those things which the Yiddish language carries was seen by the Haskalah as standing in the way of entering modern European emancipatory life—and to do that one had to speak the language of the nation—Right.

With the development of Hebrew as the language of the Yishuv [emergent Jewish state], Yiddish becomes once again attacked: it's seen as the language of the Diaspora, the language of oppression, the language of a kind of subhuman character—of marginality.—Don't forget Zionism wanted not just to have a land but to build a new person. There's an ideal of a new humanity, which is not just tied exclusively to the country. Yiddish did not fall into that redefinition of humanity, of Jewish humanity.

So in certain years—even in the early days of the State—the aversion to Yiddish took on violent forms. There was a Yiddish newspaper in Israel (which is still being published) which was not allowed to publish daily, because it would be seen as too much of an influence. The newspaper offices were also burned. Really—it was a disgrace. Now, of course, things have changed. Or, as some of the bitter Yiddishists say, now that Yiddish is dead, they can accept it in Israel. So that's a bitter statement. The truth is there's a fairly good revival of Yiddish in Israel. For instance, it's now an optional language in high school. All the universities in Israel have very good Yiddish departments. There's hope; but it's never going to be what it was.

With the Holocaust, you have the destruction of European Jewry and of European Jewish civilization, essentially, and with it goes Yiddish as a spoken, written and literary language.

When we're talking about literature, we're not talking about a few specks. We're talking about an enormous—thousands and thousands of writers, among them hundreds of women who wrote novels, poetry, essays, who were the great pedagogic writers. A lot of the programmes for the Yiddish schools were developed by women, the translators were women.

I'd like to talk more about that. Yiddish developed in a particular context, which was the European context, where it was influenced by particular languages—continued also in North America—Yes. I want to go into that a bit more, not only what happened when it did come across the ocean, but also what happened when the base culture in Europe was no longer?

See, we have to make a distinction. When you had migrations to the United States and to Canada, you still had a country that people left behind, a culture that was vibrant. They may have been poor, they may have suffered antisemitism—which they all did. But still, it was not that with their migration you had nothing left. Not at all. You had a new culture developing, a North American Jewish culture; but still back there, a thriving native Jewish culture—which is the case for many immigrant cultures.

Now, with the Holocaust that culture disappears. With the millions that were killed goes all that. We have ghetto testimonies; you realize that up until their last breath, people were still writing in Yiddish, still documenting. Chava Rosenfarb, a Yiddish writer who lives in Montreal—she says in the Lodz Ghetto, where she was, there was not only an epidemic of plagues, but there was an epidemic of writing. Everybody wrote. She was a child poet, so she wrote, of course.

So the first stage of a developing North American Jewish culture, you have, for women especially, a liberation. You suddenly have all these newspapers that are also publishing. So many of them sent their stuff to Europe and they're also selling their stuff to the *Tog*, the *Forward*, the *Morgenjournal*. So you have now millions of Yiddish readers, and you have a kind of urgency to integrate.

On the one hand you have venues for women to write—which they did. And many of the women continued to be active in the labour movement. Fascinating—if you read some of the stuff that was published in Europe around, let's say, labour organizing, then you realize that some of these same women came to New York and were involved in the labour movement here. And you see the roots in Bialystok, where they were already organizing. So that continuity is there, till the Holocaust.

Now, in our stories, you can already tell—they're introducing English words—over and over again. What they do, they Yiddishize English words. So instead of Russian words and Polish words being integrated, you now have English words—American English being integrated.

Is this how we get to Yinglish?

Yinglish is what, let's say, Yezierska wrote,¹¹—she's the first example that comes to mind when you speak about Yinglish. She does not actually become an English speaker, she sort of becomes a Yiddish speaker who speaks in English. So she uses expressions like—there's a Yiddish expression "*S'iz mir shvarts gevoren far di oygen.*" She translates it literally: "Became black in front of my eyes." Now that isn't really English; we would translate it as "I almost fainted" or "The world around me darkened." She takes the straight Yiddish

words, word for word, and writes them in English. And it becomes—I mean, her stuff is wonderful. It's an immediate kind of literature. And you realize that you're not reading English. You're reading something else. An English-speaker can understand it, but what Yezierska does is she carries the baggage of Yiddish.

Do you attempt to do that in translation?

Translation is a whole world. If I had my own way, and if I had millions of dollars, I would publish stuff that still read like Yiddish. But since this is not my lot—no, the stuff now that's translated sounds like good English. And there are brilliant translators and then there's your next-door neighbour.

When I read a Yiddish translation into English, I can give you back the Yiddish, because I know Yiddish and I know the weight of words. That's what we're talking about: What is the weight of a word. In Yiddish, they're very heavy! They weigh a lot! I've translated German and I've translated some French, so I'm not totally unfamiliar with other languages, and the struggle with Yiddish is much deeper—because I think the weight that words carry.

Don't forget that many of the words carry a two-thousand-year history. And every Yiddish-speaker would have known what—it's not as though they consciously go around carrying two thousand years—it's the association—you just sort of know, you know that if a word comes from the Tanach, from the Bible, you sort of know right away. Like the word "sacrifice"—every Jew who knew anything, and you didn't have to be a rabbi—"sacrifice" already brings you back to Abraham and Isaac. When you write in English the word "sacrifice," whatever, it certainly has meaning, but certainly doesn't carry that weight with it.

Translation, in general, is a very hard task. My own preference would be to translate in such a way that the original language still is there, in some way. Now you would probably have to be a genius to achieve this. Some people feel, No, you transmit it in such a way that a reader in America, that a reader in Canada reads something with pleasure, and through the content of the story gains an insight, gains a view into that culture—but not through the words themselves as carriers.

In our group, we have questions—for instance, what do you do with a word like "*shabbes*"? Okay, you have a choice of saying "Sabbath"—you can't say "Saturday" because it's not the same thing, at all, that's wrong—but let's say "Sabbath" means something. An English reader who knows no Yiddish, knows nothing about Jewish culture, knows that Sabbath is a day of rest. Now, *shabbes* is not "Sabbath." Every Jew knew what *shabbes* meant. If you were a poor Jew (and most of them were), you knew that the rest of the week you were just waiting for *shabbes*. You were preparing for *shabbes*. You knew that *shabbes* not only a day of rest, but on *shabbes* every Jew has another soul. "*Shema y'tayra*." (You see, Yiddish just takes that phrase and Yiddishizes it: "*shoma y'sayre*.") When a Jew reads "*shabbes*," they knew that; they knew it was not just the seventh day of the week, for us—that you rest, it's not just the day when you're not allowed to do work—it's very much more than that. You can't translate that. We have one of the stories that begins "Shabbes afternoon"—those are the first two words of the story. So what do you do? First you went to "Sabbath" then we went to "*shabbes*"—anyway we're now going to do a glossary, which is the best you can do.

If we think of history as language, and literature as language—which we can, without too much stretching—then I think that you want to know what it is that existed that the Holocaust destroyed. Not because we want to weep more, but because we want to know

what it is that we are. Then you have to read Jewish history. And you have to read Jewish literature, that was written in those days. There's no way around it.

I could puke when I think that people think that critical stuff was invented in the last fifty years.—“Critical consciousness.”—Right. “Critical consciousness.” “Hermeneutics was developed by Heidegger.” The whole Talmud, the whole literature after the Dispersion¹² is all interpretation, it's all hermeneutic. How do you take a culture and have it travel with you. How do you interpret it? How do you question it? You have tendencies from the very beginning—*beit-Hillel-beit-Shamai*¹³; the liberal perspective, and the more rigid and traditional perspective. How to keep a tradition still going with its heart and soul still there, but not rigid? This goes on in every page. And it goes on in a way that is not just cold, legal debate, but it's peppered with legends, to allow the imagination to flow in another way. All this is what was inherited. This was people's culture.—It was also a culture of travelling, of exile.—Exactly. What could you carry with you: books. You couldn't carry a temple; priests, there weren't, so you carried the word.

That's the culture. And you see that in Yiddish. You see it probably in Hebrew too—a kind of anti-authoritarianism that's built into it. It's not a language of facts. It's a language of interpretation, and a language of allegory, of metaphor. In Yiddish, you never just say a person's name—that's sort of bare and crude. If you speak about the patriarchs and matriarchs, you never say, “Rachael,” you say, “*di mame Rokhl*”—“our mother Rachael.” In other words, there's always a context for everything. So that already enriches the language. It's never a bare language—it's not Hemingway. The point is we then have a situation when you're translating, people, modern people, view some of the literature as sentimental. What it is, it's filled with a lot of feeling.

And another thing which is very interesting: A lot of our stories were written after the Holocaust. And they become, they act—Do you know the concept of *yizker bikhl*?—memorial books? Every *shtetl* that was destroyed in Europe has a memorial book. After the Holocaust, by thousands, people began to write, began to write memorial books so that the life of these *shtetlekh* would not disappear. There's a wonderful book called *From a Ruined Garden*, which documents the life in these *shtetlekh*. And they were written by people who still remembered. So they would write about the cantor, the crazy person, the woman who did this, the midwife, the *rebbe*, an incident in the village. The idea was that every *shtetl* would both have—they recount who the *yikhesdik*, the prestigious families, were, what the institutions were, stories, people—so that you have a documentation which exists in *Yad Vashem*¹⁴ and also in Yivo. There are thousands and thousands of these books.

Doris Shulno is one of the writers that we're doing—she describes what the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur were like. She describes the prayer, the going to the cemetery; she evokes it. It's as vivid as if it were happening today. So these women's stories we're translating act as *yizker bikhl*, as memorial books. The idea is not to lose this, and for us it means not to lose women's lives.

I'm going to bring in the story I told you earlier and we can talk about it. The story of my father coming across the ocean and then deciding that, for himself, he has forgotten Yiddish, Polish, Russian, and he's now speaking English. Was that common?

I think so; I think Yiddish was seen as a stigma. Not by everybody. Don't forget—even in North America, not everybody wanted to become an American overnight. You had people who still wanted to retain a Jewish culture, so it wasn't true that it all became wiped out.

I think there was a desperation, and desperation makes you learn more quickly, to learn English, to become part of the dominant culture. I don't think you ever forget the other one. But the point is, you can certainly build layers. If we think—I believe this, and I'm not alone in this—language controls us, not the other way around, if you want to begin to live in a particular way, you have to have the language there. And it's not just a tool you put down, you pick up: one day you use this and one day you use that. The way you see the world is totally determined by language—I'm not using it in the narrow sense, but in the broad sense. A Yiddish language is a Yiddish culture. It's a Yiddish way of looking at the world; it's a Jewish way of looking at the world. If you're coming to America, the urgency to merge with this culture, which in a sense promises you a life without memory, which is very tempting, very seductive, you shed this. Language is memory. When you're speaking Yiddish, it's memory, and it can be heartbreaking. And it's also love; it's like falling in love—the kind of passion. So it has all those entanglements, which for someone seeking a way which is no longer filled with memories of dread and horror—You learn a language like English, which is a beautiful, wonderful language, but doesn't have the associations. On the other hand, it allows expression, but you're now a different person.

There seems, more and more, an interest in Yiddish—an example is the recent revival of klezmer music, which is Yiddish music. I see more interest in that and I'm wondering what this is about. That it's now safe to look at this history; are people feeling safe enough to look at it, secure enough in America.

I think that that has a lot to do with it. There's that safety that you can do it in a pluralistic society. It's possible. I think the women's movement has done a lot to retrieve history—women's history, but it doesn't just go for women's history: the notion that if you don't have a history, you can't even be political. Blacks, I think, have taught the fact that roots are important. I think all those things happen simultaneously. I think also, on a kind of darker level, there's the realization of how vapid North American culture really is, particularly vapid if you're not a WASP.—As you said, it is the culture without memory.—for us! WASPs, a British person, has a long history. For them it's not a dead culture. But for me it's something I assumed later on in life. I adore English and I'm not indifferent to Western culture, at all. But the point is, it's not really my culture, it's an imposed culture. And, it's not their fault, it's my lot. I'm not blaming the dominant culture for dominating. I think that's what it is. I'm not living in Israel. I'm living for better or for worse, and I hope not forever, here. The CBC is not Kol Israel [Israeli radio], and they shouldn't be. They are who they are. But the effect on me is that I'm always a stranger here. And sometimes you're more conscious of it and sometimes you're less conscious of it. And some days it's a reprieve to be here and some days it's a burden. It moves and shifts and has gradations. There is a sense, I think especially for women and for feminists, not wanting to go through life without a history. We're shut out of male history, generally, even if you identify with Western culture, you're not really there. Unfortunately in Jewish culture we're not there either all full individual women, so I think this book is one—and a lot of stuff is being published now on Jewish women, with a historical perspective. So I think—you're right. The security does allow us to explore—psychic security and actual physical security. You're living in a country where you can do that; you can write a proposal to the dominant culture saying, give me money for a Yiddish conference and they do do it. That's something which we can't say is not worth anything; that is a freedom that people fought for and I appreciate it, certainly.

But on the other side, there's the fact that it's vapid, in a certain way it's empty. When you read something about your grandmother, it's different that reading something about

Nellie McClung—who's important; I'm glad that she was there; I take great pleasure in her work. But, our grandmothers didn't read Mary Wollstonecraft; they read the *tsena urena*.

So either you say, History doesn't matter, which I can't say, because it does matter—it matters enormously. I think all these—In a certain way, if you want to tap the motherlode of our own existence, we have to tap our mothers' history and you can't do that through English culture.

NOTES

Many thanks to Erica Simmons for a first edit of this interview; and to Ellen Flanders for editorial suggestions.

1. *Found Treasures: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*, ed. Frieda Forman, Ethel Raicus, Sarah Swartz & Margie Wolfe; introd. by Irena Klepfisz (Toronto: Second Story Press, forthcoming September 1994). 275 pages, \$14.95.

2. "A Jewish village of Eastern Europe." Plural—*shtetlekh*.

3. "Emigration to Israel"; also carries the connotation of its other meanings: to read from the Torah in the synagogue; spiritual elevation.

4. The Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, a centre for Yiddish and Jewish studies, based in New York.

5. A Yiddishist is not merely Yiddish-speaking, but an advocate of the Yiddish language.

6. Literally, "Jewish culture."

7. The Jewish Enlightenment, a social, spiritual and literary movement that developed and spread throughout central and eastern Europe from the last quarter of the eighteenth century up to the 1880s. It proposed the integration of the Jews into the surrounding culture, the abandonment of Yiddish in favour of the national language, conceiving new Hebrew poetry and literature, and Jewish integration into European culture.

8. Sephardic and Oriental Jews developed and spoke other languages, for example, Judeo-Spanish (or Ladino) and Judeo-Arabic, all of which, like Yiddish, were written with Hebrew characters. Ladino underwent many changes as Jewish exiles from the Spanish Inquisition travelled east and south into western Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

9. The exile of Jews from Palestine (as the region was called at the time, by its Roman conquerors) following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D.

10. Jewish mysticism. A body of occult knowledge originating 1800 years ago which seeks to understand God by means of "hidden wisdom" and esoteric practices of the visionary.

11. Anzia Yezierska (1883–1970). Short story writer and novelist.

12. See note 9.

13. "House of Hillel, House of Shammai." Hillel and Shammai, two rabbinic scholars, represent two schools of thought within the Talmud, the liberal and conservative perspectives, respectively.

14. The Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Israel.

SANDRA HAAR IS A MEMBER OF THE *FIREWEED* COLLECTIVE. HER WRITING AND ARTWORK HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN A NUMBER OF MAGAZINES, AS WELL AS THE ANTHOLOGY *THE GIRL WANTS TO* (COACH HOUSE PRESS).

ERRATA

(Fireweed #44/45)

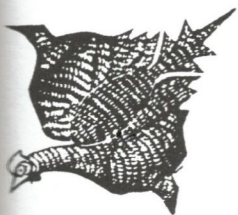
The following should appear under "Notes" to "Speaking Jewish: Women's Language," an interview with Frieda Forman by Sandra Haar, page 47.

The following sources are essential for those wanting to study Yiddish language and culture:

Irena Klepfisz. "Di Mames, Dos Loshn/The Mothers, The Language: Feminism, Yidishkayt, and the Politics of Memory," *Bridges* 4:1 (1994), 12-47.

Norma Fain Pratt. "Culture and Radical Politics: Yiddish Women Writers 1890-1940," *American Jewish History* LXX (1981), 60-91.

Bridges: a journal for Jewish feminists and our friends (P.O. Box 24839, Eugene, OR, 97402) regularly publishes Yiddish women writers in the original as well as in English translation.



Found Treasures *Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*

*Edited by Frieda Forman, Ethel Raicus,
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FOUND TREASURES

STORIES BY
YIDDISH WOMEN
WRITERS



INTRODUCTION BY IRENA KLEPFISZ

EDITED BY
FRIEDA FORMAN, SARAH SWARTZ
AND MARGIE WOLFE

The First Day

A gloomy day
no sun
no rain
the sound of the air conditioner

A hazy room
an empty room
and cockroaches,
everywhere.

Is it my share?

I narrated
all my life
all my life,
filled in a paper
dates, dates
date of birth
date of marriage
date of immigration
date of happy days
sad days
date of not being a human being
date of being nothing.

My whole life
went in a file.

*December 7, 1992
in shelter.*

I am here
out of home
a home never existed
never belonged to me
a home, I made it clean
a home, I made it a home

The first day.
Am I going to be born again
in this day?
Or lost?

The first day
is a sad day

The Second Day

In a strange house
with people
with faces
and sounds
far from me

In a land
with strange language
I am sharing
myself
with nothing, with a window
and snow
coming down, sadly

A voice in the air
a wondering voice
talking from a man, who
never knew love
never gave his hand
to anyone

It's snowing
I share my heart
with the window, bare trees
and sad snow

I share my stories
my memories
all my past
lost in so many houses
with nothing

I have an odd time
with my hands
with my eyes
looking for a piece
of a friendly look

Too many people here
all sad
all ghostly
walking around
looking for someone
lost in hate

I should regain myself
again

I should buy a bed
and sleep on it
alone, by myself

*December 8, 1992
in shelter.*

MEHRI YALFANI WAS BORN IN HAMADAN, IRAN, IN 1938. SHE WRITES IN HER MOTHER TONGUE, FARSI, AND HAS TRANSLATED SOME OF HER WORK INTO ENGLISH. SHE IMMIGRATED TO CANADA IN 1987. TWO OF HER SHORT STORIES APPEAR ON PP. 77-83 OF THIS ISSUE.

tongue

installed in her mouth
she put hers in her place

made her speak the mother
tongue to others

but to herself
mum's the word

mumbles
ma ma
moooo

◦

she goes to Greek School
in the evenings
every Monday & Wednesday
at 5 o'clock
another woman picks her up

the car load of Greek kids
from Scarborough
singing English pop songs
mumble I hate Greek School.

by day they're all englished
these products of immigrants
filling up the public schools.

reading alice in wonder
dr. seuss and mr. magoo

adopted by the other
english mothered her.

◦

η γλωσσα μου

split down the middle
by cupid's arrow

two divides one
then visa versa

two makes her halves
unequal

◦

η γλωσσα
split down the middle
by stiletto

flaps open-heart

the bones
ripped out

lemon & salt
for 13 minutes

◦

διγλωσσος
two-tongued

one split apart
like thongs

a fork stuck
in her mouth
picks her words
then sticks
it out:

by-lingo
by-lip
by-googoo
by-gone

feeds herself
on dialogues

◦

she didn't want
her mother's tongue
in her mouth.
spit it out
stomped on it
stomped it out
like a bug

her words full of words,
she covered her mouth.

o

searching for her self
expression she
cut out a paper tongue
and glued it on

her name printed in English
large between faint blue lines

the flag of her
imaginary land
flapping applause

o

mother/daughter
split inside her

knows her left
from her right
won't translate
but

The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek
tells her she understands both languages.

mouth

not the tongue
but the mouth
full

στοματου

ο

their hands said
she talked too much

the feast for dinner
μηλο in her mouth

they take back
the talk they gave her
and her mouth
shuts up.

no longer mouthy.

ο

but by word
got a round

mouthed the word love
to know it by heart

μιλω she said
with every bite

δεν μιλω

μιλω

δεν μιλω

till she could say
no more

language/race

she talked back
to her mother tongue
quipped "i'm Canadian!"

γλωσσου!

ο

you are what you speak.

Greek: the word make flesh
η γλωσσα μου
η φυλη

the Greek language speaks
for Greeks

just listen

ο

in her father's house
the mother tongue
puts its foot down
μιλησε ελληνικα!

their two-headed ομελια
sounds silly

English has Greek
to answer to.

ο

ετοιμος, ready
+ λογια, words

ετοιμολογια
repartee,
the quick reply

ο fuck off.

◦

the original sin
turns left
at the sign,
40 km/h
right through the light

comes back
to her mother
to mother her
this time

to make her
kin: kind.

◦

in so many ways
an ελληνίδα

Made In Canada

Greek roots
growing up
in the suburbs

the old blood
bleeds through
the new
wicked wound

◦

her second language comes first.
stays in her room and reads
books books books

stockpiled on the shelf
the old Greek School readers
still want to teach her

she opens Η ΓΛΩΣΣΑ ΜΟΥ

her full name printed in English
large across the right-hand page

voice

one's voice is never alone.

just say the word
and it says two

φιλε, love
φιλη, female friend

your voice can't tell
the difference

φιλι, kiss
φυλη, race

ο

not what you said
but what i heard

φωνη

voice
cry
scream
sound

no telling when
but all at once

παραφωνια
dissonance

clashing like
uncompatable
instruments

your Greek sounds
against my English

ο

you mastered the art
of talking
like a machine
non-stop

φωνογραφία
phonography

sound + write

recording your voice
in my poetry
but it doesn't sound
like you at all

mother
your voice sounds
unheard of

◦

she speaks to her mother
in her writing

she speaks of writing
as catharsis

the pain of the past
exorcised on paper
moves them into
new relations

two subjects
re-position
a dialogue

that Kanadian
hybrid tongue
twists semantics but
it's all Greek to us.

◦

divisions within each language
greater than the difference
between the two

greater than
who speaks how
one's spoken to

but the voice speaking

the play a stage for it

alone before a soundless theatre

GLOSSARY

"tongue"

η γλωσσα μου	s.f. + pron.	e glossa moo	my tongue, language
η γλωσσα	s.f.	e glossa	the tongue, language; sole (fish)
διγλωσσος	adj.	deglossos	bilingual

"mouth"

στοματου	s.f.	stomatoo	mouthy female
μηλο	s.n.	melo	apple; cheekbone
μιλω	v.t. + i.	melò	I talk, speak
δεν μιλω	neg. + v.t./i.	dthen melò	I don't talk, speak

"language/race"

γλωσσου	s.f.	glossoo	saucily, voluble female
η φυλη	s.f.	e phile	the race, tribe
μιλησε Ελληνικα	v.t. + s.n.	melese Hellenika	speak Greek
ομελια	s.f.	omelia	speech, talk
ετοιμος	adj.	etemos	ready
λογια	s.n. pl.	logia	words
ετοιμολογια	s.n.	etemologia	repartee, readiness of wit
Ελληνιδα	s.n.	Helleneda	Greek female
Η ΓΛΩΣΣΑ ΜΟΥ	s.f. + pron.	E GLOSSA MOO	the title of a Greek language arts elementary textbook

"voice"

φιλ-	prefix	phil	love(r) or friend of
φιλη	s.f.	phile	female friend
φιλι	s.n.	phile	kiss
φυλη	s.f.	phile	race, tribe
φωνη	s.f.	phone	voice; cry, scream, shout; sound
παραφωνια	s.f.	parafonia	dissonance
φωνογραφια	s.f.	fonographia	phonography; mechanical recording

ZAFFI GOUSOPOULOS COMPLETED HER HONOURS B.A. IN ENGLISH AT YORK UNIVERSITY AND HAS PUBLISHED POEMS IN *EXISTERE*, *WHITE WALL REVIEW* AND *DANDELION*. THE POEMS THAT APPEAR HERE ARE PART OF A SUITE CALLED "POEMS TO MY MOTHER(TONGUE)" IN A WORK IN PROGRESS ENTITLED "CRAZY LADY."

