INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Performative Bodies, Hybrid Tongues:

Race, Gender, Sex and Modernity in Latin America and the Maghreb

by

Julian Vigo

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2002

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 3063893

Copyright 2002 by
Vigo, Julian

All rights reserved.

UMI Microform 3063893
Copyright 2002 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

© 2002

Julian Vigo

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy.

9/19/02
Date

Vincent Crapanzano
Chair of Examining Committee

9/19/02
Date

William Coleman
Executive Officer

Vincent Crapanzano

George Yúdice

Johnathan Shannon

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Abstract

Performative Bodies, Hybrid Tongues:
Race, Gender, Sex and Modernity in Latin America and the Maghreb

by

Julian Vigo

Adviser: Professor Vincent Crapanzano

This manuscript reconsiders the body in literature and visual representation as a physical and gesticulative domain for rethinking the constructions of gender, nationalism, and sexuality. Primarily, examining contemporary literary production, I argue that the body in contemporary North Africa and Latin America serves as a physical and symbolic terrain upon which sexual, textual, national, and linguistic identities are vectored and through which postcolonial and hegemonic antagonisms of power are engaged. Rather than embrace "third world" identity as a residual repository of western thought, colonization, and linguistic infusion, as is often conferred in critical theory, I suggest that the paradigm of cultural identity in the Maghreb and Latin America is best understood through an examination of the emergent corporeal articulations of subjectivity prevalent in these literatures and cultures. This book argues that the body is a critical landscape through which the various discourses of nationalism, gender, and sexuality converge in order to construct a reading of the social that neither amasses identity as singular under the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rubric of the "third world," nor that couches the other within western identity.

Herein, the reader will note my use of language that is constantly and consciously calling into question the *very words* I use and my use of language may often seem to "contradict" itself. Indeed, this is the heart of my experiment, for this work both discusses the collapse of western parochialism and epistemological imperialism while also calling into question the very dichotomies that are examined *by virtue of their being juxtaposed through language.* For instance, I would love to never again use the words "western" and "non-western", "third world" and "first world" or "traditional" and "modern", since as I later elaborate, these modalities are as real as they are fictive, they are as polarized by the myths of certain cultural settings as they are non-identitifiable in other cultures. They are as much a product of a certain historical and social consensus (of certain persons in certain places) as they are terms that are under erasure (by other certain persons in other certain spaces). This work attempts a critique of the "non-sense" of specifically western literary, anthropological, and philosophical discourses which on the one hand wish to collapse the binaries of identity and "liberate" the subject from language, but on the other hand, disavow any possibility of such liberation since the transgressive act of renaming identity becomes reinterpolated into a system of categorization which necessarily throws the subject at the very mercy of language.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Transcription Notes

Due to the fact that my research has included texts from eight different languages (also in which transliterations were produced), maintaining one common system of transcription is difficult since there are many accepted forms for transliterating both Arabic and Nahuatl. For instance, the transcription for the letter *shīn* (ش) in a French text is often transliterated as *ch* whereas in an English text this same letter would be written *sh*. The transcription of Nahuatl, having been developed originally by Fray Bernardino Sahagún, presents fewer problems since there tends to be a general adherence to Sahagún's original work. However, when transcribing from a language such as Moroccan dialectical Arabic, *derija*, which is a spoken—not a written—language, the transliteration depends entirely upon the pronunciation embraced by the author. For instance, in Fes it is quite common that men cannot (or do not) roll the *rā'* (ر) and instead enunciate a prolonged *a* sound as if the *rā'* were an *alif* (ا). As such, I have included phonetic and transliteration guidelines to aid in the reading of this manuscript. I have left the transcriptions cited from secondary sources in their original *formexcept in certain* cases. In many older transcriptions apostrophes are used instead of the precise diacritical marks often causing confusion (especially since the *hamza* and the *ayn* are indistinguishable with many type faces). In these cases, I have replaced the apostrophes with either ' or ʿ. The following list shows the DNI transcription format while also including the other international transcription systems shown in parentheses.

