

Université de Montréal

The Poetics of Translation: A Thinking Structure

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Thèse présentée
en vue de l'obtention du grade de Philosophiæ Doctor (Ph.D.)
en Études anglaises

novembre 2018

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Cette thèse intitulée

The Poetics of Translation :
A Thinking Structure

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Résumé

Dans mon projet de thèse, *The Poetics of Translation: A Thinking Structure*, la traduction se transforme en méthodologie de lecture et d'écriture qui fait voir le mouvement de la pensée ainsi que ses effets poétiques dans la littérature contemporaine expérimentale. Plus précisément, les études menées dans ce manuscrit portent sur des textes où la traduction alimente une piste de réflexion dans le travail de création chez certains-es auteurs-es. C'est notamment le cas dans les traductions d'esprit expérimental d'Erín Moure et ses « intranslations » de la poète Galicienne Chus Pato (*Secession/Insecession*), du projet de « réécriture » de *The Book of Disquiet* et *Le Livre de l'intranquillité* de Fernando Pessoa pratiquée par le groupe de performance interdisciplinaire PME-ART, et de la traduction en tant « qu'image dialectique » dans le roman *The Obituary* de Gail Scott. Dans le corpus ciblé par mes recherches, la traduction dépasse ses fonctions normatives de médiation et de transfert d'une langue à une autre et s'avère être plutôt une utilisation à des fins épistémologique. Par exemple, la traduction comme épistémè sert dans les trois chapitres de ma thèse de méthodologie de lecture qui, comme événement poétique, pense la traduction à travers la poésie. L'objectif de cette étude est non seulement d'offrir une analyse novatrice et critique dans le cadre des études littéraires, mais aussi de contribuer à de nouvelles avenues de recherche ciblant la poétique de la traduction et la recherche création.

Mots-clés: Traduction, poétique, méthodologies de lecture, Walter Benjamin, littératures canadiennes, écritures expérimentales, poésie et prose du XX et XXI siècle, rapports de la pensée

Abstract

The Poetics of Translation: A Thinking Structure is concerned with what can be known through the poetic and theoretical vectors of translation, both as a poetics as well as a reading methodology. More precisely, through a reading of contemporary experimental texts – those by Gail Scott, Erin Moure, Chus Pato, Fernando Pessoa and PME-ART – I investigate translation’s poetic and epistemological possibilities as well as translation itself as episteme (as knowledge and understanding). Erin Moure’s generative “intranslations” of the Galician poet Chus Pato (*Secession/Insecession*), the radical rewriting practice of English and French translations of Fernando Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* and *Le Livre de l’intranquillité* by the Montreal performance collective PME-ART, and the poetics of translation as dialectical image in the novel *The Obituary* by Gail Scott all contribute to my understanding of translation’s poetics as a thinking structure. The purpose of this study is not only to furnish an innovative and critical understanding of translation’s various permutations in contemporary experimental texts, but also to contribute to new avenues of research targeting translation and research creation while ultimately bringing translation on the side of poetry rather than the inverse. The works I examine thus offer modes of thinking about translation as a form of poetic juxtaposition and as a cypher that is concerned with what can be apprehended or understood in the elliptical space(s) of an in-between.

Keywords: Translation, poetics, reading methodologies, Walter Benjamin, Canadian literatures, experimental writing, 20th and 21st century poetry and prose, thinking structures

Table of Contents

Résumé	i
Abstract	ii
List of Figures	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	1
The Poetry of Translation: Translation as a Poetics and Reading Methodology	
Chapter One	29
Friendship and Translation in Erin Moure and Chus Pato’s <i>Secession/Insecession</i> : Writing on an Incline	
Chapter Two	89
Rewriting Fernando Pessoa’s <i>The Book of Disquiet</i> : PME-ART and the Afterlife of Translation	
Chapter Three	136
Standing in Translation’s Wake: Gail Scott’s <i>The Obituary</i>	
Conclusion	193
Translation as Poetry: Writing What’s Not There and the Creation of New Spaces for Thought	
Bibliography	201

List of Figures

Fig. 1 The scribes at their task (photo credit: Christian Bujold).....	132
Fig. 2 Second room “conveyor belt” view & projection (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery).....	133
Fig. 3 Rewrite close-ups (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery).....	133
Fig. 4 Scribe, Adam Kinner, reads from his transcription (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery).....	134
Fig. 5 Becoming contemporaries with Fernando Pessoa’s <i>The Book of Disquiet</i> (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery).....	134
Fig. 6 The Monster Book in preparation (photo credit: Marie Claire Forté).....	135

Acknowledgements

This thesis is indebted to poetry above all else. The many forking paths, caesuras, and fathomless aporias that guided this research astray also led the way towards discovering a poetics of translation that is also a language of inquiry.

I have been lucky to find the support of many mentors – all of whom have been inestimable companions: my supervisors Dr. Lianne Moyes and Dr. Jane Malcolm, my examination committee Dr. Anne Quéma, Dr. Eric Savoy, Dr. Amaryll Chanady, and Dr. Gilles Dupuis, as well as my colleagues from the International Research Training Group (IRTG) on Diversity in both Montreal and Germany. In many phases of this research, my thinking was buoyed by generous interlocutors who offered transitory and budding ideas refuge: Dr. Anne Quéma (thank you for thinking alongside this work!), Dr. Jessi MacEachern, Julia Charlotte Kersting, Dr. Madeleine Stratford, Dr. Belén Martín-Lucas, Dr. Catherine Mavrikakis, and Dr. Myriam Suchet. I also benefited immeasurably from the critical and creative practices of so many authors and practitioners – too many to name here: Avital Ronell, Gail Scott, Erin Moure (thank you for your ardent reading and comments!), Nicole Brossard, Renee Gladman, Nathanaël ... a list that can only end with an ellipsis.

I am grateful for the financial support that carried me through my studies: SSHRC (*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*), IRTG (International Research Training Group) on Diversity, and l'Université de Montréal's FESP (Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales). I consider myself privileged to have been able to pursue this degree with more than a full belly, a roof over my head, a lent computer when mine suddenly decided to retire in the final stages of writing, and the knowledge that should

any of these circumstances change my family would be there to see me through the difficult times.

Finally, to think and write alongside love is perhaps the greatest privilege of all. To David who sees beyond and helps me to see it too.

Introduction

The Poetry of Translation:

Translation as a Poetics and Reading Methodology

“Traduire, s’ouvrir un chemin dans une langue en utilisant ses ressources, décider pour un sens, c’est sortir des impasses angoissantes, aporétiques de toute traduction. C’est accomplir le geste philosophique par excellence, un geste de trahison.”

— Sarah Kofman, *Comment s’en sortir*

“The language of poetry is a language of inquiry, not the language of a genre.”

— Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*

“The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything”

— Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation”

“The buried speech that creates a soundless gap between languages is at the heart of translation.”

— Gail Scott, on translating France Théoret’s *Laurence (How2)*

Introduction: Translation's In-between(s)

Translation's relationship to a conceptual in-between hardly seems to demand a learned or scholarly explanation. In many respects, it seems self-evident: there are differences among languages; there are challenges to finding the meaning of a word in one language and then in another; there are ways of exploring, with translation, the (un)common networks to which words belong; there are misunderstandings and losses that can occur; but there is also a widened understanding of linguistic and cultural differences, the addition of new meanings, and perhaps even the discovery of a new relationship to language(s) that can emerge as well. All these readings of in-betweenness are fascinating and thought provoking in their own right, but they are not exclusively the kind of betweenness I have in mind throughout *The Poetics of Translation: A Thinking Structure*.

For my own part, translation's relation to an in-between raises several questions that relate it back to poetry, or more specifically, still, to a poetics. In the work that follows, the poetics of translation is understood as that which manifests itself out of literature and a literary practice, which is as much a space of language and poetic license as it is a theoretical and philosophical one. This encounter, between translation and poetry, is thematized as a shared relationship with both forms' ability to think and create within the interstices of various gaps and aporias.¹

Characterized by motion and even as that which escapes, my point of departure in this dissertation is a reflection on the poetic and epistemological possibilities of translation. Rather than consider motion as defined by a movement back and forth, I've found it much more productive and exciting to think about what translation motions to in

¹ The relationship I define between translation and poetry parallels the one Avital Ronell

the haptic sense of what it might point to or bring forward. Of course, to think of motion in this way, in terms of apprehension rather than movement, is not to argue for a reading of translation as synthesis or fixity but to gather instead some thoughts and threads on the poetics of translation as a language of inquiry² and as a thinking structure.

During the intuitive phases of this research, I was not yet aware that I would eventually start to unravel the poetics of translation as a thinking structure. I knew only that I wanted to know more about translation as a conceptual and philosophical apparatus in texts – those by Erin Moure, Chus Pato, Fernando Pessoa, PME-ART, and Gail Scott – that weren't necessarily considered translations in the normative sense. At the time, my thinking was heavily influenced by Nathanaël's poetically astute writings on translation, especially her seductive proposition that "to translate is to touch" (*At Alberta* 16). What emerged from these considerations was a realization that translation's touch is fleeting. By "fleeting," I do not mean to gesture to translation's relationship to impermanence even though I embrace the notion that transience is part of translation's manifest. Translation's touch is fleeting because unlike the notion of equivalence that we might associate with the science of mathematics, for example, translation's relation to equivalence is precisely that – a matter of approximation and relation. It is an oblique gesture at best, one that attempts proximity even beyond impasse.

It is in the aforementioned sense, of translation's motion beyond impasse, that I append to translation a reading of that which escapes. Here, what escapes is not a

² In her book length collection of essays, *The Language of Inquiry*, Lyn Hejinian proposes the term "poetics" as a practice that works at the interstices of phenomenological and epistemological concerns (2). This study retains Hejinian's formulation of poetics as a "language of inquiry" that is the outcome of a relationship between formal innovation and concerns for something else: social, epistemological, phenomenological, universal or particular claims, etc. (2).

weakness of translation but a strength. Translation demands invention. Anyone who has ever tried his or her hand at a translative exercise will know that translation is not an answer to the translatability of an original. The most challenging aspect of translation, in fact, is working beyond aporias, beyond those moments of impasse where differences among languages forge new relationships to language(s). While countless studies on translation either express curiosity, criticism or delight in translation's ability to move meaning from one linguistic context to another, or as a semantic piece of shrapnel cutting its losses, paying (or not) its debts for its infidelities, this study wants to know what translation, as a poetics, makes legible. What does it narrate? What does it motion towards – other than, and outside of, a *geste accompli ou raté* in the space of an impasse?

The route I take is one I've learned from poetry or rather from poetic structures, for my notion of poetry is rather large and extends beyond the poem and into those spaces of oblique relations where gaps leap toward meaning but not necessarily in an attempt to obtain certainty. Poetry, in other words, thrives in the in-between and in aporetic disturbances; it is a practice which does not attempt to foreclose the object and subject of its inquiry through analytical synthesis; it embraces forms of knowing that reside outside the need for certainty as it works its way across various intervals and resonances, differences and dissonances. In short, it is a thinking structure.³

The links between translation and thinking, or translation and philosophy are links that in the forthcoming chapters are constantly redrawn. One of the only constants that seems to come through each chapter is the relationship translation has to apprehension and forms of presencing. To a large degree, translation is equated with a “making visible”

³ Judith Balso's *Affirmation de la poésie*, a book which explores the nexus between poetry and thought or poetry as thinking, is a gem in this regard. The same can be said about Alain Badiou's *Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique*, which I refer to in Chapter Two.

that grants legibility to the gaps that are woven in and between Erin Moure and Chus Pato's biopoetic text *Secession/Insecession*, Fernando Pessoa's unfinished work *The Book of Disquiet* and PME-ART's rewriting of the aforementioned book in *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*, as well as Gail Scott's overlapping narrative in her novel *The Obituary*. Translation in the above-mentioned sense, like poetry, acts as a focalizer: a way of reading and of gaining a deeper understanding into aporetic structures. Throughout the chapters that follow, I locate these aporetic structures within the texts themselves, as poetic components of the work, but I also encounter aporias outside the texts as a matter of relation or of bi-textual reading. Thus, translation's aporias are as much a part of the poetic component of the works I consider as they are part of what directs my reading methodology.

The question that ignites my thinking throughout these pages, then, can be summed up as follows: what can be known through the poetic and theoretical vectors of translation? Admittedly, it is a very broad question, and I don't believe I undermine the work herein by suggesting that it is a question that simultaneously goes both answered and unanswered. During the course of my research, I sought to make sense of literature itself as a translation of the aforementioned intersection, which is doubled or brought to life in the act of reading. But there is a very specific conceptual knot underlining the concerns I raise in my thesis, which is: what/how does translation think? Focusing on translation as a site of exchange and meaning making seemed intuitively evident at first; however, what was more difficult to extract was not just translation's epistemological contributions but translation itself as episteme (as knowledge and understanding). This

sparked a new question: what could be apprehended (learned or gleaned) by reading (original) literary works through the lens of translation?

To answer such questions, I have found it useful to bring the poetics of translation on the side of poetry and literature, and more importantly to consider translation, as I have previously gestured to, as a language of inquiry. My thinking in this work thrives in those spaces where the work of experimental texts – whether that work is social, theoretical, aesthetic or all of these – remains open.⁴ Of course, my treatment of the term translation here is problematic since translation – as a concept or a practice – can mean a number of things. And, indeed, in my dissertation translation is not a singular notion as it takes on many forms.

Let me begin, then, with a quick overview of what translation implies in the following chapters, starting with a reading of the poetics of translation which will be followed by a discussion about translation’s importance as a reading methodology. This double approach allows me to better understand what emerges in the relationship between

1. what a work provokes or illustrates in its in-betweens – with the possibility of creating something new

⁴ By “open” I have in mind Lyn Hejinian’s account of the difference between an open and a closed text in her essay “The Rejection of Closure”:

We can say that a “closed text” is one in which all the elements of the work are directed toward a single reading of it. Each element confirms that reading and delivers the text from any lurking ambiguity. In the “open text,” meanwhile, all the elements of the work are maximally excited; here it is because ideas and things exceed (without deserting) argument that they have taken into the dimension of the work. (43)

In short, the open text invites the reader’s active participation in the construction of meaning within the text; it simultaneously rejects the authority of hierarchies (those of the writer and those implicit in other structures as well (social, economic, cultural)) and privileges the process of composition, either by the writer or future readers, over the product (43).

2. and how the poetics of translation provide knowledge into what eludes or escapes our grasp; how it provides the conditions for an unpredictable encounter.

In sum, my dissertation is interested in understanding the something more that lurches forward beyond various forms of impasse, and which is akin to something like a thought process.

Translation as a Poetics and Reading Methodology: Forging a Way Toward a Thinking Structure

The intersection between a work of art's poetic properties and what it provokes or illustrates is partly what concerns Walter Benjamin in the opening pages of his essay "The Translator's Task"⁵ where he asks: how can a work's relationship between information and its poetic components allow us to understand translation? In Harry Zohn's English translation, the question is articulated as follows: "If the original does not exist for the reader's sake, how could the translation be understood on the basis of this premise?" ("The Task of the Translator" 70). By "premise" Zohn is referring to Benjamin's proposition that works of art are not intended for an ideal reader. In Steven Rendall's translation, the question is articulated as follows: "If the original is not created for the reader's sake, then how can this relationship allow us to understand translation?" ("The Translator's Task" 152). Rendall's recourse to the notion of "relationship" rather than Zohn's use of the word "premise" returns to an earlier question Benjamin asks which, in its phrasing, suggests an entanglement between two properties of a work of art:

⁵ In German, *Die Aufgabe der Übersetzer*. All citations are taken from Steven Rendall's translation in *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédactions*, Vol. 10:2 (1997): 151-65. See also Harry Zohn's English translation, "The Task of the Translator," originally published in 1968 and revised in 1982.

1. its message: what it communicates,⁶ what information it supplies and
2. its poetic properties: “what is generally acknowledged to be the incomprehensible, the secret, the ‘poetic’” (“The Translator’s Task” 152).⁷

In asking how the aforementioned relationship might allow us to understand translation in relation to an original work, Benjamin is not asking about a work’s translation but about translation itself; he says: “How can this relationship allow us to understand translation?” (“The Translator’s Task” 152). In other words, we are not in the operation of the original’s translation but in the very operations of translation itself within a work of art – that, I think, is a crucial difference, and it is one of the driving preoccupations of my dissertation’s interest in a given work’s relationship to a poetics of translation as well as translation itself as a reading methodology.

Interestingly, while it may seem as though Benjamin is suggesting that the poetic components of a work remain beyond our grasp, or that the poetics of translation themselves lie beyond our understanding, his essay remains much more productively ambiguous on this point. While “The Translator’s Task” might not provide insights into how to become a more astute translator, it does touch upon the tectonics of translation by providing various visual analogies and places of assembly (vessels, dwellings, passages,

⁶ Other parallels, beyond the one proposed by Benjamin, are possible here as well – namely models of translation which fall in at least two categories: the instrumental and the hermeneutic. The instrumental model treats translation on the basis of communication and the transfer of meaning from one language to another. The hermeneutic model approaches translation as an interpretation that is mediated by social and cultural determinants (See Lawrence Venuti’s “Introduction” in *Translation Studies Reader*). Different models will, of course, engender different translating strategies. Certain assumptions about language and textuality also give way to different understandings of the limits of translation. For some, translation is utopian in the sense that while it is necessary, it is also an impossible task. For others, translation is a question of utility. The diversity of languages logically requires it (See Paul Ricoeur “The Paradigm of Translation”).

⁷ In contrast to Rendall, Harry Zohn’s translation includes the adjectives “unfathomable,” “mysterious,” and “poetic” (“The Task of the Translator” 70).

etc.) where what escapes is simultaneously what survives in a relationship of “special convergence” between languages (“The Translator’s Task” 154).

Translation, in Benjamin’s estimation, has the ability to show how languages change over time. Importantly, it is an understanding about language that goes beyond any single literary work. It is an understanding in and of language that nudges translation into a critical apparatus that is also a thinking structure. It becomes the translator’s task to remain attuned to that which remains unfathomable, beyond comprehension, mysterious, and secret. In short, such a task is concerned with the poetic properties of a work of art and its motion beyond the aporia of an impasse, beyond what escapes. Not only does Benjamin give a name to this form of impossible passage, that of textual afterlife which I shall return to shortly, but he also describes such moments in terms of the work’s translatability.

It is this element of translatability within a work that I have in mind when I gesture to translation not just in terms of a poetics but how it can also serve as a reading methodology. The question of a work’s translatability concerns a text’s address and whether or not – which parts – it will surrender to being translated. According to Benjamin, the most significant works find textual afterlife not because they are translated but because there is something about them, an ambivalent quality of (un)translatability, that calls for translation (“The Translator’s Task” 152). Such a call is precisely what motivates my thinking in this dissertation. The conclusion I draw from the aforementioned intersection between translation as a poetics and translation as a reading methodology, and which I shall sketch in more detail throughout these pages, is that such an understanding of translatability, especially of what is left over – that something else or

extra that lurches forward beyond words⁸ – is not only akin to something like a thought process,⁹ but that this intersection, as a poetic juxtaposition between what is (not) and what is left over, proposes a deeper understanding of how translation itself as a thinking structure creates halts or tensions that become entangled in a process of making visible, which is also a process of knowing through the entanglement of difference. My task throughout these chapters, then, is to employ translation as a reading methodology, as a cypher, that is concerned with what can be apprehended or understood in the poetic in-betweens of a work.

The Poetry of Translation: Translation as Proximity Beyond Impasse

Reading a literary text, as Paul de Man has argued, “leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means” (*Resistance to Theory* 15). There is something that sticks to you, like a kind of subcutaneous perfume.¹⁰ The poetic character of translation is a lot like this perfume. There is something in the openings that

⁸ It is with the musicality of the following passage by Erin Moure, written in an essay on translation, poetics and affect, that I choose to echo here in my use of “something more or extra that lurches forward beyond words.” In her essay, entitled “Translation and Its Affective Challenges: Bodies, Spacings and Locales from the Okanagan to the Deza, from Canada to Galicia,” Moure writes “[t]ranslation’s affective challenge (and joy) then *is* this traversal, this seeding of a place *beyond* the text, where two texts shimmer and something *more* or *else* coalesces” (*Evening Will Come* italics in original).

⁹ I have the halt of Benjamin’s dialectical image in mind here, especially as it is articulated in a well-known passage from *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk* in German):

To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions – there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image. The latter is identical with the historical object; it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process [N10a, 3]. (475)

¹⁰ I’ve rehearsed this idea elsewhere – namely in an essay I wrote in 2016 on Daniel Canty’s travel narrative *Les États-Unis du vent*. The essay is called “Stimulants, Influences, Narcotic Effects” and can be found here: <http://towncrier.puritan-magazine.com/reviews/etats-unis/>

are created in its poetically brocaded compositions that either slips out or that we slip into as readers.¹¹ Each chapter in this dissertation shapes itself around these indeterminate, over-sung notes and woven patterns in order to read into the text a husk or sheath or shell that carries something elusive, something which emerges beyond what the language of the work can hold, something not easily assimilable.

Several concepts contribute to my readings of the unassimilable qualities of texts by Erin Moure, Chus Pato, Fernando Pessoa, PME-ART and Gail Scott. Before I outline what some of those are, it is crucial to point out that the texts I read throughout the following pages are not necessarily translations in the normative sense of the term. This is true on many levels: the authors of the works I examine do not automatically have to be translators, nor do the works I read necessarily have to be translations. Instead, the texts I examine move beyond models of translation as forms of transfer from a source to a target language and embrace in its place a space of poetic juxtaposition and overlap through formal experimentation. I should also point out that my use of translation as a poetic framework for reading the aforementioned literary texts should not be read as metaphorical; rather, the use I make of the term subverts the idea that translation is somehow self-evident or recognizable through key concepts or configurations such as original and translation, source and target text, fidelity and equivalence. This is why the emphasis I place on the poetics of translation as a thinking structure, and thus as a language of inquiry, is so significant.

In this study, the knowledge created out of the conditions of translation in a work

¹¹ Elsewhere and in an entirely separate topography of circulation, Jeanette Winterson suggests that this kind of intoxicating quality of language is one where “You can slide into it, [...] but you can’t slide over it. The language is not about conveying information; it is about conveying meaning (“Preface” *Nightwood* x).

– its poetics – is an effect of a special convergence between various forms of overlap and poetic juxtapositions that push the boundaries of poetic expression forward in the in-between of a work’s becoming. In such cases, convergence is not reserved to language alone but to formal elements of a text that carry conjunctive properties which shift parts of a work’s reach across gaps and aporias and into spaces of legibility, even dialogue.¹² By bringing translation on the side of poetry or poetic expression – as a formal feature of a work – translation becomes a way of pointing to the knowledge of that which – extracted from the strata of poetic juxtaposition – is (still) in process and might (partially) be eluding our grasp.¹³ In this sense, translation is both a poetic feature of a work as well as an effect and a function of reading for the convergences between various forms of overlap and poetic juxtapositions.

The concepts I use to describe this tectonic convergence or architectural feature of translation as poetic juxtaposition and overlap are various. These concepts serve less as interpretative grids that I apply to the texts I read than poetic frameworks which are derived from my readings of the works themselves. Some of them have already made an appearance in the arguments woven above. Textual afterlife, for instance, is a term Walter Benjamin uses to describe the circulation and legibility of original works across time and the aporias of various impasses. Similarly, translatability is an intrinsic quality

¹² For Antoine Berman, the mutual transformation of the original and its translation are framed within “the mediation of what is foreign.” In *L’Épreuve de l’étranger* he writes:

The very aim of translation – to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one’s own through the mediation of what is foreign – is diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture, that species of narcissism by which every society wants to be a pure and unadulterated whole [...] The essence of translation is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering. Translation is ‘a putting in touch with,’ or it is nothing. (Trans. Stefan Heyvaert in *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany* 4)

¹³ Avital Ronell refers to this space of enunciative overlap as “a trace of a relation to an ungraspable alterity” (“On the Misery of Theory Without Poetry” 18).

of a work that finds (or not) its articulation in relation to an oeuvre whose language resists containment and in some cases even resists being translated. On the notion of overlap, Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image is perhaps this thesis' most ardent interlocutor even though the term itself is only explicitly utilized in my third and final chapter on Gail Scott's novel *The Obituary*. There, the dialectical image creates the conceptual scaffolding for my reading of Scott's overlapping narrative – its co-existing characters, voices, temporalities, landscapes, buildings, etc.

Indeed, Chapter Three begins on the heels of Walter Benjamin's elliptical and compact assertion in his *The Arcades Project* about an alternative temporality: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present [...] rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill" (*The Arcades Project* "Awakening" 462; N2a, 3). As a type of montage, the dialectical image manifests itself as a moment of translatability of the past for a present (or a "critical now" as Benjamin often refers to it) that has yet to arrive.¹⁴ For instance, the predominant interpretation that historical time progresses from a chronologically linear past to a chronologically linear present no longer applies. The image as undecidable-flash-of-recognition, which gets released from the dialectical entanglement of the past and the present's encounter, disrupts the idea of any fixed order, especially temporal, as it simultaneously motions to the flickering disappearance of that which appears. Given my specific interest in the poetics of translation as a poetics of apprehension, Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image provides a useful notion for thinking about the potential continuity between poetry and translation through issues of

¹⁴ This notion of errant futurity is one I will soon return to in reference to Avital Ronell's concept of the rumour-text, which I also link to Walter Benjamin's notion of textual afterlife.

legibility, but it also serves an equally interesting case for thinking about what emerges when parts of a work blur (together).

Even though my recourse to the dialectical image does not fully announce itself until the final chapter, the notion nevertheless gathers a kind of ghostly momentum throughout the first two chapters where counterposed materials and their irreducible difference(s) move translation into a space beyond mediation and into something much more incalculable instead. I see this incalculable threshold – of one dilated and deferred space to another – as essential characteristics of poetry and of translation as well, hence why they are regarded in this dissertation as coevals.¹⁵ The approach and interest I bring to issues of legibility within the context of a work's poetics of translation is motivated by my desire to address various overlaps and phenomena of encounter in a text. This is why the dialectical image is such an important undercurrent in my thinking – it opens a line of becoming that sets in motion something we have yet to grasp. What I am after here is not mastery but translation as poetic juxtaposition, translation as a making present, and translation as a form of thinking together.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Erin Moure's English translation of Chus Pato's inaugural speech upon her investiture into the Royal Galician Academy on September 23, 2017. Pato's address, *Baixo o limite* (which in English is entitled *At the Limit*), treats several philosophical aspects of poetry – most notably its ability to speak beyond words and to make the unknown known in the tremor of the space of the caesura. After a brief section on the halt and tension in Walter Benjamin's dialectical image, she writes:

The poem provides a union of opposites, of counterposed materials not meant to be joined in synthesis, but which, in their detention, their caesura, allow a contemporaneity of language to be written that moves thinking into a space beyond argumentation, via the incalculable entity that is metaphor [...] As such, the poem does not advance from argument to argument, but exposes itself from threshold to threshold, from sill to sill.
(34-5)

This little gem of a book arrived on my desk just as I was in the midst of revising my dissertation. While Pato's thinking – and Moure's translation of it – ghosts my own in the passage above and has helped me to chisle my thinking into a critical-poetical vocabulary that links poetry to translation and vice versa, I am equally grateful to both poets' work and thinking on the enunciative and epistemological possibilities of poetry, for they have allowed this work to take leaps that would have taken me much longer to attempt on my own.

Beyond Benjamin's dialectical image, all three of the aforementioned orientations find a home in the philosopher Avital Ronell's concept of inclined writing, which is a term she coins to describe texts that make room for a thinking-towards that does not merely involve an inclination toward an other but that also consists of a text's receptivity to the alterity of thinking itself ("Walking as a Philosophical Act"). Inclined writing, in other words, is a form of writing in any genre where the poetry of speculative thinking dominates over the need for mastery and certitude. When we encounter inclined writing in Chapter One on Erin Moure and Chus Pato's *Secession/Insecession*, we encounter texts that perform methods of radical inquiry through equally radical methods of inscription,¹⁶ texts that open up a space of relays, texts which embrace their own difficulties in maintaining a sense of equilibrium along uncertain and uneven ground, texts which open onto collaborative spaces in the sense that they tantalize by reaching toward spaces for thought that lie obliquely within the grasp and gaps of one text in relation to another.

In inclined writing – which Ronell places in contradistinction to what she terms as writing on the decline – gaps, leaps and jumps in narrative are welcomed interruptions that reconfigure the text. A faltering text, inclined writing presents dis-junctions as operative parts of the text's trajectory and momentum. In contrast, a text that is written on the decline is one that has an entirely different relationship to textual embodiment. These texts present a form of closure in relation to knowledge that do not necessarily urge or invite their readers to think alongside of them.¹⁷ Translation – especially in the context of

¹⁶ For her part, Erin Moure calls this form of writing "intranslation" – a neologism she coins to capture her "echolation-homage" of Chus Pato's work.

¹⁷ One might also think of Lyn Hejinian's distinction between a closed and an open text in her essay "The Rejection of Closure." Inclined writing relates to her conception of the open text in its

an experimentally engaged poetics – furnishes the conditions of inclined writing. Like thinking, translation’s structure remains more or less open-ended, or as I have intimated at several junctures in this introduction already, it may offer a way out of an impasse and a way into spaces of legibility, even dialogue. Translation, as inclined writing, is a form of thinking-towards that embraces the possibilities that might emerge in its uncertain process.

Other texts or parts of texts are even more radical in their uncertainty as they remain stubbornly lodged in a state of open-endedness and undecidability. This is the case in relation to my reading of Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* and PME-ART’s rewriting of the previously mentioned work in Chapter Two where, pushing the open nature of inclined writing to its furthest edge, PME-ART’s performance and the book that instigated it challenge our ability to know *how* to receive such works. These are texts or pieces of text that, as though disseminated through rumourological airs, remain volatile, hence the name Avital Ronell gives to these uneasy textual compositions – that of rumour – to account for those textually capricious instances where, for various reasons, the texts seem to stand at the threshold of time. The concept of the rumour-text is linked to my reading of the works’ poetics of translation in its ambivalent relationship to an original. According to Ronell, a rumour-text is “a widely disseminated report detached from a discernible origin or source. Inasmuch as it becomes what it is, the spreading rumour takes on the qualities of a story told, without author or term, imposing itself as an ineluctable and unforgettable account” (“Street Talk” 126). Unpredictable and seemingly unhinged, a rumour-text, like translation, is one that travels ahead of its time and, like the

embrace of that which exceeds conceptualization and has a quality of open-endedness whereas a text written on the decline is a closed text that “delivers the text without any lurking ambiguity” (*The Language of Inquiry* 43).

dialectical image, it bears deep within its structure a characteristic of errant futurity. In the sense of its syncopious misalignment with the time of its circulation, the rumour-text is that equivocal part of a work's translatability that is riddled with unrest and possibilities for non-arrival – or else its appearance occurs in belated or alternative channels, as through the dialectical image, for example, where the buried text might flash in the reader's mind's eye.

Benjamin's notion of textual afterlife also offers an alternative way of thinking about the rumourological quality of some compositions. In his essay "The Translator's Task," Benjamin frames the notion of the afterlife of works of art as a feature of their translation. As he points out, in its constant renewal of an original, translation not only gives rise to an understanding of the original as a mutable form characterized by unrest, it also grants the original an afterlife.¹⁸ In figuring translation as an afterlife, Benjamin also points out that "the notion of the life and continuing life of works of art should be considered with completely unmetaphorical objectivity. Even in the ages of the most prejudiced thinking it has been suspected that life must not be attributed to organic corporeality alone" ("The Translator's Task" 153). Like Ronell's rumour-text, Benjamin's notion of textual afterlife depicts occurrences where texts run ahead of their author(s) – even independent of them – as they espouse a certain life of their own, an auto-mobility of sorts, that continues to circulate (even) in the absence of the subject (Ronell "Street Talk" 108). This will become clearer in respects to my reading of the

¹⁸ The word Benjamin uses to describe the continued life of works is *Fortleben*: a translation proceeds from the original. Not indeed so much from its life as from its 'afterlife' or 'survival' [*Überleben*]. Nonetheless the translation is later than the original, and in the case of the most significant works, which never find their chosen translators in the era in which they are produced, indicates that they have reached the stage of their continuing life [*Fortleben*]. ("The Translator's Task" 153)

rumour-text as textual afterlife in Chapter Two and in my treatment of the rumourological qualities of the (un)translability of uncertain signs in Chapter Three's reading of Scott's *The Obituary*.

Shifting Differences and the Space of the (Un)Known

In the early phases of this research, my initial attempts at naming and defining the literary phenomenon at work in these authors' texts described their use of translation as innovative. While such an account satisfied my desire to acknowledge the originality of their approach to writing, such a depiction also remained vague when I considered that innovative uses of translation could also refer to any number of approaches, not all grounded in literary works, that made use of translation in the manner I intended to describe; for instance, an innovative use of translation may simply refer to a creative linguistic solution that is implemented in order to overcome the challenges associated with finding an equivalent in the target language.

I also hesitated to describe the translative writing under discussion as "creative uses of translation" since the same vagueness, as with my use of the term "innovative," arises here also. For instance, one could ask: aren't all translations creative transpositions? Read along the indeterminate edges of such questions, the literary works figured throughout these pages are not easy to characterize: are they translations or something else?¹⁹ What I would later discover is that naming these works' relationship to translation was perhaps less important than being able to articulate why and how they

¹⁹ Umberto Eco asks a similar question in *Experiences in Translation*: "When is a translation no longer a translation but something else?" (61). Sherry Simon also quotes this passage from Eco in her chapter on "perverse translations," wondering when it is that a translation goes too far (*Translating Montreal* 159).

were inciting me to think about translation in ways that were unusual. One of the driving concerns motivating my readings in each individual chapter can be more or less summarized in the questions: what does translation make visible? And what does it allow one to know?

In my first chapter on Erín Moure and Chus Pato's dually authored book, *Secession/Insecession*, translation first appears in the form of an interlingual transfer: Moure translates Pato's Galician text, *Secesión*, into the English *Secession*. This is perhaps the most straightforward occurrence of translation in my dissertation insofar as it adheres to one of the three definitions Roman Jakobson gives to translation in "Linguistic Aspects of Translation."²⁰ Of the three types of translational operations he defines, Moure's English "interlingual translation or translation proper" of Chus Pato's biopoetic Galician text provides but one example of translation's pertinence to my study (Jakobson 429). But even this clear-cut example is quickly complexified when one considers the generative opening that this Galician to English translation provides Moure: a chance to write her own echo and corresponding text, in English, where she adapts, echoes and responds to features of Pato's text and translates them from the inside out so that they now correspond to her own lived experiences. This new text, *Insecession*, is not a

²⁰ In "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson distinguishes between three ways of interpreting verbal signs: *intralingual translation* uses other signs of the same language and is considered by Jakobson as a form of "rewording"; *interlingual translation* or what he calls "translation proper," is an interpretation using another language, while *intersemiotic translation* which he also refers to as "transmutation" uses nonverbal signs such as a drawing or a painting (127). Jacques Derrida in "Des Tours de Babel" notes an important nuance in relation to Jakobson's models. According to the philosopher, Jakobson does not take into account the inherent plurality that accompanies every attempt at translation:

Il suppose qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de traduire, tout le monde comprend ce que cela veut dire parce que tout le monde en a l'expérience, tout le monde est censé savoir ce qu'est une langue, le rapport d'une langue à l'autre et surtout l'identité ou la différence en fait de langue. S'il y a une transparence que Babel n'aurait pas entamée, c'est bien cela, l'expérience de la multiplicité des langues et le sens 'proprement dit' du mot 'traduction.' (217-18)

translation of *Secession* in the proper sense of an interlingual transfer from one language to another. Nevertheless, there is a binding correspondence between the two texts that warrants a comparative reading similar to the kind one might perform between an original text and its translation.

Such a reading is encouraged by the fact that the layout of the book recalls the face à face arrangement of bilingual editions, only in this context both works appear in English. As a text that is written out of her English translation of *Secession* and is therefore prompted by it, Moure's *Insecession* borders *Secession* in interesting ways. Take for example, the biopoetic nature of Pato's *Secession*. In combining the bio with the poetic, Pato partitions *Secession* into various short, autobiographical poetic-prose vignettes. Each piece offers a meditation on her life, on growing up in Galicia, on poetry, as well as on her poetic practice. Similarly, Moure's *Insecession* develops her own equivalent life narrative, echoing Pato's biopoetic meditations with her own experiences growing up in Calgary (Alberta), her work as a poet, as well as her views on poetry. In contrast to Pato's text, Moure's *Insecession* weaves in several reflexive musings about her work as a translator, as Pato's translator in particular, and about Pato's influence on her work. In that sense, *Insecession*'s refractive composition is just one of the ways in which Moure foregrounds translation's generative poetic possibilities. In the prefatory notes to the book, Moure calls this kind of refractive writing an "echolation-homage" that is also an "intranslation" of Pato's work (*Insecession* 8).²¹ While I shall shed more light

²¹ In the prefatory notes to *Insecession*, intranslation is described in the following manner:

I now recognize a third text alongside the readerly and the writerly: let's call it the intranslatable. The intranslatable is the unreaderly text which catches fire, burns in the mouth, an instance continuously outside any likelihood, whose function – ardently assumed by its scripter – is to contest the mercantile constraints on what is written. This text, guided, armed by a notion of *material*, prompts me to redact the following words:

on these terms in my first chapter, it is worth pointing out that both neologisms gesture to Moure's use of translation as a compositional mode that is also a writing alongside of – a thinking towards; this form of writing, where Pato's *Secession* becomes yoked to Moure's *Insecession*, takes the form of a positive affirmation that I frame as an act of thinking together, a way of writing that inclines toward the other, and that places translation in the purview of a poetics of friendship.