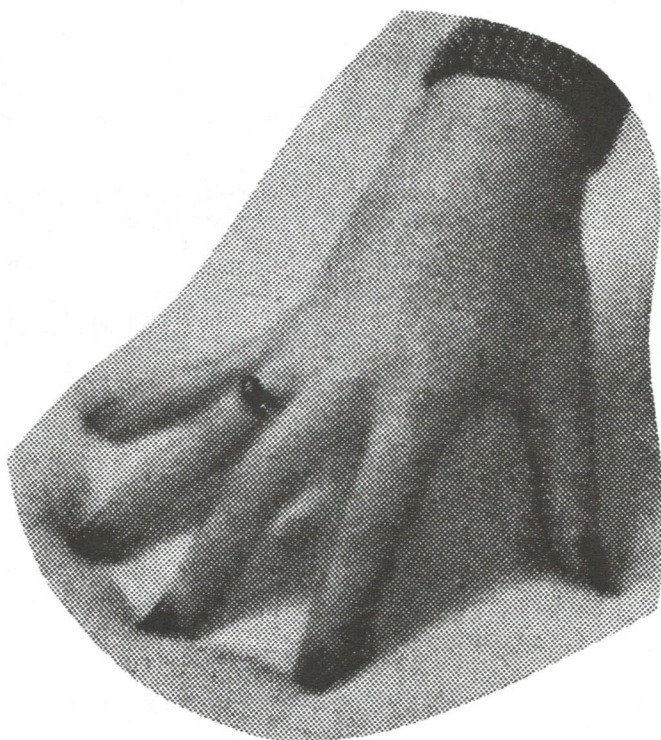
SOAKING IN “ENLIGHTENED CAPITALISM”: Imperial Stories by The Body Shop

NANCY CHATER

1. You're Soaking In It Now

A recent development in the intensified drive of capitalism to commodify and market everything under the ozone warrants the attention of feminists. The self-conscious promotion of *capitalism itself* is a growing field of representation among Euro-American retail enterprises. This re-packaged capitalism, what some term “new age capitalism,” is seductive in its capacity to obscure the deep contradictions between “alternative” initiatives at the site of consumption with “business as usual” in the mode of production.¹ New age capitalism has come of recycling age with its ready appropriation of progressive social agendas initially advocated by radical movements. Its advent must be viewed as yet another adaptive shift in capitalism’s use of popular discourses to reproduce itself. This shift serves to contain and neutralize challenges to capitalism while it pushes to expand and re-invent markets. Accordingly, the popular narratives about business are being re-written so that, as one successful new age capitalist puts it, a belief that profit-driven “business ethics undermined social values” has changed to a view of “business [as] the chief agent on the planet of social and personal transformation.”² Often credited as being the founder of new age capitalism, The Body Shop is a striking instance of this marketing of capitalism itself. The Body Shop incorporates the promotion of a “new and improved” capitalism into the “niche marketing” narratives that advertise the company’s “all natural” and healthy motif. A brief history of The Body Shop provides useful background reading to the imperial stories produced by The Body Shop in a variety of texts that I critique in this article.

One of the remarkable retail success stories of the global recession, The Body Shop has expanded since 1976 from one store in Brighton, England to 1100 stores in 45 countries in 1994; it is now an “empire worth \$500 million,” and aiming for the \$1 billion mark in three years.³ Founder and director Anita Roddick terms its practice of environmentally and socially conscious business “enlightened capitalism.” As Roddick explains, “the marketplace is now more human-oriented, more issue-oriented . . . I still believe that enlightened capitalism is the best way of changing society for the better.”⁴



THE ORAL STORY AS A TROPE FOR COMMODITIZED
EXCHANGE CONFIGURES A NEW, OR RENEWED, CURRENCY
IN THE ACCUMULATION OF "ENLIGHTENED" CAPITAL AND
"SPIRITUAL PROFITS." LIKE OTHER FORMS OF CURRENCY,
THE VALUE OF THE ORAL STORY CAN FLUCTUATE. FOR
THE BODY SHOP CORPORATION, WHEN "BOUGHT CHEAP
AND SOLD DEAR"—TO CITE THE CLASSIC MAXIM OF MAR-
KETING—"ORALITY" MAKES A GOOD INVESTMENT. THIS
MAXIM DESCRIBES, I THINK, THE DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF
THE BODY SHOP, ITS DEEP CONTRADICTIONS IN PROMOT-
ING ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS BUSINESS PRACTICES
NOT WITHSTANDING.

Roddick's theory of enlightened capitalism is implicated with a Eurocentric feminist discourse of gender. It draws on a feminist advocacy of the compatible co-existence within individuals of what have been ascribed as white masculine and feminine qualities. Dichotomized pairs of these qualities include rationality and nurturing, individualistic, competitive success and concern for others. Enlightened capitalism claims to harmonize and harness these attributes to running a capitalist enterprise, one that prides itself on being, in the words of Margot Franssen, president of Body Shop Canada, "a deeply feminist company."⁵ Roddick continually emphasizes the feminized qualities of "passion," "caring," and "good housekeeping"⁶ that characterize her vision of enlightened capitalism. Similarly, as she puts it, "female thinking" and "a sense of love"⁷ are what direct the "moral vision"⁸ of her enlightened capitalism.

The question I want to pursue here is what is the significance to inclusive, revolutionary feminist movement (as distinct from imperial, liberal or commodity feminisms) of the "busy intersection"⁹ of contradictory discourses through which The Body Shop attempts to constitute itself as unique and progressive? To answer this, it is essential to critique the imperialist discourses (encoding the imperialist gaze) that are one of the principal conductors through the corporation's busy intersection of textually mediated representation. The imperialist discourses I have identified in texts by The Body Shop include those of the missionary, classic ethnography, the travelogue, and the natural science expedition.

Situating these historical discourses within global capitalist relations so dependent upon contemporary forms of imperialism¹⁰ requires an understanding of The Body Shop's place in the global economy and the international division of labour (which is gendered, racialized and class structured). Many of its products originate in the cultures, soil and labouring hands of women (and men) of so-called Third World nations. Indeed, when Roddick opened her first store it was inspired by knowledge gleaned "on fact-finding trips she had made for the U.N. to study women in the Third World."¹¹ On these trips she learned that "for centuries women in underdeveloped countries had used organic potions to care for their skin."¹² She continues to travel six months each year,¹³ seeking more product ideas and sources. Through The Body Shop's promotion of its "Trade Not Aid" projects in India, Mexico, the Brazilian rainforest and elsewhere, it expresses concern, in familiar "development" terms, to help "peoples in the developing world . . . to acquire the tools and resources they need to support themselves."¹⁴ The vast but unacknowledged structural inequalities between the corporation and its trading "partners" operate, however, to reproduce unequal power relations by once-again assigning to the "Third World" a service role.¹⁵ This assignation is evident when Roddick writes, for example, that "trade [not aid] gives people in the Third World the ability to choose their destiny *when they meet the pressures of the west* . . ."¹⁶ (emphasis added).

This service role also has a strong ideological component in terms of how the perceived cultural authenticity of the "Third World" peoples employed by The Body Shop is praised for its rejuvenating effect on what the company calls its "soul" and its "spiritual profits."¹⁷ Therefore, examining both the feminism and the enlightened capitalism of The Body Shop reveals that the corporation replicates rather than disrupts imperialist relations between rich nations—and women—of the global North, and materially impoverished nations—and women—of the global South. This is one of the reasons why I term its politics regressive for revolutionary, inclusive feminist movement, and why it represents a conspicuous example of imperial feminism.¹⁸

Finally, placing the expansion of The Body Shop in the context of its historical period is important. Following the perceived demise of socialism, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the concept of a reformed, "kinder gentler"¹⁹ capitalism, such as that proffered by The Body Shop and others in its wake, attempts to revitalize the popular currency of capitalism. This advocacy of a "new and improved capitalism" must be sharply contrasted with the increasingly brutal consequences for the majority of women (and men) of every geopolitical location caused by the intensified globalization of capitalism. A revitalized popular currency for capitalism dovetails with the escalated promotion in the west/global North of "the victorious spread of democracy" with which capitalism is virtually equated in the mainstream media. Despite social crises of every kind rightly linked to the crises of capitalism, its supporters still present it as the best and the only solution to the devastation created by capitalism itself.

The inherent tension between my position as a consumer who is also critical of modes of production and of what fuels consumption permeates my ambivalent and dwindling consumption of Body Shop products. Inextricably implicated in global capitalism, as I simultaneously cast a critical eye at The Body Shop, I recall the infamous words of Madge, the Palmolive soap manicurist of television fame: "You know, you're soaking in it now."

2. Imperialist Stories & The "Marketplace of Cultural Differences"²⁰

"Trade Not Aid" is a way of trading honourably with indigenous communities in disadvantaged areas . . . we listen to what these people need and try to help them with it. What we bring back with us are stories—how they do things, the connections; the essential wisdom of indigenous groups. Stories are the soul of The Body Shop. —Anita Roddick in American Express/The Body Shop print ad, *Vanity Fair*, Summer 1993

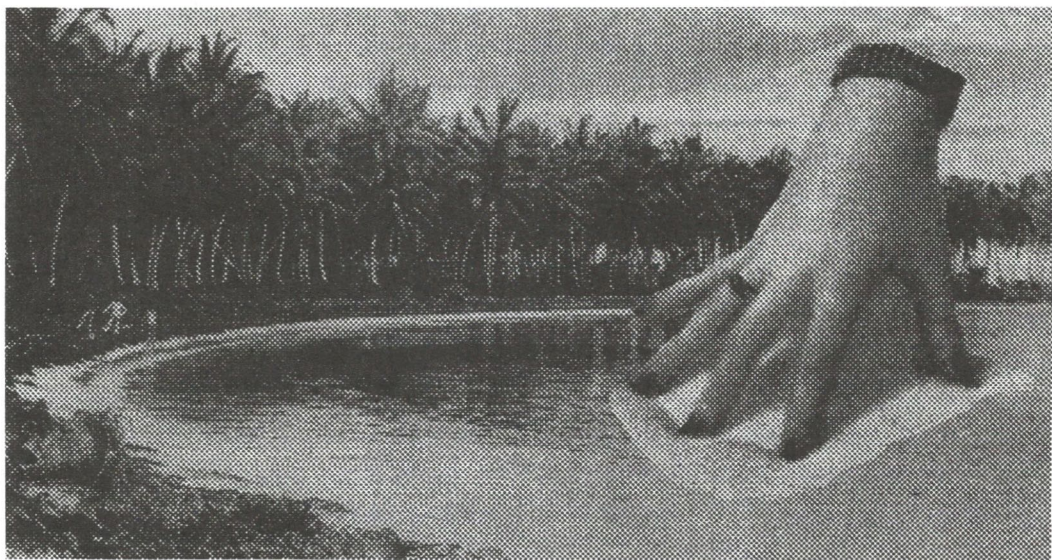
One striking aspect of a variety of texts produced by The Body Shop is their repeated referencing of orality. These texts include ads, catalogue/magazines and full-length books²¹ and contain multiple allusions to "conversation," "gossip," "dialogue," "anecdote," "oratory" and, most especially, "story." Textual narratives about oral stories play a significant role in how this multinational company tries to exhibit its enlightened/feminist internationalism while actually legitimizing its imperial authority and bargain shopping in the marketplace of commodified cultural differences. Images of a new attentiveness to the revered "orality" of a supporting cast of "native others" function in this double-edged way. As I see it, the oral "story" is a trope of enlightened capitalism which recasts production and consumption in a recycled humanitarian guise by editing out race, nation and economic power differentials between the players. The Body Shop's various images of stories being "shared," "traded" and "gathered" across neutralized difference reconfigure as egalitarian and mutually beneficial the processes of research, development and production of its products.

Asymmetrical structural (and therefore power) relations between The Body Shop and its "trading partners" in the global South infuse the profitable view that "the orality of indigenous peoples" *circulates without formal controls and is therefore mostly free for the taking*. This view is engendered within capitalist enterprise that originates in a writing-based society, where codification in writing through patents, copyrights, deeds, treaties and so on

establishes and protects ownership and private property. The definition of all that is not thus codified as property as “up for grabs” has been intrinsic to imperialist exploitation. Capitalizing on this historical dynamic, The Body Shop commodifies not only select plants but also the cultures, spirituality, knowledge systems and even the anti-imperialist political struggles from which they are “gathered.”

The Body Shop also capitalizes on imperialist feminist claims to a non-negotiated “global sisterhood” among women which similarly erases power differentials between women. “Global sisterhood” provides a cheap and profitable access point for culturally rich sources of ideas conveyed orally by materially impoverished women of the global South which can be commodified and sold. Roddick tells, for example, a “hilarious” story of how she “wheedle[d] the formula for a heady perfume from a group of Bedouin women” by showing them her pubic hair.²² One has to ask who gained more in this exchange? A reductionist view of what Himani Bannerji has termed “powered difference” is evident when Roddick claims that:

One of the wonderful things about women, which I don't think many social anthropologists have fully understood, is that we are bonded by shared experiences—by babies and the rituals and problems of our bodies . . . All women are interested in looking after their skin, for example, and that is why one woman can go up to another without any hesitation, and ask, “How come your skin's so soft?”²³



3. The Body Shop and The Kayapo of Brazil

I wanted to be Christobel Columbus, going into little villages in Mexico or Guatemala or Nepal and seeing what they had to trade . . . —Anita Roddick, 1991²⁴

The imperialist terms of such a statement, employed even as indigenous peoples throughout the Americas prepared to counter 1992 government celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival, are telling. Roddick frequently describes the benefits of her extensive travel "south of the equator" in the imperialist discourses of the missionary, the natural science expedition, the classic ethnographer, and the colonial travelogue. These imperialist discourses come into play in terms of how Body Shop texts represent and capitalize on the "orality" of peoples marginalized not only in the global economy but also in Eurocentric definitions of culture and knowledge.

A brief history of The Body Shop's relation to the Kayapo Indians of the Brazilian rainforest, who produce Brazil nut oil for its "Brazil Nut Hair Conditioner" elaborates my point. Attending a large environmentalist and indigenous protest gathering in Brazil, Roddick meets members of the Kayapo. "We were thrilled by the oratory," she writes. "The Indians had extraordinary presence: they spoke from the heart with stunning eloquence, and their wisdom was evident to us all."²⁵ One Kayapo leader has "a natural gift for oratory." Roddick states that "they told us, in no uncertain terms, to leave them and their forest alone."²⁶ Thrilling oratory and clear directives notwithstanding, The Body Shop quickly sets up research projects "into what marketable products might be available in the forest"²⁷ and another project "to try to persuade Indian tribes to harvest Brazil nuts."²⁸ "We eventually hope to be able to harvest 20 tons of Brazil nuts every year."²⁹

I am not suggesting that the Kayapo are victims without agency who gain nothing from their business with The Body Shop. Rather, I want to underline the vast structural and power inequalities within the relationship that make it especially advantageous to the corporation which gains materially from the vulnerable position of the Kayapo, further bolstered by a kind of political "credibility" acquired through promoting how they "help" the Kayapo. The inequalities of a trading relationship between a rich multinational corporation and a small nation of indigenous people fighting for its very survival are recreated in personal and egalitarian terms. Referring to the Kayapo, Roddick says: "It is just a basic exchange of resources carried out in the traditional manner—as a token of friendship and respect."³⁰

The natural science colonial expeditions of the mid 1700s, which coincided with the birth and development of a systematizing European natural science, played an important role in colonial travel and expansion through seeking and charting marketable plants in the colonies.³¹ What Mary Louise Pratt writes about the eighteenth-century colonial project of natural science is also true of The Body Shop's mission, in that they both have "extracted specimens not only from their organic or ecological relations to each other, but also from their places in other people's economies, histories, social and symbolic systems."³² For example, walking in the rainforest and listening to "the [Kayapo] village medicine man," Roddick

*label[s] all the potentially useful plants he showed me. It was worth it. The Kayapo use red beads from the urukum shrub for body painting; the Body Shop now uses the same beads, gathered by the Kayapo, as colouring for our mango body butter.*³³

How does The Body Shop's relationship with the Kayapo get reduced, reused and recycled to the corporation's advantage in narratives of revered orality? A joint American Express/The Body Shop ad reads as follows:

Customers come into The Body Shop to buy a hair conditioner and find a story about the Xingu reserve and the Kayapo Indians who collect Brazil nuts for us. We showed them a simple process for extracting oil from the nut, which consequently raises the value of the raw ingredient we use. The result is we pay them more for it, and that gives them an alternative to their logging income, which in turn protects the rain forest.³⁴

In this passage, bringing back stories translates into bringing home profits. "Finding a story" is like a colonial adventure itself: the consumer "discovers" the exoticized, serviceable, contained and dependent "native other." Buying this product seemingly makes one "part of the solution," not "part of the problem," so the story becomes a palatable one. Perhaps even more important, this version of the story portrays enlightened capitalism in a helping, teaching, ecological role towards a people and land whose very devastation was created by imperialism and capitalist expansion. This story line features "new" capitalism playing good cop to "old" capitalism's bad cop. Even political struggles for self-determination and survival are appropriated and re-presented providing grist for capitalism's self-congratulatory story mill. As John Berger writes, "publicity can translate even revolution into its own terms."³⁵

Another imperialist feature of Roddick's travel accounts is that they often echo the colonial travelogue that was so popular a genre in nineteenth-century Europe. Feminist historian Margaret Stroble sums up a salient feature of white European women's colonial travel writing by stating that in Eurocentric terms they were "the inferior sex of the superior race"³⁶ when travelling in places like India and Africa. In other words, like Roddick, they challenged white femininity by travelling the world, going into what was considered dangerous territory, seeking knowledge and adventure, interacting with men of their own and other cultures, and writing about it. However, in the nineteenth century, access to travel was facilitated by the imperial context itself, which rendered white women "superior" by way of race, nation and material wealth. Indigenous men served as labourers for European women, carrying large amounts of luggage, paraphernalia and even the women themselves in sedan-chairs. Similarly, through her wealth and access to hiring guides, translators, anthropologists and researchers, as well as being white, Roddick travels with tremendous sources of privilege which to my knowledge she does not acknowledge in writing.

Roddick's colonial travelogue perspective often emerges through a classic imperialist ethnographic gaze. Sometimes the tone is one of respect and admiration. Other times it reproduces racist images and preoccupations, such as the following description of a *sadhu* (holy man) of the Nyinba people of Nepal. Roddick writes:

One of the highlights of our visit [to Nepal] was an audience with Pagali Baba, a holy man known as a sadhu. Pagali Baba turned out to be a bit of a character. When we arrived he was stark naked and covered in ashes as part of some cleansing ritual. He was also roaring drunk. With his coarse and knotted hair (he was not much interested in Body Shop shampoos) he looked like a madman.

Towards the end of our meeting he boozily offered to demonstrate his immense strength by balancing twelve bricks on his penis. Fearing he would do himself some damage, we negotiated through an interpreter and in the end he agreed—somewhat reluctantly—to perform the feat with only eight bricks. I have a photograph to prove it.³⁷

The description of this man as a drunk, dirty, dishevelled, naked, and sexually boastful madman is a racist objectification which the superficial anthropological/ethnographic “contextualization” of him as a holy man and engaged in “some cleansing ritual” does not allay.

4. Mamatoto, “Global Sisterhood” & Authenticity

Frequent travels south of the equator, where I gossiped and shared life stories with women, made me realize that there was a wealth of knowledge about birth, virtually hidden from us in the Western world. I was amazed by their lore—their stories about conception, pregnancy, birth and baby care are so different from our own cultural experience. It made me wonder: what do we share with women in other lands? . . . We began gathering stories from indigenous cultures and scouring our own past for gleanings. Let me tell you, my entire soul was riveted by these stories . . . Many of these rituals and stories informed the creation of our mother-and-baby range of products called Mamatoto, which in Swahili means motherbaby.

—Anita Roddick, Introduction to *Mamatoto: A Celebration of Birth*³⁸

The Body Shop’s allusions to a purported “global sisterhood” and the sharing of “stories” that this “sisterhood” facilitates is strikingly illustrated in a Body Shop-authored book called *Mamatoto: A Celebration of Birth*. Described on the back cover as “a glorious pot-pourri of birthlore, from The Body Shop,” this text is a collection of brief ethnographic fragments of the “beliefs and customs” genre, describing aspects of birth from “other lands” and “our past.” (Lushly produced, it is published by Virago, a major British feminist press.)

The Body Shop generally attempts to link its capitalist interests in marketing commodified cultural difference with progressive movements. The purposes and effects and perhaps even the motivations of this link are complex. However, a search for and confirmation of a lost or threatened cultural and spiritual authenticity is certainly one element at work. A desire to retrieve a connection to authenticity is another feature of *Mamatoto: A Celebration of Birth*. This desire is linked to access to the cultures of the African, Asian, Caribbean and Indigenous peoples the book provides. The reader can “shop” among various cultural practices around birth, selecting from a smorgasbord of pluralistic cultural difference, much like the array of “preparations” to buy and dip into provided by the stores. Importantly, the reader is interpellated as Western and Eurocentric through a series of “us” and “them” references, such as “their stories about conception, pregnancy, birth and baby care are so different from our own cultural experience.”³⁹

In a similar vein, Roddick speaks of the recuperative “pure joy that is to be obtained from mixing with simple people whose lives are untainted by what we have laughably described as ‘progress.’”⁴⁰ What anthropologist Renato Rosaldo terms “imperialist nostalgia,”⁴¹ characterized by a longing for what one has implicitly or explicitly participated in destroying, is evi-

dent here. As well, citing the recuperative effects of this "pure joy" signals a re-emergence of the imperialist discourse of the "noble savage" popularized in the eighteenth century by Rousseau, which claimed the benefits for colonial Europeans of learning from the "spontaneity" and "emotionality" of the colonial subject.

Spivak characterizes as "the quintessential colonial gesture [that] which requires the colonized subject to occupy the space of the imperialist's self-consolidating Other."⁴² In this case, the self-consolidating "native other" is a repository of a projected authenticity which is then recuperable through selective commodification and appropriation. While the earlier phases of the imperialist project were justified as Christianizing "soul-making," to use Spivak's term,⁴³ what seems clear in *The Body Shop's* intersection with contemporary forms of imperialism is that the "soul-making" previously claimed to benefit the "native other" is now directed toward the urban citizens and corporate citizens of the empire whose souls have been depleted by materialism and need revitalization.

It is significant that the single cross-cultural theme that I think achieves some kind of coherence in the fragmentary *Mamatoto: A Celebration of Birth* involves the central role of touch in what the text terms "mothercare" and "babycare." The book links the "most elemental language of touch—through massage, aromatherapy, bathing and breastfeeding" to "our hopes for a gentler future."⁴⁴ Touch involves skin—for which Body Shop products are made. Not coincidentally, the Mamatoto line features products for each of the four kinds of touch cited.

On a deeper cultural level, the allusions to orality may be understood as implicated in this "elemental language of touch" or, put another way, the elemental touch of oral language. Theorizing the question of orality in literature, Zumthor finds that "since the spread of printing, Western man seems filled with longing for a world of touch and sound—the very one which the pure abstract visual nature of writing made him lose."⁴⁵ Levi-Strauss makes a related "correlation between orality and authentic living" in which "there are pockets of authenticity within the larger inauthentic culture in which the West lives today."⁴⁶ Levi-Strauss stresses that "it is essential to realize that writing, while it conferred vast benefits on humanity, did deprive it of something fundamental."⁴⁷

In *Mamatoto*, a desire to retrieve this lost connection to touch and sound and the assumptions of its authenticity are linked to the cultures of the non-Western peoples who supposedly exist in an earlier historical time. Appropriating aspects of their culture(s) provides a route "back"—back to "basics," back to unspoiled nature, back to a world of touch and sound through the oral. For example, the text reads, "And some, [in the west] by wearing amber on their pregnant bodies or saying protective mantras, are looking for assurance back and beyond modern thinking to a world untouched by science."⁴⁸ Note that wearing amber involves touch and saying mantras involves sound, both imbued with symbolic or spiritual significance. It is significant that what was "backward"—anything pre- or non-scientific—is now reconstituted as befitting "progress."