Nahuatl Phonetics

In contemporary Nahuatl transcription, vowels are pronounced as they are in Spanish. Yet, while most consonants and their combinations are similar to those in English, there are the following exceptions:

cu	kw
hu	w
h without u	*glottal stop*
tl	*single consonant*
x	š
z	s

Arabic Transcription

ا ،ء	ā, ' (â, a')
ب	b
ت	t
ث	ṯ (th, t̲h)
ج	ǧ (j, dj)
ح	ḥ (h)
خ	ḫ (ḥ, kh, k̲h, x)
د	d
ذ	ḏ (dh)
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	š (sh, s̲h, ch, sch)
ص	ṣ (ṣ, ç)
ض	ḍ (ḏ)
ط	ṭ (ṯ)
ظ	ẓ (ẕ)
ع	ʿ (')
غ	ġ (gh, g̲h)
ف	f
ق	q (ḳ)
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w, ū (û, uw, ō, ou)
ي	y,ī (î, iy)
ى	ā (â, ỳ, á, a')
ة	h, t
گ	g
short vowels	a, i, u

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this manuscript depended upon a great number of people without whom this work would simply not have been possible. I would like to thank Vincent Crapanzano, my dissertation director, whose guidance provided me with a critical reflection of my writing and whose patience throughout the last several years gave me the needed pause to rethink my relationship to academia. Likewise, I have been greatly indebted to his work with ethnography and cultural criticism which have greatly informed my writing and teaching. I would also like to thank George Yudicé who has been a mentor throughout my graduate studies and whose encouragement and reading of this manuscript I truly value. I am likewise indebted to Johnathan Shannon for his close readings and thoughtful critiques of this manuscript. I would like to acknowledge the economic endowments which have given me the much needed time for the research and writing of this text between Morocco, Mexico and New York—namely the Helaine Newstead Fellowship Dissertation Grant and the Fulbright Grant. I would also like to thank the many people who have been involved in this project from its premature moments when I was still inventing a language for discussing identity, to my fieldwork and language studies, through the current revisions of this manuscript. To those involved in my research in Mexico, I would like to thank: Margo Glantz for leading me to textual *borrones*; Carmen Boullosa for an instructive dialogue regarding Conquistador "cross dressings"; the Biblioteca Palifoxiana in Puebla; the Facultad de Letras at the Universidad Autónoma de México; my colleagues and students at the Facultad de Letras and the Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación at the Universidad de las Américas; the Casa de la

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cultura in Cholula; Roger Bartra for his guidance and assistance in my research in Aztec cosmology; Elena Poniatowska for her words at an observatory where difference between the real and unreal stars are undiscernible; Circe, Juan Carlos, Héctor, Luis, Tonatiuh, Lorena, Oscar, Alfredo, Kristina, Verónica, David, and Pepe for their work on the *hiper-mujer;* and of course, the original *hiper-mujeres,* José, Carlos, Ismael, Juan Manuel and Ana whose performances at Keops kept the spirit of this project together. I am also incredibly grateful to the following people for their contributions to my research in Morocco : Stefania Pandolfo whose work with gender and language were a great inspiration to this project; Nabiha Jerad for her attentive comments; my colleagues at the Institut Universitaire de Recherche Scientifique; *La Source;* Ḍhareddine, for his *derija* and *darbuka* lessons as well as for the greatest solo performance of the Indian film, *Disco Dancer,* I could ever hope to behold; Hamid, a cab driver from Fez with who taught me about chance (صدف), gender, and *jalabiyat* (while exchanging a "female" for a "male" *jalaba*); the countless *bouquinistes* who helped me find censured materials; and finally, the many people without whom I could have never learned *derija* and the *mélange* of life, language, and culture in the many dialogues in cafés, *souqs,* buses and *ḥaflat* (parties). In Italy, I must thank Bouchaib for all his assistance with the transliterations of Moroccan dialectical Arabic, my students in Bologna, the lovely olive harvesters in Campobello, Sicily, and the extra groovy traffic police officers in Tahrir Square, Cairo. In New York, I must thank my students from both New York University and the New School University who generously offered readings of culture, literature and media that have influenced much of this work. I must also thank my lovely friends whose

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

support over the years has sustained my spirit. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Willard Uncapher for his great wisdom regarding issues of modernity and identity politics, Edward Hylton for his amazing hospitality and friendship, Snoop Doggy Dog (thanks Edward), and Lowell Thomas for offering me the space and time to do the final editing on this project. Finally, I would like to thank Simona whose patience, insight, and perseverance brought my mind and heart together in both writing and living.