In Chapter Two, I contemplate a bilingual performance by the interdisciplinary performance collective PME-ART, entitled *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*, where they set out to rewrite Fernando Pessoa's *Livro do desassossego*'s French and English translations (*The Book of Disquiet* in English and *Le Livre de l'intranquillité* in French). Although Pessoa worked on the manuscript from 1912 until his death in 1935, the book was never assembled or published in his lifetime. It wasn't until decades later, in 1982, that the first version of the book appeared. I say the first because the book would undergo a number of mutations depending on the editors, scholars and translators who worked to assemble it from Pessoa's archives. Four different translations and numerous editions exist in the English language alone (those versions include translations done by Richard Zenith, Iain Watson, Alfred MacAdam and Margaret Jull Costa). Alongside publishing work in his name, Pessoa created a number of heteronyms to which he attributed a life distinct from his own. After crediting the book to

Dear Chus, I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I can intranslate it, like a conflagration, a drug, an insecession, an e(ri)nigmatic disorganization. (8 emphasis in original)

one heteronym and then to another, Pessoa finally relinquished *The Book of Disquiet* to his semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares.²²

Following the gallery's opening hours, PME-ART's performance is notable for the various ways the scribes transcribed, modified, and rewrote themselves into *The Book*. While it may be tempting at first to link PME-ART's rewriting of the book to Roman Jakobson's concept of intralingual translation (rewording), such a method would quickly be frustrated by the fact that PME-ART's rewrites move beyond rewriting as paraphrase. In fact, their rewrites do not set out to faithfully transcribe or reword Pessoa's text. At least not in a conventional sense. The rewrites are often punctuated by many creative departures from the original text that attempt to render the book "a little happier" and "a little more of our time" (Jacob Wren *Canadian Art*). Like Moure, PME-ART uses Pessoa's work more as a pretext for writing than a word for word model to be loyally copied. Sometimes, for example, drawings and calligrams completely replace Pessoa's textual fragments.

Translation nevertheless remains pertinent to a reading of Pessoa's work as well PME-ART's performance as it highlights the residual effects of a work's afterlife. The notion of afterlife is important to my reading of Pessoa's book as well as PME-ART's performance because one of the most significant aspects of afterlife, as I pointed to above, is not just how it challenges the linear progression of a text, from its inception to its publication or from a source to a target text, but how it questions the very idea of a destination. The term afterlife, in other words, names something about the condition of textuality itself – its rumourological qualities – rather than its arrival.

²² For a detailed account of how *The Book of Disquiet* changes across time see Richard Zenith's "Introduction" to his edition and translation published in the Penguin Edition, 2002.

The enmeshment of Moure's text to Pato's in Chapter One and my insistence on reading such moments as instances where translation takes on the form of inclined writing, allows me to read the texts' translative and differential aspects through a reading of departure rather than arrival. Working from this dislocation, Chapter Two continues the work of Chapter One by pushing its reading of translation to the limits of a text's errant features. If bits of Pato's text ghost Moure's writing in *Insecession*, PME-ART's performance ghosts Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* in a similar manner – albeit with a kind of hallucinatory intensity that gives the poetics of translation a latent address that invites various temporalities to co-lapse.

In Chapter Three, a conventional understanding of translation as either intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic – as outlined by Roman Jakobson – is rendered even more obscure. In other words, while in my second chapter I demonstrate how PME-ART's rewriting of Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* generates what I called a perceptible encounter with a work's continuing life or afterlife, Chapter Three continues with Benjamin's notion of the afterlife of translation and explores how issues of translatability give way to the apprehension of various "sightings" or forms of presencing which suggest an emergent relationship to forms of knowledge as well.

Instead of thinking of translation in terms of a transfer from one code or language to another, the notion of translatability, as modeled after Walter Benjamin's essay "The Translator's Task," points to a more useful concept for intercepting what is not "spoken" in language and yet emanates from its formal structure. I am thinking here of Benjamin's powerful yet enigmatic concept of the dialectical image as itself a form of translatability, which he treats in two works in particular: his massive *The Arcades Project* as well as his

essay entitled “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”²³ As shall become much more apparent in Chapter Three, while *The Obituary* is not a translation in the conventional sense, it modulates its narrative within different layers of poetic overlap and this overlap – in turn – creates conditions of translatability for the reader.

Given the “slippy-slidey sentences, switching this way + that” of its multidimensional structure, a reading of *The Obituary* via translation summons various challenges (*The Obituary* 39). This is in part due to the fact that Scott’s work troubles boundaries. The novel is framed by various forms of poetic juxtaposition: philosophy and poetry, fiction and nonfiction, French and English, etc. The layering of various forms of co-lapse, similar to the one found in Chapter Two, is also made palpable in the space between the various temporal references in which the work takes place. In light of this, it is not only the boundaries between original and translation that (en)fold (each other) but also their conventional temporal distinctions. The novel evokes an ever-changing littoral where the shores of one temporality or one narrative frame to another refuse fixity. They are ever-fluctuating borders. Scott’s work thrives in these indeterminate states.

While I have outlined some of the motivations for working with the concept of translation alongside my corpus – as poetic components of the work – there is a further and perhaps more pressing dimension of the significance of translation for my dissertation’s chapters and that is the use of translation as a reading methodology. In all three cases examined in the work herein, translation is present where there is a simultaneous acknowledgement that “something” isn’t quite getting through, something which defies comprehension or certainty. For example, when Erin Moure creates a companion homage-piece to her English translation of Chus Pato’s text, she not only

²³ “Über den Begriff der Geschichte” in German.

makes Pato's influence on her own work visible, she also makes visible the restrictive policies of *The Canada Council for the Arts*, a federally based granting program that supports the Canadian publishing industry and its independent publishers by offering various subsidies. In fact, the politics surrounding the publication of the translation allow one to "read" much more than the book itself. To be sure, the book translates the very conditions of its possible or impossible circulation by pointing to the fact that the book's publisher could not receive financial support from *The Canada Council* unless the book object contained "at least 50% Canadian-authored creative content" (*Canada Council for the Arts* "Book Publishing Support: Block Grants"). Hence the dually authored nature of the book and Moure's generative intranlations of her English translation of Pato's work.

While Chapter One reads translation through the conditions of a work's circulation, amongst others, Chapter Two engages with translation as a reading methodology on an entirely conceptual level. For Alain Badiou, the question of the reception of Fernando Pessoa's work is one characterized by philosophy's belatedness in knowing *how* to receive the work. What Badiou is referring to is the idea that Pessoa's oeuvre is neither Platonist nor anti-Platonist. For the French philosopher, philosophy has not caught up to Pessoa because it has not known how to work beyond those terms (*Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique* 73); it has not known how to embrace the aporias (the intangible, the irrepresentable, the void, the latent) that Pessoa's work opens and which – as a linking of both poetry and thought – still need time to be thought through (*Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique* 74). In many ways, this is the challenge proposed by a work's translatability and, as Walter Benjamin has pointed out, whether or not "among the totality of its readers" it will ever find "an adequate translator? Or, more pertinently,

whether by its very essence it allows itself to be translated” (“The Translator’s Task” 152).²⁴

In my third and final chapter on Gail Scott’s novel *The Obituary*, my concern shifts from how works of art circulate and are presented in the world to what gets translated in the in-between spaces of poetic juxtapositions. The use of translation as a reading methodology works side by side with Scott’s poetics of translation as narrative overlap where both formal structures work to signal or alter the relationship between the said and the unsaid, certainty and uncertainty. In an attempt to wrestle with questions of temporal multiplicities in Scott’s novel, I approach her use of narrative overlap as a dialectical image that translates the latent content concealed within the novel’s compositional lines. As a thought provoking halt caused by overlapping conditions, *The Obituary*’s relationship to the dialectical image has the potential to translate, for the reader, more than what is on the page.²⁵ I have reserved my thinking on Scott’s *The*

²⁴ To understand these matters from another angle, it is helpful to remember that earlier in his essay, Benjamin proposes that a work’s translatability opens onto two questions: the first has to do with finding an adequate translator even though the work itself is not meant for the reader; in other words, a work of art is not aimed at an “ideal” receiver even though it may fall into the hands of a future reader who will claim responsibility for being addressed. The second question Benjamin poses has to do with a work’s translatability and whether or not it allows itself to be translated (“The Translator’s Task” 152). To this question he adds that “the translatability of linguistic constructions would accordingly have to be taken into consideration even if they were untranslatable by human beings” (“The Translator’s Task” 152). The statement is a bit clearer in Harry Zohn’s translation: “the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them” (“The Task of the Translator” 70). Thus, it might be that a work’s translatability might amount to nothing except the remainder of an indifferent site. In other words, there is no guarantee that translatability will surge forth. In fact, there is the sense that translatability remains elusive and, in many ways, just beyond reach. The reason I am choosing to linger on this quote is because I think it encapsulates well translation’s relationship and enmeshment between what a work illustrates and how it illustrates it. Thought another way, translatability springs forth in the undecidable gap between what a work “says” and what it “does.”

²⁵ If the dialectical image’s jarring ability to point to what appears as being that which simultaneously disappears from view baffles, it is perhaps because it is difficult to conceptualize the apparition of the indeterminate or irrepresentable as a flicker of presence that vanishes at the

Obituary for the final chapter of this dissertation, as it is where the poetics of translation as a reading methodology is at its most percipient.

In *The Poetics of Translation: A Thinking Structure*, I perform a literary study of textual works that espouse an innovative relationship to translation. These are texts that move beyond the model of translation as a form of transfer from a source to a target language. Instead, translation becomes a mode of formal experimentation as well as a theoretical approach to writing. In considering the ways in which the literary texts in question challenge our understanding of translation and its role in contemporary innovative writing practices, what I show in this dissertation is that these works are examples of translation's creative and epistemological potential beyond translation as an end in itself. As I argue throughout this dissertation, translation is the radiant poetic continuum that pushes the works to innovative edges; it is what makes them radical, visionary and multidimensional works of art.

Translation measures the trace or measures the absence of something. Its consequences for thought and the way we see things – whether they are things happening in the here and now or in the space of fiction – pursue the condition of language as a thinking structure. Translation is the expression of (two) things participating in each other's existence. With translation as overlap and poetic juxtaposition, aspects or outlines spring into focus to address what falls outside of language's efforts to communicate, to circumscribe. To point to what cannot be put into words and to assess the counterpressure of one in relation to the other, translation's poetic expression alters aspects of a work, reroutes it, turns it into an affirmation of resistance. No matter how indirectly, translation

same time as it materializes. Perhaps, it might serve us, then, to remember that poetry and poetic structures excel at making images emerge from spaces which are “nothing” but in-betweens that trigger relationships into meaningful compositions.

brings about the recognisability and apprehension of the presence of a tension.

Translation is an unacknowledged thinking structure.

Chapter One

Friendship and Translation in Erin Moure and Chus Pato's *Secession/Insecession*:

Writing on an Incline

“The poem writes what’s not yet there”

— Chus Pato, *Secession* (Trans. Erin Moure)

Preface: Testing the Interval (in the Altitudes of Elation²⁶)

In this chapter, I examine the space opened up by Erín Moure’s translation of Chus Pato’s Galician biopoetic text, *Secesión*, into the Canadian English *Secession*, which is published alongside her own co-responding homage-text in Canadian English, *Insecession*. Both texts are bound together, with *Secession* on the right and *Insecession* on the left, in a dually authored edition called *Secession/Insecession* (Bookthug 2014²⁷). *Secession/Insecession* is, in fact, a shorthand form for the title that appears on the cover of the book, “*Secession* by Chus Pato *with Insecession* by Erín Moure,” a title which – in turn – is expanded between the covers of the book and reads, “*Secession* by Chus Pato the Erín Moure translation *with Insecession* by Erín Moure her Chus Pato echolation” (np).

In theorizing what emerges from the dually authored work as going beyond the normative dualisms of source and target text, I argue that, as a bicephalous text and as a text that comes to think together, *Secession/Insecession* disturbs normative translation practices by unsettling delineable patterns of categorization. There is an erotic quality to the movement of the writing as well. One that is evident in the reciprocation of Moure’s text to Pato’s – the way Moure writes lovingly into and out of her translation of Pato’s *Secession*; how she foregrounds Pato’s text as the very impetus for her own. Returning to the site of the slash in the title, I posit that *Secession/Insecession* offers a model for

²⁶ Following an invitation by Dr. Belén Martín-Lucas, an early version of this section, entitled “In the altitudes of elation ‘we look up and hold the folds of language inside us without any word for wind:’ at the start of the light we ask, what is *Secession/Insecession*?,” appeared in *Canada and Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 6 (2017). Iterations of the research included in this chapter have also appeared in *Traduire / Translating: Intermédialités*. Ed. Myriam Suchet, Vol. 27 (2016) under the title “Letters On The Move: Erín Moure and Chus Pato’s *Secession/Insecession* and Nathanaël (Nathalie Stephens)’s *Absence Where As (Claude Cahun and the Unopened Book)*.”

²⁷ Now known as Book*hug.

translation that goes beyond the realm of equivalences as it asks: what does a poetics of friendship entail for translation?

Written as a series of short reflections on the poet's life and poetics, Chus Pato's Galician biopoetic text, *Secesión*, was originally published in Spain in 2009.

Secession was published in Galician in 2009 as the fourth book in Chus's pentalogy *Decrúa*, which means *tilth* and *tillage* and *tilling*, breaking soil for the first time. The name of the pentalogy refers to that historical time in Europe when nomadic peoples went to the common forests and cut down trees to till soil for the first time, becoming sedentary. It also refers to a beginning, to an unfinished project, as it were. The soil is upturned: what will grow? *Secession*, of course, refers to the freedom of a poet, and to the Viennese Secession, the artists who at the end of the 19th century Vienna resigned from their artists' association in protest against conservatism. In Galician, the book is the biography of a poet, and also a poetics. (Moure in Conversation with Christina Davis "Outside the Fold")

Refracted through the poet's considerations of identity politics, places, nations, languages, ecologies, bodies, and friendships – Pato's *Secesión* opens onto a holistic literaryscale that contemplates the place of the poem in the world. In the process, Pato, and Moure after her in *Insecession*, shows how her poetic practice moves along the fault lines of subjectivity, thought, language and love. Indeed, the work moves porously between the genres of autobiography, poetry and the essay as each short piece incorporated in Pato's *Secesión* engages several aspects of the question *where does one write from?* For Moure, this also entails a reflection on her work as translator, which is folded into her response-text, *Insecession*.

Insecession is Erín Moure’s homage and “echolation” of Pato’s *Secession*, meaning that each text in *Insecession* not only attempts to answer or to respond to something in her translation of Pato’s biopoetics, *Secession*, but in doing so, her text also produces its own accompanying/echoic biopoetic discourse. As Moure explains,

I realized that, being the same age as Chus and having a similar position as poet in my own culture, I could write my own biography and poetics, as an echo and homage to Chus’ [...] In *Insecession* I talk about my own poetics, and very different experience of life (I grew up in a democracy in full postwar expansion, Chus in a dictatorship in postwar contraction), but also, more importantly, about translation. (In Conversation with Christina Davis “Outside the Fold”)

Though the work’s relationship to translation is unquestionable, the dually authored nature of the book requires some unfurling, especially given that Pato’s original text, *Secesión*, is not the text that faces Moure’s translation. Instead, the original is replaced, in this bitextual edition, by the translator’s response to her translation.²⁸ Thus, the work not only addresses the significance of both poets’ biography, their relationship to poetry, and the question of *where one writes from*, but it quite meaningfully transports these concerns onto the terrain of translation as well.

***Secession/Insecession* and the Relation of the Texts Across the Incline of the Slash (/)**

I am interested in the following sections in exploring some of the ways Moure and Pato’s texts break ground by treading both next and away from each other. The titles alone already entitle the break: *Secession* and its link to *secedere* or to move apart, to break

²⁸ Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza makes a similar observation in his essay on the poetics and politics of difference in *Secession/Insecession* entitled “What politics where breath fractures?: (in)translation and the poetics of difference” (2018).

away; the in of *Insecession* expressing a state or condition of being both within and without, graft and graph: “Now my work haunts hers forever,” writes Moure as she reflects upon the fact that she has been translating Chus Pato’s work for “ten years (in 2013)” (*Secession/Insecession* 158); “She doesn’t yet speak English, though so my work remains not just inside but outside hers” (*Secession/Insecession* 158). What is at stake, to quote another passage from the work, is “the relation of text to bodies” and one’s “relation of transmissibility” (Moure 112). For Pato, the minuteness of modest, everyday gestures is encapsulated in the poet’s lifetime of writing poetry:

A poet spends a lifetime writing poems, just so that some line, some tiny fragment enters the memory and dream of the language.

As a cataclysm or splendour, the poet’s name is remembered (Ferrín, Novoneyra, Hölderlin, Rosalía), or the title of a book, a miniscule snippet to reconstruct the vista or the smallest word that renews the sonic key of the language (*Secession/Insecession* 123)

According to Pato, the poet’s relation to language and – reciprocally – language’s relation to bodies is not only part of a gothic order, it is one already in secession: “Any language is ghostly because language is the nothingness of the living world extended in a body” (*Secession/Insecession* 131); she continues, still insisting on the caesura, “But my nothingness stays there, at the *finisterra* where breath fractures” (*Secession/Insecession* 131).

Secession and *Insecession*, as texts written across the aforementioned caesura, are also texts which are literally pitched at each other and at the reader from the position of an oblique relationship – an incline that is made evident, at least on the titular level, by

the slash that divides and links both titles (as Moure and Pato's texts tend to one another through the typographical manifestation of the slash's incline). Given the very specific kind of title Moure grants to her response-text, it is difficult to ignore that she interweaves *Insecession* with *Secession*, meaning that the two texts not only face each other but that one is also nestled in the other:

The slash is a graphic way of presenting a bicephalous book: our titles appear as equals. Although Pato's biopoetics *Secession*, in this edition, is interwoven with my own *Insecession*, it is in no way subordinate to my text, but is its very cause, its precursor and its most precious interlocutor. *Insecession* is my biopoetics nestled "in *Secession*." They appear "with" each other because they are friend texts, reverberative. (*Lemon Hound*)

That graphically the incline of the slash suggests the texts are equals does not necessarily amount to an equal exchange between both texts. While they appear together as "friend texts" it is difficult to ignore that both texts are in English and that *Insecession*, as an homage and response-text, exists in excess of *Secession* as it is derived from it. As Moure herself suggests, *Insecession* is caused by *Secession*. But my use of the word excess need not carry negative connotations.

As the structure of the echolation-homage attests, the book is written out of a loving admiration for the work of her friend; it is about marking an address to her friend, Pato, drawn as/out of an act of humility, a mode of reception, and a way of marking/listening to the work and its impact on her own thinking.²⁹ Moure, herself,

²⁹ During interviews and public events, it is not uncommon for Moure to exclaim that she has gone to Chus Pato university – a claim also made by H  l  ne Cixous in relation to Clarice Lispector and her "learning experience 'at the school of Clarice'" (Cixous qtd in Arrojo "Interpretation as Possessive Love" 149).

makes such a remark when she proposes that as much as translation is an act of creation, it is above all an act of humility and listening:

Translation to me is an act of creation, as engaging and strenuous as that of creating poetry. The constraint of having to try to reproduce the effects of the original poet distills the mind incredibly. That said, translation is not an act of creation; it is an act of humility and listening. (Moure in Conversation with Christina Davis “Outside the Fold”)

Not only does Moure thank Chus Pato in the prefatory notes to the work, she ends the book by insisting that “*Insecession* could not exist without the enduring friendship of Chus Pato, without her *Secession*, and without her willingness to let me translate her” (*Secession/Insecession* 174). For her part, Pato has dedicated the section entitled “Thoughts, Behave Yourselves,” which houses five texts on the multiplicity of the “I” through its relation to “you,” to Erin Moure (*Secession/Insecession* 175). The evocation of friendship is important to consider here, and one that I shall soon develop in relation to a poetics of translation, but first it is crucial to outline a few notes on method and to justify the trajectories of inquiry that will or will not take precedence in this chapter.

What Is *Secession/Insecession*? A Note on Method

With all this time spent on the nature of the book, on the question of *what Secession/Insecession is* – a bicephalous work with an incontrovertible relationship to translation – it is useful to point out that, in asking the question *what is*, this study could have followed a rather deductive approach and been led to speculate on what it is not, or even what it is similar to, drawing historical parallels with works of a similar and

dissimilar nature. Considering the face à face nature of Moure and Pato's texts, as *Insecession* appears on the left and *Secession* on the right, the work recalls the side-by-side layout of bilingual editions which allow the reader the occasion to read the translation and the original together. Only *Secession/Insecession* is not – as I have already begun to point out – a conventional bilingual edition. In fact, it is not a bilingual edition at all, at least not in the standard terms of original/translation. Appearing entirely in English, Pato's original, *Secesión*, has been replaced by Moure's translation, *Secession*, and the place typically reserved for the translation is occupied by Moure's new/"original" text, *Insecession*. To attribute the nomenclature of "original" to Moure's *Insecession* is misleading, however, for as she clearly states at the outset of the book, "each text in Canadian English responds to a Pato text" (6). *Insecession*, then, can be read, in part, as a text addressed to Pato's *Secesión* as well as its English translation, *Secession*. In both cases, Pato's work acts as the source text from which *Insecession* springs.

There are other avenues and venues as well – a comparative study, for instance, which would have sparked a reading that juxtaposes *Secession* against *Insecession* – meticulously marking the ways in which one text arrives or departs from the other. While I have not completely forgone the comparative reading just described, the readings I will be performing across the divide of the slash will be done more with the bitextual figure of dual authorship in mind and its theoretical implications for literature and translation. In other words, while it will prove fruitful to mark the ways the texts respond to each other, my interest throughout this chapter will be in reading the work with the preoccupation of what the slash in the title theoretically dis-conjoins.

With the *va et vient* of the aforementioned comparative reading in mind, another possible avenue to consider might have been to probe the significance of departedness in relation to friendship and Aristotle's view of friendship as loving the other as one would the deceased, and therefore not demanding love in return.³⁰ Why this quick pit stop to speak of friendship? Because friendship is significant to the space in which *Insecession* and *Secession* occur. Given that they accompany and face each other, at least in the Canadian-English translated edition published by BookThug in 2014, they are to be considered – not as mirror images of each other – but as friend or companion texts.³¹

As a philosophical backdrop for this study, then, it will in fact prove worthwhile to keep the question of the friend/companion text in mind and wonder what the poetics of friendship entail for translation. Interestingly, there has not been a great deal of scholarship published on the dual subject of translation and friendship. Though there are abundant theoretical resources on the subject of alterity, ethics, and care – even questions of intimacy and love in the politics of translation – the leap toward the friend is one that translation theory seems to have more or less ignored.³² My aim, then, is partly to address this lacuna as well as the repercussions of models of co-authorship that give way to a thinking with and alongside the other.³³

³⁰ From Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* (VII, 4, 1239 a 35-40) here referenced in Derrida's "Politics of Friendship" (Trans. Gabriel Motzin and Michael Syrotinski, with Thomas Keenan). *American Imago*. Vol. 50: 3 (1993): 353.

³¹ In an interview published in 2014, Moure states: "*Insecession* is my biopoetics nestled 'in *Secession*.' They appear 'with' each other because they are friend texts, reverberative" (*Lemon Hound*).

³² Spivak is one glaring exception, an exception that will be addressed further in this chapter.

³³ I am indebted to the following scholarship on the subject of friendship: Jacques Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié* (1994), Avital Ronell's *Complaint: Grievance Among Friends* (2018), Maurice Blanchot *L'amitié* (1971), Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin's editorial signature with *Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry* (2013), Andrew Epstein's *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006), and Ginette Michaud's *Juste le*

The question of friendship will, in time, lead this study to riff off the two-headed or bicephalous nature of the work, not necessarily taking the ancient road of mythology, the gothic, or even that of science fiction with its question *what if* and the leaps made possible there, but wondering instead what possibilities emerge from the echoes that are inserted in the structure of the dually authored work and the embedded act of thinking together that arises there. I will explore, in other words, how the two-headed nature of the work allows Moure to make the echo of Chus Pato's influence on her work visible. In this sense, *Secession/Insecession* is an unusual text in the way it deviates from translation theory's more standard preoccupations regarding the (in)visibility of the translator as it adds to that preoccupation the (in)visibility of the impact a work has on its translator.

In a book that is entitled by the very complaint mentioned above, *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), Lawrence Venuti critiques the idea that a translated text must be delivered as fluently as possible to the reader in its new context; this, according to Venuti, implies that the translated text be received by the reader as though it were, itself, the original text, and therefore the translator must remain as invisible as possible:

“Invisibility” is the term I will use to describe the translator's situation and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture. It refers to two mutually determining phenomena: one is an illusionistic effect of discourse, of the translator's own manipulation of English; the other is the practice of reading and evaluating translations that has long prevailed in the United Kingdom and the United States, among other cultures, both English and foreign-language. A

poème, peut-être (Derrida, Celan) suivi de SINGBARER REST: l'amitié, l'indeuillable (2009). Whether explicitly quoted in this chapter or not, these works encouraged me to pursue my line of inquiry regarding translation's relationship to friendship.

translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original.” The illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning. What is so remarkable here is that this illusory effect conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text. (1-2)

Venuti's claim that the invisibility of the translator doubly effaces the cultural and material conditions shaping the work *and* its translation has had a substantial impact on translation theory's articulation of an ethics of translation. One of those effects is the attention paid to the impact a translation and its translator has on an original; such considerations – as those granted to the translator's impact – run against the grain of the idea of the translator as a marginal figure. Instead, the translator's visibility gives her authorial status.

While Moure's inclusion of *Inseccion* alongside her translation of Pato's *Secesión* offers her the opportunity to make herself, as translator, visible – especially given that she includes several reflections on her work as translator – Moure brings the

ethical injunction of visibility one step further in *Insecession* by showing how her work, as writer and translator (and as human being), is deeply impacted by the work of Chus Pato. In *Insecession*, she writes, “ONE CAN’T in fact translate Pato without being utterly changed and challenged in one’s own poetic, poesis, that is never ‘one’s’ own or one’s ‘own’” (162). The statement, while it reflects well Moure’s generous poetics, also emerges out of the context of her response to Pato’s text; a possible corresponding passage in Pato reads: “THE POEM doesn’t fit in the poem, nor in the entire language, nor in the shadow of the language” (163). In that moment, the standard conception of the visibility of the translator, as one who impacts the original through her translation, is turned into an even more generative figure, as Moure shows how the impact works in both directions. Whether or not Pato’s passage on the poem is the originating germ that prompted Moure to respond with a passage about translation is not as important as the fact of the passages’ enmeshment with each other. In the reader’s passage from one to the other, the authority and authenticity of an original text ceases to exist as space is opened for a lively bitextual dialogue instead. Moreover, while it is usually accepted that translation changes something in the nature of the original, *Secession/Insecession* suggests that not only is the reverse also true but that the translator herself is also affected and changed in the process.

Finally, what I propose to undertake throughout the following pages, and this I believe is not contrary to the possibilities I have been pinning to this study’s diverging lines of inquiry, is to follow the inclinations of literary translation as a form of “speculative inventiveness” and “poetic probe” and to “think small, preferring the spec over the spectacular,” which is a posture of thinking I will develop shortly and that I am

borrowing from the philosopher Avital Ronell (with Diane Davis “Breaking Down ‘Man’” 377, “Walking as a Philosophical Act”).

Writing on an Incline: Inclination as Poetic Approach

In an interview with the philosopher Diane Davis, entitled “Breaking Down ‘Man’: A Conversation with Avital Ronell,” Avital Ronell suggests that the prizing of “scientific objectivization” comes at the cost of inducing a kind of phobic reaction to the philosophical modesty of more poetic approaches in a scholarly work (377). Her own work champions such “modest” poetic approaches; of course, the measure of modesty is to be read, in part, under the scope of irony here, as Ronell’s work is constituted through a poetic approach to thinking that is not, by any small measure, moderate or unassuming. Her work, which is always delivered with layer upon layer of densely poetic and theatrical material – never straightforward – opens philosophy’s viewfinder to marginalized, unexplored or overlooked territory: stupidity, addiction, complaints, the telephone – these are but a few of philosophy’s “modest” refuse items, which are given refuge in Ronell’s work both through the hospitality of a densely philosophical and poetic thinking and her own modest posturing of embracing (poetic) undecidability over certainty. As Diane Davis remarks,

This interruptive force [in Ronell’s work] – inasmuch as it does indeed “startle, irritate, illuminate” – takes a certain swipe at certitude, prompting rigorous hesitations that open the conditions of possibility for what Ronell’s works are always after: an ethics of decision in a postfoundational whirl(d). [...] That is, she takes on the role of gracious host to anything that must be evicted/evacuated for

a discourse of mastery and certitude to sustain itself. And why host such a radical party/text? Because it's within the space of certitude's withdrawal that the possibility for what she calls "responsible responsiveness" becomes available: the possibility, that is, for an ethics of decision after the so-called "death" of the humanist subject. (with Avital Ronell "Confessions" 243-44)

Ronell's work, in its engagement with what she terms "responsible responsiveness," like Moure's relationship to Pato, begins with her transformative reading practice and her production of "genre-busting texts," a practice which does not attempt to foreclose the object and subject of her inquiry through analytical synthesis but that rather aims to keep the text open even as she works with and alongside of it (Davis *ÜberReader* xxiv).

For Moure, Rancière and Pato provide such a model of responsible responsiveness:

THE "EXCLUS" or excluded is a conflicted actor, in Rancière's notion of the political; she is a figure who does not try to smooth over that cut or blow of the scinding or secession; the scimitar slash between law/fact, right/death. In Chus Pato's work, this figure would be the poet, who excludes herself or admits to being excluded, and who therefore speaks. (*Secession/Insecession* 160)

In Pato's *Secession*, the figure of excess and undecidability is embodied both in the poetry that is intermixed with the prose on the page as well as the (thinking) poet:

THUS language, that up to this moment has done nothing but communicate, realizes: that it transfers. It realizes that it speaks where there is a world to speak of [...] It sings what never happened, or will ever happen and what always occurs in the poem: strangeness, surprise at being human and speaking, at being similar

and strange to ourselves [...] (161-63)

In both cases the writer's work breaks with the instrumentality of language to focus instead on that which remains eccentric to language, poetry for example, for "the poem writes what's not yet there" (Pato *Secession/Insecession* 159). Poetry, according to Pato, is "the hardest zone of a language" (161). For poets/thinkers such as Pato, Moure and Ronell, poetic approaches embrace forms of knowing that reside outside the need for certainty, for poetry – to echo the aforementioned quote by Chus Pato – is that part of language that resists absorption.

The philosophical modesty of Ronell's poetic approaches, and the inclination to "think small" and to read for the "spec rather than the spectacular," is further explored in a talk the philosopher gave in the context of a lecture series offered at the European Graduate School in 2014. Entitled "Walking as a Philosophical Act," Ronell's lecture examines a series of (small) steps and mis-steps taken by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (*Reveries of the Solitary Walker*). In the talk, Ronell explores the relationship of knowledge to transcendence, suggesting that the grammars of epistemological trajectories are not only wholly unstable but that the supposed unity and rigour of certitude and mastery over various objects of attention are but romantic ideals that "presume a level of understanding" (Davis *ÜberReader* xxiv). Ronell is critical in her essay of the figure of the sure-footed philosopher who comes down the mountain to share *his* enlightenment – a discourse which is exclusionary as it requires mastery and certitude to sustain itself (Ronell "Walking as a Philosophical Act", Diane Davis with Avital Ronell "Confessions" 244). During the opening remarks of "Walking as a Philosophical Act," Ronell states:

I want to consider simply in terms of philosophical tracts [tracks] and literary tropologies, the history of coming down the mountain. The lawgivers, the light-bearers, the phallus-wielders, the world-class illuminated came down the mountain. Socrates, Moses, Nietzsche and Zarathustra [...] fatefully came down the mountain. They delivered. Rousseau, for his part and parts, came crashing down a hill. So I think the fact that he traces and tracks the way he falls on a hill also pushes against a whole tradition of philosophical and literary positing. Rousseau makes us ask about postures and figures of thinking on the move, our relation to the path – remembering that in Greek *methodos* is path – so what’s our relation, our method, what it might mean more precisely to write, as Rousseau says, on the decline. He’s actually, in the second reveries, walking down and writing on the decline. [...] So what it means to write on the decline, on an incline, only to lose one’s standing. (“Walking as a Philosophical Act” my transcriptions)

Working on the metaphorical register of philosophical “tracts” as ways of “making tracks,” Ronell suggests that, at least in “Western” philosophy, there is a tradition of “doing” philosophy, of walking the philosophical walk and, by implication, of talking the talk that suggests a “certain” relationship to knowledge and transcendence. In light of these remarks, Ronell asks: what does it mean to perform a series of mis-steps, to stumble, to depart from an established course, and to lose one’s grounding? What is the responsibility of the one who writes (on the decline or from an incline), and what is her relationship to the mirage effect of certitude?

Inspired by Ronell's critique of the sure-footed philosopher and her reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* as a text that breaks new ground by questioning the very grounding of the ground, I am interested in the following sections in tracing how *Secession/Insecession*, as a dually authored book with a dialogical form and as one that falls in "sharp contrast to romantic images of the writer as an autonomous and heroic thinker or creator," is an example of inclined writing – one that, among other deviations from the figure of the sure-footed philosopher, dwells in opposition to the tradition of the solitary, illuminated walker coming down the mountain to share *his* enlightenment (Diane Davis with Avital Ronell "Confessions" 245).

Such moments of deviations from certainty are thematized across the misaligned echoes that traverse the response-structure of the two works. There, the reader's dialogical reading of the juxtaposed texts fractures the work into smaller echoic assemblages, unfinished what was once finished as he or she parses the texts for their various resonances. These resonances range in style. Some form a kind of mise-en-abyme. For example, where Pato's text reads, "I turn around, go with you; wherever you want to go, I'm going too" (*Secession/Insecession* 35), Moure's text responds, "And then she opened the book. *Oh poetry*. May I translate? Wherever you are going, dear poem, dear Chus, I am going too" (*Secession/Insecession* 34). Other resonances have a furthering effect that reterritorializes an idea from one text and expands upon it in the other; the following passage, from Pato's *Secession*, "for some time, I considered my texts to be hybrids, but writing is a mutant, a territory," is expanded upon in *Insecession* and reads: "for years I considered myself the author of my texts, then the texts mutated and the territory became open, like snow" (*Secession/Insecession* 32-33). In the previous

example, Pato's reflection on the hybrid aspects of her poetry is self-reflexively absorbed in *Insecession*. While the term "hybrid" in *Secession* could be referring to a number of constraints, in *Insecession* it becomes a comment on authorial originality.

Ronell's resistance to certainty as a form of "responsible responsiveness," it should be pointed out, especially when read in relation to the modest approaches presented above, is not merely a question of working against the attainment of assurance or truth about a given subject. It is also about turning our attention to philosophy's modest refuse items, those undecidable, marginal subjects that do not figure or are disfigured in discourse; such an inclination asks that we remain attentive to various modes of address: to what might be and is often considered small, minute, or trivial; and to remain attentive to those modes of address that, for whatever reason, refuse to address, overlook their address, or are hurtful in their mode of address.

In light of the emphasis placed on various relations of address, it is useful at this juncture to return to the significance of friendship that was hinted at in the beginning of this chapter with Moure's claim that *Secession* and *Insecession* are to be considered as "friend" or "companion" texts. Moreover, friendship is significant to this study not just because it is a subject that is itself one of those modest modes of address that is frequently either left untouched and uncharted in philosophical discourse, or because it is just as often euphemized, subsumed, and translated into other philosophical concepts – ethics, alterity, or hospitality, to name only a few – but because friendship, even by any other name, is important namely due to its ethical and political address and consequences – as that which unites or divides two or more individuals. Friendship is a relation

characterized of “betweenness,” and it is with this “betweenness” in mind that I explore translation’s relationship to friendship in the following section.

Friendship and Translation: Inclined Writing as a Mode of Address

In his essay “Politiques de l’amitié” (“Politics of Friendship”), Jacques Derrida asks how it is that the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship – from Aristotle to Montaigne, and Kant to Hegel, amongst others – have not accounted for friendships between two women or a man and a woman:

Entre les deux termes de l’opposition, le *scheme* ou le *symbole familial* (nous entendons désormais les noms “symbole” ou “scheme” au sens kantien: entre la singularité sensible de l’intuition et la généralité du concept ou de l’Idée). D’une part l’amitié fraternelle paraît essentiellement étrangère ou rebelle à la *res publica*, elle ne saurait fonder une politique. Mais d’autre part, nous l’avons vérifié, de Platon à Montaigne, d’Aristote à Kant, de Cicéron à Hegel, les *grands discours philosophiques et canoniques* sur l’amitié auront explicitement lié l’ami-frère à la vertu et à la justice, à la raison morale et à la raison politique.

La question principale porterait justement sur l’hégémonie d’un canon philosophique dans ce domaine: comment s’est-il imposé? D’où lui vient cette force? Comment a-t-il exclu le féminin ou l’hétérosexualité, l’amitié entre femmes ou l’amitié entre homme et femme? Pourquoi ne peut-on y tenir un compte essentiel d’expériences féminines ou hétérosexuelles de l’amitié? Pourquoi cette hétérogénéité entre *érōs* et *philia*? [...] Quel rapport entretient-elle avec la *double exclusion* qu’on voit à l’œuvre dans tous les grands discours éthico-politico-

philosophiques sur l'amitié, à savoir d'une part l'exclusion de l'amitié entre des femmes, d'autre part l'exclusion de l'amitié entre un homme et une femme?
(*Politiques de l'amitié* 308-310)

The open call at the end of Derrida's essay is towards a "coming" friendship – une amitié à venir – that interrupts models which are premised on an alliance between brothers (322; 339).

In *Secession/Insecession* such an interruption is identified with the proleptic powers of poetry on one side and translation on the other. As I have already pointed out, Pato declares the poem to be that which writes what is not yet there (*Secession/Insecession* 159). A few pages later, at the close of the book, Pato's *Secession* ends on the idea that the poem, as an invocation of love, coaxes forward an undecidable future: "The poem is an intelligent fissure, it's love that persuades time to exist, time that implants itself into what is to come, primogenital" (*Secession/Insecession* 169). Elsewhere, Pato writes, "[t]he poem is the politics of the future" (*Secession/Insecession* 121).