In *Mamatoto*, despite an expressed intimacy with, interest in and admiration for women "south of the equator," representations of non-Euro/American cultures ultimately legitimize imperial authority because the anecdotes are so fragmentary and so removed from the cultural or historical context within which they arise that they actually reinforce a racist, imperialist attitude that "we" have knowledge (usually scientific) and "they" have beliefs (usually mythic and outlandish). As well, "their" knowledge is evaluated by the writerly author/ity of *The Body Shop* such that the Eurocentric power to define what counts as knowledge is reinscribed. This is clear in the following passage, which answers its own question: "So

much of the information we gathered made so much sense to me that I can't help but ask why it is not considered 'real knowledge.' At best, it is absolutely accurate, at worst, curiously interesting."⁴⁹

One clear example in *Mamatoto* of this fragmentary, decontextualized "information" occurs in two lists of precautions during pregnancy. For the "industrialized countries" the list is introduced with "doctors now advise mothers-to-be to avoid these potential risks." The risks to avoid include such things as "Cresol: breathing in fumes from cleaning fluids and disinfectants."⁵⁰ For the "non-industrialized countries" no doctors are mentioned and instead the list contains things like "lying too long in the sun will cause the fetus to melt away—Ibo, Nigeria" and "gazing at an eclipse of the moon can cause baby to be born with a harelip—Aztecs, Mexico."⁵¹ These examples appear timeless, not delineated as in the past or present, where toxic chemicals are certainly a concern for many women in "Third World" countries. Renato Rosaldo critiques this aspect of classic ethnography, observing that "the 'timeless traditional culture' serve[s] as a self-congratulatory reference point against which Western civilization [can] measure its own progressive historical evolution."⁵²

5. Employed Stories

Orality as a trope of enlightened capitalist exchange also reconfigures "the sales job" as educational dialogue. A professed commitment to educational dialogue is connected to a missionary-like zeal staff of The Body Shop staff is apparently supposed to have regarding their work for the corporation. In addition to "rapping and wrapping"⁵³ in the stores, working for The Body Shop includes volunteer work in various sorts of non-profit community organizations, for which the staff are at least partially paid by The Body Shop. In another imperial allusion, Roddick describes the first group of staff who went out to do their "Community Care" work as "fervent nuns in the Congo . . . offer[ing] their services."⁵⁴ Orality figures prominently in The Body Shop's employee training practices, as well as its expectations of staff-public relations on the floor.

*We do not, for example, train our staff to sell . . . We prefer to give staff information about the products, anecdotes about the history and derivation of the ingredients, and any funny stories about how they came on to Body Shop shelves. We want to spark conversations with our customers.*⁵⁵

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger critiques publicity as "the culture of the consumer society."⁵⁶ (By "publicity" he refers to what is now called "the media.") Like culture, "publicity interprets the world."⁵⁷ While The Body Shop boasts of never paying for advertising, it certainly creates tremendous amounts of publicity. Through narratives about orality, it interprets the world of in-store educational dialogue on a grand scale.

*While the art of protest is being stifled and apathy reigns, my ambition is for our stores to provide the conduit for a different vocabulary which will continue to irritate, agitate and get things moving. We'll provide an arena for debate and discussion—a chance for people to make their voices heard.*⁵⁸

Configuring a chain of stores as a physical site or seat of democratic participation in society

is a striking example of what Berger refers to when he observes that

[p]ublicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world.⁵⁹

Ideologically, this fits well with The Body Shop's promotion of enlightened capitalism within a new world order that claims to be the only way to organize the increasingly globalized economy and its accompanying major crises of every kind. At this historical time, ushering in a new era of capitalism that is "enlightened" and "socially conscious" has tremendous popular appeal. Promoting capitalist enterprise through what Robert Goldman terms "commodity feminism"—that is, "feminism tailored to the demands of the commodity form" such that "it threatens neither capitalist nor patriarchal hegemony"⁶⁰—also has a great popular appeal. The palatability of commodity feminism is especially significant in contrast to the ongoing backlash against inclusive, revolutionary feminism and other progressive movements.

NOTES

I would like to thank Margaret Christakos, the *Fireweed* collective, Michael Hoechsmann, Robert Gill and Handel Wright for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. I draw this relational analysis of "site of consumption" and "mode of production" from Michael Hoechsmann, "Benetton Culture: Marketing Difference to the New Global Consumer" in Stephen Riggins, ed. *'Others' in Discourse: The Rhetoric and Politics of Exclusion* (London: Sage Publications, forthcoming),

2. Margaret Wente, "Zen and the art of making money: Book Review of *The Republic of Tea: Letters to a Young Zentrepeneur*" in *The Globe & Mail*, 6 March 1993: C16.

3. Jennifer Conlin, "Survival of the Fittest: Can Body Shop Founder Anita Roddick keep her lead in the clean and green biz?" in *Working Woman*, NYC: February 1994. The projected 1 billion dollar figure is a quoted comment made by Gordon Roddick: 30, 31.

4. Anita Roddick, *Body and Soul* (London: Ebury Press, 1991), 27.

5. Quoted in Michele Landsberg, "Money and moral support for women" in *Toronto Star*, 4 March 1994: D1.

6. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 80, 17, 222.

7. Conlin, "Survival of the Fittest," 30.

8. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 226.

9. I take this phrase from Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 17.

10. See Linda Carty, "Imperialism: Historical Periodization or Present-Day Phenomenon?" in *Radical History Review* 57 (1993): 38–45.

11. Jennifer Conlin, "Survival of the Fittest," 28–31, 68–69, 72–73.

12. *Ibid.*, 68.

13. *Ibid.*, 29.

14. From Body Shop in-store magazine, 1993, p. 28.

15. See Noam Chomsky, "Brave new world order" in *New Statesman and Society*, 20/27 December 1991: 19, for an assessment of this perpetuated service role.

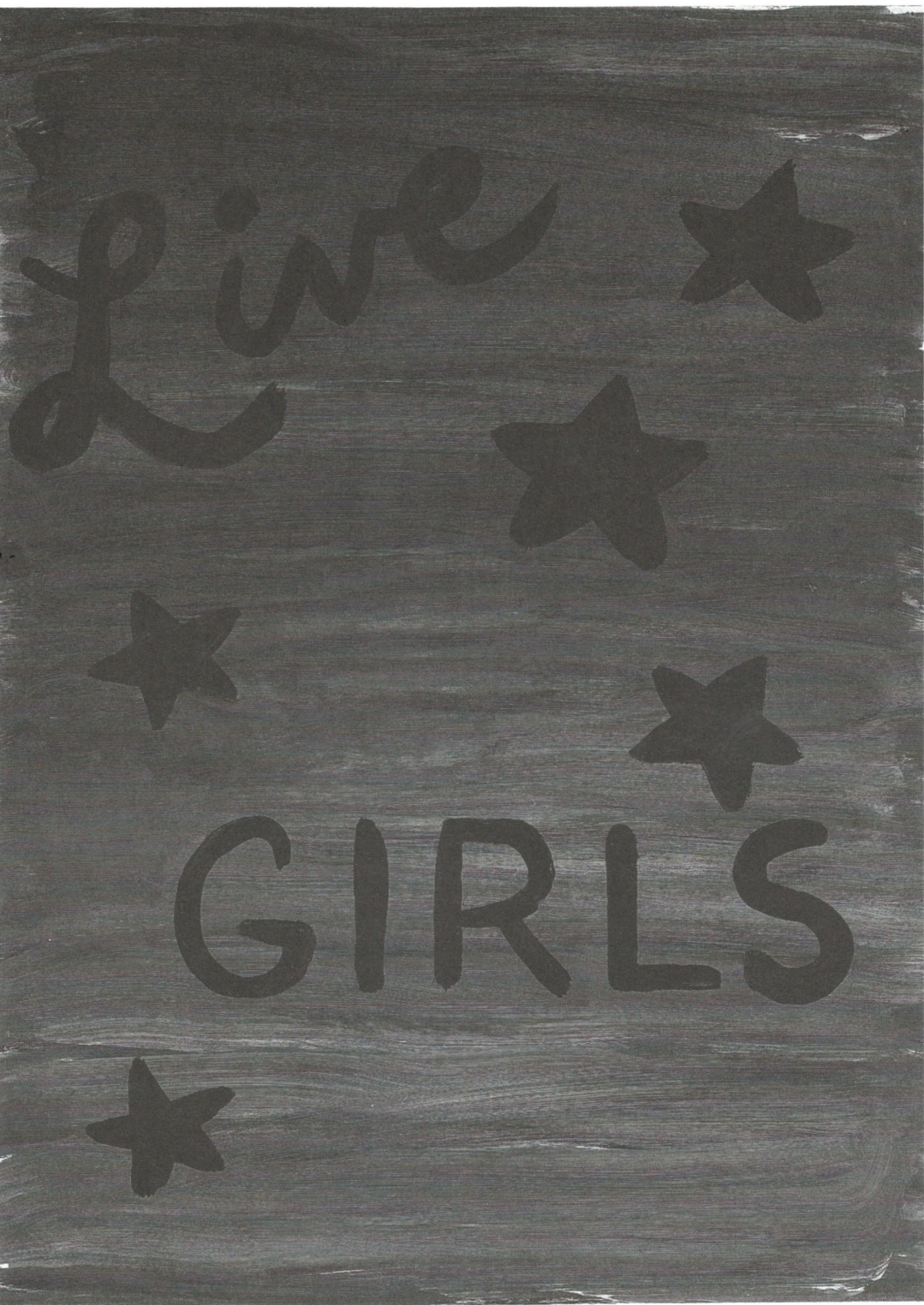
16. Roddick, *Body And Soul*, 165.

17. *Ibid.*, 143, 142.

18. For a definition and critique of imperial feminism, see Valerie Amos & Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism" in *Feminist Review* no. 17 (July 1984): 3–18.

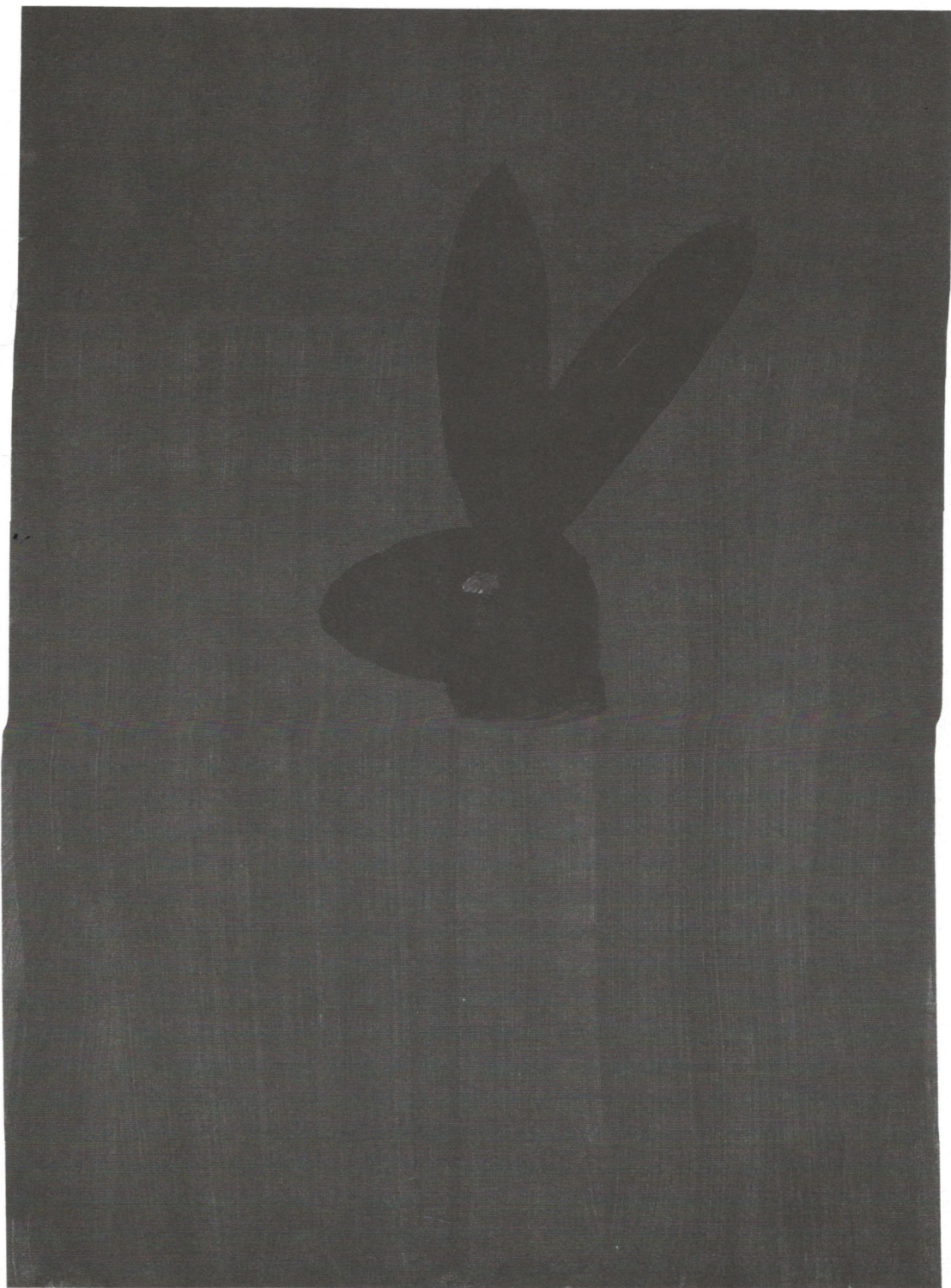
19. Roddick actually uses this phrase in an interview. See Conlin, "Survival of the Fittest," 69.
20. Himani Bannerji, "Introduction," *ReTurning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics*, ed. Himani Bannerji (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993), xxiv.
21. Anita Roddick, *Body And Soul* and *The Body Shop, Mamatoto: A Celebration of Birth* (London: Virago Press, 1991). *The Body Shop*, untitled 50-page magazine/catalogue, volume 1, 1993. Two-page Body Shop/American Express ad, *Vanity Fair* (Summer 1993).
22. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 184.
23. *Ibid.*, 70.
24. *Ibid.*, 166.
25. *Ibid.*, 189–190.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 203.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 209.
30. *Ibid.*, 213.
31. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1–37.
32. *Ibid.*, 31.
33. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 206.
34. In *Vanity Fair* (Summer 1993).
35. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC & Penguin, 1972), 151.
36. Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
37. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 180.
38. *The Body Shop, Mamatoto*, 1991.
39. *Ibid.*, 4.
40. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 181.
41. Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia" in *Culture & Truth: Remaking Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989/1993), 68–90.
42. Spivak is quoted in Laura Donaldson, *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender & Empire Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 15.
43. Cited by Donaldson, *Decolonizing Feminisms*, 15.
44. *The Body Shop, Mamatoto*, 4.
45. Eileen Julien, *African Novels and The Question of Orality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 16. She translates and quotes Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 284. Julien also states that Marshall McLuhan notices the same thing.
46. Julien, *African Novels*, 16.
47. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, 425–26, translated and quoted by Julien, *African Novels*, 15.
48. *The Body Shop, Mamatoto*, 42.
49. *Ibid.*, 4.
50. *Ibid.*, 41.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," 31.
53. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 219.
54. *Ibid.*, 152.
55. *Ibid.*, 25.
56. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 139.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Roddick, *Body and Soul*, 129.
59. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 149.
60. Robert Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (London: Routledge, 1992), 130.

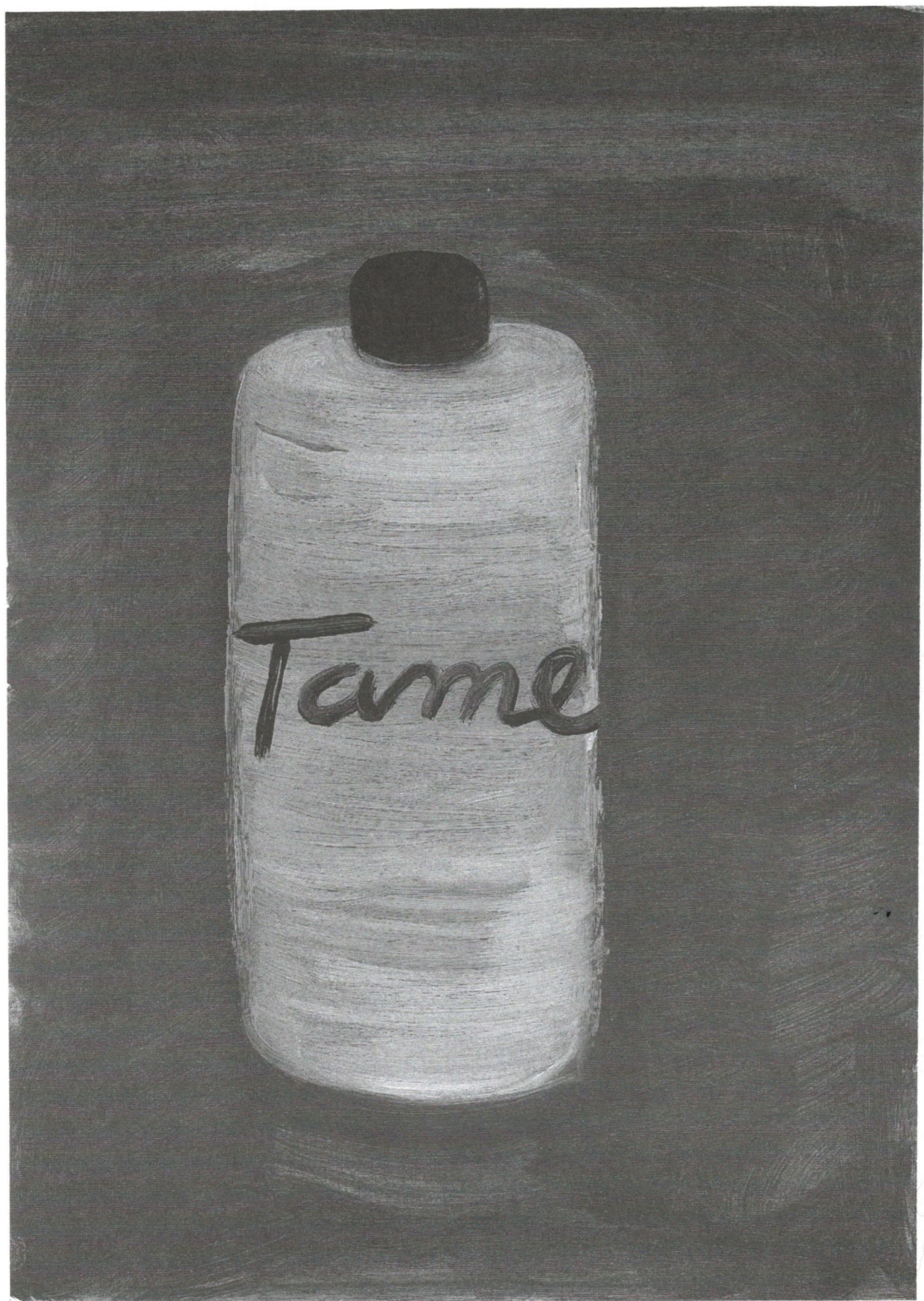
NANCY CHATER IS A TORONTO WRITER AND POET.

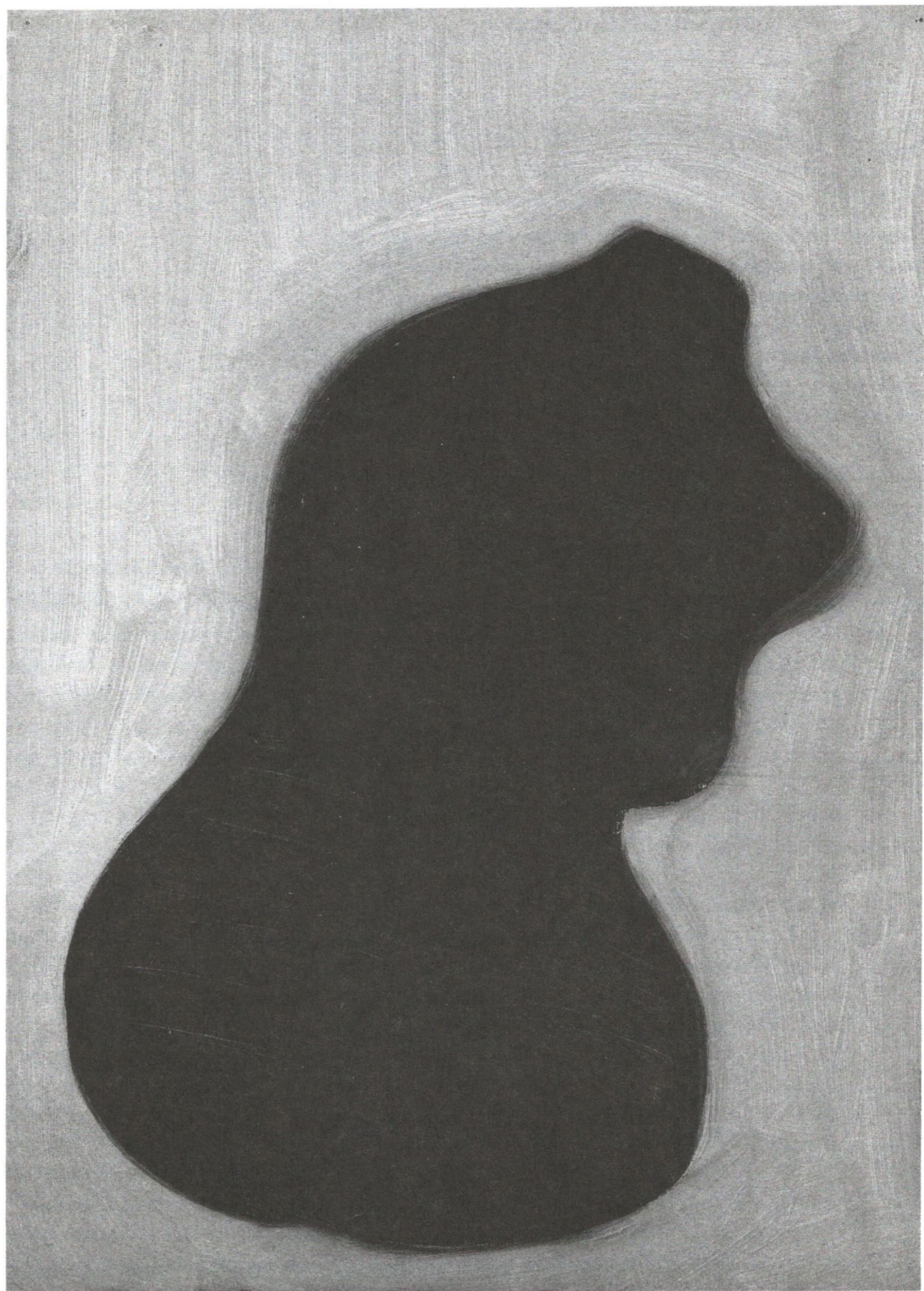




Felme







CATHY DALEY

This work is part of the series *Gut Reaction*, which looks at the way women are portrayed in popular culture, advertising and the media, and through formal language, and slang or the vernacular. Daley writes, "In my work I have used text in different ways . . . sometimes I have isolated a word or phrase or put words in juxtaposition to examine language and codes of meaning."

CATHY DALEY LIVES IN TORONTO AND HAS EXHIBITED HER WORK ACROSS CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY SINCE 1980. HER RECENT DRAWINGS FOCUS ON THE FEMALE BODY AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN VISUAL IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE.

Limbo

MEHRI YALFANI

to Mary Thornbury

It was one of those beautiful days. The sky was blue and inviting. It was soothing and kind. Its blue colour was so clear that it could take your mind off work just to look at it. Such a pleasing blue sky creates a kind of feeling under your skin, which is neither joy nor happiness, but something more, which flows through you and connects your very existence with the sky, the trees, with the earth and nature. That day the sky was truly beautiful. The weather was friendly, like an invitation to live. You could feel it with all your being.