This book is dedicated to my beautiful friend Driss, الله يرحمه , whose soul taught me about the very nature of living in the margins, inventing the present, and transgressing the body. These are the acts that, ultimately, are the very real and corporeal inspirations for this book.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Contents

	Abstract	iv
	Transcription Notes	vi
	Acknowledgements	vii
	Introduction The Erasure of Language and the Production of Meaning	1
One	Western Theories of Gender and Sex: Performative or Real?	5
Two	Language and the Body in Barthes, Khatibi and Sarduy: The Intertextual and Intersexual	72
Three	The Body of *Fitna* and the Intractable Feminine: Exile, Nomadism, Memory and the *Bi-langue* in Maghrebian Literature	143
Four	The Violence of Representation in Latin American Literature: *Realismo mágico* and *Neobarroco* Bodies of Gender, Race, Sickness and Terror	228
Five	Hybrid Bodies and Border Crossings: Nationalism and Modernity in Morocco and Mexico	313
	Images	357
	Works Cited	370

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Introduction

The Erasure of Language and the Production of Meaning

This manuscript reconsiders the body in literature and visual representation as a physical and gesticulative domain for rethinking the constructions of gender, nationalism, and sexuality. Primarily, examining contemporary literary production, I argue that the body in contemporary North Africa and Latin America serves as a physical and symbolic terrain upon which sexual, textual, national, and linguistic identities are vectored and through which postcolonial and hegemonic antagonisms of power are engaged. Rather than embrace "third world" identity as a residual repository of western thought, colonization, and linguistic infusion, as is often conferred in critical theory, I suggest that the paradigm of cultural identity in the Maghreb and Latin America is best understood through an examination of the emergent corporeal articulations of subjectivity prevalent in these literatures and cultures. This book argues that the body is a critical landscape through which the various discourses of nationalism, gender, and sexuality converge in order to construct a reading of the social that neither amasses identity as singular under the rubric of the "third world," nor that couches the other within western identity.

Herein, the reader will note my use of language that is constantly and consciously calling into question the *very words* I use and my use of language may often seem to "contradict" itself. Indeed, this is the heart of my experiment, for this work both discusses the collapse of western parochialism and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

epistemological imperialism while also calling into question the very dichotomies that are examined *by virtue of their being juxtaposed through language.* For instance, I would love to never again use the words "western" and "non-western", "third world" and "first world" or "traditional" and "modern", since as I later elaborate, these modalities are as real as they are fictive, they are as polarized by the myths of certain cultural settings as they are non-identitifiable in other cultures. They are as much a product of a certain historical and social consensus (of certain persons in certain places) as they are terms that are under erasure (by other certain persons in other certain spaces). This work attempts a critique of the "non-sense" of specifically western literary, anthropological, and philosophical discourses which on the one hand wish to collapse the binaries of identity and "liberate" the subject from language, but on the other hand, disavow any possibility of such liberation since the transgressive act of renaming identity becomes reinterpolated into a system of categorization which necessarily throws the subject at the very mercy of language.

The first chapter, "Western Theories of Gender and Sex: Performative or Real?", examines feminist and queer theories in the west which assume certain freedoms of sexual and gendered identities while simultaneously prescribing very rigid constructions of identity. Analyzing theories and practices of performance, anthropology, architecture and American land art, I offer various paradigms for unraveling the somatic/performative nexus constructed in much of gender theory. The second chapter, "Language and the Body in Barthes, Khatibi and Sarduy: The Intertextual and Intersexual", examines the writings of Roland Barthes (France) focusing on his notion of *langage poétique* which is a fragmented and pluralistic space of nature and the body while looking at how

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

this notion of corporeal fluidity is also rearticulated and situated outside the west by Severo Sarduy (Cuba) and Abdelkebir Khatibi (Morocco) as a posture for reading cultural inflections of gender, language, and nationalism specific to Latin America and North Africa. Chapter Three, "The Body of *Fitna* and the Intractable Feminine: Exile, Nomadism, Memory and the *Bi-langue* in Maghrebian Literature", situates the body of polyvalent sexes and desires within Maghrebian literature, focussing on Khatibi's *Le livre du sang* as well as other Maghrebian texts wherein the "sacred" and the "profane" are not so much dialectically related, as much as they are integrated within the scope of desire and subjectivity, contamination and death, as these writers grapple with Islamic notions of purity and transgression as well as postcolonial ties to western constructions of language, nation, and gender. In Chapter Four, "The Violence of Representation in Latin American Literature: *Realismo mágico* and *Neobarroco* Bodies of Gender, Race, Sickness and Terror", I turn to contemporary notions of magical realism and trace the history of the magically real in Latin America from narratives of the Conquest through contemporary fiction which attempts to relocate the "truth" of history while also embracing the *mestizaje* of Latin American constructions of culture, language, history, race and gender. Chapter Five, "Hybrid Bodies and Border Crossings: Nationalism and Modernity in Morocco and Mexico", examines the interstices of various discourses of traditionalism and modernity in Latin America and the Maghreb examining visual representations of nationhood in Mexico and Morocco through the official portraiture of late King Hassan II and the paintings of Frida Kahlo respectively. Locating the body as the terrain upon which modernity and tradition are simultaneously articulated and recast, this chapter attempts to understand how modernity functions in each specific cultural