In another text in *Insecession*, such fissures in time are expressed in the undecidable temporality of translation that coaxes the poem both forward and back and forward yet again: "I translate Pato's work from the state of the finished or co-finished, in which I as translator interfere. I unfinish what she has declared finished, to finish it again in English" (*Secession/Insecession* 158). As Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza remarks, "In Jacques Derrida's terms, *Secession/Insecession* is an address 'without the least assurance,' a 'harzardous' plea to a future utopian community that differs from itself, and is deferred, in every present difference of the poem" ("What politics where breath fractures" 239).

Though love would seem the ideal gesture for working against principles of exclusion, beginning with the creation of new models for friendship beyond fraternity and a new conception of time, Aguirre-Oteiza nevertheless warns against this much too narrow reading of the work:

this poetics of love cannot be separated from a rhetoric of violence. *Secession/Insecession* interweaves personal family histories, instances of collective violence around issues of national identity and reflections on the Final Solution and ecological devastation. Moure's denunciation of the causes of violence reproduces her translation of Pato's words almost exactly: "Instrumental reason is a promise that will never be fulfilled because its greatest satisfaction is the destruction of the species and surely of the planet" (46-47). (237-38 "What politics where breath fractures")

Though Aguirre-Oteiza does not continue to cite Moure, it seems significant to add that, a few lines later in *Insecession*, the reader encounters echoes of Emmanuel Lévinas³⁴ when Moure writes, "I believe in a responsibility to the unknown in the other who faces me or faces away from me" (*Secession/Insecession* 46).

For her part, in an exchange with Diane Davis, Avital Ronell captures well the unreadable stakes of the modest friend in philosophical discourse:

Let us continue to think about what it is to be modest as we proceed and question and interrogate. So, to resume, I've been very interested in the undead and the friends, dead or alive, that one can have or not have, the barriers to friendship—all of which is sometimes laughably grim: what does it take for scholars to sustain

³⁴ *Éthique et infini* (1982), *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1990), *Totalité et Infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (1961).

friendships – does the institution disrupt or block genuine friendship, should such a thing or practice or gift exist? That’s another storyline. (with Diane Davis “Breaking Down ‘Man’” 378)

In a more recent book length publication on the subject of friendship, Ronell continues to wage a complaint against what she calls philosophy’s “unreadable calling cards of relatedness,” of what can and cannot be, on the one hand, considered friendship material, and on the other hand, what can and cannot be considered a serious subject of philosophical debate (*Complaint* 8):

As Derrida has argued, friendship serves as the blueprint for political discernment and for amorous cleaves. On this stagnation and related tropologies, women, for the most part, have been assigned to the historical sidelines, even though they prove adept at traumatically intrusive break-ins and manage to achieve a modicum of social rewrites. One thinks of Antigone, of Heinrich von Kleist’s feminine figurines that shoot out counter-memory to block historical narratives of entitlement; one continues to be struck by the howls of one-woman-lone-warrior types like Valerie Solanas; one continues to stress over the seething deflations of Ingeborg Bachmann and the ongoing peel-down of Sylvia Plath. (*Complaint* 9)

Beyond the premise of its exclusion of all subjects whose bonds are not constituted through brotherhood, the place literature makes for friendship, as subject, is often one generated out of elegiac circumstances. If not through death, the friend remains an arguably marginal figure, one relegated to a role of secondary importance, as sidekick or confidante.

Often written in the high style of philosophic homage to the deceased, these texts cite and recite the verses of the elegized writer, turning the gesture of citation – but most importantly the gesture of reading – into a generous homage. Maurice Blanchot’s work on friendship, though similar to the one that emerges from the slash in *Secession/Insecession*, situates its homage for the friend on the terrain of the elegy. For Blanchot, friendship requires us to cultivate “an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation” (“Friendship” 291). That ethical distance forms a “movement of understanding” that demands “discretion” (291); we are not to speak of our friends but to them (291). Speaking thus, there’s an acknowledgement that emerges for the “fundamental separation” between one friend and another – a “pure interval” that, for Blanchot, “measures all that is between us...[that] brings us together in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech” (291). In *Le Dernier à parler*, a text written shortly after Paul Celan’s death, Blanchot produces a text that illustrates the measured interval referred to above by working beyond the register of commentary on the work of his admired friend. While he cites Celan’s work, he also does so without specifying the specific source of the work such that his text is double: his commentary is translation and his translation is commentary (Michaud 141-142). In this double movement, Blanchot, like Moure, dramatizes translation as the site not just of reading but of homage to his friend (Michaud 141-142).

Under the guise of an ethics of translation, the relation between friendship and translation is neither original nor difficult to grasp when we consider that the question and practice of an ethics of translation is one deeply concerned with how to respectfully receive, approach, and accompany the other – the friend text – across languages and

cultures. From Lawrence Venuti's seminal work on the invisibility of the translator to Gayatri Spivak's view that the translator must be the text's most loving and intimate reader³⁵ – an ethics of translation is also an ethics of care where the translator must negotiate issues of hospitality and address, of ways of being with the text, the other, to be translated. As Spivak remarks,

To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical. In that situation the good-willing attitude “she is just like me” is not very helpful. In so far as Michèle Barrett is not Gayatri Spivak, their friendship is more effective as a translation. In order to earn that right of friendship or surrender of identity, of knowing that the rhetoric of the text indicates the limits of language for you as long as you are with the text, you have to be in a different relationship with the language, not even only with the specific text. (“Politics of Translation” 183)

As theoretical texts that underline an ethics of care in translation practices across cultures and the various axes of power this entails, these same theoretical texts also offer examples, at least in a transversal sense, of friendship's pertinence to translation. Here is Moure again:

It is difficult to duplicate or ignore this process [of breathing], as it is difficult (breathing) to ignore the relation with the friend, the one outside the skin tent (breathing) but similar, she who disagrees and looks differently, and contributes this different seeing to the texture of space-time, to an afternoon, for example.

We have an argument, briefly, over words and sentences.

³⁵ Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 2008; Spivak, Gayatri. “Politics of Translation.” *Inside the Teaching Machine*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 179-200.

Who we are:

Me along with you:

What do I/we mean by me/you here?

Poetry, it is said by this me which is not *me*, is a conversation, or a texture like a shawl and each one of us weaves our own particular corner, or the bit where we gently hold its edge, aware that others are pulling gently as well on the surface of the textile, contributing their own gesture to the whole. And none of us produce this whole, not on our own, not with our friends alone. None of us are this whole nor can any of us speak for this whole that is poetry, we can only bring our hands' work into the conversation, and raise not just our voice but our ears to it, to listen [...] Translation is about this too, this listening. (*Secession/Insecession* 148)

Even though the question of friendship is not one that is explicitly broached in translation theory's dedication to an ethical practice, asking about the significance of friendship for translation seems to derive naturally from the emphasis on care the translator must take in approaching the task of translating the other.³⁶

³⁶ Though there are other models, Hélène Cixous' translations of Clarice Lispector as well as Sophie Seita's translations of Uljana Wolf offer two pertinent examples of the significance of friendship in regards to translation. See especially Cixous' *Vivre l'orange* (1979) and Seita's translations of Uljana Wolf in *Subsisters: Selected Poems* (2017) and *i mean i dislike that fate that i was made to where* (2015). Oana Avasilichioaei and Erin Mouré's *Expeditions of a Chimaera* (BookThug 2009) would be another pertinent example, as would Mouré's *O Resplendor* (Anansi 2010). Other kinds of friendships, especially the ones forged between student and mentor, have been beneficial instigators for the translation of an oeuvre. The case of the English translations of Jacques Derrida's work is one case example:

Derrida's translators have almost invariably been his American students. Under these conditions, the act of translation has contributed to the transmission of knowledge through a reciprocal empowerment whereby the philosopher's word is widely disseminated in a move that enhances the disciple's authority and establishes or sustains an interpretive community. (Godard "Deleuze and Translation" 70)

Up until this point, I have floated above textual examples and a kind of theoretic grid grounded in an ethics of translation that can only begin to point to the various instances where translation is deeply affected by friendship, both real and textual. What I have thus far failed to convey is the important affective dimension of friendship as an encounter – real and textual – that can be so powerful, so influential, so electric, that it can change the course of a writer, translator or reader’s thinking. This is precisely the poignant anecdote recounted by Erin Moure in regards to her encounter – textual at first – with Chus Pato.

Literature and Translation: The Upward Fall

In “Walking as a Philosophical Act,” Avital Ronell suggests that it is not only *how* we walk along the philosophical path that is important in relation to how we approach a given subject of inquiry, but that we should simultaneously not be afraid to take into account various forms of interruptions that affect which steps to take next (np). As Ronell herself cautions, “we should not be afraid to look at so many archives of mis-steps. Taking a first step does not amount to following a prescriptive logic. Sometimes, thinking makes itself unavailable to cognitive ledgers and complexity overruns our ability to see straight” (np). Remaining close to the idea of overrunning, Ronell goes on to suggest that not only are various forms of movement important to the philosophical walk, but that stumbling is equally important. Recalling what she terms “a very Hölderlinean landscape,” Ronell goes on to suggest that it is even possible to experience an upward fall; we can also fall upward, she insists (“Walking as a Philosophical Act”). This upward fall is akin to an ecstatic or manic overreach. Certain interruptions, she suggests, occur in

moments of textual excess, like those of Barthes' text of bliss or *jouissance*,³⁷ which can be likened to a kind of "affirmatory crash" and the "joy of losing one's bearing and bounds" ("Walking as a Philosophical Act"). For Moure, poetry enacts such a fall.

In an essay on medieval Iberian troubadour poetry, Moure begins with an invocation of such a disruption: "*O cadoiro* is, literally, *the place where falling is made*. In Galician, *cadoiro* is one word for waterfall. *Cataract*, perhaps. Thus, *the fall*. This to me is the place of poetry. For whoever writes poetry must be prepared, ever, to fall down" (*My Beloved Wager* 271 emphasis in original). There are many ways to interpret the fall evoked in the passage above. For example, Moure narrates an instance when that great, unexpected fall takes place in the form of an encounter with the medieval Galician-Portuguese songbooks of troubadour poetry known as the *cancioneiros* (*My Beloved Wager* 271): "And in 2004 I did fall. Having already fallen into Galician and then Portuguese, I had one of the founts of lyric in Western Europe, the troubadour poetry of the medieval Galician-Portuguese songbooks, the *cancioneiros*" (*My Beloved Wager* 271). The love poetry of the troubadours are ecstatic poems mixed with existential meditations.

In this verse, the speaker's own subjectivity, own feelings, are the poetic "substance," yet these are quite consciously *constructed* by the poet, never "unmediated," always social, intended, and profane: directed toward another human, not to God. This human "turn" is at the very root of lyric, and the act of turning is a movement of incredible fragility and febrility – a turning away from God's love and its purported sufficiency toward a secular love that never purports sufficiency. (*My Beloved Wager* 272 emphasis in original)

³⁷ Barthes, Roland. *Le Plaisir du texte*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973 [2002].

Poetry is also the place of dis-junctions; from the brief suspension of enjambment to the breath or pause initiated by the caesura, the rhythmic exigencies of a given line are often a complex, choreographed stutter where moments of faltering, of causing the reader to stagger, is the place where, simultaneously, the line comes undone – perhaps even desires it.

In a book-length collection of essays on translation, the prolific writer and (self-) translator, Nathanaël, writes of translation, of the “failure of translation,” in a manner that is strikingly similar to Moure’s evocation of poetry, especially as it pertains to the lyric, and Ronell’s ecstatic upward fall:

Here, then. What I call here shall be ‘the failure of translation’. A place, liminal, interstitial, abyssal – all of these – into which we fall, as one might fall in love, breakingly, or else fall apart, devastatingly, catching on the pieces of our own ruination, jaggedly, tearingly, seemingly (seamingly?). Fall away imperceptibly. (*At Alberta* 10)

The insistence of “here” incites me to hypothesize that here is the indeterminable, because invisible, place of translation.

To translate is to enact location or, better, a series of locations – those moments according to the American experimental writer-philosopher, Renee Gladman, when the expression comes into being (*Calamities* 69). Though Gladman is not writing specifically about translation, her pursuit of the variables “acts and locations” in her book of essays, *Calamities*, provides a useful poetic juxtaposition through which to consider the “here” that both records and fails to record a (linguistic) boundary crossed by a body. In all three writers – Moure, Nathanaël, and Gladman – the fall allows us to understand something,

to borrow a phrase from Gladman, “that had always eluded us” (71): (love) poetry, (the failure of) translation, acts of location.

For the writers mentioned above, the “leurre of falling,” as Nathanaël so aptly calls it, is never unmediated (*At Alberta* 10). For Moure, the lure of poetry incites her to travel to Lisbon in 2004, “after years of dreaming” (*My Beloved Wager* 272), to read the medieval cantigas – the poems “de amor,” “de amigo” and “de escarnio e maldizer” (*My Beloved Wager* 272). In Lisbon, she wanders in city and archives, following the trail of inscriptions, falling into what she calls “tapestries of word and sound, the ‘wallpaper’ – repetitive sonorities of, yes, an unrequited love” (*My Beloved Wager* 272). In 2001, such an upward fall would in fact precede the one I’ve just described. This time, Moure would fall upon the poetry of Chus Pato.

As Moure herself recounts in her book of essays, *My Beloved Wager*, it was during a visit at Andel bookstore in Vigo, Spain on March 20, 2001 with her then Galician language teacher, translator and friend, María Reimóndez, buying dictionaries and books to help her learn Galician, that she stumbled upon – and fell, interminably and irremediably, in love – with the work of Chus Pato.

[...] I saw on the counter a large book with an incredible knobby cover, bright orange, bearing the inscription: *m-Talá*, and below that, the words *Chus Pato*.

I had no idea what it was, or what those three words meant, but I could tell it was a special artefact. It was a book that refused the standards of book marketing, that made itself into a stunning object [...]

I picked up the book and opened it.

My story ends here. All the story of the *before* and *prior* ends right here.

For from this point onward, it's no longer a story. The prior and before are annulled, and a new anterior, interior, posterior, exterior, polyterior are opened. An entire life changed right then: mine. (*My Beloved Wager* 249 emphasis in original)

Ecstatic over “the torrents of words,” and although she barely knew Galician at that time, Moure had already made up her mind: she would translate the poetry of Chus Pato.

It's impossible to translate, María said. *I can tell*, I said. *That's why I want to translate it*. We both bought copies.

I carried it with me everywhere, this book *m-Talá*:

I underlined in it, highlighted in it, read it aloud, wrote notes in it. I googled things in it. I was in the heat of Babylon, on the steppes in the cold, listening to a radio show in Galicia, in the belly of the whale with Jonas, in the river with Ophelia. (*My Beloved Wager* 250 emphasis in original)

In *Secession/Insecession*, Moure discreetly references her encounter with the poetry of Chus Pato: “And then she opened the book. *Oh poetry*. May I translate? Wherever you are going, dear poem, dear Chus, I am going too” (Moure *Secession/Insecession* 34). She also celebrates translation for its very impossible nature: “If translation is impossible (my mother's ashes) then impossibility is the only thing that can occur” (Moure *Secession/Insecession* 82). Understanding the ways in which the English Canadian edition of *Secession/Insecession* is woven out of ecstatic circumstances is useful to keep in mind as we turn to questions of the texts' intimate relationship to each other.

(In)visibility: Le Cercle d'Intimité of the Third Text

I now want to pursue a new question, as it is a question I find myself asking over and over again: how or where, under which circumstances, do texts meet and collide? How or with whom do they move? When I ask these questions, I have in mind something of translation. For instance, when I open a recent book-length essay on translation by the experimental feminist and Quebecoise writer, Nicole Brossard, I stop at the very first sentence and to the very first question she poses: “Pourquoi la traduction?” (*Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 7). Why translation?

In reality, the sentence does not in fact end where I pretend it does. Instead it has a much lengthier itinerary: “Pourquoi la traduction n’est-elle pas un sujet comme un autre, je veux dire en quoi prédispose-t-elle à une authentique ferveur du sens, allant parfois jusqu’au débat, comme si en chaque mot se cachait un enjeu de vie, une vision du monde miniaturisée?” (Brossard *Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 7). What I retain from the full-length question is that whatever translation reveals, it seems it has less to do with translation itself than an internal agitation in words, as though each were a keeper of a secret whose visibility (or secret life) is sometimes glimpsed in translation. In that sense, we might add that whatever is revealed in translation, or whatever translation grants to vision, it is that something of translation is always also necessarily invisible.

For feminist writers and critics, like Nicole Brossard, who were working on questions of language and subjectivity in the 1970s and onward, the question “why translation” became intrinsically linked to issues of (in)visibility – morphing the question of “why” into the question of “how”: how can we rethink the role of translation, writing,

and reading; how can language and literature alter or mark one's presence in the world? The critique was directed toward patriarchal language and its effacement of women's realities. This led many feminists to work on language-focused texts of a highly experimental nature.

In their desire to mark the gendered spaces produced in both linguistic and social contexts, the turn to literary translation offered a potentially empowering form of writing where women's experiences could find their anchorage in the agency of their reading and rewriting of texts, often by other feminists.³⁸ In so doing, they created and appropriated for themselves an "écriture au féminin" which echoed the poststructuralist "écriture féminine" of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, all of whom placed theory at the centre of their writing. "Do the translations seek to hide the work of translation and appear as naturalized in the English language, or do they function as texts, as writing, and foreground their work upon meaning?" (Godard "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation" 43). That is the distinguishing question posed by the late Barbara Godard, whose work, both as a feminist translator and as one of its most eminent theorists, not to mention her various editorial contributions in promoting bilingual feminist literary production across Canada,³⁹ helped establish and legitimize a highly

³⁸ It may interest some readers to consult Rosemary Arrojo's critiques of experimental feminist translation strategies and theories. Useful readings include: "Fidelity and The Gendered Translation." *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 7:2 (1994): 147-63; "Feminist, 'Orgasmic' Theories of Translation and Their Contradictions." *Tradterm* 2 (1995): 67-75. Her critical reading of Hélène Cixous' relationship to Clarice Lispector's work is also pertinent here: "Interpretation as Possessive Love: Hélène Cixous, Clarice Lispector and the ambivalence of fidelity." *Postcolonial Translation*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London: Routledge, 1998 [2012].

³⁹ I am thinking here particularly of her involvement with the bilingual feminist journal *Tessera* (1984-2005). Although *Tessera* devoted the entirety of issue 6 (1989) to the exploration of translation, almost every issue in its lifespan included some element of translation (either in theory or in content). *Tessera* was also a notable language-oriented literary magazine in its

experimental feminist translation practice and poetics in English-Canada and Quebec.⁴⁰

With feminist theory on the one hand and a distinctly feminist poetics on the other, Godard helped theorize translation as a site of exchange and collaboration. Thinking of these collaborations as double movements between “re/reading and re/writing” practices, she argues that the presence of the slash in re/reading and re/writing both demarcates and blurs the boundaries between reading and writing, writing and translating. Pointing to the example of Nicole Brossard’s *Le Désert mauve*, Godard describes translation as a “dialogic moment [...] underlining the double activity of women’s writing as reading/writing, as the re/reading of the already-written followed by the divining/writing of the unrecorded” (Godard “Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation” 46).⁴¹

Shifting her attention to reading and writing as acts of production and therefore as performative, translation in Godard’s view becomes an act of “transformance,”⁴² a term she uses to “emphasize the work of translation, the focus on the process of constructing

dedication to showcasing experimental and theory-driven writing. As the note on the home page of its York-hosted archive explains,

At the outset, the editors wished to present the innovative feminist theoretical writing being developed in Quebec to English Canadian critics and writers; by so doing, it fostered the development of “fiction/theory,” the term coined in the third issue to name this body of experimental writing. *Tessera* created a dialogue between French and English speaking women writers and theorists by publishing in both official languages and providing a précis for each text in the opposite language. (<http://tessera.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/tessera/index>)

⁴⁰ Elena Basile provides a thought-provoking reading of intimacy and translation in a recent article on Nathanaël’s fuckable text in her article “A Scene of Intimate Entanglements, or, Reckoning with the ‘fuck’ of Translation.” *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

⁴¹ For a more detailed reading of Godard and Brossard’s author-translator relationship as well as a book-length study on gender and translation see, among others, Sherry Simon’s *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics Of Transmission* (1996).

⁴² “Transformance” is also the term used to describe the re/writing project between Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt. See Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard’s *Mauve* (Vancouver/Montreal: Writing/nbj, 1985) and *Character /Jeu de lettres* (Vancouver and Montreal: Writing/nbj, 1986).

meaning in the activity of transformation, a mode of performance” (Godard “Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation” 46). In transformance, translation becomes an active site of exchange, a place for (writing as) thinking, where the translator is an agent and the translation is an act of production rather than simply the site where equivalencies are maintained or where a copy or reproduction of an original takes place.

Transformance is, in many ways, a useful neologism for reading the attention granted to issues of (in)visibility in *Secession/Insecession*, but it is still too narrow in terms of accounting for the gesture of reception and address that Moure wants to grant to Pato through the publication of *Secession/Insecession*. Moure, in my view, goes further than the early utopic feminist translation project of making woman, as subject, visible, for her work as translator and poet is fractured and multiplied by her intimate relationship with Pato’s work – and more importantly, it is this mark on her work and thinking that *Insecession* attempts to make visible. As literary scholar Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza explains, “Moure, a ‘Montreal poet,’ ‘born the same year as Chus Pato,’ who is writing a ‘biopoetics’ (6-7), casts her voice into sharp relief as a differentiated poetic voice, albeit one mediated by another poet’s voice” (234). The in of *Insecession* is one visible manifestation of this intimate “sharp relief” as Moure folds her text into Pato’s without suggesting that both uniformly come together. The in of *in secession* illustrates how her text will always exist in proximity to Pato’s text while simultaneously remaining in excess of it.

Although the bicephalous quality of the book rewards a reading that notices the ways in which one text arrives or departs from the other, if the titles appear “with” each other, as Moure suggests, and if the relationship between the texts allows her to make

herself visible (as writer, reader and translator), then the cut implied by the slash in the title also opens onto a third text: “[t]here is a new space of thinking that emerges which is neither the thoughts of one nor the other, nor the reader, but arises between and among...I have been known to call this ‘the third space’” (Moure “Writing *in Secession*” 81).

Moure’s suggestion of a third space resonates with the fact that Pato begins *Secession* with a quote by Roland Barthes on the *unreaderly* third text which he terms “the receivable”:

A readerly text is one I cannot rewrite (can I write today like Balzac?); a *writerly* text is one I read with difficulty, unless I completely transform my reading regime. I now conceive that there may be a third text: alongside the readerly and the writerly, there would be something like the *receivable*. The receivable is the unreaderly text which catches hold, the red-hot text, a product continuously outside any likelihood, whose function—visibly assumed by its scriptor—would be to contest the mercantile constraint of what is written; this text, guided, armed by a notion of the *unpublishable*, would elicit the following response: I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I receive it, like a fire, a drug, an enigmatic disorganization. (Barthes qtd in Pato 9 emphasis in original)

Moure, for her part, under the heteronym “Ruin E. Rome,” an anagram of her name, playfully alters Barthes’ passage in *Insecession* – allowing the quote to traverse her *corp(us)s*, not unchanged, and not unlike her “e(ri)nigmatic disorganizations” of Pato’s text:

I now recognize a third text alongside the readerly and the writerly: let’s call it the *intranslatable*. The intranslatable is the unreaderly text which catches fire, burns

in the mouth, an instance continuously outside any likelihood, whose function – ardently assumed by its scripter – is to contest the mercantile constraints on what is written. This text, guided, armed by a notion of *material*, prompts me to redact the following words: Dear Chus, I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I can *intranslate* it, like a conflagration, a drug, an insecession, an e(ri)nigmatic disorganization. (8 emphasis in original)

Moure, not unlike Brossard and Godard’s use of transformance, invents a neologism too to account for this process in translation of simultaneous proximity and excess, that of intrantranslation.⁴³ It is also worth noting that despite their mediated appellations both terms, Barthes’ receivable and Moure’s intrantranslation, gesture toward a frictitious third text that dwells in-between or rather alongside the readerly and writerly one,⁴⁴ and which incites me to gesture to the symbol of the slash as a visual manifestation of what would otherwise remain invisible as it can only be received or in-translated.

Put another way, of the third text that exists alongside the readerly and writerly

⁴³ Erin Moure has invented several neologisms to mark her various idiosyncratic approaches to translation. One of the most well known is her use of the term transeleation in regards to her approach to translating Fernando Pessoa’s *O Guardador de Rebanhos*; the book is called *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person*. As the prologue states, Moure’s approach takes the form of “Trans-e-lations. Trans-e-irin-lations. Transcreations” (ix). While I refer to Moure’s idiosyncratic use of translation, I do not intend my use of the term to mean that she uncritically appropriates texts and uses them in the service of her own poetic practice. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Moure’s translation and poetic practices are grounded in a poetics of hospitality – a preoccupation with making space for others than herself that arises everywhere in her writing, including her co-authored book with Chus Pato.

⁴⁴ The readerly text (lisible) is one that does not make demands on the reader as its meaning is presumed to be fixed – a meaning which is intact and waiting to be extracted, turning the reader into a passive consumer of that information (for example, the realism of nineteenth century novels). These texts, according to Barthes, are concerned with the storyline and therefore demand a horizontal reading of the text; the writerly text (scriptible) is the text that is always in production, is open, self-conscious, and where the reader becomes an active participant in its meaning – essentially blurring the line between the reader and the writer (for example, the work of modernist experimental literature). These texts require a vertical reading that imparts a reading of bliss or “jouissance” on the reader. See Roland Barthes’ *S/Z* (1970) as well as his *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973).

ones, both Barthes' "receivable" and Moure's "intranslatable," register what is produced in the reader: a desire, a tiny shock, an entire world (moving) – in short, a thing in perpetual becoming. The fact that the book is divided into two parts, which are signed by two authors, invites certain reading modalities, such as a move back and forth, that modify the more linear practices of reading called for by other works and other book formats. As Moure remarks in *Insecession*, "Translation ('the poetry of Chus Pato') is a way of bringing—into the secession or cut—another voice, her human voice, markings in words from a culture across a far border, to mark these words (her words) into new ears and onto new bodies" (144). This is one of translation's most generous attributes, that it does not act alone: "double personnalité, dirons-nous," writes Brossard in relation to literature's (not psychology's) dream of being another, "je te lis dans une langue étrangère, je t'emporterai avec moi dans ma langue maternelle. Je est toujours un autre en devenir" (Brossard *Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 13). As a text "armed by a notion of material," the writing of *Insecession* with or alongside Pato's *Secession* marks a space of friendship, both real and textual – one that materializes in the intranslatable text.

Intranslation is the invisible third text or body that materializes between the reader and the work. It is not an argument for transparency; it is a way of acknowledging the various texts, quotations, dialogues, friends and forces who shape and entwine the (intranslatable) text. Viewed in this light, *Insecession* is the body-text that hosts the intranslatable echolations that bring the author-translator-reader into "a differential logic" (Aguirre-Oteiza 235). This differential logic, as much as it offers a model of co-authorship applicable to both literature and translation, also evokes and revokes the stable

identity of the writer/translator. It is in this further sense that Moure's "intranslation" project differs from earlier feminist models of experimentation, such as transformance.

The liminal space of differential logic, proposed in Aguirre-Oteiza's reading of *Secession/Insecession*, has further implications for a reading of Moure's intranslation, for, according to Aguirre-Oteiza, it "also catches up to and mediates 'Erín,' the seemingly original and immediate proper name that identifies the translator" (235). Moure's description of intranslation as an "e(ri)nigmatic disorganization" (*Secession/Insecession* 8), Aguirre-Oteiza points out, exemplifies the split – not just in Pato's choice of title, *Secession* (and its connotations of a cut, withdrawal or breaking apart), but also in the conception of the poet's identity ("What politics where breath fractures" 235).

Responding to the question regarding the meaning of *Secession*, Pato explains in an interview that its significance "brings [her] immediately to the notion of caesura in Hölderlin [...]. Here caesura is also distance, cut, secession; it is the consciousness of the empty space between one exhalation of the voice and the next that makes writing possible" (in Conversation with Christina Davis "Outside the Fold"). The address and space made for the other, then, is not simply an ideal feature in Moure's annexation of *Insecession* to *Secession*; the consideration of the other is already deeply embedded in Pato's own poetics.

Perhaps (psychology?) being a poet means assuming the caesura, constituting oneself in secession, in the very impossibility that languages might link words and things. A poet assert *I I* is a deserted site, a silence, a cut, a distance [...] A poet he remembers the writings that preceded him, those to come, those not yet born

[...] No poem will ever be its own master, nor master of the language, nor of the world. (Pato *Secession/Insecession* 119)

In Pato's conception of *Secession* as a generative opening toward the other, and in Moure's mirror gesture towards Pato, the dominant model of individualistic authorship, to borrow a phrase from Lawrence Venuti, that continues to dominate the publishing industry, at least in an Anglo North American context, breaks apart in neologisms such as intranlation and e(ri)nigmatic disorganization as do notions of original and transparent self-representation (Venuti 6). To borrow a phrase from Moure, "[t]he I of a poet torques in translation, is a constructed I, a social spacing. To secede from this social spacing and speak a located body, corpuscles, the poet secedes from the I" (Moure *Secession/Insecession* 122).

The Bicephalous Text: An Invention Drawn from the Preclusion of Subsidization

For Nicole Brossard and her early feminist collaborators, authorial originality was a myth to be debunked. Transformance, in that sense, is a neologism meant to counter the prevailing conception of the translator as the passive instrument or vessel through which the original moves and remains intact. For Brossard, as with Moure and Venuti, the translator is also – among other things – a writer. To quote Nicole Brossard writing about the very work under discussion, “À vrai dire, Erin Moure met en scène ce qui jusqu'à maintenant était resté sous-entendu: moi, traductrice poète, je vis, j'entends et je réponds à plusieurs niveaux à ce que je traduis; bref, dans chaque traduction, je réponds à ma propre vie de réel et de pensées” (Brossard *Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 55). Indeed, for Brossard, the *why* of translation soon overlaps with the *how* of

creative writing: “Aussi m’arrive-t-il de projeter sur la traduction des réflexions élaborées en pensant à la création littéraire” (8).⁴⁵ And shortly thereafter the question of how also becomes a question of whom: “Toute traductrice, tout traducteur est d’abord une lectrice, un lecteur, c’est-à-dire quelqu’un qui fait entrer dans son monde intérieur un autre monde avec ses mystères, ses ambiguïtés, ses fulgurances, ses zones dangereuses” (10). This attention to the reader and to what or to whom enters is where I wish to continue thinking about how, and on what poetic terrain, the translative act might constitute itself (or not).

Marking the exchange between her own work and Pato’s – making Pato’s influence visible in her own writing by allowing Pato’s texts to circulate among readers who cannot read Galician – *Secession/Insecession* sets an example for a greater opening up of the literary spaces that shape writers and readers alike as it enlarges what Brossard calls “les cercles d’intimité qui s’offrent dans la mise en oeuvre d’une traduction” (*Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 13). Yet, when Moure enlarges her “cercle d’intimité” by bringing her own work and Pato’s into the fold of the slash, it is not simply a way for her of confirming what Brossard describes as “la rencontre née d’une lecture intense [qui] altère, confirme, renouvelle notre façon de voir et de ressentir la réalité,” although it certainly is part of it (*Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 17). What I have not yet begun to touch upon are, in fact, the restrictive funding policies that make it impossible for Canadian publishing houses to receive subsidization for the publication of translations that do not stem from Canadian authors. Though my reading of the generative aspect of the work has, up until this point, been sparked by its creativity

⁴⁵ Brossard’s invocation of creative writing here serves as a further example of the blurred boundaries between writing and translation I had previously gestured to, not just in terms of a creative approach to translation necessarily but to a move away from hierarchizing the act of writing as supposedly distinct or superior to that of translating – as if translating was not writing.

and ardour, I have done so without addressing a crucial aspect of the book: Moure's insistence in the prefatory notes that each text in *Insecession* "responds to a Pato text, with one added Chinook Wind" (*Secession/Insecession* 6). I now want to address that claim.

The Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Authored Creative Content: Erin Moure's Chinook Wind

Chinooks are warm coastal winds that blow where the Canadian Prairies and Great Plains meet. In relation to *Secession/Insecession*, these winds blow the reader all the way to *The Canada Council for the Arts*, a federally based granting program that supports the Canadian publishing industry and its independent publishers by offering various subsidies. Publishers, like *Secession/Insecession's* BookThug in Toronto, can receive support for their publication of books in translation as long as they fit the following criteria: "[For publishers] this program provides grants for the translation of literary works written by Canadian authors" (*Canada Council for the Arts* "Book Publishing Support: Block Grants"). To be eligible, a book must "contain at least 50% Canadian-authored creative content; have at least 48 printed pages between the covers [...] be published principally in English, French or one of Canada's Aboriginal languages" (*Canada Council for the Arts* "Book Publishing Support: Block Grants"). Publishers, then, cannot receive financial support from *The Canada Council* for the publication in Canada of international translations done by Canadian translators.

Of consequence, here, is the manner in which the funding policies partly explain the dually authored nature of the book. In order for her desired Canadian publisher to

receive the appropriate financial support to pay for the costs of publishing her translation of Chus Pato's text in Canada, Moure has had to transform her translation of *Secession* into "Canadian-authored creative content." This is due to the fact that even though, technically, it is not Pato who wrote *Secession* – Moure's English Canadian translation – funding policies do not make these distinctions, and so Moure has had to invent a new book to accompany her translation of Pato's work. She does this, not only by writing her own accompanying text, which acts as an echo and homage to Pato, but also by making *Insecession* one text longer than *Secession*. That way, the now bicephalous title, *Secession/Insecession*, is sure to qualify as Canadian.⁴⁶ The Chinook wind, then, is that text which appears at the end of *Insecession* – the one entitled "48, OR 49" – and that doesn't share a corresponding text with Pato (remember that in order to qualify as Canadian the book must "have at least 48 printed pages between the covers"): "I still owe 48 words, 47+1 so the book will be Canadian +1 missing from 'Lgiht's End'" (Moure 170).

Prior to the publication of *Secession/Insecession*, Moure had published her English translations of Chus Pato's *Charenton* (2007), *m-Talá* (2009), and *Hordes of Writing* (*Hordas de Escritura in Galician*) in the United Kingdom with a publisher called Shearsman. *Flesh of the Leviathan*, another title from Pato's oeuvre translated by Moure (*Carne de Leviathan* in Galician), would appear a couple of years following the publication of *Secession/Insecession*, namely in 2016 with the American publisher, Omnidawn.⁴⁷ As a note at the end of the book suggests, Moure has translated Chus Pato

⁴⁶ Moure addresses these issues in "Outside the Fold," *Evening Will Come: A Monthly Journal of Poetics* as well as in *Lemon Hound*.

⁴⁷ The difficulty Moure has had in publishing Pato's work in Canada is well documented. Although BuschekBooks in Ottawa is credited as the co-publisher of her translations

since encountering her work in 2001, but while *Secession* is her fourth translation of the author's work it is the first to be published in Canada (np). The material conditions shaping *Secession/Insecession*, then, are also embedded in a material solution of finding a way to bring her English translations of Pato's work into Canadian circulation.

Those familiar with Moure's oeuvre will recognize in *Secession/Insecession* her generative practice of inclusion, whether through the incorporation of collaboration, intertextual references and quotations in her poetry or through her prolific practice of translating other poets: French (Quebecois/e), Spanish, Portuguese, and Galician into English. In her desire to make Pato's work and her influence on her work visible for a Canadian readership, Moure creates the appropriate textual apparatus to accompany her English translation of her friend's text across the Canadian border, hence the creation of her own response-text, *Insecession*.

The dually authored book that is *Secession/Insecession* not only represents Moure's brilliant and ingenious attempt to bring Pato's work into the Canadian literary context by inventing a book-form that will allow her to do so, but Moure's *Insecession* is also transformed into an occasion to offer an homage to Pato's work and influence on her thinking and poetics as well:

Reading and translating Pato has decidedly affected my own poetry (I have often written and spoken about this). And I would say that the fact of being translated into English and thus into cultures outside of Galicia (of many languages that also read in English) has changed Chus' sense of address — her work by and large addresses the Galician nation, but I think she realizes

of *Charenton, m-Talá*, and *Hordes of Writing*, in fact the publication house obtained Canadian copies from Shearman, a publisher based in the UK. It is also worth noting that while Canadian distribution of the work remained limited, it circulated without any promotional assistance.

more that her work has reverberations for us all, for other nations, and for those of us in marginal or differential “nations,” such as that of women, of queer life, etc.

(Moure in Conversation with Christina Davis “Outside the Fold”)⁴⁸

There is a loving quality to the expansive movement of the writing – one that points to a space of friendship (real and textual) that is further entwined in the correspondence Moure’s text keeps with Pato’s: the way Moure writes into and out of her translation of Pato’s *Secession*; how she foregrounds Pato’s text as the very impetus for her own; how she acknowledges the marks of Pato’s words on her own. By creating a space where both texts appear together, as companion or friend texts, Moure not only gives Pato’s *Secession* a new (Canadian) address, she also offers readers, like me, who cannot read Galician the gift of Pato’s writing. Interestingly, it is through this generative aspect of friendship that while Pato’s arrival via Moure’s English translation of her work has also done something to mold and morph *Secession/Insecession*, the book as object, it also makes visible *The Canada Council’s* restrictive funding policies in regards to the financial support for publications of translations of foreign literary works done by Canadian translators.

⁴⁸ In an interview, Chus Pato addresses Moure’s influence on her work and thinking about poetry and translation:

Lamentably, I know too little of Erin’s poetry, but I am fortunate to know her, and we have spoken at length and deeply of poetry and translation over the years. I am very fortunate in that she decided to translate what I write into English. I feel my debt to Erin can’t be repaid, and I am not referring here to the expanded reception of my work; it is her gesture that I will not be able to repay, the gratuitousness and risk of that work, that intelligence, that emotion. The deep friendship we maintain has changed my work by making me reflect above all on questions that have to do with translation. To the point where I have come to see that every poem is in itself a translation, translation of the unsayable that is poetry into something writeable that is the poem. Above all, I’d say that Erin Moure’s generosity sustains my writing and make it possible, makes it possible for me to continue persisting in this foolhardiness, this grandeur of placing one word after another and then another. (in Conversation with Christina Davis “Outside the Fold”)

restrictive funding policies in regards to the financial support for publications of foreign literary translations by Canadian translators.