Nargess looked at the sky. It was really appealing, but she tried to ignore it. Spring should not evoke these feelings in her. She didn't have time for them. She had to be completely focused on her work.

When Margaret came in, Nargess looked up from her monitor and said, "Good morning."

"Good morning," Margaret replied smiling, then, looking at the sky, added, "great weather." There was sincerity in her blue eyes. Nargess, as usual, had started work early. Margaret commented, "Early bird." Nargess smiled. She always smiled in response. Words were not friendly to her. The sentences she spoke, the sentences she heard—she was always in a struggle with them. She wanted to say so much, but she was not able to frame her thoughts. She lacked the right words. She had thought, "I don't need the words. I convey my ideas without talking." She felt Margaret could understand her.

At break, with a cup of coffee in her hand, Margaret came and asked, "Don't you drink coffee?"

"No, I don't like it. It bothers my stomach," Nargess responded.

"Why don't you take a break? You deserve it."

"Okay, I will come," agreed Nargess. But when they went to the other room and sat on the sofa, Nargess felt uncomfortable. She didn't know why. She couldn't speak, although she had many things to say. She needed to talk, badly, but she didn't

have the language. If only the words were not so strange to her.

Diana and Claire were chattering. Nargess didn't listen to them. She didn't want to hear. Listening needed concentration, and she didn't have it. Margaret said, "You look tired, or maybe upset. Why is that? Have you heard from your husband?" Nargess was looking down, then looked up into Margaret's eyes. Why was she so far away from her? Like the sky, with all her kindness, she was so far away.

Nargess responded, "Oh, yeah, I have." Margaret smiled. Happiness appeared in her blue eyes. She no longer wanted to know why Nargess was upset, why she looked so down. Nargess would have liked to talk to Margaret. She wanted to tell her about her problems. She wanted to tell her that her husband was not the only person she was worried about. She wanted to tell her that her brother and sister, her friends, many friends, were back there, in her homeland. That "there" was her country, "there" was her home. All of her memories and part of her being were back there. She wanted to say that she could never be complete without them, but she couldn't. Her English wasn't adequate. How could she explain all of this, using the few words she knew! Instead, she remained silent. Nargess looked at Margaret's eyes, which were blue like the sky, gentle and sincere, but far, very far away.

After the break, she went to her desk, looked at the sky, still a clear blue. It brought tears to her eyes. She wondered if they would fire her. She wanted to talk to Margaret about this. But she couldn't. Something was blocking her: pride, shame or a lack of language.

Her English was just not good enough to speak clearly. Yet her sentences were like a vague concept. She was always wondering if people understood her, what she really meant. Her communication with people seemed always one-sided, uncertain, full of vagueness, as if a curtain separated her from others. She never spoke more than three or four sentences at a time, and even those sentences were incomplete. That was why she was always upset and quiet. She had two eyes to watch and two ears to hear, but she would not listen. Words couldn't reach her. There was a barrier between them. When she couldn't understand what people said, a shadow would come over her, and she would go deeper and deeper into it.

Nargess thought to herself, "Margaret thinks my only problem concerns my husband. She thinks I have no other problem. Ah, I wish I could talk with her." But she was not able. Again she thought, "What does she think of me? Does she think I am stupid? A wandering, homeless person? Poor, weak, needy, desperate?" Nargess hated herself. She felt that she hated Margaret too. At that moment, she looked at the sky, which was still so blue. Then Nargess looked at the monitor.

Figures were flying around. She had made so many mistakes that day. She made mistakes all the time. Margaret looked over at Nargess's words and pondered. There was a thought in her gentle blue eyes. Nargess thought, "She is not nice any more. I screwed up again. Maybe it is because of the sky. I wish I had been sitting under a tree. I wish I had no problems." She was upset. How many problems she had! Which one should she have been thinking about—if her son failed his exam; how she could afford his expenses; if her husband would get killed in the Iraqi missile attacks in Tehran.

A bittersweet smile appeared on her face when she thought, "My husband . . . doesn't he have a name?" When speaking to Margaret, she had always referred to

him as "my husband," and now, she was becoming accustomed to not using his name. Was she going to forget it altogether, and her son's name? Those names were unfamiliar to Margaret. It was just the day before that Margaret had shown her an Iranian name, asking for its proper pronunciation. "Nasser," Margaret had repeated, "Nasser." The name was so strange to Margaret, but to Nargess it was her younger brother's name. Where was he? She didn't know.

She knew that he had escaped from Iran, but she didn't have an idea where he could be now. Pakistan, India, Sweden? Nobody knew. How they had been scattered all over the world. Bahram had informed her that her house in Iran was in the last steps of being sold. So, she didn't have a home any more. She had nothing.

Nargess needed to talk to Margaret. She really needed to talk to someone to somewhat relieve herself of these burdens. Talking to Iranians was fruitless. They had their own problems. She was enjoying life. The joy of life was in her blue eyes. Nargess wanted to talk about her anguish. Perhaps Margaret would comfort her. Margaret was deep, like the sea. Margaret would accept her. But Nargess kept silent. She just talked to herself. Margaret was sitting next to her, trying to help her with her work.

Margaret was talking now. "Listen, if you work like this, they won't like you. They won't accept you. They are not easygoing people. A maximum of two errors a day is acceptable, not more than that." Nargess's hands turned cold. It's over. They would fire her. One more misery on top of all the other miseries. She wanted to say, "I try, I do my best. I'm able to learn. I'm not stupid, and this is not difficult. In Iran, my work was much more difficult. I could do it without any mistakes. Please give me some time. Take it easy on me." These thoughts made her laugh. Take it easy! How did that come into her mind? She couldn't even put it into English. She'd have to find some other words. But it was nice, "take it easy." It had no meaning, especially in her situation. She had never used it.

She suddenly thought, "I will write her a letter, I'll try to explain everything. My situation, my problems." But she knew it was fruitless. For whom? For what? It wasn't one person's decision. And Margaret didn't have any influence. It was the system. Work was the only value that counts. You have to know it and you have to do it without errors. Nargess wished she were able to put her brain, her thoughts and her imagination into her purse and close it tightly. She was thinking about the screen, and the keys under her fingers being hit wrongly. She hated these mistakes. She didn't see them most of the time. Margaret did. She caught them. They were everywhere, hidden, and the next minute, they just appeared. She felt hot. She wanted to kick the computer, but Margaret was sitting right beside her.

Margaret showed her the mistakes and Nargess went red. She was sweating and tired. She was so tired. That day, she just kept on making mistakes. Margaret remarked on all of them. But she had looked at her gently and said, "You look tired." Nargess had wanted to say, "Right, I am tired, tired enough to die." But she hadn't said that. It was no use.

She just wished that she had a computer in her head instead of her brain. It would be good if she didn't have feelings, didn't have thoughts. A hollow head, filled with a calculator. She thought her head was empty, really empty. Sorrow occupied her head. Not only her head, but every single cell of her body.

When she got out of the office, the sky was still blue. Clouds were accumulating along the horizon. Nargess thought, "What could I ever do if Margaret wasn't here?
Se man, minakas."

But then outside under that glorious soothing blue sky, Nargess grew calm. She became inspired. "I'll do better tomorrow! I'll do my best. I'll even be careful, as if I had four eyes." Words were strange to her. Whenever she wanted to say something she first had to look for the words, and then they would run away from her. Nargess thought, "I'll try. I have to make it." Then she looked at the sky again. It looked nicer, more sincere. The blue colour of the sky always comforted her.



Illustration by Shirin Mohtashami

Newcomer

MEHRI YALFANI

The class had already started when Susan came in. She found a seat in the last row and sat down. The teacher said something but Susan did not understand. She just smiled. Susan had come up the stairs fast and her heart was beating in her chest like a drum. The teacher was talking to the students. She could not understand. She had been coming to this ESL class for two months. The words still had a strange sound to her. She had learned "hello," "good-bye," "yes" and "no." She had no problem in using the first two. She knew where to use them. But she always had problems with "yes" and "no." She misused them; answering questions sometimes she would say "yes," and after seeing the reaction of the other person, she would say "no."

The teacher was talking about the past tense. Susan sometimes understood the meaning of the sentences. The teacher wrote, "I had a house." The sentence stuck in her mind. She had a house too. She had a past too. She lost her concentration and dreamily went back to her own house.

The teacher wrote, "My house was big." Susan's reading was better than her listening. Her house was big too. Masoud has built a one-floor building on the big land they had inherited from her father. The building was surrounded by high trees. Looking through the window, she could see them. There was the white poplar and the fruit trees. They were full of blossoms in the spring, and in the summer they embraced the house like it was a baby.

The teacher wrote, "I loved my house." Susan thought about her house, about the big livingroom with windows on two sides, about the Tabriz rug that was like a painting, full of pictures of flowers and animals. She thought about the big ceramic bowl inherited from her grandfather and when Nima broke it with a ball, she had punished Nima and he had cried. The souvenir of her grandfather was damaged.

Susan thought about Nima. Nima was eighteen when the revolution started in Iran, and . . . The teacher noticed her, and asked, "What happened?" Then she asked a question, a long sentence. Susan did not understand, but she tried to smile. She tried to stop the tears. She wiped out Nima's memory along with that of her house and the ceramic bowl. The teacher and students were looking at her. A girl from India had sat in front of her. She had braided hair and a tanned face. She wore a sari

under her pink coat. Her sari was from green jura and Susan remembered Indian movies. The girl turned back and stared at Susan. Susan just smiled. Her smile was the only communication she had.

The teacher left Susan alone. Susan looked at the blackboard. The teacher had covered it with words that Susan more or less knew. A Chinese or Vietnamese man who sat at the front desk raised his hand and asked something. Susan couldn't recognize his nationality. To her, Asian people all looked like each other and they had the same accent. The teacher repeated his question. Susan understood the teacher better than she did the other students. Susan didn't hear some of this man's question and what she did hear was incomprehensible to her. She just understood a few words and guessed the meaning. Apparently he had said something about his country. Susan thought he had said, "My country was big." Susan told herself, "My country was big too." If she had had guts, she would have said this sentence out loud. But she was afraid. She was unable to say it. Instead she silently dreamt about her country, about the winding roads, about the mountains, about the cities she had visited, about the trip they had taken to the Shiraz. She had driven half of the way and Masoud the other half. Nima, Kahveh and Mozghan had sat in the back seat. They sometimes sang, sometimes slept, sometimes they argued over something. She stared at the roads, the trees, the valleys and the newly harvested land. How much she loved travelling around the country.

Valentina raised her hand. Valentina was from South America. She was the only person whose name Susan had learned. Valentina reminded her of her sister, Simin. It was three months since Susan had left Iran and they had not heard anything of her. She did not know if Rozbeh was back from the war front line. She had received a letter from her brother Saeed, but he had not mentioned anything about Rozbeh. When Susan told Masoud, "I don't know why he has not written about Rozbeh," Masoud replied, "He must have forgotten. You know your brother and how absent-minded he is. What do you expect from him?" Valentina was still talking to the teacher. Susan heard. She tried to pay attention. She dismissed Simin from her mind and just listened on Valentina.

Valentina was talking with difficulty. The words would not come to her, mouth. She seemed to need more time to find a word. She lost the words in her mind and was looking for replacements. Susan thought, "She is like me. I also have to think a lot before I say something. I even forget the few words I know, or else I misuse them." Valentina was talking about revolution. Susan knew this word very well, but was unable to pronounce it. It was a difficult word, and her tongue wouldn't twist it in her mouth. Susan thought, "I wish that all people would talk the same language." She wanted to understand all that Valentina said. She wished that she could talk about the revolution. She wished she could understand the revolution. She wanted to know why there was a revolution in her country and why the revolution took her son away from her? And why the revolution forced her to sell her inherited home and why her family had to risk death to pass through the mountains, to flee from her country?

The teacher was talking to Valentina. Valentina had to spend a lot of time on every sentence. The teacher was very patient. Susan couldn't understand what they were saying. She had a lot of questions in her mind.

On the other side of the classroom, a young man whom Susan did not know got into the conversation. Then a third person joined in. It was clear that the revolution was an interesting subject. The whole class was talking about it. Susan was the only person who was quiet.

The teacher asked her something. Susan thought that the teacher was asking for her idea. She went red. She did not know what to say. What if she said "yes" and it did not make sense? So it was better to say "no." When the teacher heard "no," she smiled. The whole class laughed. Susan went even redder. She felt the sweat break out on her forehead. Then she smiled at the teacher. But she felt a bitter sorrow. She wished that she could talk about the revolution, about the day when three guards had come to her home. They had rummaged through the entire house. They had looked through her photo album and made fun of the pictures. She wanted to tell everyone about the days when they would not let them water the flowers and all the flowers had died in the June sunshine; about the days the whole family was in jail, even twelve-year-old Mozghan. Two weeks later when they were released, Nima was not with them any more. Nima had been executed two nights after being arrested.

Susan wished she could talk, but she felt a piece of wood in her mouth instead of her tongue. She had incredible grief in her heart. She turned her eyes away from the blackboard and looked at the floor to hide her tears. All the class was talking. The words were vague sounds playing with her thoughts and memories. And she could not understand anything. She was quiet.

The class was finished. But the real silence was within her. She looked at the papers the teacher had handed her. She knew the letters but most of the words had no meaning for her. A pain of humiliation grasped her heart. She thought, "I must learn. I have to learn. I cannot stay silent. . . ."

MEHRI YALFANI WAS BORN IN HAMADAN, IRAN, IN 1938. SHE WRITES IN HER MOTHER TONGUE, FARSI, AND HAS TRANSLATED SOME OF HER WORK TO ENGLISH. IN 1966 SHE PUBLISHED A SHORT STORY COLLECTION, *HAPPY DAYS*, AND IN 1980 A NOVEL, *BEFORE THE FALL*. SHE IMMIGRATED TO CANADA IN 1987. IN 1991, HER SHORT STORY COLLECTION *BIRTHDAY PARTY* WAS PUBLISHED IN THE U.S. AND HER LATEST NOVEL, *SOME ONE IS COMING*, WAS PUBLISHED RECENTLY IN SWEDEN.

Oxalá

ANA C. P. DOS SANTOS

“Oxalá seja menos explorador o novo ‘boss.’”

literally: Hopefully be less explorer the new boss.

translation: Hopefully, the new boss will be less exploitative.

etymology:	oxalá	explorador	boss
	Arabic >> Portuguese	Latin >> Portuguese	Dutch >> U.S. English
	in-xa-’llah	exploratore	baas
	“if God wills/grants”	“explorer”	“master”

timeline:

A horizontal timeline with a solid line. There are three vertical tick marks. Below the first tick mark is the number '1000'. Below the second tick mark is the number '1500'. Below the third tick mark is the number '2000'.

The sentence at the top of the page might have been overheard while waiting for a street-car one night in that part of Toronto quaintly referred to as Little Portugal, say at Dundas and Ossington, on a Thursday, around 8 P.M. Or maybe in one of the numerous bakeries in the area, while buying bread on a sunny Saturday. It's an ordinary kind of sentence, such as one worker might utter to another, after inquiries as to family and health, punctuated with many "*se Deus quizer*"s (Godwilling).

In terms of syntax, the sentence is a bit peculiar in that the subject, the “new boss,” follows the verb instead of preceding it. Typically, subjects come first in Portuguese, as they do in languages such as English. In Portuguese, however, shifts sometimes occur and subjects appear in object position. Speakers of the language are never confused, of course, but these shifts do make it difficult for linguists and the like to come up with hard and fast rules.

Linguistic notions of subject and objecthood have been adopted into other fields. The two poles they represent allow for a very useful distinction to be made, i.e., between doer and donee, actor vs acted-upon, perceiver vs perceived, powerful vs powerless.

In terms of the history of the Portuguese, of people like me, one can say, as I am about to, that, considered as a unit, we have been both subject and object. Not that this makes us unique. That's just history. Flux.

Oxalá, for example, testifies to a time when the Iberian peninsula was invaded and conquered by the Moors, a Muslim people from North Africa. Portugal was the northwestern frontier of the vast Islamic empire, which stretched eastward to China, and south from Nigeria to India. In the southern part of Portugal—where my parents are from—the occupation lasted over five hundred years, and the culture underwent many changes. Those who resisted the conquerors lost their lands, their freedom, and/or their lives, but those who accepted the new régime were allowed to keep their property and practise their religion (Christianity, Judaism), so long as they paid the required tribute. There were benefits to assimilation, however, and many people converted to Islam. History books emphasize the “civilizing influence” of the Moors: mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, agriculture, education, all “progressed” significantly.

Explorador, another lexical item present in the sentence means “explorer.” The image of a gold filigree vessel comes to mind, red Maltese crosses on its sails: a favourite ornament in bourgeois homes, a popular souvenir for moneyed tourists. (Incidentally, history books tend not to draw attention to the obvious connection between advances in cartography, a direct result of the Arab conquest, and Portugal and Spain’s “great discoveries” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.) But *explorador* has another meaning as well: one who uses others for her/his own ends, takes advantage of the goodwill or circumstances of someone for personal profit. The English word which most closely approximates this is “exploiter.” The Portuguese are not only explorers, but also exploiters, of Africa, America and Asia. No doubt the cultures in question “underwent many changes.” Deals were struck, lands were stolen, people were assimilated, exterminated or bought-and-sold: treated as objects—subjecthood denied. Ships laden with plunder, in the name of Jesus Christ. Goa, “a pimple on the face of mother India,” a friend tells me; Angola and Mozambique raped for centuries. “*A pesada herança*” (the heavy legacy), a phrase of doom used to refer to Portugal’s fifty-year dictatorship under Salazar, could perhaps more accurately be used to describe Portugal’s (mostly unacknowledged) burden of moral responsibility for colonialist atrocities. Interesting that, in the minds of most Portuguese speakers, the two meanings of *explorador* seem not to be connected.

“Boss,” the other item of note, is a (North American) English term, which brings us closer to the here and now of writing. (I uncork a bottle of wine and pour myself a glass—Portuguese, of course, to do my bit for exports.) Anglicisms of this sort are very common in the speech of Portuguese immigrants here in Toronto. No doubt a similar phenomenon occurs in France, Germany and other countries where Portuguese people have gone in search of work. Even those who speak very little English use words like “boss” and “job” and “store.” Although as a group, we tend not to “assimilate” very well, our language will soon be forgotten in these parts, since so many young people are ashamed to speak it. Having come full circle, as it were, we’re back with the two workers, probably with little formal education, probably in menial, low-paying jobs, probably longing for an imaginary *minha terra* (“my land/hometown”) which no longer exists, probably out of synch with the dominant culture and wary of being “explored.”

Final words of wisdom: beware of words.

More words: Words are like decisions. For every word that is uttered, many remain unuttered. To determine the significance of a given statement, it is not enough to determine the significance of each word employed, a difficult task in itself, but to “read between the lines,” read the silences, read the blank spaces. Words are not reality, “reality” is not reality, words are symbols used to represent or evoke an image of reality in the listener’s mind. They are so alluring, so powerful, that we often forget their limitations.

If I say “the Portuguese have been both subject and object,” do I mean people who speak Portuguese, or the inhabitants of Portugal, or people born in that country? Are the Jewish people expelled, killed or “converted” in the sixteenth century included? What about the Africans and Asians from Portuguese ex-colonies who now live in Portugal? What about their children? What about medieval serfs, who were considered part of the landowner’s property and inherited along with it? What about the “working classes” in the twentieth century? What about the kings and nobility? What about the clergy (which at one time actually owned half of Portugal)? What about the bourgeoisie?

What about facts that are excluded *a priori*, by beginning at A.D.1000: the great migrations of tribes from eastern Europe dislodged by the advancing Huns of central Asia; the Roman conquest; the colonies established by the Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians; etc.?

Subject and object have been tentatively defined, but an important point was not stressed: the significance of these relations depends entirely on the point(s) of reference, so that an individual or group can be a subject and an object simultaneously.

What about scope-effects in terms of time? In some of this discourse, time is measured in centuries, in others it is measured in days, hours or minutes. The scene consequently shifts from an entire culture, to a single individual, to a single individual at a particular moment. What effect does this have on the reader’s reading?

What about syntactic manipulation, such as the erasure of the semantic subject in a sentence such as “Deals were struck, lands were stolen, people were assimilated, exterminated, or bought-and-sold”? These things didn’t just happen. Who caused them to happen? Who is responsible for the action?

And what about links made implicitly, through the repetition of certain words or phrases, such as “the culture underwent many changes,” linking colonized peoples under the Portuguese with the Portuguese under the Moors? Or the root word *explorar*, linking Portuguese immigrants in countries like Canada with colonized peoples under the Portuguese? There are similarities, but also many differences.

What about emotional responses triggered by the use of metaphors, as in “Angola and Mozambique raped for centuries”?

Or the fact that the word “racism” is never mentioned?

Or “classism” (almost, but not quite, spoken)?

Given the fluidity of language vis-à-vis “reality” or “the world,” the potential for omission, suggestion or deception is very high. It is the perfect tool for “exploring”—others or oneself. It is doubtful whether these pitfalls can be avoided, but I suppose they can be minimized. One could try to be more conscious of language as an artefact—checking words or discourse and their relationship to reality, as perceived by the senses, as experienced by individuals—and as artefacts of a particular culture, informed by its values and assumptions.

Are you still reading this text? This is not a trick question. If you are the hypothetical speaker of the *oxalá* sentence, for example, I probably lost you/You probably left me long ago. You may not have the resources, the leisure or the inclination to try to derive meaning from this text, even from its (hypothetical) Portuguese translation. Words like “text,” “semantic subject” and “*a priori*” have effectively destroyed whatever chance of communicating there might have been. I don’t blame you. How could I? If I had to work as hard as you just to put bread on the table, keep the family together and stay healthy and sane enough to keep going, I would probably think this was intellectual drivel too. I would probably despise people like me, the writer of this text; or I might laugh; or I might be angry at the *coisas feias* (“ugly/nasty things”) I said about “my own country;” or I might be pleased that such an “educated” person was Portuguese like me (though I would look at me-the-writer with some suspicion). Of course I am not really you, except in the eyes of others, and I hope you forgive the liberties I take with this “you” I/they have created.

Clearly this text was not meant primarily for “you.” Though you sometimes brandish words as talismans, not questioning their source or influence, bewitched by their power, you are not alone in this. Language is a virus to which everyone is susceptible. Given “socio-economic factors,” whatever good or evil your words could let loose on the world is severely circumscribed. Mine less so; those of others, less so still. This “we”—others whose words are more free—only occasionally feel the need for “*oxalá*”s or “*se Deus quizer*”s. Because we have more power in the symbolic realm, because our words are perceived as having more value, we also have more power in the physical world. Because we have more power in the physical world, because our words are perceived as having more value, we also have more power in the symbolic realm. A loop. But viewed from a different angle: a spiral. This Hegelian talisman at least implies change—not just possible, but inevitable—though crushingly slow. “We,” the middle people, with access to both (to simplify) the world of power and the world of no power, can play a useful role: by acknowledging our relative privilege and using our relative freedom in ways that challenge rather than perpetuate exploitation, by establishing links that facilitate alliances, by sharing resources and the power that accompanies them, by identifying and attempting to overcome our own limitations.

It’s depressing to think that words like these have been spoken throughout the ages, only to be squelched by new waves of exploiters, or sucked of meaning through iteration and reiteration without concomitant action. They are words, after all.

Oxalá feminists _____ [fill in the blank].

ANA C. P. DOS SANTOS WAS BORN IN LISBON IN 1957. SHE HAS LIVED IN A NUMBER OF CITIES IN QUÉBEC AND ONTARIO, AND BEEN INVOLVED IN TORONTO’S LESBIAN/FEMINIST COMMUNITIES SINCE THE EARLY EIGHTIES. SHE HAS A B.A. IN VISUAL ART AND ENGLISH, AND AN M.A. IN LINGUISTICS. THIS IS HER FIRST PUBLISHED WORK.

Tou Pou Yo

An excerpt from a novel

MYRIAM CHANCY

“Répêtez. Repeat. Tous ensemble.”

All together.

“One. Two. Three . . .”

Quatre

“Allez-y.”

Where are we going?