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

paradigm and how identity functions within a larger global spectrum whereby history is rethought, destroyed and imagined as a means of asserting that which is always lost and discontinuous.

This work is an experiment in erasure, collapse and reconstruction of language, performance and the somatic. In attempting to remain as critical to my own use of language as I do the discourses I critique, I inevitably enter into a *glissement* of language where to use a certain word might seem silly, but not to use it would obscur meaning. Ultimately, this book aims to work with the nuances and contradictions of language as a I utilize words as textures, layers, which, like the body, must confront the conterminous excess and paucity of meanings imposed from outside and forever changed by its erasure and rescripting. Likewise, this work analyzes the body as a physical text (surface) and performative space which is as much a terrain for understanding the heterogeneous cultural and political realities of Latin America and the Maghreb as it is a tool for enacting the "magically real" topographies of nationality, gender, language, race and sex. Ultimately, this manuscript investigates spaces wherein the subject might not only name herself, but where she might also perform, rewrite, erase and reconstruct the very language through which she is rendered and brought into being.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter One

Western Theories of Gender and Sex:

Performative or Real?

> Como todos los hombres de la Biblioteca, he viajado en mi juventud; he peregrinado en busca de un libro, acaso del catálogo de catálogos; ahora que mis ojos casi no pueden descifrar lo que escribo, me preparo a morir a unas pocas leguas del hexágono en que nací. Muerto, no faltarán manos piadosas que me tiren por la baranda; mi sepultura será el aire insondable: mi cuerpo se hundirá largamente y se corromperá y disolverá en el viento engendrado por la caída, que es infinita (p. 90).
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, "La Biblioteca de Babel" (in *Ficciones*)

Over the past century in the West, gender has been examined as a factor which is automatically posited as either part of an integral dimension of personhood or which is situated as a locus of difference—be it biological, linguistic, cultural, or sexual. As such, in the past decade gender has become a point of contention within identity politics (such as feminist and queer theories) since the "realness" of gender *as linked to certain sexed bodies* has come under scrutiny. Indeed, older forms of interpreting and constructing gender as difference have been resurrected from the cinders of linguistic, ontological and epistemological discourses and reanimated within current social and theoretical fabrics. Likewise post-structuralist theory has attempted to corrode the very manichean tendencies in Western thought which heretofore sought to tease out and separate one gender from another, strangely enough, much of post-structuralist theory has led to an even greater entrenchment of these very dichotomies of gender. Indeed,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the inherent presupposition of gendered difference which automatically marks subjectivity within the preordained schemes of being of *either* feminine *or* masculine inevitably maintains all identity as real, pervasively homogeneous, intractably different, and inevitably stuck within the tradition of Cartesian metaphysics in which discourses of the *other* are necessarily inveterate.

One of the most notable studies of gender and philosophy of recent years is Judith Butler's book, *Gender Trouble* (1990) wherein she critiques the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. I would like to turn here to all three writers and attempt to review certain historical "givens" of gender. De Beauvoir argues in *La deuxième sexe* that the feminine gender is Other, and thus women, being defined in terms of their sex, hover under the bodiless, universal construct of the masculine for whom sex, as identity, is incidental. Indeed, considering the strategies of Freud, Lacan, Barret, Cixous, de Lauretis, Wittig, just to name a few, one can hardly deny the notion of woman as "other". But what does this positing of "other" really mean for gender and feminist theory? And what is the nature of alterity as a linguistic nominate and a discursive locus in a world where the division between language and identity is increasingly becoming blurred? For the problem that immediately comes to mind when confronting recent discourses of alterity, ironically, is that there is clearly a cultural schizophrenia when dealing with gender in the West. On the one hand, when reading women as "other" the feminine inevitably remains the singular object of a discourse which insists upon a dissolution of the very language which marks its marginalization—that the feminine can somehow be liberated through the destruction of the very language which *others the feminine*. And conversely, the discourse of the feminine as other inevitably struggles with language that

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

does not position the feminine as the negative dialectic of the masculine—that there is a certain investment in maintaining the binary structure masculine/feminine. It would seem that the discourse of woman as "other" is highly problematic: for how can woman be represented if the language of the masculine (and its traces) must be destroyed in order to faithfully represent her, while nonetheless the signification of the feminine is based upon gender being two-fold: masculine/feminine.