The sense of address, of a new address, that Moure grants to Pato, both in the sense of *Secession*'s new circulation in Canada and also in the sense of Moure's address to Pato in a text derived from translating her work, surpasses the earlier feminist experimental project of "transformance" and the attempt to make the translator visible as creative collaborator. Instead, the bitextual nature of *Secession/Insecession* exists so that it is Chus Pato's work that is made visible in a literary context that, at least from a mercantile standpoint, is steeped in the very impossibility of her circulation in that context. If, as Derrida contends, translation is both a necessary and impossible task, then Moure's translation of Pato's work is, without her own accompanying text, marked by a double-impossibility (Derrida "Des Tours de Babel" 214).⁴⁹

Thus, in pursuing the inclined (dis)position of Moure's translation of Pato's *Secesión* into *Secession* alongside her own homage text, as Moure's text tends toward Pato's text through the figure of the slash (a typographical manifestation of the incline), I remain close to Brossard's suggestion that in translation one lets the other in (*faire entrer dans son monde intérieur*), such that framing the response, reciprocation and resemblance of one text to another, to borrow the language used earlier to describe Moure's relationship to Pato's text, I echo Brossard in asking: "Que ferai-je de toi une fois que tu seras entrée dans mon univers? Irons-nous quelque part ensemble? Jusqu'où?" (Brossard *Et me voici soudain en train de refaire le monde* 13).

⁴⁹ According to Jacques Derrida, the multiplicity of languages creates the conditions for translation's simultaneous necessity and impossibility: "les langues se dispersent, se confondent ou se multiplient [...] La traduction devient alors nécessaire et impossible" ("Des Tours de Babel" 214).

Translation as Thinking Together

In countering the uni-directionality (from source to target text) that is often employed to describe the movement of translation, I have, up until this point, attempted to show how translation is, first, an encounter on both sides, and second, how it opens a space of loving correspondence that is akin to the space of care in friendship. I now want to dedicate the remainder of this chapter to the relevance of translation to thinking and to the following questions: what kind of intellectual history would the slash of *Secession/Insecession*'s title open onto, especially considering that the slash is a way of representing the fact that the texts are presented, in this translated edition, as *with* each other, as friend texts? And what are some of the links that might be drawn and redrawn between translation and philosophy? Between translation and thinking?

In her essay, "Deleuze and Translation," Barbara Godard points out that, for Deleuze,

[q]uestions are important [...] because through them the outside works from within an enunciation ("machinic assemblage") to set in motion a process of transformation, a line of flight.⁵⁰ [...] This relay of questions, a recursive chain of chance, responds to "the outside" or force in a line of errant or "nomadic distribution."⁵¹ Questions, then, are one way to think about translation which, loosely speaking, might be called *an art of approach* to an outside involving a repetition with a difference. (56 my emphasis)

Translation, like Deleuze's questions as Godard points out, is also an art of approach to

⁵⁰ Deleuze. *Mille plateaux* (40). Please note that all quotations from Godard's article which contain footnotes are present in the original. For the sake of additional clarity, I have added square brackets around the translated titles of the work.

⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*. Paris: Minuit, 1986. [See also *Foucault*. Trans. Sean Hand. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988: 125.]

an outside involving a repetition with a difference. Such an approach in *Secession/Insecession* is visible in the inclination of the slash in the title as well as in the preposition “with” that dons the more descriptive version of the long title.

In her book length collection of essays, *My Beloved Wager*, Moure weaves her thinking of a space of approach, an “aproximação,” around Hélène Cixous’ writing on the Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, “wherein touch and meeting do not appropriate or domesticate but co-occur in the space of an encounter. A zone of overlap” (Moure *My Beloved Wager* 168). According to Moure, it is “a spacing, neither outside nor inside the organism” (*My Beloved Wager* 180). In other words, an approach creates a space of hospitality; non-absorptive, the approach as overlap makes space for the asymmetrical, for alterity – allowing difference to prevail over assimilation. Cixous’ writing on Lispector, Moure points out, treats the approach as a space of receptivity and giving (180). The use of the term receptivity rather than reciprocity is worth noting, for reciprocity would suggest an equal gesture of give and take whereas the notion of receptiveness holds the idea of being-with accountable to a gesture of reception and response-ability – which is different from universal exchange.

Moure’s recourse to an added text at the end of *Insecession* to ensure the book qualifies for subsidization offers a telling example of the ways in which receptivity also doubles as response-ability. This “responsible responsiveness,” to return to a notion coined by Avital Ronell in earlier parts of this chapter, captures well what Moure, in *My Beloved Wager*, describes as a matter of acknowledging that we are “incorporated beings” in a “provisional theatre” (261):

Thinking about and in spacings, placings, stagings, and how to think and be in

such spacings – a thinking always in language and always spatial, physical, as well, because we are sited, incorporated beings. The purpose of this thinking is to learn how to be able to act and enact (and this is an emergency, how to emerge) in the world in a way other than that which hegemonic politics today would construct for me [...] We urgently need thinking that pushes the boundaries of spacings. (*My Beloved Wager* 261)

Secession/Insecession embodies a form of enactment; an act thinking that exceeds (because it subverts) hegemonic policies that would otherwise curtail it. The fact that Moure appends *Secession/Insecession* with one added text on the side of her *Insecession* not only renders the book asymmetrical, but that very same asymmetricality also registers what Aguirre-Oteiza, paraphrasing David Damrosch, refers to as the “linguistic and poetic difference of the foreign text,” which punctures the text with the aforementioned quality of overlap and pushes the boundaries of what is possible (“What politics where breath fractures” 239).

A similar performance of difference is registered in the poets’ biographies at the close of the book where the political background of both poet’s upbringing is explicitly stated: “Montreal poet Erin Moure was born in 1955 in a Canada governed by the Liberals under Louis St. Laurent,” while Pato’s biographical note reads,

Chus Pato (María Xesús Díaz) was born in 1955, when Galicia was in the grip of the Franco dictatorship in Spain. Today a central and iconoclastic figure in Galician and European literature, Pato relentlessly continues to refashion the possibilities of poetic text, of words, bodies, political and literary space, and the construction of ourselves as individual, community, nation, world. (np)

The mark of difference between both poet's background is not just relegated to the space of the poets' biography of course; *Secession/Insecession* is a biopoetics after all – a blend of each poets' biography with her poetics. This blend of bio and poetic opens towards a space of difference that archives – not memory but – dispersion (*My Beloved Wager* 262). Citing Derrida's *Mal d'archive*, Moure goes on to explain that what is archived moves in multiple diffuse ways, for the time of the archive – like that of poetry and friendship, as I have previously argued – opens onto a time to come (*My Beloved Wager* 262).

Though mainly written in prose sentences, the work is nevertheless densely poetic. If Moure proclaims in *My Beloved Wager* that she desires a poetry that refuses erasure while it simultaneously elucidates the manifold voices and subject positions that compose the bio or poetic *I*, a poetry, which as she states, “could not be simply ingested. Not a consumer poetry [...but a] poetry that lets us think,” then *Secession/Insecession* could certainly be viewed as one potential response (*My Beloved Wager* 252). Moreover, difference is also made clear throughout the work, starting with Moure's choice of the title *Insecession* – an asymmetrical slippage from *secession* to *in secession* – that inscribes her response to Pato's own title.

Building on this idea of asymmetrical slippage alongside Moure's notion of approach, as being neither outside nor inside the organism, the title's use of the preposition “with” continues to register a critical practice of difference and diffusion that is made even more apparent in *Insecession*'s self-reflexive insertions of parts of Pato's text into its own.

In *Insecession*, for instance, we read: “‘With love all this is bearable,’ writes Chus

Pato. Or, more accurately, *Con amor*...for it was me who wrote ‘with love all this...’” (154 emphasis in original). For readers of Moure’s English translation, *Secession*, the passage Moure is citing can be found inserted a few pages early where the “original” reads “With love all this is bearable” (Pato *Secession/Insecession* 151). There is a playful subversion at work here, however, for even my aforementioned parenthetical information – in wanting to point out that the passage belongs to Pato – attributes the English words to a poet who does not know the language. Retrieving the Galician text, the reader realizes that Moure’s citation of it, in *Insecession*, has altered the passage slightly, for the Galician original reads “por amor” instead of “con amor” (Pato qtd in Aguirre-Oteiza 239⁵²).

For Deleuze, terms like “with” and “and” give way to a “disjunctive synthesis” that is “neither conjunction nor disjunction, but both” (60). Here is Godard again:

At stake in translation, as in philosophy, has long been a concern with meaning separated from language, with dualisms, in short. Departing from an idealist philosophy of certain meaning anchored by the unity or totality of either a transcendent Idea or a generalizing *Aufhebung*,⁵³ Deleuze replaces it with a singularity or differentiating event, with the hesitancy and stuttering of the atom, the particle, the zigzag, the flux. “Intermezzo,” he writes, is the only way out of dualisms, the in-between, the passage.⁵⁴ There is no teleological progression, no final emancipation, but only an endless, irregular, diffuse movement of becoming.

⁵² I am grateful to Aguirre-Oteiza for his observation.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Paret. *Dialogues*. Paris: Flammarion, 1977. [See also *Dialogues*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Athlone, 1987: 42.]

⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2: Mille plateaux*. Paris: Minuit, 1980. [See also *A Thousand Plateaux*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone, 1988: 339]

Diffusion accelerates in the middle, spreading rhizome-like and branching out along the surface rather than putting down arborescent roots.⁵⁵ (Godard “Deleuze and Translation” 60)

When read alongside *Secession/Insecession*, the slash that simultaneously stands in for the term “with” is reminiscent of the singular multiplicity of Deleuze’s atom, which is continuously splitting and branching out into an endless progression of slippages.

In one of the book’s prefatory insertions, such a slippage is registered in *Insecession*’s playful rephrasing of Pato’s text. Where, for instance, Pato’s text reads “We recognize altitude from elevation, we call the most extensive prairie: Ocean,” Moure’s echolation responds: “We recognize altitude as we ascend, we call the ocean that unfolds below: Canadian Rockies” (10-11). The slip from “elevation” to “ascendance” might not seem significant, nor might the slip from “prairie” to “ocean” or from “Ocean” to “Canadian Rockies” lead to an apparent political intervention into the foregrounding of difference. When read against a reading of translation theories’ concepts of arrivals and departures, however, the slippages that suddenly interrupt both texts, mark translation as the site of a fruitful *dérive* that is akin to the process of thinking itself.

In his book, entitled *Babel heureuse: Pour lire la traduction*, Arno Renken draws an evocative link between translation and thinking that recalls Derrida’s treatment of the archive as dispersion, only for Renken the trajectory of thinking and of translation is constituted in terms of a drift (*la dérive*):

Pourtant, le transport, le passage, la traversée accompagnent autant l’idée que nous nous faisons de la pensée – quel est le point de départ, le cheminement, où veut-t-on en venir – que la traduction – transport, traversée d’une rive à l’autre,

⁵⁵ Deleuze. *Mille plateaux* (543).

tra-duction, Über-Setzung...Ce qui est sans cesse mis en avant, ce qui donne *sens* à ces images de déplacement et leur confère leur caractère normatif, c'est le point de départ, l'origine et l'original d'une part, l'arrivée, le résultat, la conclusion d'une part. [...] La dérive, parce qu'elle se dérobe à la valorisation de l'origine et de l'arrivée ainsi qu'à la logique comptable par laquelle on risque de réduire l'entre-deux, subvertit l'idée d'un transport et de rives préétablies. La dérive, mouvement en mouvement, fait et défait inlassablement les rives auxquelles elle se dérobe, elle cesse d'être évaluable à partir d'un lieu sûr et s'autonomise. (Renken 30)

The result of the generative drift and echoic design of Moure's response-text to Pato's biopoetic is a work which, far from attempting to sustain a one to one correspondence with Pato's text, rather serves as an example of "oblique intimacies," a term I am borrowing from Nathanaël:

My geographies being inherent to my languages and my body being ensnared in each, I will eschew the inclination to make separate the very ensconced Cartesian divide, and will borrow instead from Claude Parent and Paul Virilio's architectural vocabulary, to posit translation as an *oblique* relationship, the oblique intimacies of which entail the touching of texts in parts and the gaping misalignments in others, the *partitioning* of bodies of text precisely where they touch, which is to say in *imperfect translation*, in other words, catastrophically misaligned. (*Asclepias: The Milkweeds* 19 emphasis in original)

The idea of translation as a series of oblique intimacies, like the notion of an asymmetrical slippage or that of *dérive*, interests me primarily because the concept

provides a key for reading Moure's *Insecession* as an imperfect translation of *Secession*, but a form of translation nonetheless. Such gaping (mis)alignments, for example, are expressed in moments when the texts edge each other in complicity. In the following example, from the prefatory notes to the book, a delightful crossover is being staged: Pato writes "when you make love, where are you?" (11), to which Moure's *Insecession* responds, "when you translate Chus Pato, where are you?" (10). Linking lovemaking to the gesture of translating Pato, *Insecession* does not repeat Pato's utterance but rather perversely translates her response into a space of erotic intermittence (Barthes *Le Plaisir du texte* 19; *The Pleasure of the Text* 10).⁵⁶

Such an approach recalls Sherry Simon's neologism, "perverse translation," to describe those acts of translation that become enmeshed with the creative interference, excess and deviance of creative writing (*Translating Montreal* 119).⁵⁷ Were we to seek to attribute a one to one relation of equivalence between the sentences from both texts mentioned above, or to think of Pato's text as source and Moure's as target text, the

⁵⁶ By "erotic intermittence" ("intermittence érotique" in French), Barthes has Sade in mind as he depicts the image of seductive edges that flicker in a complex choreography of collisions and ruptures: "le plaisir de la lecture vient évidemment de certaines ruptures (ou de certaines collisions)" (14). Further, he continues,

c'est l'intermittence, comme l'a bien dit la psychanalyse, qui est érotique : celle de la peau qui scintille entre deux pièces (le pantalon et le tricot), entre deux bords (la chemise entrouverte, le gant et la manche); c'est ce scintillement même qui séduit, ou encore: la mise en scène d'une apparition-disparition. (19)

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Tutschek's theorizing of a "dimension lapsisée" provides an interesting extension to Simon's perverse translation. In her PhD dissertation, *Dimension lapsisée: revised subjectivity in Québécois women's narratives*, Tutschek elaborates a theory of translation based on the space of translation as an oscillating state that gives way to queer subjectivities. The term "dimension lapsisée," which is drawn from Nicole Brossard, names an interpretive device that Tutschek reconceptualises with the aims of capturing the embodied language poetics of Montreal experimental writing since the 1970s. Such a threshold poetics teases out the various gender, linguistic and cultural borderlands of the subject as she/he is re(con)figured in experimental writing. Here, reading Sedgwick's call to queerness in the form of gaps and lapses, alongside Tutschek's use of "dimension" and "lapse" to describe the queer translation practices of Montreal writers is incredibly seductive.

aforementioned lines would lead us to conclude that Moure's *Insecession* is a deviant translation of Pato's text. Of course, Moure herself, with her use of the prefix "in" in "insecession," already foregrounds the fact that hers is a derivative text. As such, the slash between Moure's *Insecession* and Pato's *Secession* embodies a dis-conjunctive approach, one that effectively captures Arno Renken's emphasis on translation as *dérive*:

Dériver: voilà qui contredit ce que l'on attend d'une pensée "sérieuse," et d'une "bonne" traduction. L'errance, même commune, a une proximité ambiguë et dangereuse avec l'erreur. Quant au traducteur, dans son travail de passeur, la moindre des choses qu'on exige de lui est qu'il sache d'où il vient, où il va, ce qu'il transporte – et qu'il justifie, souvent paratextuellement, ce qu'il a perdu (ou volé, tronqué, vendu?) chemin faisant. On préférera alors l'assurance des rives et la douceur un peu cruelle de sa propre sécurité, on privilégiera la loi établie d'une méthode et la terre ferme des origines. Et peut-être oubliera-t-on que cette sûreté et cette certitude nous ont coûté un triste prix: celui d'une littérature et d'une pensée qui ne voyagent pas, d'une recherche qui n'explore rien que ce qu'elle perçoit déjà, d'une écriture et d'une lecture enfin qui, à force de jouir des douceurs de la stabilité, ne sait plus mouvoir ni émouvoir. (Renken *Babel Heureuse* 30).

Transposing Deleuze's metaphor of the stuttering atom onto translation as *dérive*, the dominant abyss-in-need-of-a-bridge model is replaced, in *Secession/Insecession*, by a flow of intermingling relations that is both an "and" and a "with":

The “middle” is where things “pick up speed” *in a sideward movement* that “sweeps away the one and the other” in the “logic of AND.”⁵⁸ In the “entre-deux,” the “in-between,” the one intertwines with, embraces, the other.⁵⁹ Thinking takes place in this interstitial place of crossover, thinking the outside as time within the fold, the outside-force as shared limit *both joining and separating*.⁶⁰ (Godard “Deleuze and Translation” 60 my emphasis)

Moving in a “sideward movement” that “both joins and separates” and that provides the opening where “thinking takes place,” the inclined symbol of the slash in *Secession/Insecession* allows the texts to drift, to approach each other, to intertwine, to think (each other), and to respond without necessarily becoming a blur. Translation is thus transformed into a space of thinking that is simultaneously a space of address and apostrophe.

Thinking in the Apostrophe

Given the intimate frame of address in *Secession/Insecession*, it is difficult to ignore the generous poetics that materialize between the two texts: “What counts for me, and what materializes in my reading,” notes Moure in an essay on the book in question, “is the one that arises between two, the life that emerges between two lives” (“Writing *In Secession*” 79 emphasis in the original). The one that arises between the two, like Deleuze’s singular multiplicity, enacts a plural poetics where, as Moure points out in an essay on the work under discussion, “what arises isn’t a desubjectivization or a resubjectivization, but an

⁵⁸ Deleuze. *Mille plateaux* (36-7).

⁵⁹ Deleuze. *Foucault* (119).

⁶⁰ Deleuze. *Foucault* (124).

emergent in(tra)subjectivity that surges from reading itself, and thus is situated, strangely, in proximity to the reader, in the very act of reception” (“Writing *In Secession*” 80).

The question of how to re/write Chus’ text is not simply one that implicates Moure as a translator, it is also one that implicates a great deal of care and recognition of the vital contamination of Chus’ work in relation to her own. In the following example, Moure makes this affective relation clear by pointing out that the encounter is not just textual but that it involves other kinds of bodies as well:

TRANSLATION (“the poetry of Chus Pato”) is a way of bringing – into the secession or cut – another voice, her human voice, markings in words from a culture across a far border, to mark these words (her words) into new ears and onto new bodies, just under new skin (leopards, fish). A word, skin (marten), a word, a mouth or tongue, a membrane (upright): Vancouver, we say, over those mountains. (*Secession/Insecession* 144)

Reading these scenes alongside Godard’s reading of Deleuze, this space of encounter or middle ground is introduced as the site of relation that goes beyond the intersubjective but rather moves or folds out of collaborative and perpetual becoming. The example given in Deleuze is that of the French conjunction “ET” which is also “E(S)T.” As Godard points out, “ET” (and) slips beyond the relation of what’s between the conjunction but rather it addresses the ongoing fixation, especially in idealist philosophy, of the subject as the centre of being (62). This is true too of the way Moure deploys *Insecession* so as not to make it or herself the centre of the work.

The slash, then, like Deleuze's figure of the middle, is a way, a method, of pursuing writing/philosophy as a "transcreative process of becoming," one that privileges a lively (and living!) process – a conversation – rather than a fixed product:

Relating, in short, the coordinating work of the AND, which is "neither disjunction nor conjunction" but both, the disjunctive synthesis, "passes on the lines, between the lines, in the AND, making them imperceptible."⁶¹ This logic of the AND AND AND, the logic of the series or "geography of relations,"⁶² works against the politics of incorporation, whether of communion or cannibalism, as both "multiple affirmation" and "stuttering."⁶³ One thing is not hierarchically absorbed by another, but both are carried away, reciprocally implicated and transformed in a transversal cross-cutting that advances a politics of exfoliation.⁶⁴ "Becoming-animal" ("the relation between man and animal") cuts across binaries and so offers a "possible critique of mimesis."⁶⁵ (Godard "Deleuze and Translation" 60)

This idea, that one thing is not hierarchically absorbed by another, is crucial to the precarious relationship of *Secession* to *Insecession* where the "transversal" that "cuts across binaries" is suggestive not just of the slash in the title but of the nestling of *Secession* in *Insecession*.

Translation is possible, I think, along with Beckett and Borges, because the original, any original, can never be finished. Because a linguistic act must be *received* to be an act (ink and paper are not acts) and because the recipient is not

⁶¹ Deleuze. *Mille plateaux* (252).

⁶² Deleuze and Paret. *Dialogues* (70).

⁶³ Deleuze and Paret. *Dialogues* (43, 73).

⁶⁴ Deleuze. *Mille plateaux* (37).

⁶⁵ Martin, Jean-Clet. *Variations: La philosophie de Gilles Deleuze*. Paris: Payot, 1993: 8.

‘one’ either. The recipient changes (and is changed, constantly, by differential forces of time that construct it), even in a single language. (Moure *Secession/Insecession* 82)

In the section “Ruin E. Rome,” Moure poses and re-poses the question “must someone think,” this time addressing it to a long list of friends through the formula AND, AND, AND:

Dear Hannah Arendt, I write [...] Dear Lisa, Dear Kim, dear Carla, dear Karis, dear Chus, dear Gail, dear Oana, dear Judith, dear Rachel, dear Anna, dear Martha, dear Christa, dear Claire, dear Anastasyia, dear María, dear Bélen, dear Nicole, dear Angela, dear Oksana, dear Uljana, dear spook, dear ghost. (168)

Just as the slash is a conventional symbol for line breaks in poetry, here it also marks the break or rather the (ex)change – the metamorphosis – that takes place in the space of encounter and reception lodged between the works. As Aguirre-Oteiza remarks, “through a seemingly endless set of apostrophes, Moure posits a dialogical form of difference which interpellates past and future readers and writers” (238-39).

Such a hospitable space of encounter is evident in sections where Moure addresses Pato directly: “In trying to parse spatiality and corporeality, I think of the prosthesis, yes, of poetry as prosthetic gesture, and of poetry as conversation. How performativity is also material gesture, something I learned from Chus Pato in translating the *razó* of her poems” (*Secession/Insecession* 120). In both instances mentioned above, the slash transmits the conversation the poets are speaking into: “I hesitate to say anything about poetry except: it is a conversation we speak into, and our consanguinity in words (material effect) matters” (Moure *Secession/Insecession* 120). Interestingly, the

use of consanguinity comes from Pato, who in turn is quoting the dialogue between Karoline von Günderode and Kleist: “I underline,” Pato writes, “*Consanguinity as a good [...] no one had ever considered this. The kinship that attenuates the distress felt before that alien sex to whom one can never surrender*” (Pato *Secession/Insecession* 121 emphasis in original). The potential of poetry’s consanguinity is perceptible in Moure’s inclusion of *Insecession* with her translation of *Secession*. To situate one’s reading practice in the in-between of both biopoetic texts provides a tantalizing experience for the reader who, reading in the back and forth of the slash’s inclination in *Secession/Insecession*, reads in the space of alternating caesuras. The caesura as breath, to echo Pato, opens the act of reading to the space of echoes on both sides of the texts – echoes which inflect the texts with difference as well as sameness; echoes that capture the poetic bond between texts, between poets, and between poets, texts, and reader(s). The potential of translation’s consanguinity is perceptible in *Secession/Insecession* where the desire to reach the unrepresentable – a prominent feature of my discussion of Fernando Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* in the chapter that follows – dis-conjoins both texts together. Even more persuasively, *Secession/Insecession* is an example of writing that is inclined toward future possibilities for the poem.

Conclusion

My interest in translation as a form of thinking together, and more specifically my devotion in this chapter to the task of reading *Secession/Insecession* as a book whose structure enacts the dynamics of a thinking together is not just a simple matter of reciprocity or textual companionship. The dually authored book, as one that embeds

several moments of correspondence and refractive echoes through Moure's echolation-homage, delivers its full resonance in a reading of slippages performed across and between texts.

In *Secession/Insecession*, translation affirms the new by bringing the work of Chus Pato into a new context, making it available to new readers, in a new language. Through the inclination of the slash that positions both works as "with" each other, Moure's translation of Pato's text has turned the impossible (her circulation in Canada) into an actuality. The dually authored book mutates what is impossible (an aporia) into a possibility. As Moure herself notes, it is crucial to acknowledge that her own text would not exist without Pato's.

The model proposed in *Secession/Insecession* makes the process of writing, reading, translating and thinking a continuous, open and generative model: one that is reverent to the point of exuberance and that makes the homage the poignant subject, not just of friendship, for it is not uncommon for poets to elegize the dead friend, but of translation. What *Secession/Insecession* makes abundantly clear, moreover, is that the contingent circumstances shaping the book – both in terms of geographical, cultural, and political forces – are impossible to ignore, and they are among the most important aspects and contributions to the transversal connection between thinking and translation, a connection which, in turn, gives way to the dually-authored format of the book.

Chapter Two

Rewriting Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*:

PME-ART and the Afterlife of Translation

“Everything depends on what we are and, in the diversity of time, how those who come after us perceive the world will depend on how intensely we have imagined it, that is, on how intensely we, fantasy and flesh made one, have truly been the world. I do not believe that history, and its great faded panorama, is any more than a constant flow of interpretations, a confused consensus of absent-minded witnesses. We are all novelists and we narrate what we see, because, like everything else, seeing is a complex matter.”

— Bernardo Soares, *The Book of Disquiet* (Trans. Margaret Costa)

Preamble⁶⁶

The first time I saw PME-ART – a Montreal-based bilingual (French/English) interdisciplinary performance collective – was, I think, in Montreal in 2011; it was in the bilingual show *The DJ Who Gave too Much Information/Le DJ qui donnait trop d'information*, where the performers took turns playing vinyl recordings as they recounted an anecdote related to each record. A few years later, when PME-ART occupied the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery during eight consecutive days with *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*, a show where they transcribed and radically rewrote Fernando Pessoa's unfinished work, *Livro do Desassossego*, from its English and French translations (*The Book of Disquiet* and *Le Livre de l'intranquillité*), I saw in PME's multilingual rewritings of the book the melding not only of the language of the visual and the literary arts but something of the work of the translator as well. Fascinated by this lieu de rencontre – between languages, versions of the book, and the overlaying of Pessoa's Lisbon over Montreal – I was struck by the way, in their creative echoes of the original, the scribes⁶⁷ made palpable a quality not necessarily new but one already inherent in the work itself: its defiant nature.

Composed of well over four hundred fragments that fall roughly in the categories of philosophic meditations, dreamy Symbolist texts, and diaristic passages (influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, and Walt Whitman among others), and described as an anti-book of sorts, *The Book of Disquiet* was never finished in Pessoa's lifetime (1888-1935). To offer a sense of the book's unwieldiness, four different translations and

⁶⁶ Earlier iterations of fragments from this text have appeared in *The Boston Review* (2017) and *TRIC/RTAC (Theatre Research In Canada/Recherches Théâtrales Au Canada)* (2017).

⁶⁷ Claudia Fancello, Marie Claire Forté, Nadège Grebmeier Forget, Adam Kinner, Ashlea Watkin and Jacob Wren

numerous editions of the book exist in the English language alone.⁶⁸ Given the book's unique history, which I shall outline below, the act of rewriting its fragments and changing them in the process – such as PME-ART has done – could be interpreted as an active contribution to the book's (un)making. Reading the performance in the aforementioned light turns the act of rewriting the book less into a gesture of appropriation of a found object than a way of activating, and of being hospitable to, the book's open-ended, plural, and elusive nature.⁶⁹

Signed by his semi-heteronym, Bernardo Soares, rather than Pessoa himself – which is not an unusual gesture from the author who created various alter egos for his oeuvre – *The Book of Disquiet* has a long and slippery history that bears to be at least cursorily sketched here – beginning with Pessoa's creation of heteronyms – but first a few notes on the trajectory of this chapter.

⁶⁸ *The Book of Disquietude* translated by Richard Zenith and published by Carcanet Press, 1991; *The Book of Disquiet: A Selection* translated by Iain Watson and published by Quartet Books, 1991; *The Book of Disquiet* translated by Alfred Mac Adam and published by Pantheon Books, 1991; *The Book of Disquiet* translated by Margaret Jull Costa, edited by José de Lancastre, and published by Serpent's Tail, 1991. The aforementioned edition followed the Feltrinelli Italian edition published in 1986. Numerous re-editions followed the ones mentioned above: *The Book of Disquiet* translated by Richard Zenith and published by Penguin Classics, 1998; *The Book of Disquiet* translated by Richard Zenith and published by Penguin Classics, 2002. The aforementioned text includes Zenith's revisions of his earlier editions and has since come to be considered as a "standard"; *The Book of Disquiet: The Complete Edition* translated by Margaret Jull Costa and published by New Directions Press, 2017. The aforementioned edition is based on the Portuguese edition put together by the Pessoa scholar Jerónimo Pizarro – an edition which emphasizes the various phases of the book's composition from the Guedes phase to the one signed by Soares. Debates regarding the "best" translation in English are divided between Zenith's and Costa's.

⁶⁹ Hospitality, in fact, is a theme that permeates much of PME's work; so much so, that it even becomes the umbrella term for a series of ongoing collaborations that explore the tensions between life and art by blurring the divide between performing and "playing" one's self, or between using language toward expository ends on the one hand and using it for artistic purposes on the other.

The Question of *The Book's* Origination: Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I consider the propulsive nature of Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* in relation to PME-ART's bilingual performance at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montreal entitled *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*. In the performance, scribes undertook the task of transcribing and creatively rewriting fragments from Pessoa's unfinished work, *Livro do Desassossego*. Producing rewrite after rewrite of fragments from the book's English and French translations, *The Book of Disquiet* and *Le Livre de l'intranquillité*, this co-authored performance not only merged performance art and literary creative practices together, it also summoned up several questions regarding the propulsive nature of the work – its particularly melancholic vocation which is suggested in the “disquiet” of the title as well the work's posture as the diary of the recluse Bernardo Soares. Having offered a reading of the previously mentioned work, I then turn to PME-ART's attempt to place *The Book of Disquiet* in a gallery setting in an ongoing way by performing rewrite after rewrite of the book.

I should point out at this juncture that my intention is not to read and compare the various versions of *The Book*, nor to perform a close reading of *The Book* and PME-ART's rewrites, but to use the example of PME-ART's performance to better understand and illustrate the condition of a text's unrest or afterlife. While I have included photo-documentation from the performance,⁷⁰ I am basing my reading of PME-ART's performance on my own memory of it, as a spectator. Aware that this might be conceived as a flawed approach, because too subjective, I – on the contrary – embrace the *trou de mémoire* and possible inaccuracies of my memories because they represent what I still

⁷⁰ These photos can be found at the end of this chapter.

retain from an event that occurred four years ago, and that seems pertinent to my object of study's interest in the reach and continued life of works of art. I should add another precision, however, regarding the partially subjective dimension of my methodology in relation to *The Book of Disquiet's* afterlife: while I mostly refer to my own memories and experiences of PME-ART's performance, I do not maintain that a work's afterlife is necessarily contingent upon human reception. This last point shall be made clearer as this chapter progresses.

As I highlighted in this dissertation's introduction, for Walter Benjamin, the task of translation is to provide the possibility of an encounter where "the most intimate relationships among languages" can emerge ("The Translator's Task" 154). In his essay, Benjamin argues that this "special convergence" between languages, where the relation between one language and another is at stake, makes new knowledge possible in the in-between of language's becoming. Benjamin gives translation's epistemological vocation a name, that of afterlife or the afterlife of translation.

Textual afterlife can be thought of in terms of a text's experiential aspects rather than an innate truth that is concealed within it. While it may be tempting to locate these experiential aspects in a reader or spectator, this is not what Benjamin suggests in his essay "The Translator's Task." In fact, Benjamin is quite clear on this point: "certain concepts gain their proper, indeed their best sense, when they are not from the outset connected exclusively with human beings" ("The Translator's Task" 152). For Benjamin, a work's afterlife is not contingent upon our experience of a text, for the work has a life and a history of its own. In that sense, afterlife is an innate feature of a work, but it is not one that can be distilled to the text's essence or truth. Afterlife, then, refers to a text's

ability to evolve and change; that is why categories such as “truth” and “essence” are misleading.

In this way, in its re-articulation of an original, translation provides an understanding into the conditions of textual mutability. Rather than purely an attempt to represent an original, translation is also bound to a critical interpretation of the work. Even as a creative practice and a mode of critical interpretation, translation’s relationship to an original is necessarily characterized by unrest by the very fact of its impossibility to keep the original exactly as it was; in other words, it is impossible in the act of rewriting a text to keep the original completely intact. Dislodging a text from one context to another necessarily changes something in the work. This is true beyond translational operations, and it is an especially salient feature of the act of reading also. In the context of translation, a comparative reading can reveal something about the text, and about language, that a reading of a single text cannot; for example, a comparative reading reveals the irreducible nature of the original; it reveals language itself as a living, thinking structure.

Deeply suspicious of the teleological movement of “progress,” Benjamin does not situate the original and the translation within a linear continuum. Instead, the translation and the original can be considered as engaged in a relationship of metamorphosis. In other words, the original is not what was; the original is what continues to change and evolve alongside the translation in a process of becoming. What is most interesting in Benjamin’s assessment of afterlife is that it is not just the translation that is transformed and that gives new life to an original. Rather, the original itself is affected by this mutation “which could not be so called if it were not the transformation and renewal of a

living thing, the original is changed” (“The Translator’s Task” 155). A work’s afterlife, then, can be thought of in terms of renewal and transformation.

This chapter uses the notion of afterlife as a means of thinking about the various forms of textual unrest or disquiet in Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* and PME-ART’s rewriting of that work. My proposal is thus to consider the work’s relationship to disquiet as an utterance of unrest or afterlife – one that exceeds a knowable origin or destination and that is situated at the cusp of a private and public discourse. By not replicating a word-for-word transcription of the book, I suggest that PME-ART’s Aufgabe (or impossible task) is to respond to the text’s unrest by continuing to exhaust its indeterminate possibilities through rewriting. The scribes accomplish this, I argue, by inserting themselves into the work as heteronymic mutations of Bernardo Soares. In this way, through PME-ART’s rewrites, the book thus continues to be overcome by an amorphous writing subject. Pessoa’s fragmented and unfinished text, then, as I show in this chapter, ambulates between everyone and no one, public and private discourses, heteronymy and anonymity, effacement and radical inscription,⁷¹ as well as inside and outside death. In one of the final sections of this chapter, I borrow Avital Ronell’s terms “post-autobiographical utterance” and “rumour-text” to name the “after-my-death report” that characterizes parts of *The Book of Disquiet*.

Moreover, as I shall show throughout these pages, Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* already thrives in this form of excessive undecidability and nomadic unfinishedness, for not only was Pessoa himself already a great shape-shifter – dispersing his oeuvre across a

⁷¹ I consider the work in relation to the notion of radical inscription in the sense that the book is not only unfinished and an anti book of sorts, but that Pessoa published some of the fragments while leaving the vast majority unpublished. I also use the term radical in the sense of the fragments’ afterlife as not one but many different books.

collection of over a hundred heteronyms – but the autobiography that constitutes *The Book of Disquiet* recounts the life of a man, Bernardo Soares, who never existed beyond Pessoa’s fiction sentences. Furthermore, considering *The Book* was never published or assembled by/in Pessoa’s lifetime, and that it was collated by several editors, translators and scholars into different versions, the question I pose is not which one is the truest *Book of Disquiet*, or even if there such a thing as Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet*, although the question is certainly valid, but rather, how are we to tell whether or not, in its itinerancy or anti-trajectory, *The Book* has actually arrived?

Thus, the errant nature of Pessoa’s *Livro do Desassossego* – as it is performed by the Montreal artist collective PME-ART and its scribes through their rewrites of its English and French translations – serves as my testing ground for thinking of experimental and creative translational practices in relation to Benjamin’s stance on the afterlife of works of art.

Pessoa’s Heteronyms

In Pessoa selves multiply. Bernardo Soares, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, Álvaro de Campos – all these constitute Pessoa’s heteronyms. In other words, they are all Pessoa and not Pessoa. What makes Pessoa’s heteronyms distinct from the invention of pseudonyms is the autonomy Pessoa prescribed to them with the creation of intricate back stories and the attribution of a life distinct from Pessoa’s own. For example, the heteronym, Alberto Caeiro, is a shepherd whose poems are written in free verse; Ricardo Reis is a doctor whose oeuvre emulates classical forms; invoking the expansiveness of Whitman’s poetry, Álvaro de Campos is also a naval engineer; for his part, *The Book of*

Disquiet's Bernardo Soares is an assistant bookkeeper, and unlike Caeiro, Reis, and de Campos he is considered Pessoa's semi-heteronym:

[Bernardo Soares is] a semi-heteronym because his personality, although not my own, doesn't differ from my own but is a mere mutilation of it. He's me without my rationalism and emotions. His prose is the same as mine, except for a certain formal constraint that reason imposes on my own writing, and his Portuguese is exactly the same. (Pessoa in a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro qtd in Zenith *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa* 259)

Like his very surname, Pessoa, which means person in Portuguese, the creation of heteronyms, an invention of Pessoa's own making, allowed him to recast his words – to disembody them into other author-characters. In French the inflection is slightly different. Person means personne, which is both someone and nobody depending on the grammatical context. This ambiguity is important. Pessoa's creation of heteronyms, four of which are mentioned here but who are among an approximated hundred others, formed a small coterie of writers who often interacted with each other's work in the form of criticism, interviews, or the exchange of letters.

The Book of Disquiet in Preparation

In 1913 an exiguous part of *The Book of Disquiet* arrives on the scene with the publication of a piece of writing called "In the Forest of Estrangement" ("Na Floresta do Alheamento"). The piece was published in the journal *A Águia* (*The Eagle*). Unlike most of his oeuvre, Pessoa not only signs the text in his own name, but he also frames it in a

letter to a friend as an excerpt “from *The Book of Disquiet*, in preparation” (Pessoa qtd in Zenith *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa* 265).