That sense of loss follows me through life like a second shadow. Me and my shadow—one of the songs they taught us in this class. It was supposed to be cute, lighthearted, fun. I remember wanting only to disappear, become a shadow myself. They did not understand why I refused to sing. They did not understand that I thought it was a betrayal.

“Marie-José, il faut que tu participes!”

Participate? In my own destruction?

I would sing *Ti Zoiseau* in my mind as we sat around the low preschool table. It was almost fall and still I was resisting, sensing that I was being told to become someone other than who I knew myself to be.

The heat, the sweat, all the discomforts of that Canadian prairie summer come back to me now in distant waves of nausea. I would lift my thighs one at a time to air them. Sticky with perspiration, they held me captive in my vinyl blue seat like suction cups. How unfree I was: a tiny person sitting in a tiny chair at a tiny table.

The letters of the alphabet (a “apple/ail”, b “boy/bébé”) wrapped themselves around the



classroom halfway between floor and ceiling. The walls were painted a deep, aquamarine blue which made it easier for me to dream, to pretend that I was home with grandmother and Désirée, going to market for a bagful of fresh plantain and string beans. Grandmother would sit us down on either side of the wooden table, bleached white by the tropical sun, in her back yard, and set the beans between us in a mahogany bowl. And as she would expertly pluck the feathers from the chicken she would roast for our evening supper, we would proudly pull the strings from the ends of the beans and split them open with our thumbs, pushing the small rounds out into a messy pile. Désirée and I would giggle until grandmother would chide us for taking our time with such an important task.

My daydreams made language class bearable.

"Marie-Jo, tu ne prononces pas tes 't-h.'"

Stick my tongue between my teeth to make that sound? I was revolted at the thought. I had already been taught to hide the whites of my teeth when I smiled, to close my mouth when I ate. How could I stick my tongue out to make a sound I could barely hear? It was simply too much to ask. Obscene.

"Répêtons ensemble. Teeth. The. Through."

All together. Teef. Ve. True. I did not realize that these sounds would matter in the long run.

Our teacher, Madame Fréchette, would take me aside at the end of each day and tell me that I would never amount to much, never become a true Canadian, if I did not make a more concerted effort to blend in. It's the end of the summer, she would say, and still you resist.

That summer was endless. *Interminable. Infernal.* As in: *Cessez ce bruit infernal mes enfants.*

Désirée and I looking up to see grandmother frowning, her chesnut brown hands white with chicken feathers. We would laugh, choking on our tears turned to hiccups. Madame Fréchette did not understand that it was a betrayal. *Betray: be disloyal to, assist the enemy of; give up (person etc. to enemy); reveal treacherously; reveal involuntarily; lead astray; betrayal n.*

Before the preschool, before the language class, the summer was ours. Mine and Désirée's.

I was four and Désirée was a worldly eight years old. I thought she knew everything, much to the annoyance of my parents who, try as they might, could not keep us apart.

My parents and I left Canada behind that June of '74 in a blue of thick clouds. Hours later we were circling the landing strip off the coast of Haïti. It was amazing to me to think that grandmother and Désirée lived here all year long and could walk the dusty brown roads of the mountains without having to worry about their vacation drawing to an end, of having to leave all of the comforts of home behind. But these were fleeting thoughts. Butterflies filled my stomach as the plane began its descent down towards the green-blue sea which would await me with open arms every Sunday afternoon for the next four weeks.

On the ground, we were quickly hustled past the long line of tourists by an aunt who worked for the airline. Our bags were opened. I watched as an agent dressed in khaki greens turned over my clothes and pawed through my underwear all the while fixing me with an unpleasant stare. He laughed as he uncovered my teddy bear. I had carefully hidden him in a crevice between books and light cotton shirts. "Ou pa Haitien," he said. "Ou étrané pitit. Çé étrané ou yé vrais."

A stranger! How could I be a stranger? I pointed to my grandmother as she patiently awaited us opposite the customs area. The guard laughed again. "Ça pap fin anyin."

She doesn't mean anything, he was saying.

Confused, I followed my parents.

The huge embrace with which my grandmother greeted me made the lingering discomfort of the encounter with the guard melt away. It was as if all our time apart had been a dream, as if we had never parted six months earlier. I breathed in her smell of herbs and spices and the delicate perfume which made me think of dried rose petals crushed to powder. Every gift she had sent to find me in Canada had had that wonderful, comforting fragrance trapped in the folds of the pink Kleenexes she used for wrapping paper.

Soon, I was wriggling out of her arms to find Désirée's hand. We had so much catching up to do. We chattered endlessly in the car on the way to my grandmother's home where we were going to be left for the week as our parents took stock of their lives free (they said) of our petty demands.

Tickled at the prospect of being free from parental restrictions and the thought of having grandmother to ourselves for days, we declined to kiss our parents goodbye. They descended from the car to follow my father's brother, Tonton Léo, to the interior of a house heavily guarded with chained, barking german shepherd dogs. My father tut-tutted at us both and called us ungrateful young ladies. Grandmother slapped our ashy knees and kissed our parents for us.

In my grandmother's house, Désirée and I reclaimed our sisterly relationship. We commonly referred to each other as cousins because our mothers had been raised together but we were not related. Still, we liked to think of each other as sisters, sometimes even as

twins. We pretended that we were the same person, with the same thoughts and feelings. It didn't always work but we had developed a shorthand way of speaking which was often wordless. This we had learned from grandmother who whistled and sang as she worked about the house but rarely spoke—to us or to herself. From her we learned that we could convey more with the gesture of a hand, a facial expression, the way we carried ourselves, or touched.

My grandmother's house had been adapted for the presence of children. One could go through the living room before reaching the bedrooms. Farther off, at the back of the house, was the kitchen which itself extended into the back yard where grandmother had maintained an old brick oven.

"Do you remember all this?" she asked as she laid my unpacked suitcase at the foot of a double bed. "I have something special planned for us this afternoon."

Désirée and I pretended we did not know what the surprise was and clapped our hands with joy. "What is it? What is it?" We cried as if our grandmother had never planned special things for us to do everytime we were lucky enough to be together.

"Get your smocks on. The fun is about to begin."

We followed grandmother out towards the kitchen as we helped each other to tie our smocks behind our backs. On the kitchen table, bowls of every size were arranged in an orderly half circle. Flour, salt, pepper, iced water, and the secret, flavorful ingredients which, unmeasured, made *paille*, the light fritters grandmother sometimes had Janine take down to market in exchange for the fresh eggs Janine would bring around early Wednesday mornings.

"You sit here," grandmother said as she waved me into the smallest chair at the table, "and hand the bowls to Désirée as I tell you."

These were our cooking lessons. Another language without a syntax. Désirée stood by me, all smiles, and took the ingredients from me one by one, measuring them each with what was becoming an expert hand at such a young age. "Let's play a game," she said, "Marie-Jo, you choose."

"I want to play Simon-says."

Désirée rolled her eyes. Grandmother laughed but still they indulged me.

"I'm starting," I said. "Simon says: eat some batter."

It was bitter from leavening powder and they grimaced at the globs on their fingers.

"Simon says: touch your nose."

They left flour marks on the tips of their noses.

"Kiss me!" And they did. On both cheeks. "You lose," I squealed. "I didn't say Simon says!"

Next came the frying of the dough. The lard from the pantry had been cut and melted already in a heavy pan. Grandmother had us stand well behind her in case the oils splattered. I had to crane my neck to see the miracle of the dropped batter swell into golden puffs. After letting them drain on a clean towel we would eat them with some goat's cheese for a midday snack. But that moment never came.

It was still early. The sun had yet to fall. A mangy, stray dog, attracted by the smell of the cooking fritters, came running from the courtyard and into the kitchen, jumping up on grandmother's back and pushing her towards the pan. Its contents flew onto her. Grandmother screamed in pain: "Amoé! Amoé!"

We ran next door to Mlle Dominique's house and banged hard on her screen door until we could see her limping towards us from the cavernous darkness of the inner chambers of

her home. We had heard many things about Mlle Dominique. That she had injured her leg in a foiled looting of the U.S. army base in the twenties. That she practiced black magic on her back porch where late at night she could be heard speaking in an unnatural voice. We thought she spoke in tongues and that the white dresses she wore every Sunday tied around her waist with a light blue sash were evidence that she had joined a secret order. She was a *mambo*, a vodoun priestess. As we ran to her house all these stories had escaped our thoughts. We knew only that she was the closest person about and that grandmother was still screaming for help in the distance.

The screen door screeched on its hinges as it opened to reveal a diminutive woman in her eighties. Her face was creased like a riverbed at low tide. She did not smile. "What do you want?" she all but screamed at us. I hid behind Désirée, using her apron to protect me from the evil eye.

"It's grandmother," Désirée said. "The oil spilt."

"I can see that."

We had not noticed that our own clothes had been stained and splattered by the flying oil. But it was grandmother who was burning, not us. "It flew all over her tummy," I spluttered from my hiding place.

"Seigneur!" Mlle Dominique moved faster than I had ever thought possible. "Désirée, get the vinegar from the cupboard in the hall." She looked at me as if she had never seen me before. "You, stay out of the way. Carmel should know better than to have such smallfry as you in her skirts while she does serious things."

I tried to tell her about the dog coming from nowhere. She pushed me aside and tut-tutted as my father had done earlier in the day. "Stay here."

I sat in Mlle Dominique's small living room among the bric-à-brac of a life that had spanned more generations than I cared to think about. There were pictures of children like me on a side table at my elbow and I wondered to where they had gone and why it seemed to me that I had no place anywhere.

Désirée and Mlle Dominique scurried about for towels, water and fresh dressings. Mademoiselle disappeared to the back of the house for a few minutes and came back into sight with a smelly blue jar of salve in her hands she said would cure about anything.

"Don't worry," Désirée pulled at my braids. "I'll come back for you when it's all over."

I waited for what seemed an eternity in Mlle Dominique's lumpy green couch. Grimacing statues stared me down from every corner of the room. I was about to cry when the screen door swung open and a head peered through.

"Marie-José. Ça ou'ap fait la. Come, it's getting dark."

It was my father. His hand reached out for me and I clung to it.

"When the vinegar hit her skin it bubbled up into blisters." Désirée was describing to me the rescue mission I had been left out of. "Grandmother fainted when she saw and Mademoiselle said that was good because she could put on the salve without worrying about hurting her."

It was morning and I was crying when Désirée came to find me at last. No one had seen the dog and it was clear that they all thought it was my fault. Mlle Dominique told them as much. They thought I had invented the dog to hide my guilt and that I was crying at the relief of having been found out. Aside from grandmother, only Désirée knew the truth but

she had kept quiet as she had been taught to do—to be quiet and to do as one is told.

"That's all that happened. She's sleeping now. My mother went to stay with her."

"What about us?"

Désirée shrugged her shoulders. "We stay here with your parents and Tonton Léo."

"My ear-s are bur-ning." Tonton Léo came striding into the room.

I did not like him. He had an affected way of speaking, exaggerating every syllable of his words as if we were all too stupid or slow to understand what he was saying. He had been to all sorts of places, to Africa, to France, to Israel, and he thought this gave him a special dispensation from sparing our feelings. He also hated his mother because she insisted on speaking to us in *Créole*. The speech of fools, he often said to my father. If you don't want Marie-José to speak as if she has pebbles in her mouth, keep her away from Carmel. I had heard him with my own two ears say this.

"Haven't you girls seen enough of each other?" He lifted Désirée from the bed. "You go down and see to breakfast with the women." Then he turned to me. "You and I must have a talk about yesterday."

He closed the door behind Désirée and came back to claim her spot at the foot of my bed. Tonton Léo was a large man and I had seen him beat Alphonse, the house boy, viciously with just the open palms of his hands. I started to sniffle uncontrollably.

"Stop that. That does not work with me."

I bit my upper lip.

"I just want to tell you that I have one rule in this house that no one is allowed to break. Not even my brother's child. I will not tolerate lies. Do you understand?"

Without looking up, I nodded.

"Lies are the devil's way of putting your soul at risk. But you don't want to be in the devil's clutches, do you Marie?"

Again I nodded thinking all the while that he was the devil with his long hands and pointy nails, the V-shaped sideburns that made his grin, so much like my father's, seem menacing.

"You're lucky she's all right."

At those words, I looked up, stunned.

"That's right," Uncle Léo went on, scratching at one of his sideburns, "it could have been much worse. And then where would you be?"

I could just imagine. The burning flames of damnation. He had said it often enough. I tried to think of other things as Tonton Léo went on and on about things I could not understand in his slow, painful French and I vowed to avenge myself, Désirée and my grandmother, from the reach of his tortured mind.

A frightful ruckus interrupted Tonton Léo's long speech. Bella's screams, muffled by the heavy door to my bedroom, rose from the living room where we both ran to see what was going on. Bella was running all around the living room, upsetting chairs and expensive lamps I had been told never to turn off and on by myself. She held a broom above her head and sometimes brought it down with a lethal swoop. And every time she brought her broom back over her head, she swore loudly. My uncle bristled at her sacrilege as she invoked the saints and God and almighty Christ. There was some small animal in the house. I thought it was a lizard because you could hear the clicketing of its small paws against the linoleum of the floor.

"Çaque passé?" My uncle had slipped into his native tongue.

"Çé rat," Bella answered. "Nou gain rat dan maison."

"That's not possible. I told Alphonse to take care of those pests days ago. I gave him the poison myself."

Bella shrugged her shoulders and followed the little brown tail of the rat out the door to the stairwell which led down to Alphonse's room below the house.

"There it goes," she said. "It's his problem now. I'm done."

With those words, Bella put down her broom and gathered up her belongings. Without a word to us, she left the house with dinner half-cooked on the gas range. That was the last we saw of her.

"Tonnerre," Tonton Léo was beside himself with rage. He followed the rat's exit to find Alphonse.

Alphonse was ten and had lived in the house since the age of seven. He was Janine's daughter's son. At least, this was what Tonton Léo called him—Janine's daughter's son. He was no more and no less and he was treated with all the contempt that that lineage made possible. He was taken in by Tonton Léo as a favour to grandmother. Janine and she had been close in childhood but their lives had taken them in different directions. Janine had made what Tonton Léo called "a marriage de chien" (a dog's marriage) and she had never been able to regain the status automatically given to graduates of the well-known Catholic school for girls, Saint Anne's, in the upper hills of Port-au-Prince.

I eavesdropped at the top of the stairs as Tonton Léo told Alphonse how disappointed he was in him, that he was a failure as his mother was, just as Janine had been. The rest of the speech was a slightly modified version of what he had been unable to complete up in my room earlier.

Once I heard Tonton Léo's feet coming up the stairs, I hid in the kitchen and waited until he entered his study and closed the door behind him. I knew he would be there for hours and emerge only at dinner with a glazed look in his bloodshot eyes, smelling faintly of rum and stale mints.

Désirée was already at the bottom of the stairs with Alphonse when I finally ventured out of my new hiding place. They were crouching over something. I squeezed in between their legs, crying to them to let me see what they were doing. They refused to answer. Alphonse handed me a dried ear of corn. In front of the two of them were three rats, brown in colour, and thinner than I would have imagined them. They looked no different than the animals my Canadian friend Sarah kept in a cage in her room and called gerbils except these seemed much more well behaved.

Alphonse was feeding them the dried pieces of corn with the tips of his fingers. Désirée did the same. I had only two choices: to run to find Tonton Léo and tell, or to remain quiet and watch. What if someone found us? Wasn't this a bad thing we were doing?

I was silent and handed over the pieces of corn I pulled loose from the ear to Alphonse who nodded at me and smiled. We were there crouching in the dirt for a long time until all the corn was gone. Then, Alphonse stood up and stamped his feet at the rats who ran to hide in the tall grass beyond the stones of the stoop. "Sale rat," he screamed three or four times so loudly my ears hurt. Désirée also yelled "dirty rat" a few times stomping her feet as she did so.

Tonton Léo came running from his study, breathless. "Did you get them, Alphonse? Did you get the suckers?"

"Of course," Alphonse said haughtily. "This is what I'm here for, isn't it?"

Tonton Léo ignored Alphonse's cheekiness and slapped his thighs in triumph. "At last. I

hope the poison works." Then, a strange look took over the features of his long face as he saw Désirée and myself standing piously behind Alphonse. "What are you girls doing in this part of the house?"

Désirée stepped forward. "We were helping. We," she grasped my hand, "we put some poison there, and there, and there." She pointed to the far edges of the stoop where the grass was growing through the loose soil between the white stone slabs.

"That's right," Alphonse chimed in, "they were helping."

Tonton Léo beckoned for me to come to him.

"Do you remember what I said this morning? No lies?"

I nodded.

"Were you helping Alphonse?"

I nodded yes and heard Alphonse breathe relief behind me.

Tonton Léo squeezed me hard on the shoulder. "O.K., the both you, up the stairs. And don't let me catch you here again."

That night, I dreamed that Tonton Léo was coming to get me with a big broom swinging above his head, to take me to meet the devil because I had let him think what he wanted to believe was true. I had lied. But just as I was about to confess, Alphonse and Désirée came to fetch me, followed by an army of brown gerbils. They took me by the hand and made me swear never to speak of our secret to anyone.

That night, I had learned how silence could be golden.

In my memory, that summer holds a secret magic. I am remembering it now because my grandmother has just passed away. A week ago today, Tonton Léo is telling me. I hang up the phone on Tonton Léo's voice as he reminds me that her health began to fail that summer when the pan of scalding grease had left her with a scarred, discoloured belly.

I think of grandmother, of the last time I saw her, some three years after that fateful summer when everything was changing so quickly. Tonton Léo had kept Désirée and I away from her and gotten us a French tutor. Everything was changing—the way we spoke, the way we played, the secrets we kept. The last visit home, my grandmother's speech had been unintelligible to me. She had pulled out an old photo album on her veranda and tried to explain the pictures to me, but I had no way of translating her words. I was eight and she was ninety-eight and there seemed nothing left between us but the ghost of that stray dog leaping up behind her for a taste of her cooking.

I put the phone down and walked through my cramped apartment wondering what else I could have done that summer to change the course of all our lives. My resistance had not lasted long. I was fluent in French and English. I knew nothing of my grandmother's *Créole*, the language of fools.

I put down the phone and walked through my apartment looking for grandmother, looking for Désirée. I had not spoken to either one for over five years. I sat on my bed and found myself floating above familiar terrain: the bald mountain ranges of the island, the patches of brilliant colours checkering the valleys, the endless winding roads leading to Janine's market stall. Walking those roads so long ago, I had known that my feet alone were roots enough for belonging. I saw myself in a painting I had seen at market. In it, the sky had been painted red and the sun was a blue ball of fire. The painter, a woman blinded by cataracts, had taken a broad stroke to transform the sun into a moving, flying object. Wisps of white went off into every direction and gave the canvas its only inner source of light. To the right, women

were gathered at the side of a road doing their wash in a green basin. I stood a few feet away from the shore of the basin, across from the women and a little girl who seemed so familiar. I wanted to run through the water and—o—couldn't I? They were chanting a song I could not recognize. They were singing in *Créole*.

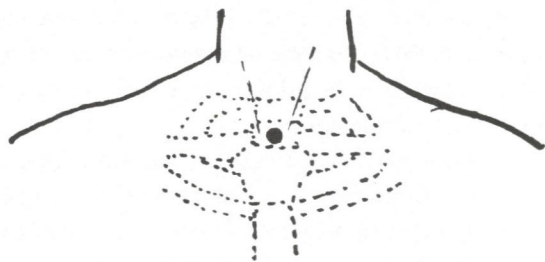
Anguish filled me as I fell back on the bed and cried for all that had been lost to me over the years. I wanted to find Désirée. She would know how I felt. Only she could understand my loss of tongue, that need to smell my grandmother's pink Kleenexes stuffed in boxes marked "fragile."

Tonton Léo's words over the phone line came back to me slowly. Désirée had disappeared shortly after the funeral. They had seen her about town. Where she lived, no one seemed to know. She had made friends with the street kids, the ones no had claimed over the years to train as their personal house boys or girls. They had called out to her, but she would not acknowledge anyone. She was rapidly losing weight, the dimples in her cheeks had flattened out into long lines like permanent tears flowing from her skin. She had the look of weathered, ebony wood. She had cut her hair and wore it in tight curls. All this, they thought, was evidence that she had turned her back on who she was, on who we were. Désirée had shed the visible evidence of our differences of colour and class. All those years in the shade at the beach, lounging, all for nothing. She had become ordinary, foolish.

A fool girl, Tonton Léo had said, and, don't do as she does. Your grandmother may be dead but this is no time to lose your sense of right and wrong. All this he had said in his perfect imitation of a Parisian accent. That was when I chose to hang up.

The phone. I set it down by the picture of Alphonse, Désirée and I sitting on my grandmother's porch that last time. I was eight, Désirée twelve, and Alphonse sixteen. We were not smiling. We were so grown up. So knowing that we would not stand together like this again.

I walked through the apartment looking for grandmother and Désirée but all I found was silence.



MYRIAM J.A. CHANCY WAS BORN IN PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI AND RAISED IN THE CANADIAN CITIES OF QUÉBEC AND WINNIPEG. HER WRITING EXPLORES THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HER IDENTITY IN CANADA AND IN THE U.S. AS A BLACK WOMAN AND THE REALITY OF HER MIXED-RACED, FRANCOPHONE, SPANISH, AFRO-CARIBBEAN BACKGROUND. HER BOOK, *IN SEARCH OF SAFE SPACES: AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN WRITERS IN EXILE* IS FORTHCOMING FROM THE LONDON-BASED CARIBBEAN/AFRICAN PRESS BOGLE/L'OUVERTURE. SHE IS CURRENTLY ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

Language into Mova, Dreams into Memory

MARUSYA BOCIURKIW

Three languages—English, French, Ukrainian—swirl in my dreams and in my waking life, as well as on the message on my telephone answering machine. I've created this multi-lingual phone message for fun, to playfully keep those two *other* languages present, but maybe I also do it to displace that first language, jostle it just a little bit.

When I lived in Québec, where one negotiates linguistic difference on a daily, even hourly basis, this sort of minor intervention went unnoticed. But here in British Columbia, my message often elicits a certain mixture of unease and sometimes shock from Anglophone callers. I get pleased recognition and delight from the occasional Francophone caller—this is Western Canada after all. And dogged curiosity from others: am I French? Do I receive a lot of French callers? Some have said: "You know, your message is quite long, you really should shorten it."

It takes up a lot of space, this fifteen-second string of words.

I've always had languages mixing themselves up in my life. The Ukrainian I learnt as a child is a hybrid language, its contours, its vernacular, changing with each generation. Its roots go far and wide, as could be expected from a country half-way to the East, situated between Europe and Asia. Its cultural influences draw from European Latin languages, as well as from Greek and Middle Eastern tongues. The Ukrainian I speak is laced also with the colonial influence of Polish, Russian and English. To my parents I speak a kind of pidgin Ukrainian, "half *na piv*" as we say jokingly, *na piv* being Ukrainian for "and half." But we are only half-joking, because there is disappointment in this loss of language, and a kind of shame.

Russian, not Ukrainian, is now the *lingua franca* of urban Ukraine; its life-force exists in the diaspora. As the first generation of Ukrainians in Canada, I and others of my generation are expected to be guardians of the language, to preserve it and pass it on. Concealed between the lines of this expectation is the assumption that we will have children, and that

they will bear the marks of language and genetics: high cheekbones, full lips and perfect Ukrainian grammar. And so the disappointment goes wide and deep, surrounding the anglicized, childless (*lesbian*) daughter.

Between them, my parents speak six languages. My mother learned French from the Catholic nuns of her prairie childhood and passed its music onto me. There was always liquid pleasure in her voice when she spoke French, and this made me want to learn the language more than any textbook ever could. My father learnt Russian from the Bolsheviks who took over the schools and the language of his native Ukraine. German was a matter of survival: outwitting the Nazis, getting through the war. These languages as he speaks them sound bitter to me, though from others I've sensed their particular beauty.

And Ukrainian was always there, like mother's milk, like prairie winters and long Saturdays in church basements; like repetition; like abuse, and like love.