Luce Irigaray in her work entitled *This Sex Which is not One* questions the very bases upon which are grounded the traditional dichotomies of active/passive, penetrator/penetrated, and then masculine/feminine. Irigaray argues that women are the "sex" which is not "one"—that is the sex which is unevocable, unrepresentable, since there is an inherent linguistic opacity in a language which elides the polyvalence of identity thus making the construction of the subject and the Other as integral to the creation of the masculine, excluding the feminine entirely from the process of representation. Thus the female sex for Irigaray constitutes that which is not "one" but many: "She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either. This puts into question all prevailing economies: their calculations are irremediably stymied by woman's pleasure, as it increases indefinitely from its passage in and through the other" (p. 31). What Irigaray unfolds, unlike Freud's concept of woman as lack with respect to the phallus and de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the negative of man, is that a system which sets out to deploy the feminine is insufficient—that the economy of signification within the system of representation based on the archetype of Western metaphysics is simply a mirror which necessarily employs phallogocentric language

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of and *for* a construction of masculine identity.[1] According to Butler, Irigaray's notion of gender is left in a position of linguistic and mimetic aporia while for de Beauvoir the female subject is "always already masculine" (Butler, p. 11). Yet, I would argue that both claiming the impossibility of representing woman, as in the case of Irigary, and maintaining that any representation of woman is necessarily the negative of man, as in the case of de Beauvoir, are equally problematic solutions. In the case of de Beauvoir, woman cannot *truly* be represented since any such interpretation necessarily denies all essence (truth) of the feminine as the body of woman is subject to cultural taboos and readings.[2] For Irigaray, any representation of woman is necessarily flawed. Thus, in representing woman, language for de Beauvoir is simply *not enough* (language as castrated from signification), where for Irigaray language *is defective* (scarred by the traces of

---

[1] Butler writes: "Beauvoir and Irigaray clearly differ over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced; Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetrical dialectic, while Irigaray suggests that the dialectic itself is the monologic elaboration of a masculinist signifying economy. Although Irigaray clearly broadens the scope of feminist critique by exposing the epistemological, ontological, and logical structures of a masculinist signifying economy, the power of her analysis is undercut precisely by its globalizing reach. Is it possible to identity a monolithic as well as a monologic masculinist economy that traverses the array of cultural and historical contexts in which sexual difference takes place? Is the failure to acknowledge the specific cultural operations of gender oppression itself a kind of epistemological imperialism, one which is not ameliorated by the simple elaboration of cultural differences as 'examples' of the selfsame phallogocentrism? The effort to *include* 'Other' cultures as variegated amplification of a global phallogocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallogocentrism, colonizing under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call the totalizing concept into question" (p. 13).

[2] De Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex:* "[A] society is not a species, for it is in society that the species attains the status of existence—transcending itself toward the world and toward the future. Its ways and customs cannot be deduced from biology, for the individuals that compose the society are never abandoned to the dictates of their nature; they are subject rather to that second nature which is custom and which has always reflected the desires and the fears that express their essential nature. It is not merely as a body, but rather as a body subject to taboos, to laws, that the subject is conscious of himself and attains fulfillment—it is with reference to certain values that he evaluates himself" (p. 36).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

phallogocentrism).

Yet, the problem is not simply that language is not enough or scarred, but instead the problem is located in how we are posing and answering questions of gender. In the West, an economy of signification which relegates feminine/masculine within the bifurcating structures of the familiar subject/object dichotomy is part and parcel of an all too familiar cultural dilemma. That is to say, Western culture is obsessed, quite literally, with making intelligible identity—be it sexual, gendered, national, ethnic—in terms of clear, concise and unquestioned boundaries. In the United States, for instance, quotidian experiences whereby individuals complete forms in which they must indicate their "precise" race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so forth, verify the cultural weight of identity as intransigent. Similarly, this centrifugal force of separating "opposites" has a contagious effect both within the structuring of language that "teases out" identity as well as within normative cultural practices which mark gender and essentialize difference—usually the feminine body—as unified, single. As such, the drive to polarize masculine from feminine, active from passive, et cetera, becomes a force laden with cultural baggage, assumptions, and recastings, thus further eradicating the very possibility of emancipating the subject from a discourse of gender asymmetry.