By the early 1920s, the book had still not fully materialized into a finished product but was instead to remain adrift. “[As] Pessoa worked on it for the rest of his life, the more he ‘prepared’ it,” notes Richard Zenith in his introduction to his 2002 English edition and translation, “the more unfinished it became” (“Introduction” *The Book of Disquiet xi*). Eventually, in a kind of manic surrender, Pessoa began scribbling the letters “L. do D.” (*Livro do Desassossego*) on various texts, even those predating 1913. As Zenith points out, these indexing scribbles were added somewhat precariously, “sometimes as an afterthought, or with a question mark indicating doubt” (“Introduction” *The Book of Disquiet xv*). Noting how Pessoa struggled to maintain a uniform voice or style for the work as a whole, scholars have tended to divide the writing of the book’s fragments in three phases.

The first phase, which is attributed to the heteronym Vicente Guedes as early as 1913, is written in the near style of fin de siècle semi-Symbolist prose pieces. The texts offer meditations on various states of mind, imaginary dreamscapes/landscapes and advice to dreamers/lovers. The second phase of the book’s development, beginning around 1920, is characterized by a near ten year pause that places the book’s writing in a state of limbo; finally, sometime around 1929, when all the other heteronyms had gone silent, Pessoa introduced Bernardo Soares, the semi-heteronym and humble assistant bookkeeper who would eventually become the sole author of the work, even though his arrival postdates the book’s inception. It is believed, in fact, that Soares wrote more than half of the book during the period between 1929 and 1934 (Jackson *Adverse Genres in*

Fernando Pessoa 162). In Pessoa's lifetime, only twelve fragments from the book were published in Portuguese periodicals,⁷² leaving close to four hundred and fifty others, marked "L. do D." in the margins of various ephemera, to be puzzled over by scholars and editors long after Pessoa's death (Zenith "Introduction" *The Book of Disquiet* xxviii).

The Book as an Anti-Book

The first published edition of *The Book of Disquiet* appeared in 1982, forty-seven years after Pessoa's death.⁷³ "It was a heroic effort," writes translator and editor Richard Zenith,

since Pessoa's archives are notoriously labyrinthine and his handwriting sometimes almost illegible, and it was doomed – for these very reasons – to be seriously flawed. Subsequent editions considerably improved the readings of the original manuscripts and added new material, at times a little recklessly. ("Introduction" *The Book of Disquiet* xxviii)

Zenith notes that if Pessoa had accompanied *The Book of Disquiet* through to publication, it would not only have been a different book than the one assembled posthumously by numerous editors, but that it would also have been a much smaller book ("Introduction" *The Book of Disquiet* xxviii). It is not clear exactly what Zenith has in mind with his use of the adjective "smaller." It's possible he is making a point about the triage of fragments

⁷² "In 1929 by *Solução Editora*; in 1930 in the prestigious Coimbra journal *Presença*; in 1931 in *Descobrimento*; and in 1932 again in *Presença*" (Jackson Averse *Genres in Fernando Pessoa* 162).

⁷³ The book was published by Lisbon's publishing house, *Ática*, with the collaboration of Jacinto do Prado Coelho, Teresa Sobral Cunha and Maria Aliete Galhoz. Interestingly, nearly a decade elapsed before an English version, in four translations (!), appeared at once in 1991: by Margaret Jull Costa, Alfred MacAdam, Iain Watson, and Richard Zenith.

that Pessoa would have performed versus the one done by editors who began with nothing but a vast and unwieldy collection of unbound fragments turned editorial project – a manuscript or a book that was not one – one that, to quote Zenith, “multiplied without ceasing, being first one book and then another, told by this voice and then that voice, then another, still others, all swirling and uncertain” (“Introduction” *The Book of Disquiet* x). On my desk alone there are four different editions of the work: three are in English and one is in French.⁷⁴

With many texts existing prior to *The Book of Disquiet*, and Pessoa’s post-dated annotation of *L. do D.* in the margins of certain works, *The Book of Disquiet* is a book that continues to rehearse itself, that continues to be re-assembled, and, in that sense, continues to be re-written – first by Fernando Pessoa himself as well as his heteronyms and second by countless editors, translators and scholars who arranged and continue to re-arrange the book post-humously. *The Book of Disquiet* can thus be considered as an authorial project on the one hand and as an editorial construct on the other – features I shall soon return to specifically in relation to PME-ART’s performance.

⁷⁴ For Judith Balso, the exponential features of the unfinished book are not due to the fact that Pessoa did not finish the work before his death. Even if *The Book of Disquiet* had been “finished,” the fragmentary nature of the work would have remained an intrinsic quality of the work:

L’inachèvement du livre ne constitue nullement un trait extrinsèque. Il n’est pas l’effet d’un vellétarisme de celui qui l’écrit, ni la conséquence d’une interruption de son organisation par la mort, mais il ne résulte pas non plus de l’impossibilité de faire tenir ensemble des morceaux disparates. C’est de façon essentielle que ce livre existe sur un mode discontinu: il ne peut se développer que dans la multiplication sans ordre ni lien de ses parties. (*Pessoa, le passeur métaphysique* 23)

Rewriting as a Lieu de Rencontre

The literary texts produced out of PME-ART's rewriting of the fragments from *The Book of Disquiet* and *Le Livre de l'intranquillité* assumed various shapes and tactics. Some transcriptions actively deviated from the source text and used Pessoa's fragments more as a prompt for their own echo-fragments. As Jacob Wren recalls,

[w]hile previous experts and translators sought to work toward some definitive version of *The Book of Disquiet*, here we clearly find ourselves drifting toward the distant other end of the finished/unfinished spectrum [...] When nothing is finished, everything remains possible. At least for a while. Or at least within a work of art. This is one of the paradoxes that art can scratch away at and evoke: sometimes a job well done is a job partially undone, to make room for the future. Pessoa never finished his masterpiece, *The Book of Disquiet*, and neither does *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*. One can gaze at a fragment and fear its implicit sense of failure. Or one can glance at a fragment and think: this is only the beginning. (Wren *Authenticity Is a Feeling* 235)

While some rewrites would contribute to the book's endless drifts between perpetual becoming and unmaking, other transcriptions remained more faithful to the task of rewriting the book, changing only a few words here and there. In some cases, however, even minor modifications were enough to completely change the destination (the mood and tone) of the fragments. In an article in *Canadian Art*, Wren points to the freedom the scribes afforded themselves in the process of rewriting the work:

Sometimes we did simply copy out the page, or a section of the page, and this act of transcription significantly changed it. Or we copied it out making only small

changes. Sometimes these small changes, altering only a few words, in fact did the most to make the page a little bit happier [...] We had techniques and a few basic rules, but for the most part you could do whatever you wanted, and yet whatever you did resulted in little more than one more page on the shelf. (Jacob Wren *Canadian Art*)

Far from reticent about their intentions to intervene and insert themselves into the work, even rendering it a little bit happier, PME-ART's creative manipulations, which overlap Pessoa's work with their own, involves the fabrication of new lines of inquiry in an already deeply introverted and philosophically inflected work.

Introducing PME-ART's Performance

What the reader has to imagine is a large gallery space which is divided into two sections. In the first section the walls are white and bare. There's a table in the middle of the room where six scribes are seated with their books and sheets of paper of various colours.⁷⁵ You can walk around the scribes, trying to catch a glimpse of the passages they are transcribing, how they are modifying them to render them "happier" and "more of our time," but what you realize is the lack of intimacy the setting affords, or else it is too intimate (Jacob Wren *Canadian Art*). The onlooker either ghosts PME-ART's process of rewriting as a marginal onlooker, or accepts his or her position as a figure of excess in the performance. There is a sense of discomfort for the spectator. When you enter the gallery, you are immediately drawn to the middle of the room where the scribes are busy at work. Upon entering their "inner circle" or "workspace," the onlooker quickly realizes he or she will not be invited to partake or participate in the work's rewriting. In fact, there is an

⁷⁵ Please consult Figure 1 for an overhead photo of the scribes' table.

overwhelming sense that his or her gaze and presence, as observer, might obstruct the creative process of the scribes.

[...] even more so than with the previous project, I had such a strong feeling that we were the art. Many who came in wanted to participate, to join in, to rewrite Pessoa alongside us. For some reason we had decided that, for this project, there would be no audience participation; it was the six of us who had dedicated ourselves to the task of rewriting *The Book of Disquiet*, not a free-for-all where anyone who wandered in could give it their best shot. (Wren *Authenticity Is a Feeling* 236)

Sensing the disquiet brought about by the structure of the performance, the way it incites an uneasy interaction between private and public spaces, the viewer feels drawn to explore the rest of the gallery if only to leave the scribes to the full concentration their task demands.

In the second section of the gallery there's a long shelf running along the length of the wall where the scribes place their transcriptions once they are done, page by colourful page. There's a camera too, mounted above a plinth that serves as a broadcast podium where scribes go to read their rewrites, and which initially captures the image of the transcription and projects it onto the wall.⁷⁶ When each performer is done his or her rewrite, he or she walks over to this section to project the newly transcribed text. They read it to themselves, silently at first, then they read it a second time, out loud whether or not there is actually a spectator present. Again, there is this double play of intimacy ghosting the process of rewriting. On the one hand the aforementioned gesture is a private one: the scribe reads the passage to him or herself. On the other hand, what is

⁷⁶ Please refer to Figure 4.

interesting is that the gesture then morphs into a public one as the scribe reads the transcription aloud. Of course, to interpret the gesture as one that moves from a private to a publicly broadcast discourse is misleading, for the nature of the performance itself already situates the gestures of the performance within the public space of the gallery which is free to all who wish to come and witness it.

In a more logistical sense, to evoke the idea of work or the work – whether of a public or private nature – is also to take note of the fact that the performance unfolded, over the period of eight days, during the gallery’s regular working hours. Between October 23 to November 1st 2014, PME-ART’s rewriting of *The Book of Disquiet* occupied the space of the gallery from Tuesday to Friday from noon to 6pm and Saturday from noon to 5pm. It makes sense also to link this idea of “work” considering the durational nature of the performance. Beyond the implications of their working schedule, each rewrite of a fragment is reminiscent of a factory line. As each scribe or performer finishes his or her re-write of a fragment, before undertaking another one, it is broadcast in an adjacent room with the help of a microphone and a projector, then placed on a wooden shelf about three feet off the ground running the entire length of the gallery. Over time, as the pages multiply, the horizontal tablet is virtually transformed into a conveyor belt.⁷⁷ In a piece of criticism by Nayla Naoufal on the performance published in Montreal’s *Le Devoir*, the headline aptly reads “la fabrique de littérature,” recalling not only PME’s transformation of the language of the gallery space into the language of the studio space where one makes works, but again suggesting that the performance is situated between public and private gestures. The performance’s finale – with the

⁷⁷ Figure 2 illustrates this feature quite well.

creation of an unreadable “Monster Book”⁷⁸ – further maintains the blurring of the aforementioned edges, for as Jacob Wren maintains the object in the gallery was perhaps more the scribes themselves and their transcription work than the work itself:

On the last day of the performance/exhibition, for the finissage, we stapled all of the rewritten pages back into a copy of the original *Book of Disquiet*, reading each one aloud before we did so, creating what we called the Monster Book. I did not expect the finished Monster Book to be so aesthetically compelling, so like an art object, the kind of physical object we had never really made before. All of the colourful pages jutting out at every possible, origami-like, unseemly angle. A record of our work together crammed into a somewhat unreadable package. Something I could imagine seeing in an art gallery, if the object in the gallery hadn’t actually been us and our ongoing performative work. (Wren *Authenticity Is a Feeling* 237)

While a book is generally intended to be read and circulated, the final public reading of the fragments, prior to being stapled into a copy of *The Book of Disquiet*, can be interpreted as a last gesture of homage directed at work (and at a work) that in many ways eschews progress; it is work whose end is done for the work itself, Pessoa’s, and therefore done for no one. PME-ART’s rewrites, which double *The Book of Disquiet* by producing a text upon a text, also multiply the site of reading into a unreadable object where something more or else or both coalesces and is unleashed from the work.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Please see Figure 6.

⁷⁹ In an essay on translation and affect Erin Moure writes: “Translation’s affective challenge (and joy) then *is* this traversal, this seeding of a place *beyond* the text, where two texts shimmer and something *more or else* coalesces” (Moire *Evening Will Come* emphasis in original).

To think in terms of a public and private discourse is somewhat useful in considering the rewrites themselves. PME-ART's mandate might be to transcribe a book that has been in public circulation since 1982, but the interventions they perform on the text – the diverse ways their rewrites depart from the source text – are of a more private than public nature; admittedly, “private” in the aforementioned context is perhaps not the most concise term compared to a concept like invisibility. This is because, in terms of the transcriptions, there may be some signs of intervention – especially when drawings and calligrams replace a standard paragraph – but generally speaking the scribes' modifications are invisible. Unless the spectator already has intimate knowledge of *The Book* it's often impossible to tell which are theirs and which are Pessoa's words. In terms of the private nature of the rewrites, to return to the term that I had temporarily replaced with the idea of the invisible, the rewrites express the private thoughts of the scribes who replace Soares as diarists. Whether or not those private thoughts stem from art or from life is another matter, however, that does not concern me here. What does interest me is the idea that the rewrites suggest a productive tension between art and life, public and private, the seen and the unseen – all of which remain in keeping with the spirit of Pessoa's unfinished project.

Of all the studies on *The Book of Disquiet* I've come across, Paulo de Medeiros' *Pessoa's Geometry of the Abyss* is by far the one that grants the most attention to the visual aesthetics of the work. To give a sense of the significant role “visibility” plays in the work, here is de Medeiros:

Throughout the *Book of Disquiet*, visual elements are made key to any form of thought, whether about the Self or the surrounding world: hardly any fragment is

without some reference to seeing, watching, looking, the eyes, or the gaze, so that a reading of the *Book of Disquiet* with any pretension to meeting its challenge must foreground the importance given by Pessoa to the visual element. (34)

It is noteworthy also that PME-ART's performance would take place in a gallery space rather than a library or even a theatre, to name but two possible settings. The performance's divide between two sections allows the performance collective to incorporate, in the first section, the immediacy of a creative process through performance (like the one afforded by the conditions of a theatre or theatrical space), and in the second section, the long shelves recall the archival practices of an institution, a library for example. The first section also reminds the spectator of the authorial project the book represents while the second section harkens back to the editorial project that has preoccupied so many editors and scholars since Pessoa's death. At the end of their performance, it is fitting too that PME-ART would transform Pessoa's original book into a "Monster Book" – a hefty, colourful, protruding, and unreadable art object – that would not only replace the original but that would remain in keeping with its itinerant and unfinished (publication) history.

The Book of Disquiet's Secret Rendez-Vous

In a talk on the nature of the test or testing, the philosopher Avital Ronell points out that

[w]e do not always know how to calculate the importance of a work. In some cases there is nothing even to guarantee that the work will arrive. Some works seem to set an ETA – there is a sense that it will take them years to make their arrangements, overcome the obstacles of an unprotected journey, get past the false

reception desks blocking their paths. In the more assured and seductive version these works follow the itineraries of Benjamin's "secret rendez-vous," targeting "the secret rendez-vous" that a work has made with the singularity of a destination in the form, perhaps, of a future reader. The reader or receptor from the future assumes the responsibility of being addressed, of signing for the work when it finally arrives – helping it originate. Yet little tells us how many hits a work will have taken on its way, or whether we will be there to receive it [...] perhaps the work will be prevented from showing up at the appointed time. On the other hand, some works barrel toward their destinations, causing a lot trouble for a lot of *daseins*. Heidegger once said that it can take two hundred years to undo the damage inflicted by certain works (I think he was evaluating Plato, so thousands of years). ("The Test Drive" my transcriptions)

Ronell's intimation that a work carries its own in-built and fluctuating temporality – depending on the reader who is there (or not) to receive it – is well illustrated in a book that is not one but multiple versions. In his introduction to his book-length study of *The Book*, Paulo de Medeiros echoes the undecidability captured in Ronell's statement:

Even at that most basic level one cannot properly speak of a book but of various books, or, more precisely, of various conceptions of what the book might have been like. If one adds to the editions in the original Portuguese those appearing in translation, also diverging from the Portuguese editions, one can imagine an infinite multiplication of books that in itself would already contribute to an annulment of the very idea of a single book, as if the text, in its publication history, would also represent a form of incessant disquiet. ("Introduction" 2)

There is, in de Medeiros' assessment, a pellucid relationship between the scattered fragments, as they were being written and recuperated by Pessoa over time, and future manuscript versions of the work by editors and translators which have been characterized as an impossible task. Though his own articulation of the book's unwieldy nature is less metaphysical than Ronell's, he echoes the seemingly infinite ontological possibilities of the nomadic book-object.

In one recent case, Tim Hopkins, of the London-based publisher Half Pint Press, has produced one of the most unique book-objects in his attempt to embody *The Book of Disquiet* in ephemera form. This particular edition, published in 2017 and of which only eighty copies exist, is composed of handmade pieces of ephemera ranging from a matchbook, a string of unused bus tickets, a map, gift tags, office stationary, etc. As I write this, New Directions Press has released a renewed English translation by Margaret Jull Costa, for she had translated the work once before for *Serpent's Tail*,⁸⁰ that is based on the 2013 Portuguese edition assembled by the Pessoa scholar, Jerónimo Pizarro. In Pizarro's latest edition, the fragments are organized in the presumed temporal progression they had evolved; thus, the book is divided into two main sections. The first representing the Vincent Guedes phase and the second embodying the work signed by Bernardo Soares.

The American publisher, New Directions, moreover, is marketing the book as "The Complete Edition." The paratext is interesting considering the fact the introduction, which is signed by Costa, is far from reticent about the fact that the book must remain an impossible task, a work in progress:

⁸⁰ The *Serpent's Tail* edition was put together by Maria José Lancastre and subsequently translated in Italian by Antonio Tabucchi. Many texts that appear in the New Directions Edition do not appear in Lancastre's selection for *Serpent's Tail*.

Pessoa never understood this rigorous process of selection and adaptation. The “book” thus remained forever a work in progress. Indeed, although some fragments were published in magazines during Pessoa’s lifetime, it did not appear in book form in Portuguese until 1982, forty-seven years after Pessoa’s death. (x) Costa ends her introduction by invoking the freedom that the book, regardless of the edition or translation, affords the reader:

In a way [the book’s] very incompleteness is enticing, encouraging the reader to make his or her own book out of those fragments. What awaits every reader of *The Book of Disquiet* is the sheer serendipitous pleasure of opening the book at random and reading whichever fragment you happen to alight on. (xv)

For the French philosopher Alain Badiou, the question of the reception of Pessoa’s work is one characterized by philosophy’s belatedness in knowing *how* to receive the work. He asks: “[l]a philosophie de ce siècle, y compris celle de ces dix dernières années, a-t-elle pu, a-t-elle su, se mettre sous condition de l’entreprise poétique de Pessoa?” (*Petit Manuel d’Inesthétique* 61). “Il faut donc conclure,” he continues, “que la philosophie n’est pas, n’est pas encore, sous condition de Pessoa. Elle ne pense pas encore à hauteur de Pessoa” (62 emphasis in original).⁸¹ Badiou’s use of “not yet (n’est pas encore)” suggests that Pessoa’s work is syncopatically misaligned with the time of its being written. In other words, his writing – as de Medeiros points out in his brief reading of Badiou’s assessment of Pessoa – belongs to a readership of the future that must accept contemporaneity with Pessoa (25). Badiou’s claim, that philosophy has to catch up with

⁸¹ “Has the philosophy of this century (that of the past decade included) been able to – has it known *how* to – put itself under the condition of Pessoa’s poetic enterprise?” (*Handbook of Inaesthetics* 36 emphasis in original). “We must therefore conclude,” Badiou continues, “that philosophy is not – at least not yet – under the condition of Pessoa. Its thought is not yet *worthy of Pessoa*” (*Handbook of Inaesthetics* 36 emphasis in original).

Pessoa, hinges on the new pathways through art and thought that his work carves out. Such a focus sheds some insight onto the nomadic and promissory nature of the future-oriented work as one lighted by philosophy and lyricism on the one hand and history and experimentation on the other. But what is this “condition of Pessoa” that Badiou understands as being ahead of philosophy?

Perhaps we can begin thinking about this condition of failed or misaligned contemporaneity by considering the formal aspects of *The Book of Disquiet* – a work that is conceived and composed in fragments and which continues to circulate through the editorial efforts of various scholars, editors and translators – albeit in various (imperfect) iterations. Indeed, as I have already intimated throughout these pages, the book’s disquieting publishing history suggests *The Book of Disquiet* is riddled with a material quality of untranslatability that destines it to a state of fragmentary incompleteness.

The book’s incompleteness, as a feature of its untranslatability, reminds me of the figure of the Tower of Babel. To understand the reference to Babel, it is useful to examine it in relation to Derrida’s essay on Walter Benjamin’s “The Translator’s Task” where he provides an insightful interpretation of the fragmented nature of the tower as one that not only instigates disquiet but that must remain forever on the make:

La “tour de Babel” ne figure pas seulement la multiplicité irréductible des langues, elle exhibe un inachèvement, l’impossibilité de compléter, de totaliser, de saturer, d’achever quelque chose qui est de l’ordre de l’édification, de la construction architecturale, du système et de l’architectonique. (“Des Tours de Babel” 209)

The logic of disquiet in *The Book of Disquiet's* mutating form across editions and translations – its edification – match the confusion of babel itself, at least for the reader who remains on the heels of Derrida's essay:

D'abord: dans quelle langue la tour de Babel fut-elle construite? Dans une langue à l'intérieur de laquelle le nom propre de Babel pouvait aussi, par confusion, être traduit par "confusion." Le nom propre Babel, en tant que nom propre, devrait rester intraduisible, mais une sorte de confusion associative qu'une seule langue rendant possible, on put croire le traduire, dans cette langue même, par un nom commun signifiant ce que nous traduisons par confusion. (210)

Like Babel, *The Book of Disquiet* remains not only fundamentally possible in its unfinishedness as well as impossible to finish, it also claims its own diffusion of the proper name – naming not only the (anti) book-object itself but entitling the book to disquiet at a material as well as a hermeneutic level; put another way, *The Book of Disquiet* is a largely (un)nameable thing.⁸²

With these considerations in mind, the eponymous quality of disquiet that is proper to Babel and its parallels with *The Book* are based less in conditions of confusion than an ambivalent relationship to translatability, for the (un)nameable which teeters between ideas and things – their untranslatability – is simultaneously that which calls for translation. In the same essay as the one quoted above, Derrida acquiesces to a similar idea in relation to Benjamin's poetics of translation where he states that the paradox of

⁸² By my use of "thing" I have in mind the kind of eccentric reading of an original text provided by Derrida in "Ear of the Other": "A text is original insofar as it is a thing, not to be confused with an organic or a physical body, but a thing, let us say, of the mind, meant to survive the death of the author or the signatory, and to be above or beyond the physical corpus of the text, and so on" (121).

translation – the very confusion of translation – is a condition of the multiplicity of language(s):

Depuis cette limite, à la fois intérieure et extérieure, le traducteur en vient à recevoir tous les signes de l'éloignement (*Entfernung*) qui le guident en sa démarche infinie, au bord de l'abîme, de la folie et du silence [...] Ce danger n'est pas celui de l'accident, c'est la traductibilité, c'est la loi de la traduction, l'à-traduire comme loi, l'ordre donné, l'ordre reçu – et la folie attend des deux côtés. (234)⁸³

It is worth noting, too, that as Soares explores the world as it comes to him through his thoughts and senses, in shards or fragments, the book too can be described as an improvisation that defies lucidity. In fact, in a letter to a friend, Pessoa admonishes the fragmentary nature of the work: “My state of mind compels me to work hard, against my will, on *The Book of Disquiet*. But it's all fragments, fragments, fragments” (Pessoa qtd from de Medeiros 15). Unlike most manuscript versions of the book, which attempt to present a uniform product, PME-ART's rewritings on loose sheets of variously coloured paper echo Pessoa's fragmented compositional process as piece by scattered piece Pessoa wrote on napkins, envelops, and whatever materials he may have had on hand at the moment of the fragment's spontaneous recording. PME-ART's performance, too, contributes to Babelian features of *The Book of Disquiet* perhaps most poignantly by making those incomplete and fractured features a notable part of their own work.

⁸³ A similar passage exists in *Ulysses gramophone*: “Selon une distinction que j'ai risquée ailleurs à propos de l'histoire et du nom Babel, ce qui reste *intraduisible* est au fond la seule chose à *traduire*, la seule chose traductible. L'à-traduire du traductible ne peut être que l'intraduisible” (Derrida 59-60).

Indeed, as concerns *The Book of Disquiet's* fleeting nature, it is difficult to ascertain if it ever really “took off,” at least in terms of it being an unfinished and anti-book of sorts. For de Medeiros, the prerogative that *The Book of Disquiet* is an anti-book of sorts has precisely less to do with the editorial history of the work than its fragmentary nature “and its refusal of systematic thought” (de Medeiros 3). Then again, assuming that Pessoa was not quite done collecting and preparing the book – taming its restless spirit – there is a sense in which in writing beyond his time,⁸⁴ the book had never fully arrived on Pessoa’s doorstep to begin with, and that it was already in motion well before Pessoa ever caught wind of it. In this less assured version, the book is replete not just with uncertainty but with untraceable origins – hence why it can be read as bearing the traces of disquiet – and what is more – of afterlife.

The Times: Becoming Contemporaries with Pessoa

In a retrospective glance of their twenty-year career as a performance group, Jacob Wren summarizes the 2014 performance in the following manner:

The relation between art and emotion is a long and complicated one. With *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*, PME-ART rewrites *The Book of Disquiet* page by melancholy page, altering the emotional tenor of the book in many subtle and unsubtle ways. Of course, within any conventional view of literature, rewriting such a classic and deeply loved text is practically sacrilege. But the intention here is not to break any particular canonical rules, rather to see what happens when a door long assumed to be locked is partially reopened, when fragments left unfinished seventy-nine years

⁸⁴ de Medeiros makes an identical observation in his chapter “Protocols of Reading” (21).

ago are mischievously treated as if they still remained unfinished today, as if one could simply continue working on them. (Wren *Authenticity Is a Feeling* 233-34)

While the focus Wren places on the emotional tenor of the work makes it seem as if it were the only determining factor directing the task of rewriting the book, the intent in making *The Book of Disquiet* a little happier, as Wren concedes, was also to make the book more of our time:

This is a more playful, democratic, collaborative notion of writing. Pessoa's virtuosity in turning his own compulsions and doubts into literature here meets a contemporary moment, the year 2014, in which compulsions and doubts are expressed in a multitude of old and new ways: online, in televised pseudo-reality, and in every kind of autobiographical literary expression. What might it mean to rewrite these fragments today? What shades of early twenty-first century emotion might be woven into Pessoa's unfinished twentieth-century elegy? (Wren *Authenticity Is a Feeling* 234)⁸⁵

PME-ART's engagement with the affective dimensions of "the times" in which the book is rewritten suggests a mode of transmission and reception that attempts to give the work a temporary destination, a time stamp. Can the performance, then, be read as an answer to Badiou's provocation about our (and philosophy's) inability to catch up to Pessoa? And if so, how are the scribes attempting, through their rewrites, to bring Pessoa's book into the present moment?

Assuming the unfinished book will continue to float through the flux of time – from Pessoa's twentieth century to PME-ART's early twenty first century and to readers

⁸⁵ See Figure 5, which captures the permeable relationship between "the times" as news and the rewriting of the book.

beyond – the book is not just one that moves through time but one that changes depending on its temporal and perhaps even geographical coordinates. As we have seen, the continually mutating existence of the book “barrels” toward its unknown destination where editions continue to vary in their contents and orderings of that content. Indeed, the book’s mutability is exemplified in PME-ART’s brief eight-day long intervention. Running counter to the usual task of dutifully transcribing a work, the approach of faithfully copying a text in order to preserve its authority is undermined in PME-ART’s performance as they endow the work with new references, alternative entries, and interpretations. Their rewrites, in other words, are both deliberate and spontaneous. Moreover, PME-ART’s interrogation, “what does *The Book* feel like today,” and “what is ‘my’ relationship to *The Book* in this present moment,” certainly contributes to a reading of *The Book*’s disquieting ontology, but I am curious to explore how it might simultaneously respond to Badiou’s quandary as well.

It is interesting to note that while PME-ART’s mandate is to render the book more of our time by inserting themselves and their experiences into the text, the genre of the book PME-ART has decided to transcribe represents Bernardo Soares’ diary and autobiography – his melancholic and fragmented day-to-day reflections on life and art. Is it paradoxical, then, that the diary, an intimate and inwardly directed (narcissistic) gesture, is transformed into an outpour of outward connections? Can the conflation of the diary of one person and then another offer a way into what Badiou terms “the condition of Pessoa’s poetic enterprise”?

With the diary’s speculative tone, Pessoa/Soares/PME-ART’s scribes all perform (and broadcast) an outward gesture of thinking’s inwardness. The fact that the diary’s

mostly undated fragments treat Soares's day-to-day is nevertheless what offers spectators, readers and scholars an opportunity to contemplate the book's relationship to time and PME-ART's rewrites of the work in the twenty-first century. What I mean by this is that the performance draws attention to the links between Pessoa's "now" and our own "now." Tinged with the marks of "reportage," in the journalistic sense of "reporting on the times," PME-ART's deliberate insertion of the present moment into their rewrites and their embrace of textual variants make it close enough to the original to highlight parts of it while the mix of "fidelity" and "departures" from the original also do something to heighten features of the text as well. In this case, Badiou's provocation that Pessoa was writing beyond his time, and that we should concede to the prerogative to become his contemporaries, turns Pessoa and his heteronyms into messengers in the sense the word has in another essay by Walter Benjamin – his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" – where the "messenger" or "reporter of the times" is embodied in the figure of the angel of history.⁸⁶

In his essay, Benjamin borrows an image from a painting by Paul Klee entitled "Angelus Novus" (Angel of History). According to Benjamin, the angel of history is a messenger who gazes towards the past as he is simultaneously blown toward the future by a storm that brews in the present. "The angel would like to stay," Benjamin writes,

awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...] This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress. (258)

⁸⁶ I am indebted to Avital Ronell's observation, in "Street Talk," that Benjamin's messenger in his essay "Karl Kraus" comes bearing more than news, as "news" can also be understood in the wider sense of a commentary on the times (111-12).

In the angel's witnessing of the storm and in his desire to awaken the dead, he becomes a messenger of the times: those before, those of the present moment and presumably those to come as well. Time, in this sense, is not just a temporal matter, but like PME-ART's performance mandate to render the book more "of our time" it can be understood in the sense of "the times" as "news" (Ronell "Street Talk" 112).

The Book, in the sense afforded to it as "reporting on the times" and as "news," becomes an open letter: a private utterance made public. What I mean by this is that Soares' diary is overtaken by a certain kind of journal-ism. Quite apart from being a literary object that appears at a crossroads between "journal" in the intimate sense of a diary⁸⁷ and news in the public sense of an open broadcast, the utterances that compose *The Book of Disquiet* participate in a double hermeneutics – double because the work is situated in-between public and private discourses. Is the overlap in discourse, then, what allows PME-ART to reach the text with a certain sense of contemporaneity?

For the philosopher Avital Ronell, the intersection marked by public and private discourse is characterized by a rumourological quality that, in Walter Benjamin, takes on both an internal and external function. In her essay entitled "Street Talk," Ronell explores the rumourological quality of works by Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As Ronell unfurls and enmeshes one philosopher's rumour-text to another, a common thread that runs through all three authors' work is the conception of rumours as stray utterances that run ahead of their author – even independent of them – as they espouse a certain life of their own, an auto-mobility of sorts, that continues to circulate (even) in the absence of the subject (Ronell "Street Talk" 108). As Ronell points out, the disquieting function of the rumour is thematically anchored in the writing itself,

⁸⁷ In French this is more obvious. A diary is a *journal intime*.

internal to it, while it is also that which is ex-centric to the work (thus it is external to it) and appears to have a “decisive rapport to [an] ‘after-my-death’ discourse” (“Street Talk” 122). Indeed, there is much to unpack in Ronell’s suggestion that the blurred edges between private and public discourses are similar to those of a rumour. Even more perplexing is the link Ronell makes between the rumour and what she terms an “after-my-death” discourse.

In one of the examples Ronell provides, Jean-Jacques Rousseau has just survived an accidental encounter with a carriage and a Great Dane. While Rousseau keeps face in the literal disfiguration of his accident (his body is mutilated by his fall in several places), and while he maintains authority over his “physical and textual body,” such a form of control soon eludes him (“Street Talk” 124). The news of Rousseau’s fall travels quickly through the streets of Paris where it takes on a life of its own. According to the news, Rousseau did not just fall; he died. After reading of his death in the obituaries, Rousseau states that he was mortified to learn that the state had given itself the right to publish any manuscripts found in his apartment. The falsely interpreted posthumous publication of his work carries a double consequence: not only does the rumour of his death outlive him but so does his textual body; as Ronell points out, “[w]orst of all, however, he also will have witnessed himself after his presumed death, in his afterdeath, being buried alive” (“Street Talk” 127).

Part of what can be gleaned from Ronell’s reading of Rousseau is the idea of the rumour as afterword: as a genre of writing that has an *après-ma-mort* (afterlife) structure that can be likened to what she calls a post-autobiographical utterance (“Street Talk” 128). Reading Ronell, the definition of rumour I propose is that a rumour is a floating

discourse; it is one that suggests instability as it is situated on the edges of a private and public discourse which becomes indistinct, even interchangeable. To understand *how* rumours move, then, we must also understand the temporality of the rumour, as an utterance that “runs ahead of their author.” What I extrapolate from Ronell’s temporal treatment of the rumour is that it is characterized by an eruption: a moment of creative flight where the coherence of an origin(al) is called into question. But what does this mean for Pessoa and PME-ART? If we refer back to Badiou, Pessoa’s “after-my death” discourse is a discourse which still bears to be understood.⁸⁸ My proposal is thus to continue throughout this chapter to situate *The Book of Disquiet* on the terrain of the rumourological and to continue to envision the work’s relationship to disquiet as an utterance of unrest – one that exceeds a knowable origin or destination.

Between Editorial and Authorial Tasks

The Book of Disquiet exposes the limitations of dividing the book between an authorial project on the one hand and an editorial construct on the other. These categories might be useful in some instances however. For instance, Pessoa eventually authorizes Bernardo Soares to pen the unfinished *The Book of Disquiet* – even though traces of Guedes’ signature still stand out in relation to the fragments signed by Soares. Soares’ authorial project, in turn, cannot be apprehended without considering the diffusion of subjectivity at work throughout the text. As Pessoa’s semi-heteronym, Soares is not just any other authorial figure derived from Pessoa’s cast of heteronyms. He embodies a double of Pessoa himself, and thus overlaps Pessoa in ways that the other heteronyms, as supreme fictions, do not (Ramalho 2003a 2-3 qtd in de Medeiros 13).

⁸⁸ Ronell makes a similar observation in relation to Walter Benjamin in “Street Talk” (108).

To complicate matters further, Soares can also be considered as an embodiment of all the other heteronyms, for as Pessoa's doppelganger he holds within himself the inscriptions and voices of Pessoa's palimpsest and limitless universe (de Medeiros 95). Further unrest provokes the distinctions between the categories of author and editor to blur when Pessoa decides to attribute *The Book* to Bernardo Soares and hatches a plan to edit Guedes' previous sections, thus volleying the project between an authorial and editorial impetus:

The organization of the book should be based on as rigorous a selection as possible of the various existing texts, adapting older ones that are untrue to the psychology of Bernardo Soares [...] Apart from that, there needs to be a general revision of style, without losing the personal tone or the drifting, disconnected logic that characterizes it. (Pessoa qtd in Costa "Introduction" *The Book of Disquiet x*)

While such a project was never brought to completion, it does problematize the distinction between the task of the writer and that of the editor as it confuses the two.

Tim Hopkins' handmade collection of ephemera for Half Pint Press provides another lucid example of the melding of the two projects. In the process of the book's transformation into a collection of ephemera, the reader's notion of what the book is, its established norms and bound forms, finds itself uncompromisingly questioned. Hopkins' immanent signature looms over the box set. Such a halo of immanence is also undeniable in the work of the book's countless editors and translators. Margaret Jull Costa, for example, makes the enmeshments between the editorial and authorial project visible in her introduction to the New Directions Press edition when she prefaces the difficulties in

translating Pessoa's "meaningless" sentences:

Jeronimo Pizarro's edition contains many texts that were omitted from Maria José Lancastre's edition, and faced with those new texts, I was reminded just how difficult it is for the translator to find meaning in those "meaningless" sentences – which can often be oblique or enigmatic – and, at the same time, reproduce that same languid fluidity in English, that seductive voice [...] the difficulty for the translator lies (a) in understanding *what* the author means, (b) picturing the image as he creates, and (c) transporting that meaning and that image into meaningful, tangible, sensuous English. Keeping close to the original simply won't work. Paradoxically, the translation has to take quite a bold step away from the original if meaning and imagery are to be preserved. (*xiii*)

Of course, whether writing or translating, both are forms of editing. And obviously, the enmeshment of translation as writing and of translation or writing as editing is not news; yet, the ways in which *The Book of Disquiet* invites various forms of intervention into its conception are far from conventional. The book, to name just one possible iteration, could have existed exclusively, or at the very least primarily, as an archival artefact rather than any kind of editorial or authorial construct at all. But that has not been its fate, and we have to wonder why that is not so.

What would have been Pessoa's influence in modernism, had his texts been known, in translation, across Europe and the United States? What would have been the reception of *The Book of Disquiet* had it been published and translated immediately after Pessoa's death in 1935 or even a few years later, after World War II for instance, instead of languishing until 1982 to be first edited, and even

later to be translated into English and thus finally receive world-wide recognition of its significance? (de Medeiros 96)

Emphasizing the unwieldy quality of *The Book*, de Medeiros' question of the text's belated reception is unknowable. Yet, it is precisely this unknowable quality that continues to enmesh the various editions, translations, and versions of the book together into an impossible object. In so far as the book remains adrift, inexhaustible in a sense, it will continue to yield invitations unto its (un)essayed finitude. Signed by the semi-heteronym, Bernardo Soares, a figure who is both Pessoa and not Pessoa, the book holds within its atomized structure – the undated fragments of a purported (fictional) diarist, the autobiography of a melancholic recluse – something rumourological.