English came soon after and stole me from my mother, protected me from my father. Years and miles away from the Alberta's flat horizon, Ukrainian now works for me primarily as a formal, descriptive language. I can say in Ukrainian to my mother that my work goes well, that the weather is fine, that my grandmother seems tired. If I want to say I am anguished or ecstatic about something, I revert to English. Were I to talk about anything to do with sexuality: were I to use the words "dating," "breakup," "sex," "lesbian," even "menstruation" or "menopause," I would have to turn to my Ukrainian dictionary, and I would find only absence. But then, I would never talk of such things with my parents, for in our culture sexuality is not verbalized. It does not exist as an entity to be discussed, described or transformed. It is silent, secret, unspeakable.

And yet, my Ukrainian dictionary speaks luxuriously of love. It defines archaic and romantic terms like love-lorn, love-child and lovesick, and words I've never heard—like *love-in-a-midst*, and *love-in-idleness*. My ardent, insistent dictionary lists ten possible uses of the noun love, whose first usage is love of parents, and second is love of country. (Interestingly, the word my dictionary uses for parents—*bat'ke*—and for country—*bat'kivshena*—comes from the same root, *bat'ko*, which means father.)

My dictionary does list incest. It's a word I've never heard in Ukrainian: *krovosmishennia*. Literally, "mixing of blood." My English (Webster's) dictionary is equally cryptic—"sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that they are forbidden to marry."

Neither of these languages is talking about abuse. They're in denial, they're talking romance; star-crossed cousins; Romeo and Juliet.

Love of the father is clearly spelled out, while sexual abuse remains undefined.

I speak to my father only in Ukrainian. If there's something I cannot say, I stumble, borrow some English words or remain silent. My father forbade us to speak to him in English from an early age, and this admonition is somehow impossible for me to transgress, even as an adult. My father's Ukrainian, of course, is perfectly fluent. When we speak, he is constantly correcting my grammar.

My father possesses the power of language and of expression in our interaction. We have often argued, and I have never won, because I collapse early on into half-language, into a kind of Ukrainian baby-talk.

I remember the names my father called me: *kitsunia*, *krasevetsia*—little kitten, beautiful one. I remember how he confided in me, about his marital problems, about his loneliness. And I remember, now, almost with a sense of shame, the love songs he sang to me, Ukrainian folksongs with my name in them. Songs of desire and unrequited love. Beautiful

songs, that I am only just now, beginning to sing again.

But mostly I do not remember. I have vivid dreams of abuse, I have had them for ten years. Over and over again, I wake up in a cold sweat, trying to form the word *No*. In English.

But dreaming is not the same as remembering. Or so we are told.

For the past year, a time of upheaval in my life, I have had some healing dreams. Always, the images are the same: my woven *kylym* (blanket) from Ukraine. An embroidered blouse, a Ukrainian scarf. Ukrainian women's names repeated over and over. These images and sounds often conclude the abuse-dreams and comfort me within the dream.

Listening to my dreams has proven to be an important part of my healing process. Coincidentally or not, I have also begun to have more contact with other Ukrainian artists of my generation, as well as with my brothers and sisters, nieces and grandmother.

And, I have joined a Ukrainian women's singing group, whose weekly rehearsals I attend faithfully, like church, or like therapy. I am enormously moved to sing these familiar songs with other women. The women in the group are mostly non-Ukrainian, so I am also touched by their dedication to a language they don't understand. It seems I have never met people like this before, willing to place themselves outside of their own language, wanting to learn the curvaceous slips and slides, glottals and diphthongs of a Slavic tongue. The music heals me, but so does this happy linguistic coalition of difference.

I have also begun to integrate my Ukrainianness into my writing, and into my public identity of Canadian artist, and out lesbian. I have begun to experiment with the insertion of French and Ukrainian phrases, often used without translation. Three years in Québec have disordered my vocabulary, have displaced the adoptive English parent in my head. I have published a book that gives equal space to my Ukrainian and lesbian identities, and I am working on a film that speaks of common experiences of xenophobia amongst Ukrainians, Chinese, Japanese, Arabs and Québécois. None of this feels easy, much of this feels awkward. All of this has created anxiety, tension and suspense in some of my dealings with publishers, editors and funders.

In a particular interaction with a publisher, a small but significant typographical error is made in a Ukrainian text which uses a Cyrillic alphabet the designer and typesetter do not understand. The publishers are at first reluctant to provide an errata sheet. They have carefully pored over various proofs and decided the error was my fault, a spelling mistake. Throughout the process of negotiation I bear the burden of proof, while they possess the power of language, *even when the language at question is not theirs*.

In a hegemonic culture devoid of signs of difference, the written residue, the imagistic detritus of an old world culture acquires extraordinary significance. I worry I am fetishizing these Cyrillic letters, I wonder about the fine line between *fetish* object and *sacred* object. I can't tell the difference, I'm in a hallway lined with mirrors, and it's impossible to separate the watched and the watcher, the spectacle from the voyeur.

Ukrainian children, growing up in the Canadian diaspora, in the bosom of official Multiculturalism, are taught to perform. So many hot Sunday afternoons spent flushed and embarrassed in a stuffy church basement, dressed in Ukrainian blouse and embroidered apron, flowers in my hair. Reciting Ukrainian poetry I didn't understand, performing dances I thought—even as a child—were demeaning of girls and women. Curtseying and smiling, performing and performing.

We were raised to be spectacle, we were raised to parody ourselves. We were not raised to think of our Ukrainian lives as ordinary and real. Small wonder then, that Canadian Anglo Saxon culture acknowledges Ukrainian identity only as spectacle, only as a pretty collection of empty signifiers drained of meaning: the pysanka, the weddings, the perogies. Small wonder that I am told I am wrong, when a designer wants to put a Ukrainian Easter egg on an illustration to my stories and I say, loudly and clearly, and in English, *No*.

Since leaving Montréal, I am taken aback by the unacknowledged dominance of the English tongue: the speed with which I am corrected if I say a colloquialism wrong, even in jest: *happy as a clam in shit; tighter than pigs to a tree*. I did not grow up with these Anglo expressions, and I am never asked what some of my Ukrainian colloquialisms might be. I am rarely asked: where my parents are from, what my music is like, what I love about my culture. It is not that people aren't interested; it is that they don't think it correct to ask.

In attempting to create an anti-racist feminist movement, we have only *begun* to speak of difference. We have touched upon the visible, the obvious: skin, and language and certain words. We have created guidelines about what white women should and shouldn't do, which, in some ways entrenches the problematic of binary opposites; a Berlin Wall of us and them. Fear occupies the cracks in this wall: fear of not getting it right; fear of being placed outside of language, fear of asking questions. As feminist communities, we have created few ways of working or celebrating together, of sharing languages, expressions, traditions, recipes and histories.

But silence, to paraphrase gay African American videomaker Marion Riggs, is like a knife, and cuts both ways. I have often demanded cultural tolerance for others, but never for my own people. I have helped to organize, in feminist publishing, in coalitions, in the art community—for anti-racist guidelines, for inclusive strategies, for understanding, for standing aside. But I have never spoken, in the first person of diaspora, immigration, linguistic difference, xenophobia. In part because this project is complicated and must speak of white privilege in the same breath that it speaks of cultural intolerance. And in part because while I have experienced being *spectacle*, I have rarely experienced being *visible*.

Whiteness erases difference within itself. It often seems that when a white Anglo-Saxon feminist looks at me, she sees someone who looks just like her. Though it is never said (because for her it would be impolite to do so), I often feel it is unseemly of me to parade my ethnicity—let alone my language—to create a dividing line between her and me.

"*Ethnicity is a devalued text*," says a Ukrainian colleague of mine. Any rips in the seamless fit of my whiteness and another's are mine to be corrected. I struggle daily with the burden and the privilege of speaking the unspeakable, of making visible my ethnicity in its beauty, its ordinariness, its pain. Making fatherland into motherland. Fetish object into sacred object. Language into voice, dreaming into remembering.

With thanks to Margaret Christakos, Penny Goldsmith and Anita Sheth for editorial input.

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ACTING THE (RE)WRITER:

a feminist translator's practice of space

SUSANNE DE LOTBINIÈRE-HARWOOD

Five years ago, I came out of performance retirement. My last show, a multi-media bilingual solo piece, part of a parallel gallery series, had been a searing experience. For specific personal reasons, I'd been unable to focus my energy that last night in 1984, and got a strong taste of the "F" word in front of an audience full of family, friends, artists, non-friends. Failure. So I "retired from the stage" as they say. Haunted by the question: *Must* the show go on? Should I, could I, have just stopped the music to say: Sorry, I can't do this. Everybody knew it anyway. But I plowed on for twenty miserable minutes. They kindly applauded and quickly left.

Needing to lick my wounds, I dug into my writing, published creative texts and literary translations in Québec, Canada and the U.S., started to write my book. I was missing performance though. It activates so many selves in me.

Doing performance offsets writing's solitude and physical harshness. The writer gets to produce a text and perform its sounds and silences to a live audience. Through performance the translator can further her author-translator¹ experience of collaboration, for she will require the participation of other women working in various artistic mediums. The would-be visual artist explores new creative dimensions through experimenting with audio and

visual mediums, with matter. The lover of style enjoys the sensual gratification of costume, makeup, accessories. The body-worker is challenged to stretch into deeper levels of awareness to find the gestures and movements expressive of her intention. The spiritual seeker is drawn to performance's ritual aspects, such as the manipulation of objects invested with meaning, the opportunity of psychic self-transformation, and the real-time unfolding in real-space shared with a live audience creating a sense of community.

So the performer within is huge. She is the agent of my desire to put the "show" into the "... and tell" of writing. Of creative writing as well as diary-writing, for performance provides a direct outlet for self-disclosure. Also, writing as a feminist translator. In the act of translating, the translator is acting for the writer being translated. Rewriting her in a second language. But the translator has things to say too, and the feminist practice of translation as co-creation, instead of mere reproduction, has given her voice as a writer. The performer, then, is a means of acting the (re)writer.

In 1989 came an invitation from the University of Western Ontario in London to speak as a literary translator on a writers' panel at a colloquium addressing "Le discours féminin dans la littérature post-moderne du Québec." I was delighted but couldn't imagine myself discoursing in the feminine while seated behind a microphone. The time had finally come to translocate my performative desire from the art space into academia. The show must go on . . .

In that five-year interval I'd attended many performances by women artists, always fascinated to see what their bodies were knowing and how their bodies were speaking. And many lectures too, where I became increasingly distressed listening to feminists speaking about writing the body, *l'écriture du corps*, thinking through the body, *la pensée corps*, etc., while their seated bodies were neatly folded away behind a table or standing out of sight behind a lectern. Signifier and signified seemed in such contra-diction.

My malaise peaked during the 1988 Montreal International Feminist Book Fair where I listened to women sitting on stages, solo, in pairs or all in a row, bodies collapsed out of sight, the edge of the table cutting into their diaphragm, the muscle membrane vital for breathing. Breath, the vehicle of sound.

The Fair's venue, l'Université de Montréal, has huge windowless lecture halls where much energy was spent straining against the distance separating "them" there on stage and "us" here in the audience. Famous women writers from around the world were reduced to talking heads by these cavernous, hierarchically constructed spaces, their voices swallowed by the sound system which seemed to be retransmitting the architecture's static masculinist ideology instead of the speakers' dynamic feminist meanings.

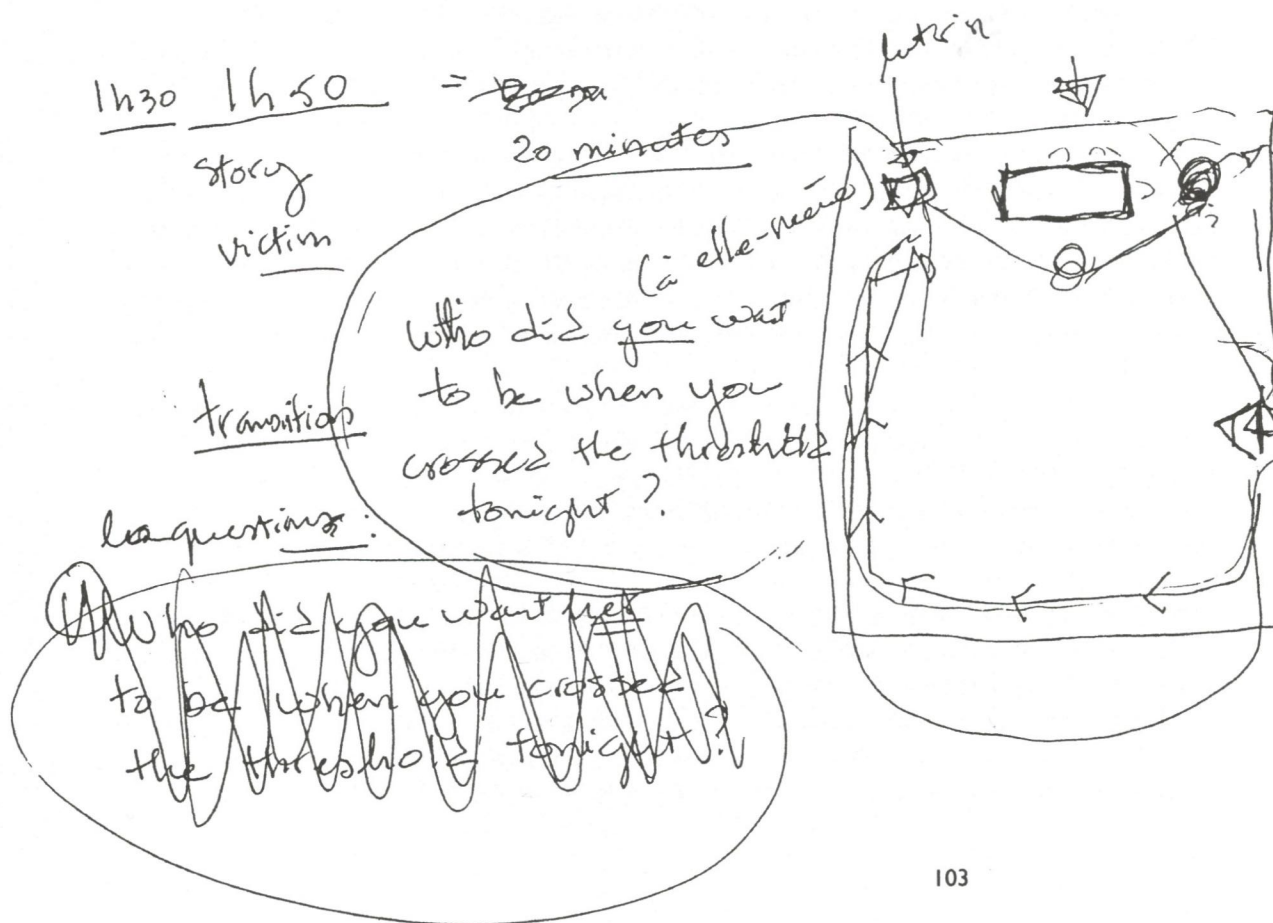
Afterwards, I often couldn't remember what they'd said. Because our senses were not directly engaged, little energy circulated and communication was incomplete. I was left feeling disembodied and frustrated.

I decoded my frustration as an effect of syntax. As feminists we were subverting patriarchal language's hold on our voices, yet our flesh, blood and bones were still held captive by

architecture's syntax. We were challenging straight thinking through our writing, yet were framed in and by conventional order when presenting work at academic/feminist events. It appeared to me that the codes of the lecture space needed problematizing too. My question: What are our bodies doing while we're speaking about the body? Why not attend to the physical body as well as the theoretical one? Could we not translate the desire and politics driving the innovative form and content of these texts into a corresponding physical practice of space? Could we not break the lecture setting's prescribed spatial arrangement for speakers' and listeners' pleasure?

I decided I would perform excerpts from my book-in-progress, *Re-belle et infidèle : la traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin* / *The Body Bilingual: translation as a rewriting in the feminine* at the London colloquium.² To embody the traditionally silent and invisible figure of the translator, whom feminism has empowered to speak in her own voice. Also to out myself as a partner in a full-fledged relationship with "my" authors, for feminist writers and translators have rejected the longstanding "master-slave" paradigm of writing versus translation, and replaced it with the love relationship paradigm, making her and I co-authors of the translated text.

*I'd translated work by several writers participating on the panel, so this first lecture-performance would be a highly charged event for me. Not only would I be coming out of retirement from the stage but also, despite the autonomy conferred to the translator by her acknowledged co-author status, I was aware of not wanting to disappoint them when acting the (re)writer.



Live performance art sprang from visual arts scenes in Europe in the early twentieth century, and "became accepted as a medium of artistic expression in its own right in the 1970s," writes New York performance art historian RoseLee Goldberg. "At that time, conceptual art—which insisted on an art of ideas over product, and on an art that could not be bought and sold—was in its heyday and performance was often a demonstration, or an execution, of those ideas."³ Not surprisingly, as this coincided with the rising Women's Movement, performance became and remains an important vehicle for feminist artists to give their ideas body.

Performance art mostly remains outside of academia, unrecognized as a formal art discipline because it is interdisciplinary and interdisciplinarity has not yet been conceptually defined, thereby implying that it cannot be taught.⁴

Meanwhile, in academia, feminists are constantly "giving 'papers'" as the saying goes, when in fact it's female bodies they/we are giving while lecturing. Their voices, presence of mind and spirit, energy and knowledge. So why not use the deviance of performance art to crack the rigid code of academic public lecturing? Being institutionally unattached at the time, I was free to enter that unexplored space.

Early on, I ask my London hosts for a description of the lecture hall. There will be a long rectangular table, a lectern to its left, microphones at both, several chairs onstage, a roll-down slide screen behind, no windows, a door to the left of the stage raised from the floor by several stairs on both sides. Will all the panelists be sitting on stage while each one speaks? Will our legs under the table be visible to the audience looking up at us? Is seating fixed or arrangeable? Organizers are understandably puzzled by my questions.

(I'm not sure I know what I'm doing either . . .)

Home alone, I simulate the lecture set-up with table, chairs and the printed-out pages of my text. And realize that in order to subvert the text-based lecture format through body-based performance art, I must first free my eyes, hands and body from lecturing's page-dependancy. This means learning much of my written text by heart. Then the performer will be free to establish eye contact with audience members, to speak with her hands, to walk her talk.

To perform my intended subversion on stage, I'll have to start by foregrounding lecturing's habitually invisible support, the actual pages of the "paper" being given. For example, by letting a page fall to the floor to mark a passage, or crumpling one up into a ball and throwing it on the floor when I've finished reading it. Only once the "paper" has been made visible can I then make it disappear and proceed to work "off the page," as photographer Nina Levitt put it.

I hire performance artist and friend Suzanne Valotaire as coach. Rehearsing in my kitchen, in hers, in a rented studio, we work to let surface the body language underlying the signs already written, to choreograph movements that will move my performing body through space like print moves readers from one paragraph to the next. Recalling the translator's body, constantly in motion between the source text, the target-language text-in-progress and the readers she aims to entertain with her work.

Her search for equivalence of meaning keeps her travelling through the standard intertext (dictionaries, reference books) and the feminist one, activating her memory, plumbing the author's imaginaire and her own, making her body one of the most moving/performing bodies in language-centered work of any kind.⁵

Intention = emotion + reason. *What do you mean by that movement?* asks my coach. *If you're not clear, they won't be.* I want to sit at the lecture table with my back to the audience to read a passage concerning the past. I know it's risky. It can backfire if my intention isn't focussed, if I don't speak loudly enough, if something in my performing body makes the audience feel shut out. *Here, let me do it and you be the audience.* Watching her, emotion + reason make a powerful click. I love it. We keep it.

It's a rough passage, translating a written essay through the body. My voice keeps colliding with the linear hardness of print. My real physical body feels so absent from even my own theoretical writing (so informed by French male post-modernism) that I don't know how to connect head to body. I find myself falling into literalness, i.e. mimicking a word with a redundant gesture.

Etymologically, "theory" means to see, and "discourse" originally meant *oral delivery*, verbal interchange of ideas. My intention with this hybrid form is to create visual images and to open discursive spaces using my body as well as my words and my voice.

That's good but take your time! We're in rehearsal and I'm removing my little Balinese hat to indicate an inner voice shift before moving on to the next paragraph. Valotaire is telling me to slow down and grant the gesture its fullness. True, I'm rushing through. Time's emotional reality unfolds much more slowly for the performer than for the audience. What seems like an eternity to her is a mere moment to them. Breathe! I realize that I'm afraid of leaving a few seconds silence in between words to remove my hat because I dread "dead air." *The audience will breathe with you . . .* Unlike a performance art audience, this audience will not be expecting the performative content of my lecture, so if I don't give them time to absorb the double decontextualization, I will literally make no sense.

What to wear? In performance art the performer intentionally draws attention to herself as speaking subject whose sexual body is the spectacle. Everything about her body matters because everything about her body makes meaning. Colours, shoes and jewellery as much as movement and shaved or unshaved armpits. Female academics who lecture know they are scrutinized for appearance, body language, etc. differently than are their male colleagues, and most resort to disembodiment as a way of registering in male public official spaces. Most but not all . . .

I remember how Jane Gallop thrilled me when she lectured at Concordia University wearing a side-slit skirt made of men's ties, which she described as "a phallic displacement" as she crossed her legs, exposing a thigh. Sexy and savvy, she was. And a feminist and a scholar.

(So, I thought: the show can go on . . .)

At some point during rehearsal I remove the scarf I'm wearing and drape it over a chair to delineate an imaginary space I want to invest with meaning by inscribing it with a trace of my presence before moving to the next one. The scarf is big and bold enough to make a clear statement when seen from the audience. The image works conceptually, yet has the sensuality of wafting perfume.

(Plus, wearing my favorite scarf on stage will make me feel more secure—so I figure, go

for it.)

(I want to end wearing my scarf, though, so we'll have to find a reason to get me back there so I can reclaim it and, in the process, erase that no-longer-needed imaginary space.)

How I'm using my hat and scarf, and later on a reversible jacket, reminds me of the dressing and un- and cross-dressing recurrent in feminist artists' performances, again revealing where I've come from. These gender-specific articles of clothing sexualize my performing body, which, thus language, enacts a subversion of the desexualizing female academic dress code, the same way my translating body performs its subversion of sexist grammatical codes (gender-marked French, gender-neutral English) through the practice of translation as a rewriting in the feminine.

I'm questioning the codes and conventions of the panel format too. As a panelist I'm ambivalent about sitting side-by-side with other speakers. I enjoy the physical closeness of women gathered together on a panel, and the statement it makes. However, sound travels forward, so when I'm sitting next to her speaking, I can't hear what she's saying. I try to imagine a situation where panelists could see one another and grasp all the non-linguistic expressive content of language as she is spoken.

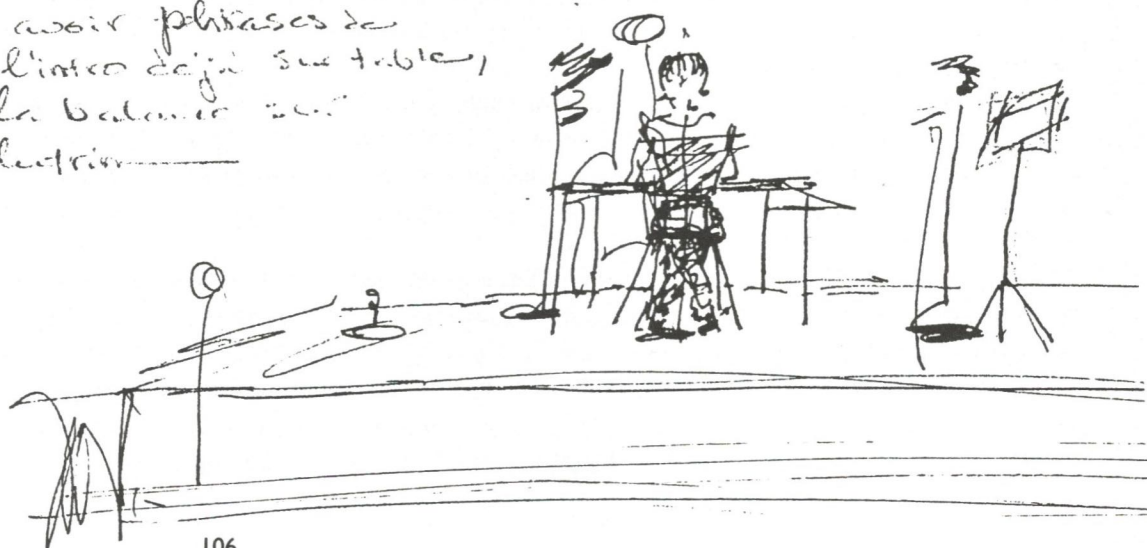
My coach Suzanne and I devise ways I can be and can be seen to be a participant in this panel as well as a performer physically problematizing the format. I decide to sit in the front row to listen to the other panelists. And to begin my performance from there. And to progressively become the figure of the translator as I perform my/her way through the space between the front row and the stage, that rarely crossed physical boundary space enforcing power relations between audience and speakers, then up the three stairs onto the stage—stopping at each one to speak something—finally reaching the panel table.