What all these theories ultimately hook into as part of their radical discourse of gender signification is the physical element of the female body—that which again falls into the Cartesian trap as being controvertly opposed to the male body and derivatively equated with the feminine. Butler, however, argues for an elucidation of the space between the mind/body construct and states: "This association of the body with the female works along the magical relations of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (1990, pp. 11-12). Demonstrating the problematic explicit within the Western philosophical tradition which associates masculinity with the mind and femininity with the body, Butler examines how these systems are simply reproduced throughout feminist discourse of the twentieth century. Butler concludes that feminist theory attempts a revolutionary liberation of the feminine through fantasy in which the mind "flees the body" (p. 12) while confirming that the structures which name the masculine signifying economy as totalizing fall short of viewing other constructs which have nothing to do with a universalizing disembodied masculine marginalizing the corporeal feminine (in questions such as race, class, and heterosexism). Butler's work seemingly throws a wrench into feminist theory while bringing to the fore necessary dimensions of identity that feminist theory has by and large elided for most of the twentieth century.

Butler's *Gender Trouble* situates the dilemma of gender not as a paradigm in which the masculine dominates the feminine, as within the "master/slave" tradition, but instead locates the discursive construction of gender as burdened by the effort to separate and make "intelligible" the relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality:

> "Intelligible" genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire though sexual practice. The notion that there might be a "truth" of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms. The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine", where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female". The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender (p. 17).

For Butler, the body *is* the canvas incarnate which, correlative to its sex, is saturated, marked, and encoded with fixed cultural, epistemic and linguistic markings of gender and sexuality. As such, the body is both the space of performance and the site of subversion or redemption of gender, sex and sexuality. Reciprocally, it might follow that the performance of gender and sexuality would necessarily subvert the discursive markings of the body, invoking a restructuring of the relationship between the somatic and the performative. But this is not possible according to Butler's reading since she views the body as both the site of designating and subverting identity. The somatic is the mirror, then, of language for Butler—it either confirms that which we already knew and named, or it completely opposes it, toppling the linguistic structures of knowledge. And this is the point of incision in which the lack of language that de Beauvoir evidences and the flaw of language that Irigaray discusses emerge in Butler. She does not entirely resolve the problem of representation as effective, as seamless, and instead of positing the language of representation as being flawed or as lacking, she invokes the body as the "signifying lack." In her critique of Foucault's notion of power, Butler translates the "interior psychic space" (the soul) as that which "contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction," the performative encoding the body.[3]

---

[3] Butler discusses Foucault's notion of the spirit and the body, arguing against his

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Butler offers two spheres of signification for the body, the physical (sex) and the performative (gender), in which the body is marked by the performative and thus becomes the site for inscribing identity because it is always lacking. Unlike Foucault, Butler maintains that the real and the representational are interdependent whereby each reads the other.[4] By making a distinction between the physical and the gesticular and stressing the power of performativity, Butler opens up the possibility for examining the body as the superfice upon which meanings are inevitably inscribed instead of being the coded transmitter which designates identity and gender:

> The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and peformance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory

---

notion that the body (materiality) precedes signification: "The figure of the interior should be understood as "within" the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility. The effect of a structuring inner space is produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure. The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. That lack which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show. In this sense, then, the soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed *on* the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such. In Foucault's terms, the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest, but "the soul is the prison of the body" (p. 135).

[4] Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* gives an excellent analysis of this point: "Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated. This "being a man" and this "being a woman" are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely" (pp. 126-127).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency* (p. 137).

Discussing drag performance, Butler initially grounds her theory of gender as that which "imitates" when there is an "incongruity" between the somatic and the performative—that is when gender and the body are, under conventional standards, antagonistic. Later in her discussion of the performative, Butler uses the discourse of drag to question the very performative of gender when "incongruity" is not an issue: "If the body is not a "being", but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal surface?" (p. 139). In effect, Butler locates gender as the posturing and stylization of the body and not vice versa, the body dictating the performance.[5]

So what, exactly, does the body imitate and what is the identity created? For if, as Butler asserts, identity must be comprised as "social temporality" and if gender is truly "internally discontinuous", then the body becomes a manufactured identity for which there is no "real" and, conversely, where there is no "play":

> "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic

---

[5] Butler continues: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylizaton of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requries a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (pp. 140-141).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 141).