The Rumour

After Pessoa's death, the book hits a literal dead-end. It remains buried in trunks that held twenty-nine notebooks and approximately 25 000 texts/sheets of paper and envelopes containing essays and criticism, poetry and plays, translations and linguistic theory, etc., all written in either French, English or Portuguese. Some texts were typed, many were written by hand and recorded on napkins, envelopes, loose sheets of paper, others were kept in notebooks or in the margins of earlier texts (Wren "Ways of Thinking" Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery Archive). *The Book of Disquiet* is an example of textual afterlife, then, in the sense of its perpetual (semiotic) restlessness. Long after Pessoa's death, the book is given "another topography of circulation," as Avital Ronell puts it in another context ("Street Talk" 107). Always destined to be elsewhere, *The Book's* restless

qualities certainly justify such a reading, of afterlife, as does the fact that its disquieting publishing history stems from its author's ultimate departure: death.

Taking into consideration its fleeting nature, as though it arrived from a secret source of scrambled origins, only to always be getting away, and in a sense, always on its way out, *The Book of Disquiet* can be read as a rumour-text: a post-autobiographical utterance marked by an "after-my-death" report or afterlife. Readers who are familiar with Walter Benjamin's notion of afterlife (*Fortleben*) may start to intuit a connection here between the continuing life of works through the original's relationship to translation and Ronell's concept of the rumour-text as that part of a work that lies outside of anyone's control and that takes on a life of its own. In its renewal of an original, translation not only gives rise to an understanding of the original as a mutable form characterized by unrest, but it also grants the original an afterlife. As Walter Benjamin writes,

a translation proceeds from the original. Not indeed so much from its life as from its 'afterlife' or 'survival' [*Überleben*]. Nonetheless the translation is later than the original, and in the case of the most significant works, which never find their chosen translators in the era in which they are produced, indicates that they have reached the stage of their continuing life [*Fortleben*]. ("The Translator's Task" 153)

For his part, Derrida explains that afterlife or *Fortleben* in German, what Gondrillac translates as "survie," implies an extension of the life of the original rather than life after death or *post mortem* (Derrida "Des Tours de Babel" 222). In figuring translation as an

afterlife, translation participates in the un-rest and continuing life of art works (Benjamin 154).

Both Ronell's rumour-text and Benjamin's textual afterlife offer examples of how works take on a life of their own, how they survive their authors and surpass their readers. Like Benjamin's notion of textual afterlife, the rumour does not have a fixed boundary except perhaps for the fact that its imprint is future-oriented. In translation, the original does not lag behind the translation, nor does it have a fixed temporality; it too continues to evolve. In that sense, the rumour, like the afterlife of translation, cannot be fully anticipated; and like a fragment from a larger vessel, to echo Benjamin, it comes to us as incomplete, ongoing – as though its business lay elsewhere. Perhaps there is a bit of an echo of Badiou's reading of Pessoa here as well, and a suggestion that the rumour-text and textual afterlife are somehow linked to possible entries into the text's errant futurity.

I believe that a further potent link to describe the rumour's relationship to language is to understand it through the concept of "afterlife" and "translatability" found in Benjamin's essay "The Translator's Task." In terms of "translatability," the relationship between original and translation does not depend upon it actually being translated. Instead, translatability is an intrinsic part of the work that exists independent of the translator. Here is Benjamin:

Translation is a mode. In order to grasp it as such, we have to go back to the original. For in it lies translation's law, decreed as the original's translatability. The question of a work's translatability has two senses. It can mean: will it ever find, among the totality of its readers, an adequate translator? Or, more pertinently, whether by its very essence it allows itself to be translated, hence – in

accord with the meaning of this mode – also calls for translation. (“The Translator’s Task” 152)

These questions recall Badiou’s provocation that philosophy has not yet known how to catch up to Pessoa. Moreover, it seems to me that this is a problem summed up in Benjamin’s first question – regarding our ability to receive the work being translated – as well as in his second question, which has to do with that which may resist translation. In both cases, Benjamin’s notion of “translatability” works well to help us understand how textual afterlife troubles the very idea of a destination. To borrow from Benjamin, “[translatability] would merely be a demand to which human beings had failed to respond” (“The Translator’s Task” 152).

The notion of afterlife is important to my reading of Pessoa’s book as well as PME-ART’s performance because one of the most significant aspects of “afterlife” is not just how it challenges the linear progression of a text, from its inception to its publication or from source to target text, but how it questions the very idea of a destination. The term, afterlife, names something about the condition of textuality itself rather than its arrival. According to Benjamin, the most significant works find textual afterlife not because they are translated but because there is something about them, a quality of translatability, that remains latent. To understand these matters from another angle, it is helpful to remember that earlier in his essay, Benjamin proposes that a work’s translatability opens onto two questions: the first has to do with finding an adequate translator; the second question Benjamin poses in relation to a work’s translatability has to do with whether or not it allows itself to be translated (“The Translator’s Task” 152). Textual afterlife, as a condition of a text’s translatability, then, has precisely to do with Badiou’s preoccupation

with contemporary philosophy's failure to know how to receive Pessoa. Put another way, Badiou's provocation is related to the question of the work's afterlife and philosophy's inability to know how to respond.

Concluding on Errant Futurity: PME-ART as a Readership of the Future

After Pessoa's death, the book that is not one holds a kind of quantum superposition. While with Pessoa's death the work hits a literal dead-end on the one hand, it continues down several forking paths on the other, with no observable in-betweens. As versions of *The Book of Disquiet* multiply, it becomes the ultimate orbiting text. It is a book which is situated on the very outskirts of itself.

What we have here isn't a book but its subversion and negation: the ingredients for a book whose recipe is to keep sifting, the mutant germ of a book and its weirdly lush ramifications, the rooms and windows to build a book but no floor plan and no floor, a compendium of many potential books and many others already in ruins. (Zenith *ix*)

Picking up on the groundlessness of the ground, in Zenith's observation that *The Book* lacks a floor, further encourages us to read *The Book of Disquiet* as a rumour: "a widely disseminated report detached from a discernible origin or source. Inasmuch as it becomes what it is, the spreading rumour takes on the qualities of a story told, without author or term, imposing itself as an ineluctable and unforgettable account" (Ronell "Street Talk" 126). The idea that *The Book* is somehow detached from a discernible origin or source is, I think, most compellingly located in the figure of the semi-heteronym, Bernardo Soares,

the assistant bookkeeper in the firm Vásques & Company, whose factless autobiography is the horizon of *The Book of Disquiet* itself.

In the disfiguration of the writing – which is expressed in Pessoa’s changing figures, from heteronym to heteronym, but most poignantly from Pessoa’s semi-heteronym, Bernardo Soares, who represents a mere mutilation of Pessoa’s personality – there is a literal and a figural defacement that happens. As Pessoa relinquishes his name and the name of several others of his heteronyms to Soares, I cannot help but wonder what, in a rumour, one has to lose but one’s (good) name (Ronell “Street Talk” 110). Is Soares, the assistant bookkeeper, to blame for the book’s rumourological quality? Or is he, as the keeper of all records, keeping tabs on the rumours, transforming the book into a kind of “rumour control center,” “capturing stray utterances,” as the fragmentary nature of *The Book* might suggest, constructing a catalogue of moments about to lapse into oblivion (“Street Talk” 113)? What better than a factless autobiography to frame the rumour after all.

For de Medeiros, the assistant bookkeeper, Bernardo Soares, houses the spectral qualities of the text.⁸⁹

In its form, fragmentary, obsessive, constantly returning to the same topics, with great intensity, the text itself should be seen as a form of haunting. Soares uses the terms ‘phantasma’ and ‘espectro’, ghost, spectre, phantom, to refer both to himself and to others he encounters or imagines encountering. (de Medeiros 53)

I agree with de Medeiros. To the degree that *The Book of Disquiet* exists and persists on a certain level of “fantasmic transmission,” it acts as a kind of medium that continues to

⁸⁹ There are various ways to consider the proposition that Soares embodies the rumourological quality of Pessoa’s oeuvre beginning with his containment – as Pessoa’s semi-heteronym – of all the other heteronyms that shape and constitute Pessoa’s oeuvre.

roam “afterworldly in-the-world,” restless as a ghost (Ronell “Street Talk” 121). How many editors have received the psychic call, played the role of *The Book’s* amanuensis, taken its dictation, arranged its “post-autobiographical utterances,” listened to its archival cues, Pessoa’s trail of clues – in the form of letters or notes, multiple prefaces – as though he too was constantly rehearsing the book, trying it on. The act of close listening, as though to a rumour, sent Richard Zenith in 2001 to review his own edition and translation, published in 1991, redressing the rumour as it were.

Soares, the bookkeeper and thus keeper of all records, can be likened to a crypt:

If one is still to see in *The Book of Disquiet* any survival of the heteronyms then, it is already as a phantasmagory of the name of the author, here condensed in that of Bernardo Soares, even though that other one, of Vicente Guedes, though replaced is never quite annuled, surviving under erasure as it were, a sort of trace, visible only in its signature and the minimal biography the text still retains among a few references [...]. (de Medeiros 61)

The logic of the crypt is, in fact, one that de Medeiros develops over the course of an entire chapter. While I won’t invoke all of de Medeiros’ arguments in the space of this conclusion, I do find it useful, in terms of my reading of the rumourological qualities of the work, to pick certain aspects of his account especially with the goal of capturing how, as a rumour-text, *The Book of Disquiet* continuously confounds public and private discourses, rest and unrest, and the overlap between a closed and open letter.

In his chapter on *The Book of Disquiet* as crypt, de Medeiros usefully points out that for Derrida as well as psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, the crypt not only houses a desire, it also implies a division of the self into a simultaneous process

of introjection and incorporation such that the expansion of the self as well as the creation of the other involves a multiplication of the self (62-63): “In this process a part of the Self is assumed then as Other, but kept inside the crypt and dead, in a specular effect of topographic definition in which inside and outside reflect each other while simultaneously separating and excluding themselves” (de Medeiros 63). In its conflation of interior and exterior, the passage bears a striking resemblance to Ronell’s description of the architectonics of the rumour-text that – like Walter Benjamin’s glass arcades which I develop in Chapter Three – bear a permeable relationship between the vectors of an inside and an outside.

This element of co-presence is exemplified in PME-ART’s approach to the book where their rewrites – including its visual and material poetics – exist in a material reality that is neither beyond nor completely intrinsic to the text. In other words, they enter into the textual reality of the work at the same time as they escort it towards their own. And because each scribe comes to the text with a different subjective state, the “essence” of the rewrites is never locatable, which is perfect for a book that already finds itself in the thick of it: neither with a clear beginning and certainly with no discernable end. In a similar sense, the setting of the gallery gives the work a visual/textual topography that floats between the vectors of ideas and processes as well as between the viewable art object and its impossible completion. If, as Jacob Wren insists, the performance dislocates the work – both in the textual sense of the book but also conceptually in the sense of their task to rewrite it – so that “the work” becomes associated less with the book than with the scribes themselves, it is partially due to the book’s ongoing transformation and the errant dimensions of PME-ART’s role as future readers.

The slow and contemplative pace of the performance, as the viewer or readers await for the rewrites to materialize, never allows for a complete view of the work – nor does it grant the viewer a greater understanding into the rewriting process. What becomes transferred – from Soares to the scribes and then to the reader/viewer – is the time of the rewrites themselves, which is as enigmatic as it is fleeting. In this sense, the performance simultaneously gives and enacts a visual and a spatial trajectory for the book that is impossible to translate and yet it is part of the performance’s most prominent feature.

If PME-ART’s interrogation, “what does *The Book* feel like today,” and “what is ‘my’ relationship to *The Book* in this present moment,” highlights *The Book*’s disquieting ontology, it also grants its destination a supposed “happier” end. Without articulating a final or definitive version for the book, the Monster Book (like the scribes themselves) invite a temporary co-presence with the work. Their rewrites coincide with the objects and things of Soares’ universe in an emphatic exchange that is future oriented. The “adventure” in PME-ART’s performance title is this errant futurity.



Figure 1: The scribes at their task (photo credit: Christian Bujold)



Figure 2: Second room “conveyor belt” view & projection (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery)

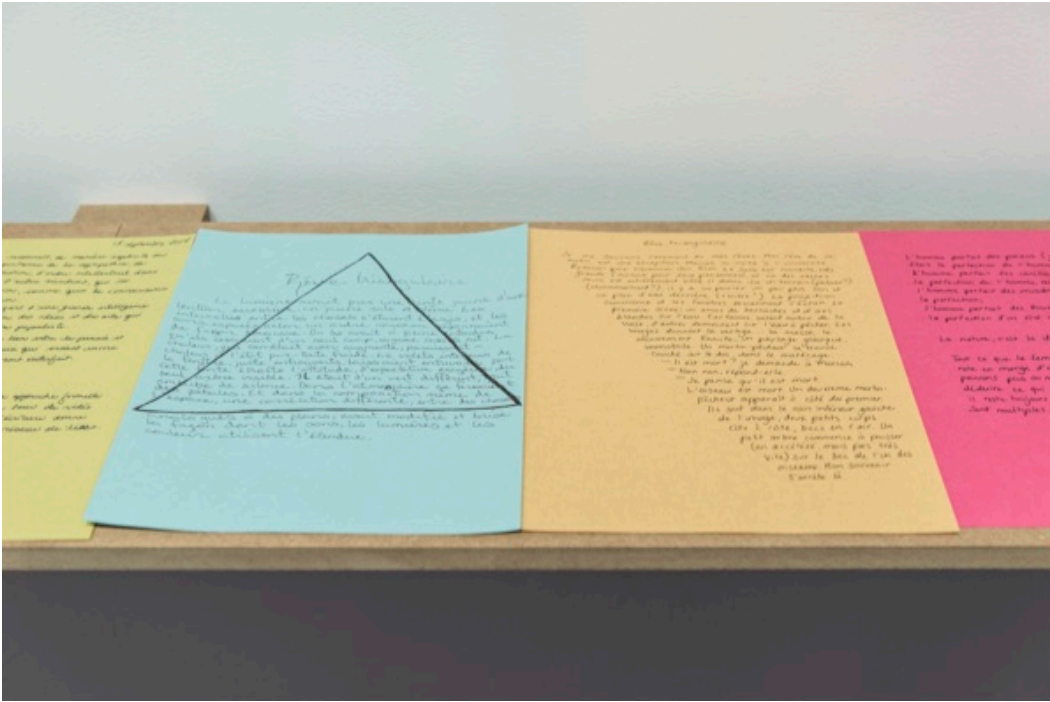


Figure 3: Rewrite close-ups (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery)

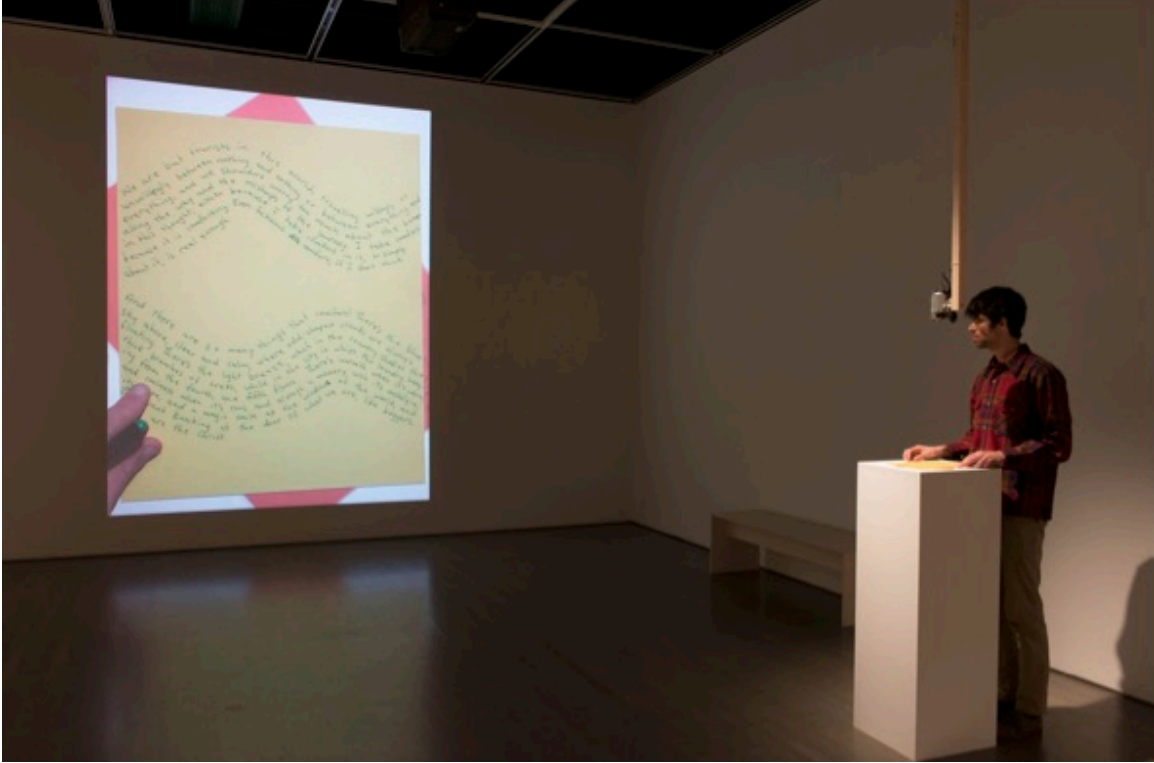


Figure 4: Scribe, Adam Kinner, reads from his transcription (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery)



Figure 5: Becoming contemporaries with Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* (photo credit: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery)

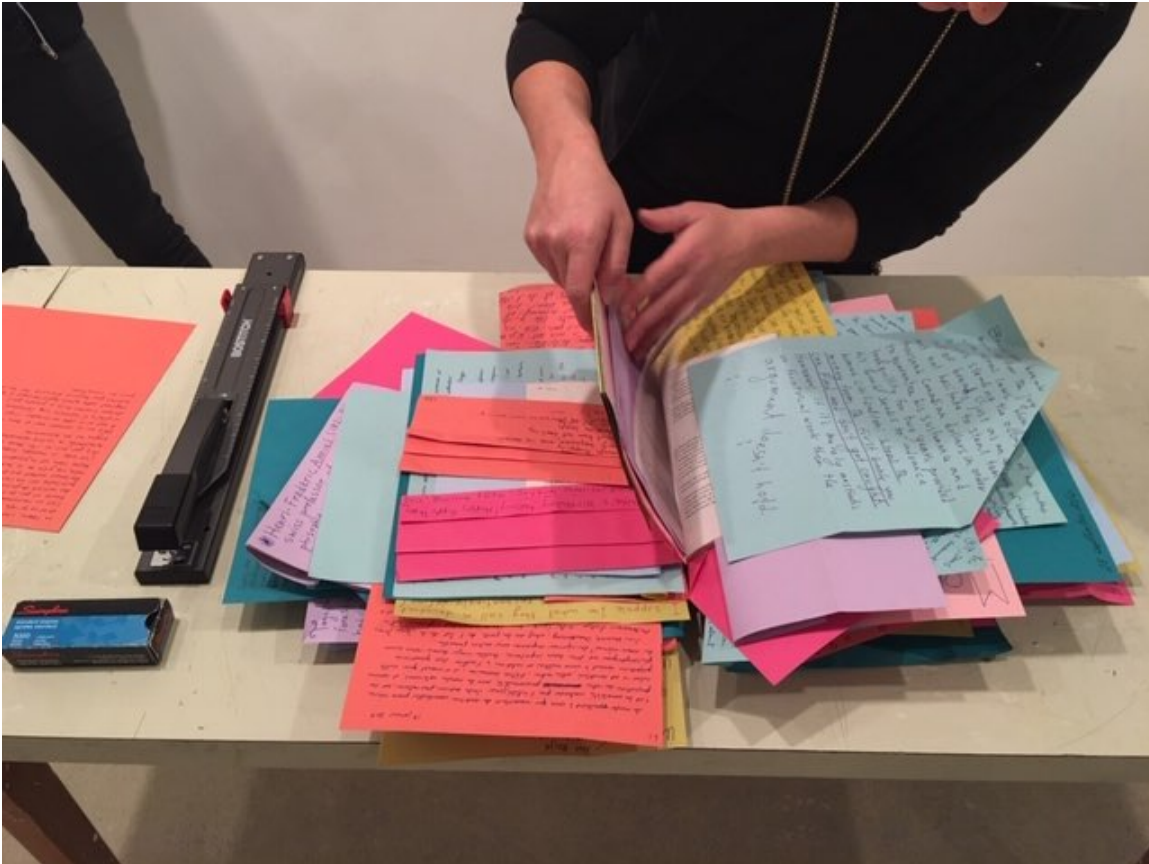


Figure 6: The Monster Book in preparation (photo credit: Marie Claire Forté)⁹⁰

⁹⁰ This photo was taken during a second performance of *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie* at La Galerie l'Oeuvre de l'Autre, le centre d'exposition de l'UQAC (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi) in Chicoutimi, Quebec between September 28th to the 30th, 2016. The scribes for this performance included the participation of Julie Bernier, Claudia Fancello, Marie-Claire Forté, Anick Martel, Étienne Provencher-Rousseau and Jacob Wren. The Monster Book contains rewrites from both the Montreal and the Chicoutimi performances.

Chapter Three

Standing in Translation's Wake: Gail Scott's *The Obituary*⁹¹

“In both the Paris book and, now, *The Obituary* – which is set in Montréal – the white noise of the past, and the multi-linguistic onomatopoeia of the present, are written over particular urban sites. The semantic gaps that the narrative launches into are dark streets, are ghosts, invisible save as myths endlessly challenged by awareness of a multitude of meanings.”

— Gail Scott, “The Sutured Subject”

“An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties.”

— Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

“One has, I am now certain, to be a little mad to see into the past or the future, to be a little abridged of life to know life, the obscure life”

— Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

“...disappearance is not absence”

— Fred Moten, *Black and Blur*

⁹¹ Earlier iterations of this research appear in a monograph on translation that has been edited by the IRTG (International Training Group) on Diversity in Montreal and Germany. The article in question bears the same title as this chapter.

Introduction

In this chapter on *The Obituary* I want to explore how issues of translatability give way to the apprehension of various “sightings” or forms of presencing. These sightings vacillate between a state of indeterminacy and a shape- or meaning-making whose contours are indicated in the tension between the poetic juxtapositions of one signifying surface to another. In time, the emanating and flickering properties of the aforementioned proposition will become clear, especially when I begin to read Scott’s novel in relation to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the dialectical image, which he treats in two works in particular – his massive *The Arcades Project* as well as his essay entitled “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”⁹² In the sections that follow, I also retrace Gail Scott’s creation of a porous and sutured subject in her novel *My Paris* and consider Sherry Simon’s reading of the aforementioned novel’s “comma of translation” alongside Walter Benjamin’s poetic understanding of the dialectical image as an explosive site of connectivity that, like his view of translation, opens onto a play of dis-conjoined and overlapping surfaces that link together various threads (histories, languages, referents, etc.).

While traces of Walter Benjamin’s influence may have shaped *My Paris*’s comma of translation, inciting Sherry Simon to propose a parallel reading between the play of surfaces suggested by Scott’s comma of translation and the figure of the translator/historian found in Benjamin’s “The Translator’s Task,” in its palimpsest depiction of past, present and future, *The Obituary* furthers this emergence of presence by shifting its focus, among others, to overlapping time frames. As Simon explains, regarding Benjamin’s essay and in relation to Scott’s *My Paris*,

⁹² Also referred to in English as “On the Concept of History.”

both translator and historian rely on the unexpected encounter of objects and words, the confrontation of languages and temporalities, to jar us into a renewed understanding of the present. The work of translation, like the work of history, provides *forms* through which the past and present ‘flash’ into uneasy constellation. (“The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation” 75)

This interval between translation and history made visible in Benjamin’s dialectical image is the space where the project of *My Paris* is carried over into Scott’s *The Obituary* – and this is precisely the space I intend to explore in this chapter.

Proceeding with the above-mentioned dimensions in mind, I consider various forms of overlap in *The Obituary* and focus mainly on the impact of these overlaps on narrative diffusion: their creation of alternate yet simultaneous temporalities and their influence on the opening of a space of translation. This attention, to what is overlaid, leads me to consider the novel’s palimpsest portrayal of time where what has been co-exists with the time-space of the now, giving way to a provocative indeterminacy in the form of irruptions, discontinuities, narrative ruptures, lags, crossed out words, etc. Above all, I note how these formal strategies open the possibility of a critique of the valuation of progress – both in terms of history and novelistic time – in favour of gaps and (syntactic) mutations through poetic undecidability.

In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, Marjorie Perloff argues that modern and postmodern poetics are split between two influences: the Symbolists (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Eliot) and the anti-Symbolists (Rimbaud, Pound, Stein, Williams, Beckett). It is in the influence of the anti-Symbolists that Perloff situates her “poetics of

indeterminacy” or “undecidability” where “indeterminacy is created by repetition and variation, sameness and difference, a rhetorical pattern of great intricacy, to creative semantic gaps” (98). What Perloff is gesturing to is a form of aesthetic mobility that defies easy comprehensibility (or a communicative or representational model of poetry), and that focuses on the materiality or material traces of language.

Such traces abound in *The Obituary*, where the novel’s emphasis on delays, uncertainties, gaps, and repetitions crystallize in a porously phonic telling; the indeterminacy of these radical poetics produces a constellation of multiple and multidirectional meanings. What interests me is *The Obituary*’s ability to make visible/audible what has been made eccentric to language, not just in its fiction sentences, but what has undergone a process of erasure in (everyday) speech. In *The Obituary*, linked stories of dispossession are embodied in the text by une négativité fuyante⁹³ that points, for instance, to a lack of recognition of shared historical responsibilities for the forced assimilation leading to the genocide of Indigenous peoples.⁹⁴ This fleeting quality of negation in the novel begins with an oneiric fragment that encompasses a tale the protagonist’s grandfather won’t tell. Though I shall return to the significance of *The Obituary*’s multiple references to an unspeakable tale, I gesture to it here in order to begin flagging ways the novel frames the dilemma of how to represent the irrepresentable.

⁹³ A case in point, the first section of *The Obituary* is entitled “Rose, Negative.” Rose, is a diminutive of Rosine – the name of the protagonist.

⁹⁴ Gillian Lane-Mercier’s study on *The Obituary*’s portrayal of multiple, even palimpsest affiliations and conflicting loyalties in her article “Gail Scott and Barbara Godard on ‘The Main’: Borders, Sutures, Micro-cosmopolitan Interconnectivity, and Translation Studies” is an insightful read for anyone interested in the novel’s depictions of negative forms of connectivity and how translation can be called upon to mediate overlapping cultural memories and narratives of personal loss – not through discrete languages but constantly shifting spaces of difference (228).

Various “translation” strategies in the novel contribute to making these erasures visible/audible over and through time. Voices float through the novel. There is no master narrative or single narrative voice. Instead, the narrative is consistently kept off-balance. Though there is the semblance of a forward moving narrative, it is one that drifts between scenes, characters, voices, locales and temporalities. If voices emanate through the corridors of the novel’s elusively dis-conjoined structure, the reader also floats through various quotidian scenes, trying to make sense of the pieces of the tale even as they overlap – or perhaps especially because, like the dialectical image, they overlap in temporally diffuse ways.

Aspects of co-existence and narrative overlap are also refracted in the shards of perspective that compose the narrative, as the main protagonist, Rosine, is fractured into several forms of embodiment: she is the shadowy figure and face haunting the triplex at 4999 rue Settler-Nun (variously referred to as I/R/Rosine, daughter of Veeera or *Face*), she is embodied in an erotically-fixated fly on the wall figure (called *I/th’ fly*), as well as the writing subject/historian who supplies the story with historical factoids and meta-commentaries that are mostly relegated to the subterranean level of the text – footnotes – which are demarcated by a “♥” symbol (she is referred to as the lezzie ~~Basement~~ Bottom Historian).

Despite their recurrence, other speaking subjects, both named and unnamed, contribute to the plurality of voices that mend the narrative together. Some of those subjects include: the late nineteenth century Shale Pit Workers!, Rosine’s grand-father, her uncle Peeet, Aunty Dill, her mother Veeera, a Parisian gendarme called Casse-Noisette as well as his rookie Québécois assistant and hacker Jean-François Jean, a voice

on the radio called Celia Raw Raw©, Shakespeare's MacBeth playing Rosine's and her neighbours' psychoanalyst, as well as Rosine's neighbours who often appear alongside narrative reports from The Street and The Triplex – structures that, in *The Obituary*, witness and record the city around them. As they merge together, the diffusion of temporality as well as the incorporation of various speakers into a palimpsest narrative “construction” – a word that, as shall become apparent, acquires architectural significance – creates the conditions through which ghostly voices emerge from various time frames.

It is in this sense, that of a potential flicker of presences made possible through formal narrative torques, overlaps, and residual temporalities, that I situate *The Obituary* within a poetics of translation. Such a feature becomes evident in the link I establish between Scott's representation of the triplex – a quintessential architectural signifier in the Montreal landscape – and Walter Benjamin's use of the arcades as a visual analogy for thinking of translation as a play of dis-conjoined surfaces.⁹⁵ Most importantly, I examine how the voices and stories that emanate from and around the triplex where Rosine lives offer clues to an unspeakable past. In so doing, I consider how various forms of narrative and material overlap in the novel are linked through the figure of the triplex as a space of translation where, I suggest, additional forms of meaning/signification can emerge. Moreover, I argue that — like the triplex — the character of Rosine, too, houses secrets from the past. The content of these “secret transmissions” can vary from personal memories to collective histories. From trauma to desire, the narratives which are set in

⁹⁵ *The Obituary*'s overlapping narrative structure is interesting to consider, not just in light of translation's dis-conjoined surfaces in the analogy of encounter between the arcades' metal and glass structure, but also alongside a reading of the arcades as “passages”: passages which Benjamin collaged from a plethora of sources in his *Arcades Project* as well as Paris' (pedestrian) passages that linked various commercial attractions together.

motion emerge as voices that all seem to be running along the axes of their own time. These voices emerge in the narrative, often as disembodied and ghostly, as though they had been floating in the air for decades, even centuries, and as if they had been pushed by the winds of changing weather systems. From a formal perspective, Scott overlays these voices across sentences that, from one to the next, interrupt, extend, and perform simultaneously. Finally, in its various forms of narrative overlap – either through the palimpsestic characterization of Rosine or the three-storied triplex where she lives – the pull of the past into the present and the ghostly stories that circulate within the novel’s pages provide a tantalizing opportunity to analyse the prevailing spectral qualities of the novel, which, as I will argue, calls for a reading of the novel’s poetics of translation as a rumourological one.⁹⁶

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, before I develop the central arguments, I want to first add a few thoughts on Sherry Simon’s influential reading of the poetics of translation in relation to Scott’s *My Paris*, and how my own work on *The Obituary* is inspired by the terms Sherry Simon puts forth in her study of *My Paris* – namely her references to Walter Benjamin’s arcades as a visual analogy for translation. Doing so will allow me to draw links between what I understand as *The Obituary*’s spectral, overlapping qualities and these qualities’ relation to a poetics of translation. I then want to briefly consider Walter Benjamin’s concept of the dialectical image and how

⁹⁶ In Chapter Two, the rumour-text is conceived as a text that flies ahead of its author and, in “out-living” said author, espouses a life of its own. In this chapter, the rumour-text is still one that carries a life of its own as it seems to travel without a discernable source or origin, only in this case the floating text encrypts the narrative with an aura of anxiety and disquiet that does not necessarily wish to remain incomplete. Put another way, if *The Book of Disquiet* works as a rumour-text it is because it embodies a certain quality of hearsay; this is especially true in relation to the book as an unfinished work that then gets picked up and rewritten by various intervening editors, translators and scholars. *The Obituary*’s rumour-text, in contrast, is haunted by forms of erasure that threaten to impede the rumour’s circulation to the point of oblivion.

it relates to my understanding of *The Obituary*'s relationship to translation. Of course, my summary understanding of Simon's and Benjamin's arguments will undergo an important process of development as the chapter progresses. What follows, then, can be considered an extended prefatory note.

Walter Benjamin and Sherry Simon: Structures Toward an Understanding of the Poetics of Translation

In her article, "The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation," Sherry Simon explores the space of cultural difference opened by Gail Scott's incorporation of "the comma of translation" in her highly experimental novel *My Paris*. The comma of translation refers to Scott's use of this punctuation mark to join French expressions to their literal English translations: "*Écriture blanche*, white or neutral writing" (36), "femmes-cuir (queer), leatherwoman" (121), "Comme si de rien n'était, as if nothing happening earlier" (121), "*C'est si peu dire que je t'aime*, it's so little to say I love you" (135). Other than their use as markers of difference, commas in the novel appear more or less sparingly. Instead, *My Paris* is constructed of small syntactical units – associational shards written in the present participle and gerund forms – which are separated by periods.

By pointing to Scott's adherence to a "rigorously modernist style, made up of sentence fragments separated by periods," Simon further maintains that although the novel is "imbued with the ghost of Gertrude Stein," Scott goes against Stein's dictum to eradicate the comma from the sentence in favour of imbuing *My Paris* with the heteroglossic sounds of the city where she lives ("The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio

and the Comma of Translation” 74).⁹⁷ Hence, according to Simon, the comma allows Scott to permeate her Paris-based novel with the sounds of a multilingual Montreal (“The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation” 74).⁹⁸

Other than Gertrude Stein, *My Paris* is also haunted by the ghost of Walter Benjamin, particularly his *Paris Capitale du XIXe Siècle* (*The Arcades Project* in English), which has been left behind by the previous occupant of her studio. *The Arcades Project* is Benjamin’s monumental, unfinished study of Paris’ glass-housed arcades – the mid-nineteenth century equivalent to present-day shopping malls. Composed of notes, essays and an assemblage of archival materials, *The Arcades Project*’s compositional method of montage is organized into twenty-six “convolutes” or literally “bundles,” which are alphabetically and thematically ordered as subjects/objects, such as “Arcades” and “Catacombs,” “Fashion,” “The Collector,” “The Automaton,” “Boredom,” “Baudelaire,” “Dream City,” “Photography,” “Advertising.”

In his attempt to create a dialectical image of time, where what is past and what is present are recognized as mutually imbricated rather than successive, Benjamin’s *The*

⁹⁷ Here is the specific passage from “How Writing is Written” by Gertrude Stein that Sherry Simon quotes in her article:

The comma was just a nuisance. If you got the thing as a whole, the comma kept irritating you all along the line. If you think of a thing as whole, and the comma keeps sticking out, it gets on your nerves; because, after all, it destroys the reality of the whole. So I got rid more and more of commas. Not because I had any prejudice against commas; but the comma was a stumbling block. When you were conceiving a sentence, the comma stopped you. That is the illustration of the question of grammar and part of speech, as part of the daily life as we live it. (“The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation” 78)

⁹⁸ “I’m tempted to call it realism,” Scott writes in her essay “My Montreal” (5).

It’s very possible the sound-effects that trouble my narratives and even my syntax, and that have always underscored my writing are, among other things, a formal response to the question of how to best represent my city. Its pulse, its tensions. Its ceaseless plethora of strong minority voices [...] constantly challenge any notion of authority. In such a context [...] thinking becomes, rather, a constellation, a pattern [...] Put another way, the French erupts into the English text, puncturing it, subverting the authority of both languages. It puts holes in memory as well. (5)

Arcades Project aimed to create a “flash of illumination” in the reader – a flicker of awareness that would reveal as much as critique the consumer culture that defined the bourgeois experience flourishing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:⁹⁹ “The dialectical image,” writes Benjamin, “is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only by these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already intrievably lost” (Benjamin *The Arcades Project* [N9,7] 473). Seizing the reader with a flash of recognition, Benjamin was convinced that “behind the facade of the present, these otherwise forgotten moments could be recovered from oblivion and reintroduced, shoved in the face of the present, as it were, with devastating force” (Pensky 181). Such a form of critical interruption emerges from Benjamin’s materialist critique of historical time and the predominant interpretation that historical time progresses from a chronologically linear past to a chronologically linear present. *The Arcades Project*, then, would infuse the detritus or trash of history that was disappearing underneath the heap of the “new” with life again.

The Arcades Project’s method of montage – especially its capacity to stage an overlap between what has been and what is now – dismisses the idea that the past and the present are part of a linear continuum known as “progress.”¹⁰⁰ In his essay entitled “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin calls this form of imbrication “now

⁹⁹ For further consideration of Benjamin’s concept of the “dialectical image” as well as his views on “historical materialism” please refer to Susan Buck-Morss’ *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (1989), Michael Jennings’ *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Literary Criticism* (1987), Anthony Auerbach’s “Imagine no Metaphors: The Dialectical Image of Walter Benjamin” (2007), Rolf Tiedemann’s “Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*” (1988; 1999) as well as Max Pensky’s “Method and Time: Benjamin’s Dialectical Images” (2004).

¹⁰⁰ See Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (originally written in 1942 and translated by Harry Zohn in 1968), particularly sections VI, IX, XIV, XVI, and XVIII A.

time” or “jetztzeit.” In his essay, Benjamin illustrates the concept of *jetztzeit* by invoking the image of an angel moving toward the future with his back turned as he gazes towards the past. As I suggested earlier, in Chapter Two, it is an image borrowed from Paul Klee’s painting “*Angelus Novus*” (Angel of History). Meanwhile, a storm brews in the present. It is the storm of historical wreckage, and it is gathering at the angel’s feet: “Where we perceive a chain of events,” Benjamin writes, “he sees one single catastrophe” (257). “The angel would like to stay,” he continues, “awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...] This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress” (258). As the angel is blown toward the future, he simultaneously cannot stand outside the heap of histories which are blowing all around him. Progress in this case, with the angel’s back to the future even as he moves toward it, does not necessarily entail a morally or ethically superior view of the present or the past. With his depiction of the swirl of debris like a tower accumulating at the angel’s feet, Benjamin gestures to history as a discourse that we is partly unspeakable – presumably because the ideology of progress itself irrevocably dictates forward movement. That tower of debris is also embodied in Scott’s *The Obituary*, where the reader is acquainted with the figure of the triplex which is built on layers of history that have not simply disappeared to make room for the future of this new construction. The latent layers of history housed on the site where the triplex is built erupt across the narrative to form ghostly pockets of narration within the novel’s depiction of “now-time.” This ghostly or latent content participates in the translatability (or not) of the

novel's insinuation of unspeakable tales, which like the storm of progress that blows the angel of history toward the future accumulate around the site of the triplex.