But to me that boundary space resembles the passage that is the translation process, a crossing from author to readers operated by the translator. It can be empowered as a site of meaning when made visible by naming. Feminist discourse on translation exists because translators have things to say about their practice. That boundary space can be reclaimed from dominant syntax when crossed into by a transgressive speaking body.

As my written words become absorbed into my mouth and body during rehearsal, my text—"paper" becomes a script covered with stage directions to guide my body through performance space and time: Move to panel table—Look at panelists (make eye contact with each)—Touch table (to assert participation in panel) —Sit—Breathe.⁶

See the *discourse*?

* avoir phrases de
l'intro déjà sur table,
la balancer sur
lecteur



I love what you're doing with that chair but if you want to do that, do it bigger! Valotaire is reminding me how unaccustomed women are to taking up space. As my intention is to signify "my" author's presence, I pick up the chair again and really handle it as if someone precious were sitting on it. "Signing in a bigger space," as I once heard American ASL interpreter Sherry Hicks express it.

Re-working the spatial code raises questions of ethics concerning the presence of my co-panelists, whom I don't want to take by surprise nor offend by what could be construed as mere grandstanding. I'm relieved to find them receptive and curious when I explain my intentions beforehand.

Finally, London, November 1989 rolls around. In the bathroom applying lipstick (on a feminist mouth?) minutes before going on, I vow never to do this again, it's too hard, especially faraway from home.

Although I felt awkward (still!) about taking up so much space in front of all these writers (a new take on "the translator as traitor?"), and struggled for legitimacy in this very large hall lined with very large portraits of the university's past deans (something the organizers could not know to tell me nor I to ask), the show went well. The mostly female audience of writers, professors, literary critics and students reacted strongly. Questions put to me later gave me the impression they understood what I tried to do. Except for the boots . . .

I'd insisted on removing my cowgirl boots during the performance. I wasn't sure why, I just wanted to. Well, my coach was right. Audience members picked up on it. Quite a few asked: What did that mean?

Several papers delivered on the remaining days of the colloquium alluded to my presentation, which was exciting. But the most revealing comment of all came from a professor who said to me: "I teach here, so I could never do that, but I enjoyed it." Although I'm aware of its pedagogical potential, and am not suggesting that every feminist professor and lecturer "do that," she perfectly voiced my point . . .

My developing practice had no name at the time. A year later, some Concordia University students invited me to speak on "Sexuality and Language: the 'problèmes de genre' when translating." As video artist Chris Martin, who was then living in Montréal, had once asked to come and play with me some time, I proposed that we act out parts of the piece *à deux*. The day we went to rehearse, Chris excitedly brought me an article entitled "Has the Body Lost Its Mind?" by American feminist art critic Joanna Frueh, in which she is photographed topless and uses the crossover term "performative lecturing" to describe her own practice of space.⁷ I've used it ever since.

So far I've done about ten performative lectures. In English, in French (my first language), in both, depending on the event or topic. When it's translation, for example, I can posit a somewhat bilingual audience. Each one site-specific, a feature of much performance art. Difficult when presenting out of town. Even with a floor plan, I'm working in the dark. I have to remember to ask what kind of lighting is available. If seating is arrangeable, how many chairs will be set up? And how?

To subvert the authority and unicity of the lecturing voice, I sometimes ask another panelist to read out a specific sentence of mine or a quote from another writer. Our voices compose a live intertext resonant of dialogue and community. Or the passage can be from something I've translated, in which case she stands in for the author by reading the original

text while I read my translation and the audience stands in for the readers. Our momentary "we" recreates translation's collaborative, feminine plural process.

The Concordia venue has three blackboards, a standup piano and large rectangular tables informally arranged in a square around which students will sit. Chris and I map three interactions. She will follow me around the room as I write on the blackboards, questioning the feminist language strategies I'm explaining: "Your gender-marking and deconstructing are fine for writing—but what about when we're talking . . ." She will sit atop the piano flashing her gold tooth and ankle strap biker boots to quote a Kathy Acker review that starts: "The mouth is and continues to be the most threatening opening of the feminine body . . ." (Luisa Valenzuela, "Dirty Words"), her sexually aggressive body posture and statement performing my radical stance as a feminist translator while my lecturing body continues speaking. And we will physically mirror-image a sentence in French and in English to enact the body bilingual. "Make sure your lipstick isn't too dark," Chris recommends as we leave the venue after rehearsing. "Let's wear the same one," I suggest. Nobody notices, but our meaning gets across to the amused—and bemused—young audience.

Ah! the wild syntax of spaces. In a studio arts classroom, I'm faced with a wall-sized mirror and a paint-soiled sink. The mirror's doubling effect becomes an opportunity to once again turn my back to the audience to perform a flashback autobiographical passage, but this time I can see them and they can see me front and back. Our eyes meet in the mirror framing "us" in a kind of tableau vivant. The effect is startling, especially because we are so close.

I can't resist the dirty sink, which is all the way across the room. So I dare to have my art pros-and-students audience pick up their chairs and move them over there as I shift the scene to "my kitchen" by running the faucet for a few seconds. I'm talking about how, when the creative process hits a snag, I procrastinate by, for example, doing dishes to counteract the anxiety. Hoping (at least I do) that the hot water will inspire. There is the laughter of recognition.

During the question period afterwards, I realize that for me classrooms are a great setting for performative lecturing. Perhaps the best. Though situated inside academia, they elude the formality of official lecture halls. And while students come expecting a lecture as usual, they are delighted to get something more. Also, a fairly long question period is usually possible in classrooms and, because performative lecturing is an experimental form, this time of exchange is really important for performer and audience alike. And when the audience is students, the feminist pedagogue in me merges with the acting (re)writer and we are all very happy.

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Last year, invited solo to a Halifax university art gallery to speak as a translator on the theme of "Cross-cultural Issues in the Arts," I took the risk of sandwiching a French performance piece between two English lecture sections. Why not act out the body bilingual's cross-cultural issues instead of just talking about them? I knew that if I didn't show my roots, I'd pass for an Anglophone.

I rehired my coach Suzanne V., another body bilingual, so she was well aware of the challenge and danger involved. I wanted to perform *Manu Opera*, an erotic essay I'd written in the lesbian translator's double voice-of-love addressing both her auther and her real-life *amante*. I'd read the text in French and in English at the 1992 Fifth International Feminist Book Fair in Amsterdam, and later published it. Now I wanted to translate the original

French version into a body piece. Its (re)writerly doubleness seemed appropriate for the Halifax theme.

Again Valotaire was relentless about intention. *Are you doing this just to provoke? Who are you to this audience when you're speaking French?* We strategized at length, carefully balanced the piece so as not to alienate my mostly English-speaking audience. Painstakingly worked out the two extremely important hinge moments when I'd been switching languages and personae. Counting on the sounds of French, on the performance's visuals and movements, to carry the meaning until I resumed in English (standing right at the front row):

When I decided to perform Manu Opera in French here tonight, you were on my mind. It was a matter of necessity, representing difference instead of just talking about it. Yes, I took the risk of losing many of you, of failing to communicate, of losing some laughs, of creating boundaries between our bodies, of merely provoking . . . But I was also taking the risk of making myself more vulnerable, because French is my mother tongue, it's my roots language. If I was to go all the way, it would have to be this way . . . I've taken the opportunity of tonight's invitation to make the complex reality of this body seen and heard. Thank you for being here to cross the threshold with me.

I was shaking like a leaf when I finished. Reactions I had sensed during the presentation and questions afterwards confirmed that most had been able to stay with me throughout. My gamble had paid off: it is possible to speak this body of possibilities.

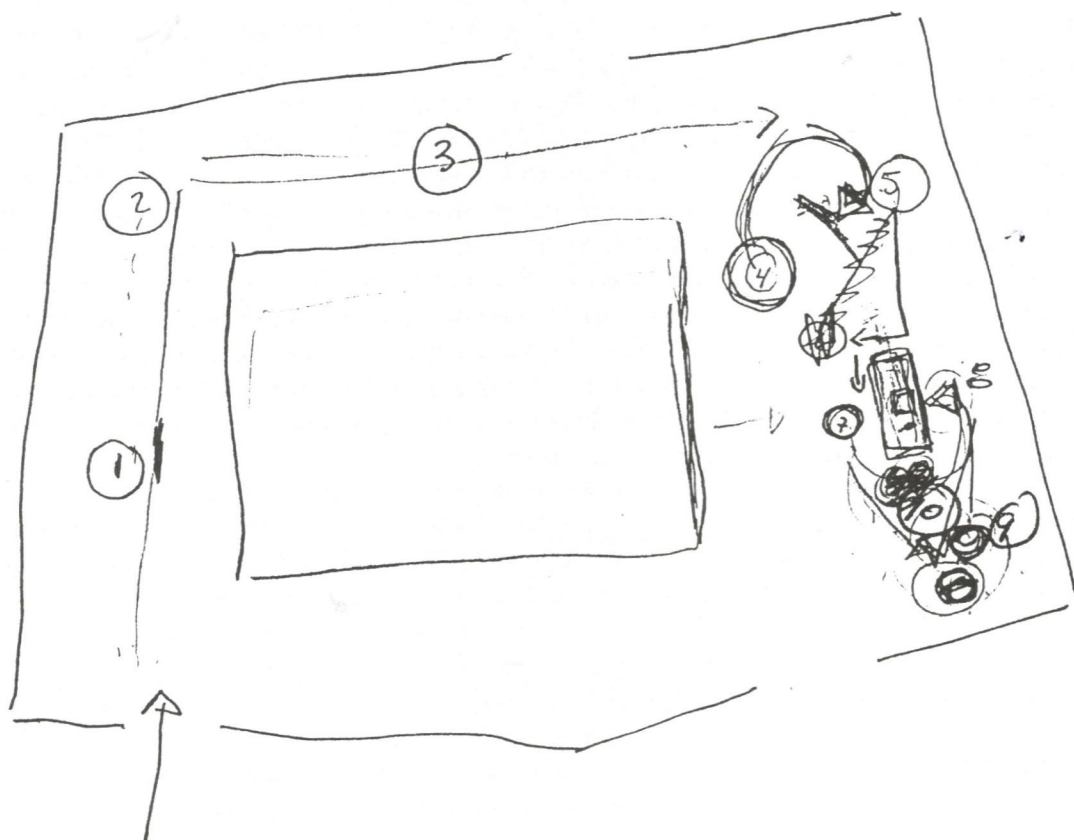
Reflecting on my five years' practice of performative lecturing has proved difficult. There's been a lot of resistance in my body. This shouldn't come as a surprise. It's a first attempt at producing discourse about it. Any writing I've done related to performative lecturing to date have been the scripts themselves, which are written to be spoken, not to be printed on a page. Writing it all down in intelligible form, in English, for publication, has required applying ordered thinking to exteriorize a process I've mostly carried in my body. It feels strange. Very exposed.

Although many avenues remain unexplored in this article as in my practice—I haven't learned to handle a microphone like a rock singer yet, I haven't produced any visual documentation of my performances yet, I . . . —what started out as a small piece became much more important than I thought it would be. Which means that I didn't know everything my body already knows about it. Which could mean I'm taking the practice more seriously now that it's seen print. I guess I'll live with the paradox. . . .

Notes

1. Originally but no longer a typo: *auther* is my feminized spelling of author.
2. *Re-belle et Infidèle : la traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin / The Body Bilingual: translation as a rewriting in the feminine* (Montréal/Toronto: Les Editions du remue-ménage/Women's Press, 1991). Both French and English sections contain discussions of "translation as performance."
3. Goldberg, RoseLee, *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*, revised and enlarged edition (London, Thames and Hudson, 1988).
4. See Danielle Boutet, "Interdisciplinarity in the Arts," *Harbour* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1993).
5. de Lotbinière-Harwood, *Re-belle et Infidèle*, 160.
6. See "La Voir Sa Voix," a visual presentation of a 1990 script, layout designed by Lani Maestro, hand-scripted by SLH, in *Harbour* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1991).
7. Joanna Frueh, "Has the Body Lost Its Mind?," *High Performance* (Summer 1989).

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What (it) is & what (it) isn't:

Language of "Tolerance"

SANDRA HAAR

The Museum of Tolerance, located in Los Angeles, is a Holocaust Museum with an added extra. Like any Holocaust museum (and their numbers are increasing), it seeks to inform the visitor of that historical event and also to impart some political consciousness. In each case the strategies are well worth noting. In the Museum of Tolerance, structure is important. Visitors are guided in as a precisely numbered group. The day my friend, Ellen, and I went we were the last group, lucky to get in. We are greeted by a serious and calm man. "I am your docent," he says. The main event, the reason I am here anyway, is the Holocaust part. Instant political consciousness I'm wary of. The gruesome spectacle that I anticipate (with no small amount of terror) is the Museum's apparent re-creation of a gas chamber, the "showers." I imagine we will be shoved in and the doors will slam behind us.

But this turns out to be the finale. Visitors must go through layers of interpretation before we can "experience" the brutal truth of the Holocaust. Very tricky inversion going on here: analysis before experience. This is how it works. The first section, a large room, contains a number of multi-media exhibits on racism and "prejudice." Most of them are interactive. One focuses on the L.A. Riots, encouraging interpretation of news clips that are shown. There's one that is a test. I like tests, and I like to figure out the rationale behind them. This one is way too easy. I "get it" even before I start. Words appear on a screen and the interactor pushes the button to say if they are not okay. Words like "broad," or "queer." Not okay. Obviously. Obviously? Says who?

This becomes, for me, the pit that undermines the whole presentation. Here is a faceless machine that is going to tell me if I'm "tolerant enough," based on whether I can distinguish nice

and nasty words in the number of seconds it prescribes. And there becomes a fissure in my mind between liberal "knowledge" and radical/subcultural strategies. I know all the right answers. I could score 100 if I play by their rules. But I'm more than just bored. I think about their rules and stop answering within the time limit, which by their system means I've said all the words are okay.

Language of hatred, like symbols of hatred, are highly charged territory. The oppressor (and you can fill in the blank here) has defined their view of us; the word stands in place of the bad things that have happened, taking the flak. Sometimes they've taken words with neutral or positive meanings, and like oppression, they've been negatively imposed. By wiping out the history, the language-colonizer empties the word of its meaning. As an empty vessel, it comes to be inhabited with negativity, a symbol of the powerful one who stole it. Using the bad word is seen to be like amassing privilege. But despite the risks, some of us are mucking around in that landscape. We've ignored middle-class propriety of "mustn't say."

What changed when a guy at college told me the origin of the pejorative "wop," that it is an acronym for "without passport" and was attributed to Italian immigrants at a particular point in history? What did it mean for him, being Italian, to tell this to me, who isn't? When a friend and I would call each other "Yid," were we "reclaiming" a negative word, divesting it of oppressive power? Or using the word in its original usage (meaning "Jew" in the Yiddish language and often used in the way "folk" or "people" is used)? Or both? Might someone who didn't know the history or understand the strategy of reclaiming be insulted? And what words can we use to describe ourselves when even "Jew" is used as a term of insult by boys in my neighborhood streets (the way they might also call each other "fags")?

At a seminar I recently attended on "prejudice," a woman used the term "homosexual," to mean, you know, _____. I was appalled. I quickly realized that she was trying to be a good liberal, respectful. But by saying "homosexual," she indicated to me how out of touch she was with us (me), how cautious and uncertain, how unfamiliar we were (I was) to her. How carefully she adhered to what she believed was the expected term. Who expected it? Her respectful distance infuriated me. It distanced her from me, and by virtue of (her apparent) normative heterosexuality, she was still in the room and I was out the door. I would have been thrilled to hear her say, "Queers are subject to oppression," and I would have definitely known she was on my side.

It's trite to say that each situation demands a different strategy. How can this context, the Museum of Tolerance, contribute to an appreciation of diverse histories and the agency and creativity attained through subcultural language strategies? Instead visitors are written into a homogeneous group of conscientious individuals, adhering to rules of proper conduct. No one should use a "bad" word, even to contest its so-called badness, even to throw it in an abuser's face, even to disrupt the pretense of politeness, even to describe oneself.

I became critical of the politics of this museum. Not as interactive as the exhibits advertise. Following the exhibit room, we have some options: film clips of war atrocities (I pass on that); a video on the Civil Rights movement; a "timeline" of civil rights in the U.S. (which does not include Stonewall). They only increase my apprehension. (I much preferred the Anne Frank House

in Amsterdam, where I could go through "The Annex" (the hiding place), and then sort it out and focus on the second half, which was a documentation of racism in Europe, historically and in the present.)

Our docent reappears. The final part, we must enter as a group, which only makes it harder to see everything properly. This section is dry and dirty. Apparently we're in the "camp." It also has exhibits, little figures are illuminated as the voice-over explains the historical context for the rise of Nazism. We go through the section. Then as a group we wait. We've arrived at the "gas chamber," and the group before us is still in there. Finally, we enter. Yes, the doors do clang behind us, but the room is cavernous and dusty, certainly not what I imagined. Realism has been attempted, but some things mar it. Our pace has been leisurely (obviously I had worked myself up for nothing), to be sure, but most clearly, even here we have not been able to escape the insistent "multi-media" presentation (it is "America" after all). Video monitors are affixed to each pillar. There must be a dozen in all, displaying the same tape, and accompanied by low sound. The docent is speaking. I'm not listening, just watching the tape.

In the language of "tolerance," like the language of liberalism, everyone is meant to have the same reaction because everyone is seen to have the same reality, the same experience. The museum has put a real premium on managing people's reactions. Whether through the docent or the exhibits, through displaying, re-creating, interpreting, "reality" has been carefully and conscientiously presented to heighten visitors' awareness. The visitor is envisioned as an uncritical blob to be transformed, an ignorant receptacle to be filled up with information. Multiple interpretations do not signify an engaged consciousness, rather a lack of their control, for the museum.

Then we leave. Ellen and I make some complaints about the lack of gay politics in the timeline and elsewhere (there is no system in place for receiving these criticisms), we buy some things in the gift shop, then head towards the car. Illegally parked, it has, thankfully, not been towed.

S ANDRA HAAR IS A MEMBER OF THE *FIREWEED* COLLECTIVE. HER WRITING & ARTWORK HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN A NUMBER OF MAGAZINES, AS WELL AS IN THE ANTHOLOGY *THE GIRL WANTS TO* (COACH HOUSE PRESS).

Lilith, Captive

CLAUDIA GAHLINGER

A Dream

My older sister and I are servants in the home of a wealthy rapist.

His house is dark, glossy, stately, his rooms are of polished wood.

We are satisfied here. We are horrified. Both. The comfort, the luxury. The entrapment as if by a surgeon, a subdued Ripper, and us moving about under anaesthetic. We grew up poor. Poor as dust. We know we've got it pretty good at last.

At first, living here, our secret thoughts revolved entirely around the possibility of theft: how to get out of this house and into town to steal things. Food, stuff, junk. Anything.

Today for the first time we think secretly of escape. . . .

Mothertungsten

We have come from an ocean village, my sister Sophie and I. Now we walk along a sidewalk. Why was this street named Tower Road? The buildings on either side are monumental, but not towering; or did they appear so to the people who built them, a hundred years ago? The trees tower over our heads but that can't be the reason, they must have been only little when the road was first named . . . We've just stepped out of the hospital and I am trying hard to hitchhike a ride out of town—somewhere, anywhere—on etymology.

The trees certainly tower now. They are fountains, their plumes of leaves whisper and hiss like water falling against the wind. Among these monuments in the centre of the city.

We walk a while in silence. Then Sophie says out of the blue, "Sie webt."

Swept up among the trembling leaves, my thoughts fidget. *She wept*, I translate from our

mothertongue, which is Swiss-German. It's a puzzling statement. Lilith, Sophie's friend, hadn't wept. At least not in our presence. I turn to look back at the monstrosity that houses her. My eyes scale the walls until they reach the top floor, corner room.

Lilith had startled at the door's opening. Massive and heavy-looking, it had swung wide with a dismaying speed and momentum at our touch. Such a heaviness in the mind here. Such a weight of necessary thinking in this bright and flimsy room far from solid earth and sealed away from the fountains of the trees, the wellsprings, the green arches that bless the streets even though the streets are avowed atheists.

This is the tableau they made: her head turned, her back naked. Fair skin, fair hair, eyes struck. The sheets disarranged. An undraped nude. And the patch of white over which he bent. The silver-haired gentleman. Portly, courtly, dressed in white. The master, drawing the bandage back from his work: her wound . . .

She wept—but no, Lilith had been brave, her eyes focused sharply ahead and then steady into our eyes after he left. Her voice light, firm and light, joking and trembling, distracted. She looked as if she had cried all night, though. Away from home, alone with possibilities. In exile and weeping with homesickness. Her body an open city, occupied by anarchy on the one hand, and the technicians with their hokey promises and dubious strategies on the other.

Sie webt. My mind has switched on images of weeping and fright before I realize *webt* isn't accented English but a German verb I haven't heard before. *Webt*, from *webben*: to make webs: to weave.

"She weaves," is what Sophie has said.

I'm reminded at once of two things: Sophie spent more of her childhood in the old country than I did, so her vocabulary is more extensive: and Lilith is by vocation a weaver. Tapestries and tunics she weaves, Sophie tells me now, in sea and forest colours. "And the wool! Fur from any kind of animal that'll hold still long enough for her to take a brush to it."

Webber. Webmaker. Cancer the crab, spider the spinner. Both many-legged, but one divides while the other makes in-dividual.

Or was this all and only wishful poetry?

Lilith had give us the doctor's explanation for the course of action he would take with regard to her bodily insurrection. Fluids coursing along certain channels perform specific functions: chances were that the insurgents would follow these particular channels, coming to rest here and here, setting up new headquarters. The answer might well be to remove the channels themselves and the likely resting places, take away the tributaries and the bay to preclude their contamination. The fluid would just have to find another way to flow, the river make another configuration.

The doctor would take this drastic action on the basis of a possible betrayal, and would give no guarantees.

Brave Lilith. Beyond brave. . . .

We sat quietly for a while. The merits and purpose of conversation just now were unclear. And every silence was an abeyance, drawing in a wave of fear.

How much of this fear was my own? When had I been a captive warrior in my own life? I couldn't say exactly, but I knew the feeling. Unbearable. A doom-cloak descending on my head. So I started chattering about sestinas.

The past winter, too poor to take a trip, I'd travelled through poetic forms and fallen in love with the island of Sestina. Its complex, repetitive, orderly rhyme scheme generated a consoling beauty.

But what sort of crazy person would invent a thing like that? A sestina consists of six main stanzas of six lines each, ending in six words. These six words (*Lilith, courage, captive, force, course, river, say*) repeat in every stanza but in a different order, slightly graduated. And their meaning is always slightly modulated. Because *We walk and do not walk into the same river twice*.

The body likewise, I thought, sitting there in Lilith's room, the body likewise in the long run: the same, tangible, yet not. A repetitious manifesting, giving the illusion of solidity.

Is it the rubbing of sameness against newness that makes the sestina so wistful yet heart-gladdening? Within the inescapable pattern, the sense of noble striving. *This is my life, incomparable, inimitable, and I will not escape it.*

Lilith didn't seem to mind taking her thoughts on this tangent. I like to think it served as an antidote to fear. At least, it helped alleviate mine.