The problem with Butler's theory here is that one cannot simply wipe away "preexisting identity" as if there were never a referent to some "true" or historically configured gender. For if this were the case, then there would be no possibility of gender subversion, no space of play. In attempting to bring forth a discourse of subversion, Butler stumbles between her allegiance to "true" and "abiding" genders while claiming, simultaneously, there is no fixed identity. Moreover, Butler fails to return to the body as the fabric of subjectivity and relies so heavily on the performative of gender and sexuality that the body seems to be incidental on the stage of gender performativity.[6]

At this point at least one question remains: if there is truly an "arbitrary

---

[6] Butler then turns her attention ot sexuality as the site for destabilizing gender categories: "In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed...The repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures by both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories. The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" (pp. 20-31).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

relation" between somatic identity (the sexed body) and the performative (gender and sexuality) in which there are no "real or distorted acts of gender" and where the body is liberated from "domination and compulsory heterosexuality", why then is the body, in Butler's reading, solely the space of singular sexed inscriptions and never an agent of its own disruptibility? Moreover, how can we discuss the relationship between the somatic and sex, gender, and sexuality without constructing yet another facile discourse which seeks either to reverse the dichotomies of feminine [female] passivity and corporeality to masculine [male] activity and intellectual energy by eliding the body, or to nullify the historical remnants of these discursive markings which might possibly serve as an arena of subversion or creation? Returning to de Beauvoir and Irigaray, if language is always lacking or defective when referring to gender, would Butler's subversion in which not language but the body as lack offer a solution to the heterosexual dichotomization of gender or merely serve to underline the linguistic and ontological artifices of her own argument. For instance, a man in woman's clothes *has to be* funny according to Butler because the spectator realizes that the juxtaposition of gender is "confused" and *not* "normal" . Despite her effort to subvert the body, Butler nonetheless bases her notion of gender subversion on an *original gender* located within very heterosexual, dichotomized models of gender that she sets out to critique.[7] Hence, I fail to see any sort of *effective* subversion in Butler, and instead view a reinstallation of "traditional" gender

---

[7] Discussing Jameson's notion of parody and pastiche, Bulter writes: "The loss of the sense of 'the normal,' however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when 'the normal,' 'the original' is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived" (p. 138-139).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

roles (and hence "traditional" readings of sexuality) in which meaning takes hold at the very moment in which the previous heterosexual models are collapsed in favor of a consciously queer—a queer which is equally problematic as the heterosexual model Butler vituperates. As Butler compels the performative to efface the social regulatory practices on the body (and even the body itself), she fails to allow for an all-encompassing range of freedom for sex, gender and sexuality. Butler's argument presents a major stumbling block for gender theory which, like many discourses of freedom, issues promulgations of liberation through the destruction of "tradition". Instead of focusing on subversion, to which she tenaciously clutches as a performative in which the historical modalities of an *original* body and gender are confused and displaced, Butler loses all sense of free play of the body, for the traditional models for sex, gender and sexuality which she critiques might, in fact, not at all be "normal."

After all, what is subversion really, if not a temporal jarring of the cultural traditions and the language of reading a certain identity? In subversion there is necessarily a marking of the "real" or the "original" against which the subversive act is fighting. Ultimately, I find Butler's reading of the body and gender quite problematic since the somatic necessarily retains all traces of history and language without ever taking on a singular meaning. Butler's assertion that the body is the object, not the subject, of performative inscription (and remember, she maintains the body as the lack for "that which cannot show") becomes the site for locating a new queer schizophrenia in which heterosexuality is denied (except as performance), masculinist discourse disappears, and the body is never enough. In shunning all access to language by virtue of performance, Butler creates the terrain for reading a kind of "polymorphous perversity" in which sustained gender

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

performances enact arbitrary "gender realities." And Butler takes this issues up once again in *Bodies That Matter* wherein she de-emphasizes subversion and argues that the body is the site of denaturalization through performance.[8] Analyzing drag culture in Jenny Livingston's *Paris is Burning*, for instance, Butler asserts that the gender performance of the drag balls is not at all subversive but rather evokes a construction of the *traditional:*

> The drag balls themselves at times produce high femininity as a function of whiteness and deflect homosexuality through a transgendering that *reidealizes* certain bourgeois forms of heterosexual exchange. And yet, if those performances are not immediately or obviously subversive, it may be that it is rather in the *reformulation of kinship*, in the redefining of the "house" and its forms of collectivity, mothering, mopping, reading, and becoming legendary, that the appropriation and redeployment of the categories of dominant culture enable the formation of kinship relations that function quite supportively as oppositional discourse" (p. 241).