This very storm blows us now through the pages of Scott's novel: "Here, Reader, in this storm – snow to rain back to snow again – driving North, here, let us [in interest of dénouement], follow silhouette dégageant from wind-battered crowd + turning West toward parc, thin + bright as high winter air, ringing with echoes of those going before" (126). With its ubiquitous attention to meteorological conditions – mostly freezing rain and snow – and its insertions of a few weather reports by the voice on the radio, Celia Raw Raw©, a critique of progress slyly makes its way into *The Obituary's* animate weather conditions. Wind currents are described as carrying fallen (dead) yellowing autumn leaves and blossoms across the city as well as pages from the torn *Book of Genocides*. The novel's emphasis on the weather is also accompanied by subtle yet persistent reports regarding the ever-changing effects of light and its fleeting shadows throughout time. As I shall address in the section on the rumour as well as in the final section on ventriloquism, the storms that brew in *The Obituary* and the shadowy figures that appear on the fringes of visibility within the novel's pages bear the trace of a subversive impersonation of Benjamin's storm of progress, which carries the detritus (or shadowy figures) of history across the blur of time.

To desire to be translated, to invite not synthesis but a coming into existence, to allow relations to be perceived even if they defy structures of argumentation – this is the invitation I receive when I sit down to read *The Obituary*. But the call of translation is not just one that wants to manifest itself in the ethos of the reader. At the heart of *The Obituary's* complex style of composition, a fossilized secret lies deep within the

narrative's élan. As I have already begun insinuating, such a secret takes the shape of a transgenerational secret that is inherited by the subject, Rosine, and her various permutations. This phantom kernel within the subject's psyche acts like a ventriloquist, splitting the subject's interior even though its presence and meaning is not fully understood. This kernel is also referred to by psychoanalysts Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham as the crypt that houses family secrets. Like an inbuilt fort, the loss or trauma that the crypt conceals cannot be accessed or spoken by the subject that is haunted by it.

In proposing that *The Obituary* is a novel that wants to be translated, I am primarily gesturing to its relationship with the ineffable and to the stratified layers of meaning that conceal the trauma deeply embedded in the novel's telling. In attending to the persistent mystery or gap that haunts not just Rosine but *The Obituary's* narrative, Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image – and my own treatment in this chapter of translation itself as dialectical image – is useful to keep in mind. As a space of poetic juxtaposition, both translation and the dialectical image operate within a set of relations that lead not to certainty or truth but to a gesture that points to the gaps that emerge everywhere in the narrative: from *The Obituary's* overlapping structure to its depictions of various forms of erasure, the novel points to clues and traces of an unspeakable past, a form of negated enunciation that is fossilized within – within the subject, within the novel's depiction of a trans-temporal Montreal, and within narrative itself. The project of the dialectical image, then, is to translate the unspeakable tale into speech. Here, I consider translation as a language of inquiry that, like poetry, operates in the gaps of signification and the knowledge of that which eludes our grasp.

From *My Paris* to *The Obituary*: The Play of Surfaces of the Porous Text

In *My Paris*, Scott's inclusion of the comma of translation de-composes the narrative into an assembled, porous telling. As does the influence of Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin's influence on *My Paris* emerges in the formal qualities of the novel, especially in terms of experiments with non-narrative forms, such as montage.

The *Arcades Project* is actually a huge pile of detritus, 19th-century quotes and anecdotes, put together in a series of montages. Benjamin was looking for a way to write a history based on found objects, juxtaposed in unexpected or contradictory ways, in order to continually challenge the biases of both the historian and the reader. The point was to make the historian, as a writing subject, not disappear but become a construction of the whole. *My Paris* isn't exactly a montage, but in a way the diary form is a montage, like it or not. It's discontinuous. Sometimes things are juxtaposed in a shocking manner. (Scott "Some other kind of subject, less bounded")

The partially associative as well as cumulative effect of *My Paris*' experimental sentences disperses the continuity of the narrative in ways that welcome gaps, fissures, and indeterminacies into its telling. The result is what Scott calls "the porous text."

Such gaps and fissures in the diffusion of the narrative allow what is outside the narrative – for instance the soundscape of Montreal in a Parisian landscape – to slip inside the frame. Consequently, when Scott includes a comma between a French expression and its literal English translation, she allows the mostly English language narrative to be punctured by a disruption coming from the outside. Scott's break in the homogeneity and smooth continuity of the sentence's linguistic and syntactic unravelling

gives it an undeniably localized register out of which springs, amongst others, Quebec's multilingual and multicultural heterodoxies.¹⁰¹

In its mark of cultural difference and its incorporation of an outside turned inside, the porousness stemming from the comma of translation blurs the distinction between inner and outer, centre and margin. Such a quality of porousness also creates a sculptural relief in the narrative – a play of dis-conjunctive surfaces where the punctured narrative accentuates the porosity of the subject in its suspension of closure. More than a relay between Paris and Montreal, or a question of opposing the English language to the French language, the comma of translation allows for a play of differences that, according to Sherry Simon, gives physical form to the third space opened between the language of the original and its translation:

The “comma of translation” leads us directly to Benjamin's reinterpretation of the role of the translator where he suggests that translation is less about transmitting a message than it is about revealing differences. The task of the translator, he suggests, is not to neutralize the difference between the original and the translation through the replacement of one with the other but to display the complementarity of languages and texts. The space between one language and another opens up a “third space” between original and translation, a utopian space that no longer means or

¹⁰¹ I owe and borrow the specific phrasing of the above sentence from Andy Fitch's interview with Gail Scott in *Trip Wire: A Journal of Poetics* (Issue 13), where he asks:

Since your epigraph invokes a foundational component in the thinking of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, the concept of a transgenerational crypt, whereby the undisclosed, unprocessed trauma of one's parents (or, more broadly, one's preceding generation) produces inherited (though again unrecognized, misunderstood) symptomatic responses in the present, could you discuss how the tacit legacies of European colonization, the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the agonistic multilingual/multicultural heterodoxies of Quebec, and/or the Benjaminian historical wreckage concretized amid Montréal's architectural textures manifest within *The Obituary's* highly distinctive discursive form? (163)

expresses anything, but refers to a “reine Sprache,” a pure language, an expressionless and creative Word. Benjamin gives a physical shape to this space: the shape of the arcade. (“The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation” 75)

In giving physical form to an otherwise elusive and “expressionless” (translative) space, Benjamin transforms the arcades into a three-dimensional analogy for translation:

True translation is transparent, it does not obscure the original, does not stand in its light, but rather allows pure language, as if strengthened by its own medium, to shine even more fully on the original. This is made possible above all by conveying the syntax word-for-word, and this demonstrates that the word, not the sentence, is the original element of translation. For the sentence is the wall in front of the language of the original, and word-for-word rendering is the arcade (Benjamin “The Translator’s Task” 162).

Piecing out the translation word-for-word, Benjamin suggests that a “literal translation” does not obstruct the original but that it provides a new vantage point for the original instead.

Benjamin’s ecstatic reinterpretations of the interrelation and temporality of translation and its original are part of a cluster of metaphors he puts forth for the apprehension and seizure of a much larger poetic understanding of translation as not simply affecting the original but language itself (reine Sprache/pure language).¹⁰² For her

¹⁰² It may serve to be reminded here that Benjamin is not thinking of ordinary, everyday language. As Paul de Man notes, “[h]e’s speaking of the very peculiar, unusual, and uncommon element in language called translation: something that language allows one to do, which is translation within language” (“Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 100).

part, Sherry Simon sums up Benjamin's architectural and refractive interpretation of translation in the following manner: "The glass roof allows light to flow through matter, just as the literally translated text is a transparent surface which allows the light of the original to fall on the new version, creating an interplay of surfaces" ("The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation" 75). The relationship established here, between original and translation, exceeds a mere "mirroring" of one another. For Benjamin, the original (what has been) and the translation (the shape of the work in the now) shed light on a "critical now" not because they necessarily illuminate one and other but because they are mutually imbricated in a play of surfaces.

In particular, I have in mind a passage from *The Arcades Project* that resonates with the refractive reading of translation in the previously cited passage from Benjamin's "The Translator's Task." In the following passage, moreover, Benjamin's understanding of the dialectical image can be read, at least transversally, in relation to translation:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. ("Awakening" 462; N2a, 3)

Interestingly, there's another passage in Benjamin's "The Translator's Task" where the relationship between languages creates a productive overlap out of which the original too is changed:

[...] the relationship among languages shows itself in translations *to be far deeper and more definite* than in the superficial and indefinable similarity of two literary texts. To grasp the true relationship between original and translation, we must undertake a line of thought completely analogous, in its goal, to those taken by critical epistemology in demonstrating the impossibility of a reflection theory [...] no translation would be possible if, in accord with its ultimate essence, it were to strive for similarity to the original. For in its continuing life, which could not be so called if it were not the transformation and renewal of a living thing, the original is changed. (Benjamin "The Translator's Task" 155 my emphasis)

Instead of a series of events, the past and the present reveal something of each other much in the same way that Benjamin proposes that translation should reveal rather than conceal elements of the original. In other words, the present does obstruct or occlude the past. Instead, their interrelation allows the time-space of history, as a dialectical image, to refract and thus illuminate parts of the past in the present. In that sense, the original is changed.

Like Scott's porous subject, who floats across a landscape only to discover that in her porousness she both haunts and is haunted by it, the use of "among languages" in the aforementioned quote suggests that the original permeates and pokes holes in the translation as much as the translation permeates and pokes holes in the original; hence the image of the glass-roofed arcades, which has a distinct quality of permeability with

regards to an outside/inside, also becomes the symbol through which the time of the original (what has been) and the time of the translation (now) overlap. There is a relationship of asymmetrical reciprocity that makes the flash of recognition in the dialectical image possible.

In my reading of Benjamin's dialectical image, oppositions such as past and present or original and translation become modes that not only mutually inflect one and other but their overlap gives rise to a critical space as well. As Max Pensky observes,

[u]nlike concepts, the claim to immediacy inherent in the graphic image contains the potential to interrupt, hence to counteract modes of perception and cognition that have become second nature. The primary locus of the term "dialectical" is thus itself the establishment of a (eminently dialectical) tension between two terms which, developed to their extreme, suddenly overcome this opposition ("Method and time: Benjamin's dialectical images" 179).

Pensky's treatment of the dialectical image is reminiscent of Scott's porous text where the dialectical image, juxtaposed in unexpected or contradictory ways, challenges the biases of both the historian and the reader (Scott "Some other kind of subject, less bounded").

For Benjamin, the distinct feature of the dialectical image is its ability to produce a "shock of recognition" in the reader through its startling use of juxtaposition, and this is as true for history as it is for translation. It's a profoundly revelatory relationship: the idea that in the defamiliarized context of translation, certain elements of material signification in the original are reframed, hence rendering the dialectical relationship between the original and its translation visible and meaningful. The same can also be said of the

dialectical image in a materialist view of history. It is via the critical tension of the dialectical image that there is a critique of modes of historical interpretation which, if we recall the pile of detritus blowing in the storm of progress, suppress time into ahistorical bits of alienated trash. To borrow a phrase from Benjamin, “nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 254). The productive force of the dialectical image is embodied within these contradictory poles – between blindness and sight, erasure and legibility, victor and loser, etc. – hence Benjamin’s insistence on the dialectical image’s potential flicker of recognition within the reader. It is my contention that *The Obituary* offers a structural critique of the progress of history by dramatizing the overlapping contradictory poles in an illuminating play between emergence and submergence, acknowledging the flicker of visibility and invisibility as it illustrates that there are those who keep moving in time and those who are buried along the way (some without a burial place).

Composition and Time

To illustrate the form of critical arrest the dialectical image provokes in the reader, it is helpful to return to Benjamin’s essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in which he assembles a series of short passages that critique the certainty of narrative historical development where history is apprehended as a continuous series of events. Instead of a view of history as progressing from one set of events to another, Benjamin contends that it is impossible to access the past as it really was since “history” is comprised of different moments – some recounted, some not – which (in)form the story of the present. He writes,

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 255).

Readers of Gertrude Stein may hear some resonances to her essay entitled “Composition as Explanation” in the passage quoted above. In this essay, Stein treats legibility and time, among others, as a matter of composition. Since composition defines the experience of what is seen, the angle of vision through which we see the subject or object changes depending on how it is framed.

Such a difference in perspective must take into account the compounding of times. Hence, Stein writes: “There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking” (“Composition as Explanation” 495). This melding of times, between the beginning, the middle and the ending, is in many ways quite similar to Benjamin’s concept of “now time” or *jetztzeit* where “[h]istory is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 261). To return to one of Stein’s text’s signature phrases, such a notion of time is summed up as follows: “The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything” (“Composition as Explanation” 495). Along this visual line of thinking, Stein’s emphasis on composition, as what is seen, takes into account the space of multiple vanishing points: “Nothing changes from generation to

generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition” (“Composition as Explanation” 495). For Benjamin, such vanishing points must provoke the shards of historical materialism to explode “the continuum of history” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 261). In doing so, Benjamin contends that such an interruption would liberate “the oppressed past” by granting the image of what has been recognition in the dialectical now (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 263). For Stein, it is those moments which do not become assimilated into (victorious) “instant classics” that remain illegible:

That is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between and it is really too bad very much too bad naturally for the creator but also very much too bad for the enjoyer, they all really would enjoy the created so much better just after it has been made than when it is already a classic, but it is perfectly simple that there is no reason why the contemporaries should see, because it would not make any difference as they lead their lives in the new composition anyway, and as every one is naturally indolent why naturally they don't see (“Composition as Explanation” 495).

Benjamin makes a similar claim, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in relation to a dialectics between revolutionary and conservative voices. He writes, “[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 256). In the aforementioned quote, civilization and barbarism are tinged with ambivalence. They are “so called” civilization and “so called” barbarism because they are documents narrated by the ruling class. Benjamin’s critique, then, regards what such a narrative process erases:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of the past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 245)

When we replace the image of the historian as chronicler with the image of the chronicler as writer, suddenly we are confronted with the possibility of breaking free from homogenous conventions about how to write. As Max Pensky contends,

Benjamin was convinced that the historical truth of the nineteenth century was *objectively* present in his assembled fragments, and that this truth would be lost, not recovered, by the imposition of a theoretical superstructure upon them. Historical truth, Benjamin came to believe is not simply available to any theorizing subject at any given historical moment; rather historical truth becomes “legible” or “recognizable” only at specific points. (“Method and time: Benjamin’s dialectical images” 180)

Like Benjamin’s method of montage, Scott’s method of overlap emphasizes the legible over the threat of its disappearance in a way that makes the dialectical tension between them apparent. Such a method also locates the writing subject within her moment in time, which is a task that translation too both permits and undoes. The task of the following section, then, will be to examine some of the structures of this dialectical tension that allows the subject of *The Obituary* to become legible and located.

Walter Benjamin's Flicker of Presence: Montage and the Dialectical Image

a. The Cut-Up as Caesura (*Le Cadavre, Exquis Signifie?*)

As is the porousness of *My Paris*, *The Obituary* is written using the “old surrealist trick” of montage, which points back to Benjamin but also to avant garde writers as well, namely William S. Burroughs and André Breton, who appear in *The Obituary* where they serve as models for Jean-François Jean’s surveillance assignment (a rookie hacker and student of Techniques policières) – an assignment he is tempted to subtitle “Dreamland” (*The Obituary* 101).¹⁰³ Segmented into various “frames,” the surveillance materials include chat logs, police cams, diary and email entries as well as “phone tabs” all looped together, “disappearing/appearing in no fixed order. Creating nifty multi-flash effect” (*The Obituary* 103). The cut-up form of the student’s final police assignment is in many ways a parallax version of *The Obituary*’s own form.

Divided into poetic units that are spliced together with periods and drawing from Breton’s “hazardous selection method,” the porous construction of *The Obituary*’s narrative, with the accumulation of culled materials, also echoes the towering collage of

¹⁰³ It is useful to briefly consider here the political project of the Surrealists’ technique of montage within the larger frame of the “institutionally structured history of painting,” as its significance, I believe, can be applied to the literary (Surrealist) context in general and to Scott’s use of a collage-inspired form in particular (Pensky 185):

[...] rejecting the model of the solitary creative genius, the method stuck together otherwise useless or discarded found objects – paper scraps, portions of painted canvas, newspaper, ticket stubs, cigarette butts, buttons – in a construction whose power to disorient and to shock lay to a large degree in the defamiliarization effect of seeing otherwise meaningless material objects suddenly removed from the context that determines their meaninglessness. (Max Pensky “Method and Time: Benjamin’s Dialectical Images” 186)

What stands out in particular in the aforementioned passage is the idea of the method of montage as working with the negative (the otherwise meaningless objects) against the grain of commodity culture and thus to resist against its meaninglessness. Here is Max Pensky again:

The materialist critic scavenges the detritus of history for those objects that resist incorporation into a triumphal story of capitalism as endless progress and that therefore express (in their very quality of trash) the frustrated utopian fantasies of a particular generation. (187)

Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* – not to mention the pile of detritus that is accumulating at the angel's feet in "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Such a parsed style of writing, "[its] incipient integration of life + art," also has an important hallucinatory side effect (*The Obituary* 102). Though mended together, the dis-conjoining of these compositional remnants create fissures – portholes!¹⁰⁴ – where the potential for additional meaning emerges.¹⁰⁵

In poetry, this "additional meaning" often resides in the caesura – that leap, or gap, or space, or breath line – where the poetic image becomes unhinged. Viewed in this way, *The Obituary*'s compositional parsing turns the sentence into a poetic structure rather than a grammatical unit. Reading into, over, or between enjambed lines in poetry, where leaps play a quintessential material role in contributing to the poem's meaning, *The Obituary*'s poetic compositional lines privilege the indeterminacy of the poetic image over narrative acumen (sharpness). In fact, the gaps in the narrative, where the poetic image becomes unhinged, is where we can come to recognize the flickering presence of an unknown.

In her introduction to her book-length collection of essays, *The Language of Inquiry*, Lyn Hejinian writes:

Poetry comes to know that things are. But this is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is, rather, acknowledgement – and that constitutes a sort of unknowing.

¹⁰⁴ In a review in *Jacket2*, Jane Malcolm aptly refers to these perspective framings as portals: "As readers, then, we peer through various portals – the doorways, the blinds, the "oeil de boeuf" windows, and an entire section entitled "VENETIANS THAT EVEN PRIVATE EYES HAVE TROUBLE SLEUTHING" – all of which happily conceal as much as they reveal" ("We peer through various portals: A review of Gail Scott's 'The Obituary'").

¹⁰⁵ In an interview with Lianne Moyes, Scott herself suggests that what is left unsaid in the novel "is there as a kind of allegorical projection, opening the door not for less, but for more, meaning" ("Architectures of the Unsaid" 131).

To know *that* things are is not to know *what* they are, but to know *that* without *what* is to know otherness (i.e., the unknown and perhaps unknowable) [...] This acknowledging is a process, not a definitive act. (2 emphasis in original)

Here, the caesura of Hejinian's known-unknown need not be exclusively reserved for the space or gap between the lines. If we compare *The Obituary's* indeterminacy, as poetic overlap or caesura, to Erin Moure and Chus Pato's relationship to scission as a strategy against invisibility and the instrumentality of language, it becomes clear that the process of making visible is also a process of knowing through the entanglement of difference.

Such a process of incorporation and layering runs counter to forms of knowledge production that presume a fixed form of understanding over the subject. Instead, *The Obituary's* experimentally overlaid structure porously assembles voices, narratives, as well as counter narratives together – suturing them together to create a narrative brimming with ontological possibilities. Put another way, Scott's porous structure in *The Obituary* allows for subjects to be sighted rather than recited by the certainty of an omniscient narrative superstructure. There, in the very fissures of indeterminacy, they emerge with at least the possibility of the freedom to speak – and speak they do, though such a form of presence does require the reader to both participate in, to listen closely, and to surrender to the text.

If we recall the fragile eco-system of reception made clear in Moure and Pato's *Secession/Insecession*, then we will equally recall that such a gesture is also based on an ethics of address in a call and response structure that demands “responsible responsiveness” and humility among others. The gesture of responsible responsiveness is helpful to keep in mind in relation to *The Obituary's* insistence that “Remembrance

concerns not the dead. But what is alive + speaking within us” (117). Such a form of remembrance is lodged in a kernel of unspeakable truth that, as I’ve begun to suggest, pokes holes in the narrative’s certainty. Gaps or unknowns, as I have previously elucidated, create temporal ruptures that overlap each other in a play of dis-conjoined surfaces, much like a caesura might break up a line’s certain progression in poetry.

But a line can also refer to a family line, and in *The Obituary* such a line is also characterized by gaps and uncertainties:

The Man from Glengarry went to the stove: Veeera knew the score. People sans possibility of origins, losing links. In the wake of Others. Was not ‘Grandpa,’ as she calling her father, known back in Pincher Creek for hawking diamonds + reading tea leaves, saying certain individuals [~~her beloved dying mother~~ his wife] bearing the Seal of the ancestors?♥ He saw it in a teacup. Where, one day long ago, also seeing his favourite granddaughter, Rosie. Black eyes, blonde curls, skating on future ice of big dark city. Something happening but winter keeps her warm. Entirely my sentiments, old man thinking. When alas beholding, in bottom of cup, time going on back. Out Room door. Stairs. Yellow leaves, also exiting court. What alarming Grandpa most: his little Rosie casting no shadow. (*The Obituary* 121)

If secrets cannot be spoken of in the present moment, the dialectical tension between the known and the unknown nevertheless gives way to a flicker of presence that haunts the narrative and its temporal warps.

The rupture from a known family lineage, the rupture in narrative (continuity), and – consequently – the rupture of the site of reading (where are we? when are we?) all

contribute to the legibility of various unknowns, or at the very least to the presencing of a secret:

Grandpa, for us you were the future [+ the future tale within]. Which tale's omissions contributing to succeeding generations' inability to communicate with open-mindedness, understanding, steadfastness of principles, consequently, always putting up defence walls of near paranoia. To Wit: your story of Great-Grandma at the ranch. (*The Obituary* 160)

These unknowns, which are figured in the novel as “[the future tale within, which is the realm of the ancestors],” are dis-conjoined in *The Obituary*'s promise of a future novel: “Rest assured, dear X, a tale's encrypted mid all these future comings + goings of parlour queens, sweet 70s chicks, telephone divas, Grandpa's little split-tailed fis'. A tale unspeakable as owls in ceaseless vigil staring from eyes round + amber as that cat Etta's [more on whom shortly]” (*The Obituary* 152, 12). But as scholars Kate Eichhorn and Angela Carr contend in their queer reading of the novel, the yet unspeakable novel, the one to come, is nevertheless already inscribed in the encrypted narrative: “Our future novel is already here, even if we (readers) have not quite yet arrived and even if its preoccupations are with the ~~past~~ present secrets” (Carr and Eichhorn 28). The narrative dispersion of the story is, in fact, overtly announced by one of its many narrators who proclaims,

Oh darling X. Is not our future narrative to keep us moving forward? Bus, bicycle, cinema streaming up du Parc, in three, four different measures, for avoiding paranoia. Stay put [*Face*] + keep an eye on things while we go to get th' story.

Yes. We disperse. Often. Dissociation oblige! When certain members behavior'.
Inappropriately. (15-16)

The composite nature of the speaking subject and the de-composition of a smooth and singular narrative line is crucial to *The Obituary's* project of co-lapsing various "perspectives" and moments together. It is within these overlaps that Scott inscribes her narrative with additional meanings, new frames of thought, and new possibilities for "seeing/apprehending" that which is unspeakable.

b. Sight and Insight

What I want to examine now is the way in which the composite representation of *The Obituary's* sutured narrative is assembled through the shifting borders delimiting the past from the present into a critical and insightful "now." The narrative's permeability is thus expressed in terms of a dilation where the porous boundaries between an inside and an outside remain productively ambiguous.

One of the ways *The Obituary* extends the structural work of *My Paris* has precisely to do with how different layers of time work together. In bringing the past into the present, Scott inscribes various temporalities and their subjects against the grain of their potential disappearance. Compared to *My Paris*, however, where the narrator finds a copy of *The Arcades Project* in her studio, *The Obituary's* engagement with Benjamin's compositional use of montage, free association, and juxtaposition is not made as explicit. Yet *The Obituary's* narrative drifts, its poetic use of narrative structure, its juxtaposition of images, and its palimpsest displacement of chronological events all suggest a line of continuity with the experimental narrative qualities of *My Paris* and Benjamin's *The*

Arcades Project.

Thematically, Scott's engagement with Benjamin's theory and method of montage in *My Paris* and *The Obituary* also represents a shared concern for the spectacle of history. More precisely, as Dianne Chisholm notes in regards to *My Paris*, "the concern that Scott shares with Benjamin is the problem of representing the spell-binding effect of capitalist phantasmagoria wherein 'real' history is obscured" (156-57). As I have previously pointed out, rather than reading history as a linear progression through time, Benjamin's montage technique critiques the notion of progress while also providing a depth model of reading. Montage, then, supplants "the fairy tale of progress – with a concrete object, the arcade, that resembles the city in miniature and embodies the Ur-form of capitalist modernity. In montage, the object appears as an image: a primary dream image of the city's dreaming collectivity" (Chisholm 159-60). Such a mode, Chisholm notes, creates a technology of perception, a way of "seeing" contemporary urban reality (156).¹⁰⁶

This form of sight is crucial to the indeterminacy of *The Obituary's* open and heterogeneous narrative form. As a method of writing that does not present a totalizing view of the subject, nor the story through the omniscience of an all-knowing narrator, but rather shatters the perspective into several composite perspectives, the juxtaposition of *The Obituary's* multiple and simultaneous narrative perspectives open possible "gestures of seeing" (Chisholm 181).

¹⁰⁶ Lianne Moyes in *Wider Boundaries of Daring* notes the difficulty of doing justice to Scott's use of Benjamin's montage technique, describing it as "disjunctive images selected by the writing subject, images that affront readers with the disparate and conflictual histories hidden by the narratives of fine cuisine, haute couture, bohemian culture, cosmopolitanism, modernity, and so forth that constitute Paris" (15).

While “seeing” can suggest rendering something visible in an ocular sense, *The Obituary*’s relationship to “seeing” has much more in common with the haptic sense of seeing as grasping and understanding:

Reader, you may be forgiven for asking: what, here, is a ~~novel~~ life? If endlessly eclipsing into the emptiness of the middle? May we offer a clou in R case. A solid griffe or claw from ‘the past.’ Which time-worn device [analepsis]. Deployed in wider noir genre. By way of photo inset. Or scintilla. The past + its objects, saying the great Walter B. Solely graspable in present as fragment or flash of illumination. At moment of extreme contradiction. Implying any flickering planetary molecule [+ its shadow, memory]. Animate or inanimate. Capable of unexpectedly impacting any other. Such as when understood, fully. Will restore to rightful status discerning Indigenous peoples. Who knowing nothing happening in any one planetary domain or moment. Ever definitively lost to any other. (*The Obituary* 118)

Writing about features of Benjamin’s dialectical image, philosopher Max Pensky observes that, for Benjamin,

[u]nder conventional terms “past” is a narrative construction of the conditions for the possibility of a present which supercedes [sic] and therefore comprehends it; Benjamin’s sense, on the contrary, was that “past” and “present” are constantly locked in a complex interplay in which what is past and what is present are negotiated through material struggles, only subsequent to which the victorious parties consign all that supports their vision of the world to a harmonious past, and all that speaks against it to oblivion. (180-81)

In light of reading the dialectical image as a form of poetic apprehension where seeing is akin to seizing, reading and writing become modes of producing flashes of recognition: “Be further advised,” warns *The Obituary*’s narrator, “only epiphanic afternoons shall herein be remembered” (12). Moreover, rather than have the narrative congeal into a single telling, Scott inscribes *The Obituary*’s narrative across several overlapping temporalities and jarring ontologies. In this sense, my reading of the narrative’s various perspective framings recalls Lyn Hejinian’s poetics of description as apprehension¹⁰⁷ where, in an essay called “Strangeness,” invention and composition offer transformative and improvisational possibilities as a way of writing into a language of inquiry:

Description should not be confused with definition; it is not definitive but transformative. Description, in the examples here, is a particular and complicated process of thinking, being highly intentional, while at the same time, because it is simultaneous with and equivalent to perception, remaining open to the arbitrariness, unpredictability, and inadvertence of what appears. Or one might say that it is at once improvisational and purposive. It is motivated thus by simultaneous but different logics [...]. (Hejinian 138-39)

The significance of the blurred configuration between “simultaneous” but “different” is that it relates description to a metonymic process which, because metonymy implies a form of movement between or across relationships, such a process also instigates other ways of thinking and knowing, even as it shifts the connections between things known to an unknown or unknowable.

The Obituary’s narrative overlap and narrative diffusion are but two examples of

¹⁰⁷ I am indebted to Bronwyn Haslam’s linking of the poetics of indeterminacy with the poetics of description in her MA thesis *A Poetics of Apprehension Indeterminacy in Gertrude Stein, Emily Dickinson and Caroline Bergvall* (2013).

experimental strategies that dilate the novel's narrative space into a space of apprehension in the sense that Hejinian understands it. For instance, the boisterous noise produced out of *The Obituary's* (often seemingly bodiless) floating voices are projected – like the use of “scintilla” or “photo inset” in a film noir – against the gaps that interrupt and dis-locate their speech and the reader's ability to see them fully embodied. Scott's experimentally overlaid narrative builds upon the layers to produce visibility in accretion, which I examine in the following section.

Narrative and Temporal Overlap: Apprehending the Space of Translation

I now want to return to consider various forms of overlap, and examine the dis-conjunctive play of surfaces in *The Obituary's* experimentally composed narrative, in order to focus on the effects of narrative diffusion and its impact on opening a space of translation. This attention, to what is overlaid, leads me to consider the novel's palimpsest portrayal of time, where past and present co-exist – a feature that is exhibited in the plural and indeterminate nature of the narrative's various perspective framings. In their merging together, the diffusion and re-distribution of temporality as well as the incorporation of various speakers into a dis-conjoined palimpsest “space” acquires three-dimensional and thus architectural significance.

In terms of “space,” the incorporation of various angles of vision as well as the superimposed time frames are mainly anchored in or around the figure of the triplex, the place and space where most of the action emanates. To quote one of *The Obituary's* narrators: “If material conditions shape the spirit, we may empirically declare the Triplex the place where what is happening is the place” (21). Indeed, the triplex is a ubiquitous

part of Montreal's quintessential architectural landscape. As an apartment building with "two sets of stairs. Outside. Plus inner, dropping directly down from upper flat door," each tenant has his or her own private entrance (*The Obituary* 21). "We are proud of this architectural peculiarity," notes the Bottom Historian, "where each exit, no matter how high, permits unique access to exterior, so that every tenant may call her flat her house" (*The Obituary* 21). With its spiralling iron staircases, this "architectural peculiarity" also implies that its inhabitants live in close proximity to their neighbours. As a tri-stacked dwelling place, the three floors that typically constitute the triplex's layout, along with its long and narrow middle corridor (thus the many references in the novel to the triplex as a "railway flat") entails that, both literally and figuratively, voices occasionally float through the cracks in the floorboards, wafting like ghosts in others' apartments.

While each floor cannot be said to represent a specific time period, the triplex's vertical structure does become a symbol for the sedimentation of time. The novel achieves such a depiction by representing the site of the triplex, where Rosine lives, as the burial place of the Crystal Palace, a nineteenth century exhibition hall that existed prior to the triplex and that is now buried underneath it. Situated at 4999 Settler-Nun in Montreal's present-day neighbourhood known as the Mile-End, the novel also suggests that the Crystal Palace served as a smallpox hospice (ca. 1885) before it accidentally burnt down (*The Obituary* 19). Still, such a disastrous fate does not relinquish the Crystal Palace to the space of a historical factoid in the novel's footnotes. Instead, voices and portraits of the Crystal Palace erupt into the narrative, suggesting a living-dead figure. Such a layered construction is also reflected in the character of Rosine who, herself a

liminal figure between the living and the dead, is haunted by her uncertain ancestry, an aspect to which I shall return below.

To consider the flicker of presence and absence in the novel, what comes into focus only to fade out again, is to liken the play between what is absent and what is present to a series of entries and exits that are characteristically spectral. “What haunts are not the dead but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others,” reads the epigraph to *The Obituary*.¹⁰⁸ As scholars Angela Carr and Kate Eichhorn point out, the collapsing of various time frames in the novel is a formal attempt to create a porous structure that will allow buried secrets to be unearthed, revealed rather than concealed (30). “So our future novel is not about the ancestors but rather the persistent *pull* of the ancestors on the present” (Carr and Eichhorn 28). Such a layering of temporalities is figured, at least symbolically, in the architectural remains of the Crystal Palace. Interestingly, not only does the adapted wooden-walled Crystal Palace stand as a translation of its original, glass colonial model, but such a translation also determines its fate: “Hélas, one hot June-wind night, alleged spark from cigarette catching hay in carriage house. And spreading to Crystal Palace’s wooden walls, which in departing from pure glass+-iron mother-country model meaning Palace instantaneously burning. To ground” (*The Obituary* 59). A symbol of European wealth and power, the Crystal Palace is the allegorical sign of colonization whose pylons are still freshly rotting under the modern-day triplex. “What struck me especially, and this is how I see the novel now,” says Scott in an interview, “is that a whole life happens at the level of the city, ‘under’ which are other unspoken

¹⁰⁸ The question “what haunts” also frames Scott’s previous novel *My Paris* – only in *My Paris*, rather than asking “what haunts,” the question is rather “whom does one haunt?” Such a question is lifted from the opening pages of André Breton’s novel, *Nadja*: “Qui suis-je? Si par exception je m’en rapportais à un adage: en effet pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je “hante”?” (9).

presences [...] *The Obituary* is a look behind where what has allegedly ‘passed,’ reconsidering it as an element of ‘now-time’” (Scott and Moyes “Architectures of the Unsaid” 135).

The creation of a “now-time” is further accentuated by Scott’s ubiquitous use of the present participle, even when referencing an event from the past. Such a verb tense has the effect of blurring the borders between one time frame and another. Keeping track of the verbs ending in the clipped “in” instead of “ing” in the following example, the action is made to feel continuous.¹⁰⁹ What begins in one time-line, ca. 1885, seems to persist irrevocably.

Having puffed a joint for dessert, all by himself, outside l’École nationale de théâtre, the assistant’s nodding, halfway down inner 4999 Settler-Nun stairway, whose façade, red-orange painted brick, pressed peeling metal cornice, reading 1908 in middle, curiously resembling a dollhouse: one little brick floor piled atop another. Up up up. Yet, numbered downward, toward bottom, #4995 directly over buried pylons of former magnificent Crystal Palace, built for agricultural + commercial exposition purposes. Where ca. 1885, mid rows of faces on iron beds erupting like plastic bubbles into fetid putrid pus, lay Shale Pit Workers! of neighbouring Saint-John-Baptiste, dying in smallpox epidemy, raging in our filth-+-vice-ridden city. The ‘night soil’ not yet bein’ plucked from alleys, overflowin’ + floatin’, thawin’, joined by offal, floatin’ downhill from overflowin’ privies, down lanes where children playin’ in first warm April suns. Further contaminatin’

¹⁰⁹ In “Architectures of the Unsaid,” Scott admits to Moyes that the Gallic tonality of apostrophizing words, such as “th” or “in” reveals a great deal about who is speaking: “[In this space,] we find people that don’t speak well, and we find the shame of not speaking well or rather of not speaking like the well-educated. Thus, this apostrophe does something on two levels, both the sonic level and the informational level” (132).

leakage from refuse barrels, vegetable leavin's, broken sewers, all rushin' in filthy ruisseaux. As if to welcome th' pestilence, just gettin' off th' train. Which Palace's wooden walls, quarantined for duration, catchin' spark from carriage house one hot June night +

burnin'

down. (*The Obituary* 19)

If the quote I've chosen seems excessively long, its length nevertheless serves a purpose. For example, it shows that the style of the writing makes it difficult to cut trim passages without losing important pieces of context. While the action is clearly marked by date-specific temporal references that should divide the past from the present, the use of the present participle brings the action to the forefront of the story, making it feel as though it were happening in the present time frame. The "night soil," a playful euphemism for the city's garbage, contaminates not just the soil, alleys, and streams, but the entire space of the story is temporarily subsumed by the poetic detail and sheer exuberance of the language. Words like "offal," to signify the putrid decomposition of animal flesh, or the use of "privies" instead of overflowing toilets, contribute a poetic density to the passage that further distances the reader's orientation. Where are we? When are we? As readers, it is not until we fall upon a reference to the Crystal Palace's walls several lines later that we are reminded that the action is technically taking place in the past.