"So this pattern is very orderly," I said, "but always changing. Like waves on a beach. And the rhyme scheme is called *cruciate retrogradation*."

"Cruciate retrogradation," Lilith repeated carefully. Suddenly she poked her finger at the air. "Yeah. That's *exactly* what the food here is doing to me."

We laughed like madwomen.

Then we sat looking around at the walls. Children's drawings full of trees—green balloons on brown trunks—and daisy-petaled flowers were taped on them. Lilith's boys are four and nine.

"My melodrama," said Lilith, smiling at the drawings. "That's what my kids and I call it. They had to remove the melodrama from my back."

Sie webt has become a warm thought, an affirmation of strength. It rhymes with *Sie lebt*: she lives. A happy coincidence. My thoughts lighten up. Here is a pairing that could tremble like the rest of the world in the summer, even in the city.

Entering the park on the boulevard we pass a fountain. An arcing circle of water, well-tempered and pretty, it falls and is held in a stone basin surrounded by an iron fence. Endlessly arcing, endlessly held. Sometimes we are like that water. Women in summer dresses, surrounded by wrought iron. Behaving, it seems. Circumscribed. But the sign on the fence tells a secret: *Danger. High voltage.*

Kindskopf

Sie webt, says Sophie, and she should know because she is a weaver too. What she dreams at night, what she lives each day of fishing on the sea, the people she meets—she weaves them all. Garments she wears, pleasing to the eye. Cloaks she will drape over you when you're cold. What guardian angel protects Sophie so that she feels safe enough to weave like that? Under an angel's wing. But of course she works hard. The weaving isn't done by elves in the night.

Sie webt, sie lebt.

She weaves, she lives.

We walk around downtown, my sister and I, speaking our mothertongue. Our secret tongue. Our *Kindskopf* tongue. Because we left our homeland at an early age our language with each other is the language of children. *Kindskopf*: child-head. Simpletons! Simple tongues. We forget more and more words. We forget the word for curiosity and duck and

maple tree, for envy and surprise and bargain. We are orphans of the mothertongue, our clothes are full of holes.

We jaywalk everywhere.

Our mothertongue is the tongue of fairytale grandmothers: childlike and gap-toothed. Practical, sensible, nonsensical, of-this-world. Soft rough wool tunic with a hood. It is the language Red Riding Hood's grandmother might have spoken with her: sentimental, slightly dotty, anarchist. Involving the whole mouth. Mr *chönt lache bis t'chüe chönd hei*: I could have laughed 'til the cows came home. The hoods our mother made of the flannel bedsheets, warm around our heads in winter when the furnace heat in the old farmhouse wouldn't reach the top floor.

(What wolves did this language protect us from? Did it ever protect us at all . . .)

The tongue was given to us, and we made it our own. Between us we drop prefixes and suffixes because they're understood. Just as speakers of high German are confounded by Swiss, so people in Switzerland are confounded by us. We've dropped so much now that the language—at least I like to think so—is bedrock over which meaning flows clearer and clearer. Fluency. Fluent in an invented tongue. Arcane, hidden, secret tongue. Ours no matter how many the gaps.

We shape the language as if it were clay, or bread dough. Shorten, mash, comfortably squash. New tails stuck on the ends, sometimes, a sentimental "li" making a word longer yet smaller, little enough to hold in the hand: *Khatz* becomes *Khätzli*, *Hund* becomes *Hündli*, even *Mama* becomes *Mameli* when we're being really foolish.

Orphans of the mothertongue. In the new land our tongues were made wards of the state. We were taught to speak in an orderly fashion. But this new language is the language of artifice. When our tongue does not suffice we fill the gap with English: the filling. Artificial. Artifice.

English, for us, is the speech of adulthood. Of the Other. Of economy. It is the uniform. When we wear this uniform we are secretly making a mockery of it. English in our mouths is a posturing. English is the colonizer, it insists on logic, pedestrian logic, civil service logic. Its fingers are ever at the keyboard, yet capable of treachery, of swiping thoughts and labelling them falsely.

We are spies in this country. Swiss is the language we use for secret communications, English the language we use to pull the wool over somebody's eyes. Not yours. Not your eyes. But *theirs*. They. Them. Whom we must please. Bend them to our will because they will never bend of themselves. This country doesn't belong to us. In order to get by it is necessary to trick. To confound. To speak because we do not feel. To speak in inverse proportion to what we feel. To say as little as possible when we are feeling so much.

We agree aloud and at great lengths, while secretly following other agendas . . .

So many holes exist now in our mothertongue. When my sisters and I speak, does a shortage of vehicles for thoughts to ride in lend itself to genuineness, because empathy and gesture must carry so much of the cargo of expression? If a thought/feeling is not immediately snared by words can it drift a little, float like a cloud, be its own shape? (We are certainly childlike in our thinking, so primitive! We are *kindsköpfe*.)

Our mothertongue is jungle, and it is duty-free territory.

The difference between mothertongue and foreign tongue is also an abyss, however. The tongue that is mine does not serve my thoughts on paper. But the language of a hundred thousand words is the language of artifice. It so readily traps me in attitude, posturing, agenda. And words are the lifeline. *I must be coherent to survive . . .*

We have come here from the seaside. We are dizzy with asphalt heat, mirror-glass, flashing metal. Heat at long last, too, after what may have been the most protracted winter in the history of the world.

Effulgence, fulmination, effusive growth . . . Of course English is also a gift of tongues, a cornucopia, a lush tropic . . .

This blessing of heat. Some people rush through it scowling; overhead looms the tyrant, Time. *Like sands through the hourglass.* (Our widowed mother, stranded in the New World's afternoons, watching soap operas . . .)

"*Sie tuet au die,*" Sophie says as an afterthought.

She has weaved, she has lived, but now she is dying . . . No, I'm quicker this time. *She weaves; she also dyes.* It's a more hopeful, more fecund pairing.

The Box

The foregoing involved slow, careful work. An exercise, a curious task, it didn't cost much emotionally. Seated at my desk I was wrapped once more in the warm garment of love for my family.

Reading this piece out loud to a group of women was another story. It came as a big surprise. The words jammed in my mouth, which started the breath jamming in my lungs, until I was gasping, stumbling and stuttering.

It was as if speech had awakened a shark lying asleep in my diaphragm. As if speech were a hook that had caught a thrashing shark.

As if a lioness had taken my body in her mouth.

As if I had opened Pandora's Box and discovered:

Something I must bow to. Something in whose presence I, a captive, fall back in awe. Realization of the theft of my birthright. Knowledge that its lack has not left me untouched all these years, but that it trampled my heart.

Speech opened the box, revealing treasure. A burgeoning turning cloud. Rage is this ghastly, beauteous tornado, its madness whirling in my head, its taproot deep and sound in my belly.

CLAUDIA GAHLINGER LIVES IN HALIFAX. HER STORIES HAVE APPEARED IN *ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*, *POTTERSFIELD PORTFOLIO* AND *AMERICAN VOICE*, AMONG OTHERS. HER COLLECTION OF SHORT FICTION, *WOMAN IN THE ROCK*, WAS PUBLISHED BY GYNERGY IN 1993.

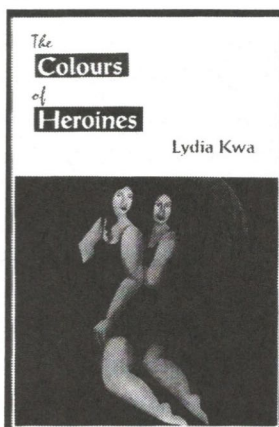
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nurses for Social Responsibility is happy to announce the launching of its publication *Towards Justice in Health* to a national audience. The magazine offers an alternative vision to the male-dominated, medically driven, for-profit, high-tech health care system. It takes a no-holds-barred look at the connections between health and social conditions such as poverty, homelessness and racism. For ordering information, contact Nurses for Social Responsibility at 416-363-2021.

Catholic Church established to meet the spiritual and liturgical needs of gays and lesbians. **Same-gender marriages** sacramentally united. Has a male and female non-celibate priesthood. If interested, please contact Fr. Denis Martel, St. Ambrose Church, 500 Dufossat St., New Orleans, LA 70115 or call 504-895-4742 or fax 504-895-2004. Vocation and membership inquiries welcomed.

Girlfriends, "The Magazine of Lesbian Enjoyment," a bi-monthly, national (US) magazine for lesbians, will debut at the Stonewall/Gay Games celebrations in New York City. Published by the former editorial staff of *On Our Backs*, **Girlfriends** will be a glossy colour magazine covering lesbian culture, politics and sexuality. **Girlfriends** is looking for contributing writers, photographers, illustrators and models. Women of Colour especially encouraged. For guidelines or information, contact Diane Anderson, Associate Editor at P.O. Box 713, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 or call 415-995-2776. For subscriptions to **Girlfriends**, call 415-995-2776. Single issues \$4.95 (US), subs \$24 (US).

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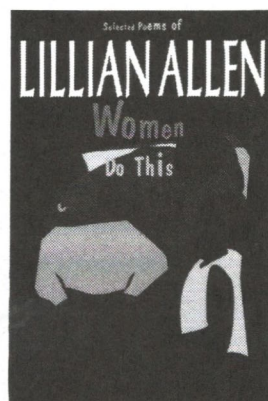
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

In June of 1994, Women in Active Recovery and the Pictou County Women's Centre will publish a **guide book for women recovering from dependence on alcohol or drugs** interested in directing their own recovery within a group. Called *Sharing Our Strengths*, it is written in clear language, from a recovering women's perspective, and will include practical information, stories, drawings and poems. For more information, please contact Women in Active Recovery, P.O. Box 964, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia B2H 5K7 or call 902-755-4647.

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CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

Call for poetry that tells the truth, that shares what is possible, that expands our view of the world. *Contemporary Verse 2* welcomes your submissions on the following themes: **Letters, Women and Nature, First Nations, Women Loving Women.** Please query regarding book reviews, essays, interviews and visual art. Send submissions to: CV2 Editorial Collective, P.O. Box 3062, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4E5, or call 204-949-1365. Deadline for all submissions: August 15, 1994.

Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme is planning a Winter 1994 issue to explore **women entrepreneurs.** The rapid rise of women-owned businesses in the world is one of the most significant economic and social developments of the past two decades. Articles are sought to address various related themes and issues, as well as research reports, true stories, poetry, cartoons, drawings and other artwork that addresses the experiences of entrepreneurial women living in regions of Canada as well as around the world. A short (50 wd) abstract and a brief bio must accompany each submission. Write or call *Canadian Woman Studies*, 212 Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3, 416-736-5356 or FAX 416-736-5700, ext. 55356. Deadline: August 30, 1994.

Do lesbians fuck? We do, and we know you do too. We are looking for poems and short fiction for a **lesbian sex anthology** to include writings by a diverse mix of women. Maximum length 5,000 words. Do not send originals. Include an SASE and include an extra SASE for correspondence. Please send a one-paragraph bio with all submissions. Send to: Lesbian Sex Anthology, Women's Press, #233—517 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M6G 4A2. Deadline: August 31, 1994.

The Evergreen Chronicles, a journal of gay and lesbian literature, will award **\$500 for an original novella** to be published as a special issue of the journal in March 1995. A second prize of \$100 and possible publication will also be awarded. The contest is open to writers with no more than one previously published novel or novella. Each submission must in some way speak to the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender experience. Submit two copies of an unpublished manuscript of 60 to 120 pages. For complete guidelines, send an SASE to The Evergreen Chronicles Novella contest, P.O. Box 8939, Minneapolis, MN 55408. Submissions should be postmarked no later than September 30, 1994.

Blue Collar Queers! Working Class and Poor Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Two-Spirited, Transgendered and Transexual People! What is **"Gay Community"** and how do you fit in? An anthology is accepting submissions that explore the relationship between class background and queerness. Write for guidelines with an SASE to: Susan Raffo, Anthology, P.O. Box 8939, Minneapolis, MN 55408. Deadline: October 1, 1994.

I am asking you to join me by

CLARISSA SLIGH

TORONTO PHOTOGRAPHERS WORKSHOP / GALLERY TPW
80 SPADINA AVENUE, SUITE 310 TORONTO, ONTARIO M5V2J3

Tel: (416) 362-4242 Fax (416) 362-6510

July 1, 1994

Dear Friend:

I am writing to you from the Toronto Photographers Workshop /Gallery TPW where I will create an installation based on Sandy Ground, a former "free Black" oystering community in Staten Island, New York. Using historical information about the prosperity and eventual abandonment of this community as metaphors which resonate with aspects of my life, I will recreate Sandy Ground in Toronto.

I AM ASKING YOU TO JOIN ME BY BEARING WITNESS TO YOUR HISTORY: to make public – to send me a story about your, your family's, your community's movement, migration and/or relocations.

Sandy Grounders migrated northward from the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia, in the 1830s prior to the U.S. Civil War. A "free Black" woman, Eliza Morriss, and her family was among those in this 1830s northward migration. She had purchased a slave, Philip Cooler, from his owners in Virginia, ten years earlier. They were married and had five children. Upon learning the story of Eliza Cooler and Sandy Ground, I felt an unexplainable deep sadness and loss. Did it have to do with my own lack of family – my own lack of community?

Do each of us carry a similar kind of longing for a lost connectedness? You may or may not have lived through your family's migrations/relocations, but know something about how those events have affected your life.

SEND ME ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: a personal reflection, experience, autobiographical statement, a photograph, or note from your diary in words, collage, audio tape or other.

I want your first thoughts. Not a whole lot of editing, please. I want it as it comes into your mind and hand: crossed out lines, hand writing, pencil or pen, typewriter, or computer. Take a few minutes to sit down and do it now. Do not remain invisible. Let me hear from you.

PLEASE DO IT NOW! Your contribution will become an official permanent part of the installation, which may travel to other sites. Your experiences will add to the richness and diversity of our collective voices.

PLEASE SEND OR FAX YOUR RESPONSE TO ME at the above address or fax number by August 19. The installation will be open September 10 through October 15. For more information, please call the above number. Thanks so much for your participation.

Sincerely, Clarissa Sligh

Clarissa Sligh is an African American whose work comes from a strong involvement in feminist, race and class issues. When she was in the 10th grade in 1955, she became the primary plaintiff in Arlington County's first public school desegregation case. Although this Washington born artist, now based in New York, gained several degrees and careers before practicing art full time, this experience has remained profound and informed her work. Much of her art, teaching, writing and political organizing is based in a collaborative working process. For the past ten years Sligh has exhibited and published her work internationally.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme is planning a Winter 1994 issue to explore **women entrepreneurs**. The rapid rise of women-owned businesses in the world is one of the most significant economic and social developments of the past two decades. Articles are sought to address various related themes and issues, as well as research reports, true stories, poetry, cartoons, drawings and other artwork that addresses the experiences of entrepreneurial women living in regions of Canada as well as around the world. A short (50 wd) abstract and a brief bio must accompany each submission. Write or call Canadian Woman Studies, 212 Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3, 416-736-5356 or FAX 416-736-5700, ext. 55356. Deadline: August 30, 1994.

In the Winter of 1995, *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* will explore women's rights as human rights. Articles from around the globe are sought to analyze gender dimensions of basic human rights concepts while reporting on the areas where the most progress has been made and also where the greatest abuses of human rights continue. We seek examinations of the ways in which women are specifically affected by any human rights issue. Invited are essays, research reports, true stories, poetry, cartoons, drawings and other artwork which addresses the experiences of women living in Central and Eastern Europe. Write or call as soon as possible indicating your intention to submit, to *Canadian Woman Studies*, 212 Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3, 416-736-5356 or FAX 416-736-5700 ext. 55356. Deadline: November 30, 1994.

Essays, personal narratives, articles, commentaries and poetry are invited for a new anthology of **Writings on Identity and Assimilation in Canada**. This anthology will focus upon the experiences of non-white women, born or brought up in Canada, in search of cultural identity but caught between two sets of values, traditions and lifestyles—those which derive from Canadian society and those influenced by cultural heritage. Submissions should be typed, double-spaced (send diskette copy and WordPerfect, if possible) and include a biographical note with full address and phone no. Do not send originals. Submit in duplicate with an SASE to: Hazelle Palmer, c/o Sister Vision Press, 19-1666 Queen Street East, Toronto, ON M4L 1G3; or call 416-691-5749 for more information. Deadline September 15, 1994.

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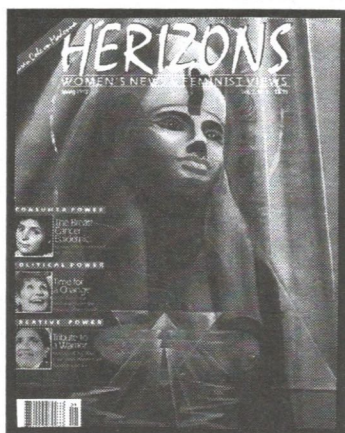
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HIGHLIGHTS OF BACK ISSUES OF **FIREWEED**

ISSUE 25: CLASS I

A special theme issue on class: includes Part One of Dionne Brand's "Black Women and Work," fiction by Makeda Silvera, poetry by Joy Parks, Sandy Shreve and Joanne Arnett, Mary Horodyski's historical coverage of the Eaton's Strike, "A Question of Identity" by Cy-Thea Sand, "Why Can't I Write About Class" by Nym Hughes and an extensive bibliography on gender, class and writing.

ISSUE 26: CLASS II

Fiction by Helen Potrebenko and in translation from Jeanne D'Arc Jutras, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias interviewed, Part Two of Dionne Brand's "Black Women and Work," a round-table discussion by the Working Class Caucus of the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, Ramabai Espinet reviews Sistren's "Lionheart Gal," poems by Afua Cooper and Mary Horodyski's "Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919."

ISSUE 28: LESBIANTICS II

Poetry by Leslea Newman, Brenda Brooks and Leleti Tamu, Jude Johnston's photo mural and Lynne Fernie's pixel-board project "Lesbians Fly [Air] Canada," essays on "Lesbian Mothering" by Claire Dineen and Jackie Crawford, On being a Sansei Lesbian Feminist by Mona Oikawa, "S & M is an Adventure" by Donna Barker and Makeda Silvera's "Man Royals and Sodomites," plus prose by Mary Louise Adams, Marusia Bociurkiw, Nalini Singh and Candis Graham.

ISSUE 30: AWAKENING THUNDER: ASIAN CANADIAN WOMEN (\$4)

Guest edited by Sharon Fernandez, Amita Handa, Mona Oikawa, Milagros Paredes and May Yee: features Himani Bannerji's "The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience" and "Sisters in the Movement" by Mutriba Din and Ravida Din, visual work by Gita Saxena, Millie Chen and Brenda Joy Lem, poetry by Nila Gupta, Jean Yoon and Tamai Kobayashi, "Safer Sex in Santa Cruz" by Mona Oikawa, an oral history from the project Voices of Chinese Canadian Women and an interview with filmmaker Manjira Datta.

ISSUE 31: WEIRD WRITING

An array of form-conscious, experimental work guest edited by Ann Decter, Martha Judge and Wendy Waring: includes short prose by Carol Laing, Lillian Allen and Jane Farrow, performance piece "Open Your Eyes and Listen" by Karen Augustine, Gita Saxena's video transcription, photo-text works by Susan Kealey, Carla Murray and Sandra Haar, poetry by Angela Hryniuk, Margaret Christakos, Patricia Seaman, Anna Malkin and Pauline Rankin and a cartograph by Rhoda Rosenfeld.

ISSUE 35: JEWISH WOMEN (\$5)

Guest edited by Brenda Cossman, Ellen Flanders, Sandra Haar, Karen Pearlston, Paula Saunders and Shlomit Segal: features critical essays "Jewish, Woman, and Lacking 'Class'" by Bonnie Burstow, "Spheres of Identity: Feminism and Difference" by Carole Dahan and Susan Nosov's "Educating for Change: Jewish Women Confronting Racism," prose by Henny Buncel, Gita Schwartz, Ann Decter, Gila Strauch and Lilian Green, the photo-story "As Jews We Cannot Live as a Coercive People" by Rachel Epstein and Amy Gottlieb, a discussion on sexual assault, and poetry by Gail Novack and Lilith Finkler.

ISSUE 36: IDENTIFYING (\$5)

Margaret Christakos interviews June Jordan, Queer Radio questions "The Les/Bi Divide," and Kaushalya Bannerji on "The Politics of Identity: 'Aesthetics' or Opposition," poetry by Chin K. Yuen, Rachel Rose, Rita Wong and Ruth Mandel, fiction by Victoria Freeman and Gina Frangello, "The Secret k.d. Lang" by Pat Jeffries and photographs "Looking Beyond Identity" by Ellen Flanders.

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ISSUE 37: SEX & SEXUALITY I (\$5)

Thelma McCormack analyses censorship and the politics of protectionism, Ellen Flanders interviews Ani DiFranco, hot pix and text from Kathy Daymond and Shannon Bell's film on female ejaculation "Nice Girls Don't Do It," fiction by Susan Beaver, Jyl Lynn Felman and Lauren Slater, poetry by Carol Camper, Terri L. Jewell, Mona Oikawa and Angela Hryniuk, images by Martha Judge, Jennifer Gillmor, Melanie Aguila and Susan Stewart.

ISSUE 38: SEX & SEXUALITY II (\$5)

Becki Ross on the Lesbian Fantasy as Felony in the Bad Attitude court case, Maureen Richards answers back Laferriere's "How to Make Love to a Negro," Kathleen Pirrie Adams on Lesbian Bar Culture, Trish Thomas on "Dykes and Dicks," photo-text works by Paula Gignac and Sandra Haar, poetry by Lynn Crosbie, Chocolate Waters and Joanne Arnott, and fiction by Jackie Manthorne and Emma Laberge.

ISSUE 39/40: FROM THE MOUTH TO THE PAGE (\$8)

Erella Shadmi on "Israeli Feminism Today," Part One of Ayanna Black and Roberta Morris's "More Back Talk: Race, Sex, Differences and Literal Methods," Alanis Obomsawin interviewed by Pinelope Gramatikopoulos, fiction by Ann Decter, Leila Marshy and Rhoda Rabinowitz-Green, poetry by Méira Cook, Suzette Mayr, Paula Obe Thomas, photo-text by Amy Gottlieb and art by Brenda Joy Lem.

ISSUE 41: SHIFTING IDENTITIES, REWORDING RAPE (\$7)

"My Desh is Not Identity But Politics" by Urvashi Vaid, Laura Levitt on "Speaking Out of the Silence around Rape," Part Two of Ayanna Black and Roberta Morris's "More Back Talk," fiction by Kyo Maclear, Susan K. Dymont, Shahnaz Stri and Jennifer Footman, art by Shirley Chow, and poetry by Nancy Chater, Vivian Marple, Margaret Webb and Susannah Smith.

(cont'd)

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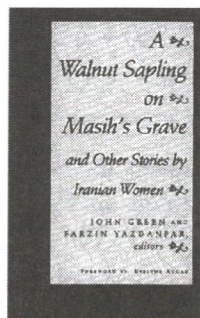
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Guest edited by the Asian Women Writers Collective: features an interview with Yuri Kochiyama, fiction by Milinda Sato, Judy Fong Bates, Ji Bai and Nancy Chong, poetry by Ann Chin, Jean Yoon, Grace Sakae Murao, Mona Oikawa and Tamai Kobayashi, art by Louise Noguchi, Millie Chen, Kyo Maclear and Marilyn Jung, and reviews by Ann Shin and Melinda Aguila.

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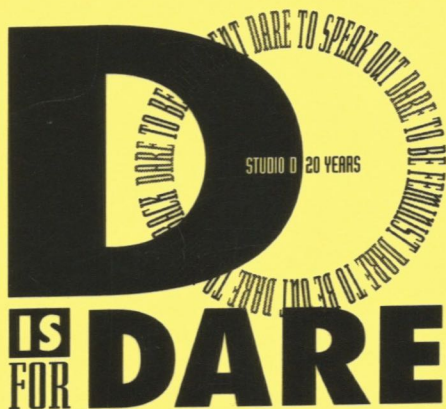
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