Such an indeterminate use of temporality, the way the past seeps into the present in a continuous stream, defies the conventions of analepsis or flashback, which would typically work to cleave one novelistic moment from the other. In *The Obituary*, such a clear separation does not exist. Cleverly, the play of light in the sentence that follows the

example provided above returns us to some semblance or version of the present moment: “Real light of day. Likewise falling through oeil-de-boeuf onto upper palier of stairway. Where old cop, Casse-Noisette to his friends, on knees, awaiting, en principe, as befitting diplômé de l’École Supérieure de Police de Paris: a search warrant” (*The Obituary* 20). Readers will remember, however, that the temporality in which the gendarme exists is contemporaneous with the early 1920s. “Indeed: In old gendarme’s head, it’s Paris. 1924” (*The Obituary* 98). He is enamoured with Rosine’s grandfather, his “adored Jos. Dousse,” his “beloved half-breed danseur à claquettes” (*The Obituary* 148): “Peacefully, they stroll. C-N in soft leather boots, fashionable à l’époque, laced to the ankle...When ancient Casse-Noisette, geriatrically adrift in long bygone afternoon [...] about to tell a story, uttering: *NOW!*” (*The Obituary* 99). In another instance, after he hears or hallucinates a voice saying, “I wanted to fuck you all night,” (*The Obituary* 140) the gendarme imagines himself walking the streets of Montreal in search of Double Jos. Dousse. It is 1924. “[He is in] search of only man he ever really loving” (*The Obituary* 140). Hence, if the gendarme is “present” in the hallway of Rosine’s apartment, he is nevertheless constantly eclipsing into fantasy, into other time periods, and presumably between the living and the dead. Like other characters in the novel, he too is haunted. He is haunted by his desire and obsession with his old wartime lover, Double Jos. Dousse, a fantasy that he has denied for so long that, “like all in R intrigue,” his desire remains unspeakable – “his chain of words unable to emerge” (*The Obituary* 148). Of course, while the gendarme might be haunted, this does not preclude the fact that he too haunts the stairwell where he is ensconced. In fact, since he seems to more properly belong to a

different epoch, he too, like the Crystal Palace and the nineteenth century Shale Pit Workers! who haunt it, may very well be a ghost.

The triplex, then, becomes the site of inquiry for the sedimentation of history in all its spectral layers. In such a layered form of writing, Scott's treatment of time has the effect of unhinging the present moment from its central and thus canonical position. It is here in particular that Scott's fractal narrative is reminiscent of Benjamin's historian:

A historian who takes this [the past as a precarious and living entity] as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time (Benjamin "Theses on the Philosophy of History" 263).

In place of a clear separation between various time frames, the reader finds a "landscape's history occasionally erupting into present" (*The Obituary* 48), a landscape where "phantoms = prime companions, o'er neighbourhood, o'er succeeding generations of recurring genetically torqued brats born on former Crystal Palace site, o'er former orchards + fields + men + this + that" (*The Obituary* 20).

As I have previously suggested, in palimpsest fashion, the Crystal Palace inhabits the triplex on rue Settler-Nun in quite the same way as the dead inhabit the space of the living: "Do not skyscrapers bear, deep within, straw huts? The person, her ancestors?" (*The Obituary* 117). For Carr and Eichhorn, the triplex furnishes the novel with an allegorical scaffold that mirrors its indeterminate references to genealogy:

The triplex provides an allegorical structure for linear historical time, for past-present-future (bottom-middle-top). Triplex, tri-plic, thrice folded. Three parallel partitions. Three equal parts. In Montreal in the early 1900s, triplexes were marketed to the bourgeoisie of the period (advertising external, private access to individual flats) for aspiring families in the bustling city. While pitched to families, the urban triplex unit is not, however, an ancestral home where memories and the forgotten are lodged in perpetuity (and geneological integrity). Instead, the triplex flat is non-vertical and rootless. Rarely passed down from generation to generation, it is most typically occupied as a rental unit and thereby, a dwelling marked by its own disjunctive temporality. (27)

While the triplex houses the imperial symbol of the city's colonial past, Rosine can also be said to "house" the secret lineage of her ancestors. Moreover, if the triplex is characteristically divided into three units, each with their own private entrance such that each occupant may call their suite their "home," so is Rosine divided into a tripartite structure of her own. She is at once the (possibly) dead woman lying on the bed, the fly doing a little erotic jig, as well as the basement historian also known as the lesbian modernist supplying the story with "facts" as she guards against "overinterpretation" (*The Obituary* 16).

As the triplex is both lodging and tomb, a crypt for transgenerational secrets and trauma, the fracturing of the character of Rosine too embodies this double ambivalence. More than a historical marker, however, the triplex also shapes the poetic space of the novel in the theoretical sense – linking the question of "what haunts" from the epigraph, by psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, to the wider question of Rosine,

her ancestry, and the interrogative “who speaks when one speaks?” – a recurring question in Scott’s work.¹¹⁰

Indeed, the question of “what haunts” directs our reading to the main protagonist, I/R/Rosine, whose Indigenous ancestry becomes entangled in a “murder mystery plot.” I place the term in quotations so as not to belie the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples and the communal repression of their genocide that is at the heart of the novel’s “detective story”: “on th’ afternoon we are murdered, this set will turn malodorous...Vrai, I mebbe back as a ghose” (*The Obituary* 16-17). Such a lapse of presence from the annals of history is evinced in the missing pages from the *Book of Genocides* (which was loaned to her by her landlord). Falling upon such an omission, Rosine, who is haunted by her Métis “inchoate origins,” (*The Obituary* 12) tears the yellowing pages from the book. In what will become a leitmotif for the violent treatment and subsequent effacement of Indigenous peoples from different texts (history (books), landscape, genealogy, etc.), the pages float through the streets of Montreal, blowing across the landscape as a bitter and ambivalent reminder of the historical violence and loss endured by many Indigenous families.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ The question of “who speaks” is a recurring concern in Scott’s work. In an interview with the poet, editor, and critic, Sina Queyras, Scott professes that such a question is at the forefront of *The Obituary*’s concerns:

Since starting to write prose “fiction,” I have, like so many contemporaries, written with the awareness that both spoken and written, lines, phrases, theories, are borrowed. Kathy Acker was my first mentor in that respect. Formally, or even stylistically, speaking, I take what is punctually useful to me, often to cast it off or to give it diminished importance later. What is left accumulates into the writing subject “I” am becoming over time. I feel, with *The Obituary*, that I have achieved something I have been reaching toward as concerns novel time, as well as the question of who speaks when one speaks, which is the real puzzle of the novel. (*Lemon Hound* “A Conversation with Gail Scott”)

¹¹¹ As Scott herself remarks in an interview with Lianne Moyes,

The Native presence is deeply embedded here [referring to the unsaid at the level of the city and its history] [...] In other words, the unsaid in the family was also unsaid in the social context, the layer of silence ventriloquized back and forth. *The Obituary* is a look

Where *The Obituary* brings the past and the present into proximal space, blurring the clear distinctions between them, both Rosine, in relation to her family lineage, and the triplex, as it houses the city's colonial past expressed in the allegorical figure of the Crystal Palace, become crypts for the ineffable. Thus, in the novel's experiments with perspective and time, both Rosine and the triplex become carriers of transgenerational secrets that resist containment.

Instead of remaining buried within the subject, these repressed (his)stories take on rumouological airs as they float through novelistic space seemingly detached from a determining origin. They are fragments – voices detached from bodies, yellowing pages detached from books – that float through the novel without clear temporal markers or narratorial interventions. The (white) noise of the past provides a haunting soundtrack for the present, as snippets of conversations, stories and songs suture the narrative composition into a continuous present. This noise, as rumour, is the subject of the following section of this chapter.

Rosine and the Question of What Haunts

Almost everyone and everything bears some form of haunting in the novel. As Lianne Moyes points out, “Rosine, for example, is haunted by places that have been effaced, by languages written over those used around her, by people whose histories are not recognized – the entries missing from the book of genocides” (Scott and Moyes “Architectures of the Unsaid” 131). Indeed, if the novel is a queer intervention into the past and its transgenerational haunting, as Carr and Eichhorn aptly maintain, it is also

behind what has allegedly ‘passed,’ reconsidering it as an element of ‘now-time.’ (“Architectures of the Unsaid” 135)

about omissions, some deliberate, others tainted by more sinister undertones (Carr and Eichhorn 28). “Never say you’re an Indian. If. You’re. Not,” Rosine’s aunt tells her when pressed about her Indigenous heritage (*The Obituary* 22). Perhaps the most violent form of omission, however, is the missing entry from the *Book of Genocides* that makes no mention of the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples:

Reaching for *Book of Genocides*, turning non-acid-treated leaflets. Detaching as I touch. GER-many. Somalia. Armenia. Rwanda. Kosovo. Sudan. Eeeeeeast Teeeeemor. Scrutinizing for la Gêne on which we standing, those going here before, stencilled in ice tunnel below bridge (*The Obituary* 22).

Suddenly, the “bitter particles of those going there before,” an ambiguous reference made in the novel’s opening pages, takes on a new significance (*The Obituary* 18):

Turning pages of landlord’s *Book of Genocides*. And finding no mention of the Gêne on which we ourselves standing – les cent-cinquant millions – vrai, I/R never thinking of that before: silent. Like falling snow on mountains. Letting the yellowed leaves fly one by one. Out window. Then felt a wave of shame. And went to lie down. (22)

Like those bitter particles, the yellow leaves and snow that blow throughout the novel’s pages also acquire a new level of significance as they float across the city, further emphasizing that no part of the landscape is left untouched by the omission of the city’s colonial past: “walking down streets. Feet in autumn leaves. A shadow rustling behind. Possibly an ancestor” (*The Obituary* 112 emphasis in original).

Such a past is not past of course but very much alive in the present moment of the novel’s depiction of a critical “now.” Indeed, in the image that follows, the “leaves” from

the trees become interchangeable with the “leaves” from the *Book of Genocides*. As their origin is no longer clear, they not only echo the indeterminate qualities of a rumour, but they also recall Rosine’s “inchoate origins”: “Following pair of crumbled autumn leaves. Wearing deep in their veins th’ storm of generations. Blowing o’er parc...Blowing past triplex...O’er boul Saint” (*The Obituary* 147). Seated on the bus, I/R watches the yellowed pages of th’ *Book of Genocides* as they land at the “foot of that old Con-fed Father, Georges Cartier’s monument” (*The Obituary* 23), a tribute to the city’s colonial past. The pages are then swept up by the wind and are described as flying across the street “into parc Settler-Nun [formerly F’s Field]” where they float like blossoms from an orchard, or like snow in a gentle breeze (*The Obituary* 23). Finally, the pages land over the site of the former Crystal Palace where there is no mention “of people camping there ere establishment of Gentleman’s Raquette + Hunt, then glass+-iron Crystal Palace’s mille-et-une facettes” (*The Obituary* 24). The treatment of the blowing pages and the flagrant omission they represent brings the present into a critical state. It is interesting to note that Max Pensky makes a similar comment in relation to Benjamin’s treatment of history:

Benjamin was convinced that behind the façade of the present, these otherwise forgotten moments could be recovered from oblivion and reintroduced, shoved in the face of the present, as it were, with devastating force: “The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state” (*Arcades*, 471; N7a, 5). (Pensky 181)

It becomes the task of the historian / translator / writer / reader, then, to “cultivate a particular capacity for recognizing such moments” (Pensky 181). This is precisely what I think *The Obituary* has set out to do – and with an admirable degree of success.

Scott suggests that the incorporation of the past into the present creates a flicker of presence, and no other figure in the novel embodies this flicker as overtly as the ghostly figure of *Face* haunting the triplex on rue Settler-Nun. Falling in and out of focus, the narrative describes the face that haunts the frame of the upper triplex window as attracting a crowd in the street below. Such a flicker of presence is analogous to the disjunctive temporalities linking the triplex, as crypt, to the burnt down Crystal Palace. Here, secrets act as phantoms haunting the subject (Rosine, the triplex, even novelistic space itself). In their ghostly appearances, such phantasmagorical sites/sight(ing)s operate in a manner that is similar to Scott’s use of the comma of translation in *My Paris* where the dis-conjoined narrative surface allows the narrator’s multiple affiliations to permeate each other. This is further elucidated in the manner *Face* simultaneously attracts both a crowd as well as a barrage of stories at the foot of the building on rue Settler-Nun – hearsay – which turns the triplex into a widely contested space out of which disparate (hi)stories arise.

The triplex is the place, in other words, where rumours emanate:

Here, Dear Reader, we begin our intrigue. Mid hangers-on [our natural element]. Gathered beneath 4999 Settler-Nun in the rain. Umbrellas raised smooth, or dehisce, like gangsters at a funeral. Heads shaved or impercipiently coiffed gazing up at contour behind venetians in darkening third-floor railway-flat window. Our wildest *élan*,♥ like Peter’s, dutifully restrained. Eagerly awaiting, futurity oblige,

dénouement of some devastating calumny or love tourniquet. –*Entoutkàs*, venturing the café-philosopher among us, goateed + pointedly down at the heel: – *Even if only about love. Are not love’s overwrought requiems usually covering deeper pilferings or betrayals, lost lands, homes, or lost people in them?* Meaning our novel beginning drenched in the acerbic, therefore subject to countless deviations + only slowly, anteriorly, releasing its elixir (*The Obituary* 31 emphasis in original).¹¹²

As the crowd awaits the mystery and reports regarding *Face* to be resolved – the scene depicts the uncertainty of the face’s identity and origin with terms that are akin to those of a rumour:

Gazing + unhurriedly opening, closing their odd-shaped umbrellas. Jostled, occasionally, by younger, more productive A-types rushing home to dinner. Who, themselves – if glancing up a sec at *Face* in Settler-Nun window – thinking [being somehow already negatively predisposed]: rumour having, a pervert [children looking away embarrassed]. While *Face* in situ behind sooty grey venetians denying, like everyone in this theatre, what *is*. And expounding what is not (*The Obituary* 32).

While rumours accumulate at the foot of the triplex, they also accumulate across the landscape of the novel.

The accumulation of the rumour across space is both literal as well as figurative. In the literal sense, they take the form of gossip between the characters who are, in one

¹¹² The translation of the word “rumour” into the French language befittingly gives way to “des bruits qui courent” – an élan which says a great deal about the speed and temporality of the rumour as one that outruns the present moment, eclipses into fantasy.

shape of another, haunted by Rosine/*Face*. The triplex's landlord, for instance, who shares the same psychoanalyst as Rosine, has gathered several complaints/stories about her tenant and recounts them to her analyst, MacBeth. In a therapy session, the landlord confesses to MacBeth that Rosine was apparently seen "washing sex toys on the balcony [...] dildo like a stallion's. Who's she think she's kidding?" (*The Obituary* 92). Beyond her scandalous exhibition of her dildo, she is also apparently making such a racket "skipping non-stop up + down the stairs" that the other neighbour, Lena, "*saying crystal meth for sure...*" (*The Obituary* 95). Meanwhile, due to complaints, *Face* is now under surveillance:

Police officers from District 20 of le Service de police de la Ville de Montréal seeking individual living in Mile End borough. Object of various complaints from neighbours; of late, one or two reporting as possibly missing. Others claiming to see face in upper 4999 Settler-Nun window several times daily. No bank nor credit card transactions for a week..... (*The Obituary* 102)

The traumatic uncertainty that *Face* represents for those living in the neighbourhood simultaneously points, in a figurative sense, to the threat of the indeterminacy of signification. Meredith Quartermain addresses this anxiety in relation to *The Obituary*, albeit in an oblique manner, suggesting that such a form of disquiet is also embodied in the character of *I/th' fly*:

In *The Obituary*, the notion of words secreting some phantom significance is explicitly addressed (with a nice play on secret and secrete), when *I/th' fly*'s early amazing speech about "th' masks, denials, secrets of that Psycho called Reality" is repeated late in the story with interesting changes. *I/th' fly* images what will

happen once she/he is murdered by a fly swatter, and Rosine will be “at a loss without her fly on th’ wall, to secrete th’ Méta Physique under th’ Topo Logic of reality” (144). Rather than a menacing Psycho (reality imposed by the colonizers), reality is seen as a logic of places suggesting something with contours and textures that must be mapped [...] At numerous junctures specific words trigger cracks, fissures and gaps signalling hungry ghosts of history, seemingly innocent colonial language which actually harbours murderous impulses (as casual as fly-swatters). (“How Fiction Works” 125-26)

The inherent threat gestured to above lies in the image of words (signifiers) floating detached from meanings (signifieds). This is an image the reader is familiar with – at least in terms of the floating omission of Indigenous peoples from the novel’s depiction of the *Book of Genocides*. It is the same kind of menace that threatens to engulf the “truth” regarding Rosine’s family lineage, just as it is the same threat that has led to the shared repression and collective effacement of Canada’s genocide of Indigenous peoples:

♥ No human lineage is certain. The family, like so many, faded on purpose into background. Replying when questioned: we know nothing beyond X generation. Not Grandma Prisc’s proper family name. Nor the language Grandpa speaking when talking to his mother. Everyone knew the words of the new concept anthem: *The Maple Leaf Forever*. (*The Obituary* 121)

To return to the stories that accumulate at the foot of the triplex, and we could say that the entire novel serves such a purpose, these (hi)stories – as rumours – float across the

novel's landscape seemingly unanchored in time and place, and therefore encrypt the narrative with undeniable anxiety.¹¹³

Indeed, one way to frame the rumour is to think of it as a story that runs against the grain, against the grain of the "truth of the story" in some sense. Rumours are carriers of an encrypted message that needs to be detected or interpreted. Embodying a life of their own, and alienated from any discernable sense of authorship, rumours are comparable to the contagious spread of disease, moving with the vampiric tenacity of the living-dead (Ronell "Street Talk" 120). They are inhuman, careless. They roam completely detached from an apparent origin, and equally free from any sense of responsibility for their effects.

Rumour as Translation

This inhuman quality recalls a few select passages in Paul de Man's "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'" where, during the question and answer period of his talk, the question of the inhuman in Benjamin's "The Translator's Task" is broached.¹¹⁴ Most interestingly, in relation to this section's focus on the rumour, de Man suggests that language is inhuman because it is impossible to fully comprehend. Cautioning against a reading of the inhuman as a secret, he argues that it should instead be viewed as the very (im)possibilities which are inherent in language. "The 'inhuman,' [...] is not some kind of mystery, or some kind of secret; the inhuman is: linguistic structures, the play of linguistic tensions, linguistic events that occur,

¹¹³ This is not to say that this is the novel's only affective register. In fact, *The Obituary* is a rather funny novel as well, which says nothing about its decadent or expressionist features, and which would reward their own reading elsewhere.

¹¹⁴ In his essay, "The Translator's Task," Benjamin attributes the features of life to everything that has a history (153).

possibilities which are inherent in language – independently of any intent or any drive or any wish or any desire we might have” (de Man “‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 96-97). Anchoring his claims in the example of the necessary but impossible task of translation, he suggests that translation is a way of reading the original. Of consequence here is the idea of translation as utopic. It is an impossible possibility. Necessary but impossible.¹¹⁵ According to de Man, to understand this possible impossibility, we simply have to think of translation’s irreversibility, “to the extent that you could not possibly get from the translation back to an original” (“‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 97). A translation will relate to the original in interesting ways, he suggests, raising some questions about aspects inherent in it, all the while destabilizing the text in the process (“‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 97).

That is the great difficulty inherent in translation, that it necessarily changes certain aspects of the circulation of meaning within the text:

And what happens to the original – I think can be said – the original is disarticulated, the original is reduced to the status of prose, is decanonized, all that by the process of translation, because the impossibility of translation is due to disruptions which *are* there in the original, but which the original managed to hide – in the same way that Benjamin manages to hide, from the reader, from the translator, from everybody who reads this text, manages to hide, for example, the

¹¹⁵ Derrida makes a similar claim in his essay “Des Tours de Babel”:

[...] les langues se dispersent, se confondent ou se multiplient, selon une descendance qui dans sa dispersion même reste scellé du seul nom qui aura été le plus fort, du seul idiome qui l’aura emporté. Or cet idiome porte en lui-même la marque de la confusion, il veut dire improprement l’impropre, à savoir Bavel [sic], confusion. La traduction devient alors nécessaire et impossible [...]. (214)

inadequacy of any symbol in relation to what it means, by using symbols which are particularly convincing, which are particularly seductive, and which seem precisely to achieve what they want to achieve, what they mean to achieve (de Man “‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 87-88).

I am not suggesting here that translation is a rumour or vice versa. What I am suggesting, however, is a link between the detached meaning inherent in the passage from original to translation and the circulation of the rumour as a carrier of meaning – regardless of its truth factor.

In both instances, translation and rumour lead one to harbour a potential mistrust in the inhuman properties of language. The translation is stereotypically scrutinized and then criticized for straying from the original while the rumour becomes the (terrorizing) word on the street stripping one of one’s good name. Here is de Man again: “That there is a nonhuman aspect of language is a perennial awareness from which we cannot escape, because language does things which are so radically out of our control that they cannot be assimilated to the human at all, against which one fights constantly” (“‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 100-01). Rather than approaching it with distrust, de Man recommends that such insights bring about “a certain kind of critical examination” (“‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 101):

Things happen in the world which cannot be accounted for in terms of the human conception of language. And they always happen in linguistic terms, or the relation [to] language is always involved when they have [happened]. And good or bad things, not only catastrophes, but felicities also. And they happen. In a sense, to

account for them, to account for them historically, to account for them in any sense, a certain initial discrepancy in language has to be examined (“‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” 101).

Roland Barthes, for his part, addresses the inhuman element in language as “the terror of uncertain signs,” which are traumatic in the sense that it is impossible in such circumstances for meaning to congeal: “Aussi, se développent dans toute société des techniques diverses destinées à *fixer* la chaîne flottante des signifiés, de façon à combattre la terreur des signes incertains” (44 emphasis in original).¹¹⁶ As Teresa de Lauretis remarks in an essay that begins with the same Roland Barthes quote I just used,¹¹⁷ narrative, she argues, even as fiction, is one manner of stabilizing meaning (“*Nightwood* and the ‘Terror of Uncertain Signs’” 117). She writes:

That is the function of the linguistic message in the (advertising) image, whose polysemy would otherwise produce a traumatic suspension of meaning. Such an anchoring function is provided by narrative in literary function, where the rhetorical/figural dimension of language, in disrupting the stability of meaning, carries what Paul de Man calls “the persistent threat of misreading.”¹¹⁸ Or, as de Man puts it elsewhere,¹¹⁹ reading a literary text “leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means.” (“*Nightwood* and

¹¹⁶ “In every society,” he writes, “various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs” (Barthes “Rhetoric of the Image” 39).

¹¹⁷ The article in question is on Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, another experimental novel that broaches questions of history and its “eccentric losers.” I am indebted to de Lauretis and the link she makes between the “inhuman” element in language and the embrace of a process of misreading that does not seek the congealment of (narrative or referential) meaning but that acquiesces to its indeterminacies – what de Lauretis refers to as “the otherness in it, the ‘inhuman’ element in language” (“*Nightwood* and the ‘Terror of Uncertain Signs’” 118).

¹¹⁸ Paul de Man “Blindness and Insight” 285.

¹¹⁹ Paul de Man “Resistance to Theory” 15.

the ‘Terror of Uncertain Signs’” 117)

What is impressive about *The Obituary* is that it manages to make these floating, ghostly aporias visible precisely because its various overlaps disallow the narrative to congeal into a single (his)story. The encrypted and unanchored features of the narrative, therefore, open a space of translation that is akin to the undecidability of a rumour.

The rumourological version of the haunting, as one that carries the persistent threat of misreading, to echo Paul de Man, is not entirely surprising in a novel about how the secrets of the dead haunt the living. Nor is a passion for the rumourological surprising in a narrative that is only “slowly, anteriorly, releasing its elixir” (*The Obituary* 31). Meanwhile, as the narrative is subjected to “countless deviations,” the better to outdo/outrun the suppression of a contagious secret, the time-sense of its pacing as well as its fantasmatic projections of the detached story, as rumour, keep the narrative in a constant state of anxiety, which I also read as a form of critical *vigilance*.

Moreover, with its barrage of voices and collaged temporalities, there is hardly any resting place for the reader, just as there is hardly a resting place for the dead whose voices float across *The Obituary* with the same living-dead tenacity of the rumour:

Here, dear Reader, born of an instant’s delight. Mere figment of the parents. Themselves pale projection of those going before. Here, we arriving in space where the sharp sensation something incontournable requiring our attention. For footprints exiting slushy court those in Grandpa’s leaky teacup. Why, on this day of our lord, no shadow gliding back up stairs? (*The Obituary* 122)

In interviews, Scott refers to the scattered and slippery shards that constitute the narrative and its omissions as forms of ventriloquism. In her essay “The Sutured Subject,” Scott

writes: “For what it’s worth, post-Freudian analysts like Abraham and Török also stressed that we are mostly haunted by the secrets of others, down through the generations, other voices that try to make us perform on the stage of society like ventriloquists” (66). In effect, the ventriloquizing quality of the narrative is referred to by the Basement Historian as stemming from the past’s secret index:

Children take words from the air, ventriloquizing omissions passed down generations. Hence Rosie’s ‘charrettes,’ those famous Métis Red River carts with their wooden axles, capable of bearing giant loads, famously squeaking over rutted prairie. Which landscape’s history occasionally erupting into present. As voiced by that Métis farmer on the radio decrying new floods banks raised to keep provincial capital Winnipeg burghers safe. Meaning the waters formerly rising on floodplain some genius planned the capital city on, flooding the outlying farmland instead. (*The Obituary* 48)

The words the children take from the air seem to float without a discernable origin or source. These rumourological utterances, which in the figurative sense of their French meaning as *des bruits ou mots qui courent*, are best captured in the image of the disfigured *Book of Genocides* and the pages of said book which continue to blow across the landscape of the novel, ultimately offering their own image of a haunted landscape.

Conclusion: Passages Through Language

The Obituary is a profoundly (and impressively!) genre-busting text that, akin to Avital Ronell’s critical posture of “responsible responsiveness” discussed in Chapter One, does not attempt to foreclose the object and subject of its inquiry through analytical synthesis.

Legibility is produced as narrative and temporal overlaps create the possibilities for new significations to occur and erupt in the dialectical blur. With her overlapping and experimentally composed narrative, Scott proposes a radical way of opening a path to thinking through issues of legibility and inscription by pointing to those places in language (which includes history, representation (or at least a critique thereof), etc.) that lead to a void or negative – a gap – in the subject’s place. This quality of negation makes visible that which has been blurred or effaced, rendered unnamed, unnameable, ineffable, unthought – hence the novel’s articulation of transgenerational trauma and the subject of the future as crypt who bears the inscriptions of an unspeakable past.

This unnamed and unnamable other (story, subject, etc.) is performatively disjoined across various temporal strata that (irre)vocably interrupts the flow of narrative progression or progress itself. Where I have attempted to link the terror of uncertain signs with the groundlessness and contagion of the rumour, I did so in an attempt to imagine what these unpredictable and unhinged narratives might reveal. What is it, in a rumour, that we cannot imagine seeing? What teratological threat threatens to topple understanding? Is that the (inter)zone of trauma? Is that the task of translation? – to quell the terror of aporias that are un-doing their source(s)? In her conclusion to the novel, Scott closes on the word “Engleeeeeesh.” Does this mark the illegible as a conclusion in and of itself?

Perhaps the most readily available avenue for thinking through the above-mentioned questions is to consider the manifestedly visual signs of overlap in the novel’s use of brackets, symbols, crossed out words, and warped spellings – all of which reroute signification in interesting ways. While I have not specifically lingered on these

features,¹²⁰ I would like to close this chapter with an anecdote regarding Scott's evocation of crossed out passages in at least one public reading of *The Obituary* I've seen. In choosing to end on this particular anecdotal note, I hope to underline the noisy features of such a mercurial composition, and how – in its excess – the reader must wander through its layered passages¹²¹ which are constantly shifting and undoing the ground(s) on which the text is built (even in the simultaneous moment in which they are read).

If one has ever had the delight of listening to Scott read from her novel, he or she might remember that she does not gloss over those passages in *The Obituary* which are bifurcated: “We are loath to go ~~Father~~ farther” (20), “There being no redemption in ~~origins~~ extinct matters” (117), “Is she lying there next ~~th’ absent one beside her~~ stuck like that?” (139). When Scott encounters a word that has been crossed out she reads it – does not skip over it. In other words, she'll say the word that's crossed out, then say “that's crossed out” before moving on to its substitution.

The vocable presence and the dis-articulating tactics that Scott gives to these moments of erasure coalesce to form new significations that underscore (and underwrite) the very vocable-ness of the text's ineffable components. One utterance is simultaneously underwritten/overwritten by the other which overlaps it. Translatability is the “voice” of that dis-articulated overlap: the multiplication of (possible) utterances across an uneven,

¹²⁰ Others have done so already and in ways that I'm not convinced I would have added to. See, for instance, Gillian Lane Mercier's reading of *The Obituary* as sutured text (“Gail Scott and Barbara Godard on ‘The Main’: Borders, Sutures, Micro-cosmopolitan Interconnectivity, and Translation Studies”) as well as Corey Frost's original insights into Scott's apostrophes (“Punc'd: Towards a Poetics of Punctuation in the Novels of Gail Scott”).

¹²¹ Remember that for Walter Benjamin the arcades are passages in the most polysemic sense of the word.

three-dimensional plane; a plane of language that is also a dwelling place – like a house – for the unsaid, or what is difficult or (nearly) impossible to represent.

Conclusion

Translation as Poetry:

Writing What's Not There and the Creation of New Spaces for Thought

“There are phantom structures being built on top of and in between...
what would you call them? Real structures, concrete structures?”

— Renee Gladman, *Houses of Ravicka*

The (Un)Known: Thinking Beyond the Visible Into What Exi(s)ts

What can be known through the poetic and theoretical vectors of translation? During the course of my research, I explore various modes of translation in which creative and critical practices intersect, and thus emerge as poetics. I was also drawn to the primary works cited in these chapters because, each in their own way, they foreground the making of the work but also the work's agency. The experimental texts herein also consist of examples where the poetics of translation are linked to the vocation of thinking, of knowledge production, and of presencing – read: inventing! – new possibilities for thought, language, and poetry. Each work offers more than aesthetic contemplation. Each is laden with the invitation to think beyond the visible into what exi(s)ts.

Reading the works in this thesis through the lens of translation – as both a reading methodology and a poetic component of the work – allows a deeper understanding of the conditions of textuality as an overlapping performance, often at the cost or expense of making something visible or invisible. Through these texts' relationship with generative overlap they invite a poetic thinking that is otherwise a questioning into the very structures that mediate critical thought practices themselves. Such a harnessing of an “otherwise” is also true of the way I have been using translation as a cipher for these experimental texts. By allowing translation to be encountered in a form other than its regular or normative use, I was interested in discovering what translation can make visible, both in regards to the texts but also in relation to itself as a densely theoretical and politically charged concept. Indeed, this study situates translation as a form of enactment that extends beyond hermeneutics.

The implications of translation as overlap and as a form of “being with” offer various examples of the diffusion of time and temporal overlays. In Scott’s novel, various forms of overlap counter teleological ideas of progress. Indeed, Hamlet’s famous musing that “time is out of joint” is perhaps most obvious in a novel like Gail Scott’s – where various timeframes (and their subjects) overlap in a provocative disjunction that Walter Benjamin theorizes as the dialectical image. In the chapter on *The Obituary*, more than any other in this dissertation, the dialectical image is turned into a febrile critical tool for sighting/situating the present within the ongoing overlap of the past into a critical now.

Working across the poetic juxtapositions within the texts, each chapter provided an opportunity to translate the various moments/vectors of alterity and tensions produced out of the crossroads between history, textuality (art) and languages. Each study sought to explore how reading the works from the perspective of translation can potentially create alternative connections and alignments between subjects, epistemological processes and procedures. The works under discussion have taught me how translation can embody the poetic practice of making space: for others, for the new, for new or other ways of thinking.

In *The Obituary*, Scott’s overlapping narrative assembles invisible, eradicated, erased or (historically) non-signifying elements of discourse with a chorus of unpredictable ghostly (mostly sonic) appearances of snippets of words, conversations, and passages that have a citational quality to them, even though their source is irreparable. The narrative’s plural construction, overlapping subjectivities and perspective framings give way to a pun that mutates citation into sighting. Of course, as I argued throughout my chapter on novel, the very conditions of the possibility of these sightings

depend upon a friction between uncertain signs, which have both an indeterminate significance and a certain presence. The text must, as a condition of its resistance and revolutionary qualities, be composed of difficult to assimilate utterances – passages which invite insight by troubling our direct and transparent access to them.

Along similar lines, the second chapter on Fernando Pessoa and PME-ART, opens with the conceit that in Fernando Pessoa selves multiply. If, as the chapter suggests, *work* in Pessoa is propulsive as it multiplies with the élan of a rumour, it also invites us to read the dispersal of *the work* across bodies, times, languages, and (in)numerable editions. Moreover, in its enfolded and productive dislocation there is a destinal mark in *The Book*, which ambulates toward everyone and no one in a stroll of double occupancy, between heteronymy and posterity, as well as inside and outside death, as it holds within itself something rumourological. Here, the auto-mobility of the book, which I conflate with the poetics of a rumour, ties back to translation (or to a defiance of translation) in the sense that the book is rife not just with uncertainty but with untraceable origins.

When, for instance, Erín Moure (in)translates Chus Pato, she not only makes Pato's influence on her own work visible, she makes visible the strict policies of *The Canada Council for the Arts* which withholds financial support for the translation of foreign authors by Canadian authors. Thus, *Secession/Insecession* carves a path across the Atlantic Ocean; it opens a space of homage that is also a space of changing littorals: between poets and readers. In its inventive form as a bicephalous book, Moure's (in)translation reaches beyond the aporetic impasse or gap left open by the funding body's restrictive policies and traces a new pathway for her friend, Chus Pato's, work.

Face to face, the texts motion toward a compelling invitation to consider translation as a kind leap that, like poetry, points to what the impossible can make possible.

Moreover, the transtextual practices present throughout this dissertation are further compounded and complexified by the vast array of ways that translation – as a poetics but perhaps especially as a reading methodology – affects the manner in which experimental and socially conscious texts are apprehended.

Why Translation?

It is worth speculating at this juncture why translation seems to be the ubiquitous term of this historical moment. Is it because of the mobility of translation's multiple analogies – the way terms like rewriting, reworking, or transposing all seem to come to “mean” a form of translation? Or is it that the very broad scope of translation more generally can be useful in theorizing the intertextual and sometimes even intermedial exchanges across various creative and critical fields? Perhaps the temptation to use a term like translation comes from its ability to touch or to reach across several disciplines and metaphors? Translation, after all, is already a subdiscipline of linguistics, a discipline of its own (a study and a practice) as well as an interdiscipline.

Certainly, the idea of translation as an empowering tool for activism and agency pervades several of the aforementioned examples, but a cautionary note necessarily needs to be formulated here. While I have stressed the positive aspects of translation in the political and social field, I have done so without offering any counter examples of the violence inherent in translation – as scattered meaning, undecidable references, gaps, displaced origins, silences, or loss, which all point to forms of untranslatability. Keeping

these in mind, the chapters throughout this work sought to explore how translation might shift the boundaries and possibilities that initially determined its passage. My dissertation's entanglement in various border crossings, in issues of cultural exchanges, and in diverse representations of encounters (*va-et-vient*, *face à face*, and *contre-face*) demands a rereading of the very horizon(s) that constitute the *work* of translation.

My choice to examine the ways in which translation transforms our ideas about language, literature and writing, and how it might also work to signal or alter one's presence in the world, is not work that is finished or closed. The observations and thoughts outlined in this dissertation offer but one permutation among others where I see this project of investigation into epistemological and ontological possibilities of translation taking root. The important stake here was to look at the ways in which translation might offer a critical lens and material conceit that invites philosophical inquiry into the very enabling properties of writing and thinking itself. My aim, then, was to carve a space where the poetics of translation can give way to alternative poetical-critical models for critical inquiry, hence my emphasis on translation as a reading methodology.

Although none of the works in my corpus incorporate aspects of the visual that are not firstly of a verbal order, I maintain that there is a significant argument to be made regarding the visual and material qualities of all of the texts under discussion, and that this "visual or material condition" stems from these works' implicit construal of the poetics of translation. What I attempted to show, and this is perhaps the most crucial and innovative aspect of my thesis, is that because translation necessarily dwells in a negative or in-between space – as a leap into the unknown, a simultaneous getting together and

moving apart – the works project the emergence of a sign that, due to its disintegrative nature and the way it eludes the capacity for narration, materializes itself in visual analogies. From there, I built the structure of my arguments around a poetics of translation that conceives of thinking as non-linear. Benjamin’s and Ronell’s body of work were helpful light bearers here, illuminating the way towards an unravelling of that abstract materiality between texts by theorizing that very abstraction as the result of the friction (in translation) between various *corpuses*, not origins.

While my study drives toward theoretical questions rather than sociological ones, the methodological reorientation I propose allows various critical frames – feminism, translation studies, cultural studies, and philosophy – to touch and to further one another. My research distinguishes itself from the significant cluster of critical material that already exists on translation in the very rhythms of the writing, which undergoes a technical mutation by enmeshing what Avital Ronell terms the “speculative inventiveness” and “poetic probes” of creative writing with the differently systematized traditions of academic writing. In the sense of models, I am very grateful to the writings of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Nathanaël, and Avital Ronell.

Translation as Poetic Juxtaposition

In thinking through the various possible modalities for the present and final section, I decided one way to frame the issue of the visible within language, and of translation within language, was to think in terms of images and invisibility. Thus, I began thinking of this dissertation’s primary works alongside other books that deal with the poetic dilemma of translating invisible structures, and found that of all the works I encountered

during the last six years none of them reach at the “problem of the visible” as gracefully and as insightfully as Renee Gladman’s deeply poetic novel *Houses of Ravicka*.¹²²

In the final stages of writing and then in the period of revision that followed, I found that reading Gladman alongside the chapters I had written allowed me to access a kind of poetic juxtaposition (the architectonics of poetry and thought). The more I juxtaposed and allowed my mind to be lighted by Gladman’s work, the more I wondered how to allow such an oblique response to activate and make visible a productive ambiguity. In other words, my interest – like the works I studied across these chapters – is in poetic juxtaposition as a methodology, as a system for pointing. Such a form of sight is crucial to the indeterminacy of the open narrative form of the works in this dissertation where each chapter suggested ways translation as a reading methodology and a poetic component of the writing can be thought of as opening onto “gestures of seeing” or insight (Chisholm 181). Though Gladman does not figure in this dissertation – apart from her rare appearance in Chapter One – it is important that I make space to thank her here, in the space of my concluding remarks, for her insightful work.

Here, I do not conclude with Gladman.

With Gladman, whatever layers there are yet to peel

remain utterly open.

¹²² Here is an aphoristic sample from Gladman’s novel – a novel that, like *The Obituary*, also treats issues of legibility and invisibility: “[...] perhaps I should begin by saying what it means to see or how measurements occur in time, because first you have to let go of the notion that sights enter the eyes, or merely the eyes” (*Houses of Ravicka* 104).

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