The obvious question, then, is why in *Gender Trouble* is drag subversive when it reveals gender as a "falsely naturalized" moment of heterosexuality, where in *Bodies That Matter*, in considering class and race as well, Butler maintains that there is no "pure subversion" of gender since the drag balls of *Paris is Burning* are about reformulating other equally traditional concepts of being: wealth, collectivity, house and kinship? Could it be that Butler fails to read subversion where she sees gender co-opting static, *real* points of identity and power—whiteness, wealth and community (as if these modalities were any more real than gender)—where the subjects adopt a language which is not their own in

---

[8] "The goal of this analysis, then, cannot be pure subversion, as if an undermining were enough to establish and direct political struggle. Rather than denaturalization or proliferation, it seems that the question for thinking discourse and power in terms of the future has several paths to follow: how to think power as resignification together with power as the convergence or interarticulation of relations of regulation, domination, constitution? How to know what might qualify as an affirmative resignification—with all the weight and difficulty of that labor—and how to run the risk of reinstalling the abject at the site of its opposition? but how, also, to rethink the terms that establish and sustain bodies that matter?" (p. 240).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

order to take possession of an identity which was never *theirs* in the first place?[9] It would seem that Butler selects which moments of identity and language are *real* and which are not by positing the *real* as stable, as transcendental (ie. class and race) while still marking gender and sexuality as ambivalent. Livingston's films prompts the spectator to fathom the multidimensionality of class (the "house" itself as an elite group within the lower class) and race (the many possible readings of blondeness and blackness) every bit as much as it questions the performativity of gender and sexuality.

Butler's following book, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), delves into the very fabric of identity—race, class, sex, gender—and seeks to understand language as that which is outside of materiality (the body). Yet by making a split between performance as transcendence and stabilizing (in *Paris is Burning*) and performance as parody and subversive, Butler necessarily ends up rereading static sexual, economic and racial relations between the body, society and language. While Butler on the one hand, maintains that there may be (but there is not always) a correlation between language and materiality such that representation of gender and sex is possible, on the other hand, she denies that language can fully represent materiality.[10] Where, then, does this leave the relationship between

---

[9] "It is one of the ambivalent implications of the decentering of the subject to have one's writing be the site of a necessary and inevitable expropriation. But this yielding of ownership over what one writes has an important set of political corollaries, for the taking up, reforming, deforming of one's words does open up a difficult future terrain of community, one is which the hope of every fully recognizing oneself in the terms by which one signifies is sure to be disappointed. This not owning of one's words is there from the start, however, since speaking is always in some ways the speaking of a stranger through and as oneself, the melancholic reiteration of a language that one never chose, that one does not find as an instrument to be used, but that one is, as it were, used by, expropriated in, as the unstable and continuing condition of the "one" and the "we", the ambivalent condition of the power that binds" (pp. 241-242)

[10] "To posit a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

language of representation and the body if not in an aporia of awaiting a moment in which naming might be fully compatible or stable? Or perhaps, the subject will perpetually seek a language that might very well be constituted from outside and not within as Butler's argument of *Paris is Burning* indicates (since one can only transcend by escaping the *real*)?[11]

Therefore, if Butler's work is to have any relevance at all, it must be because the body—sex more specifically—does not lose its ability to name or to act as an imaginary field of signification as Butler professes, and because the body maintains all the vestiges of language, power, the imaginary and history effecting subversions even within white, male heterosexual performance (which, after all, is every bit as performative as drag balls in Harlem). In attempting to de-essentialize gender, ends up essentializing race and class (as well as gender) as she consolidates certain identities as *play* and other identities as *real*, while never taking into account the pervasiveness of performance in *all* gender roles/performances. I would even go so far as to say that in all performance—sexuality, gender, race and class—there is no line between the

---

materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition. To posit a materiality outside of language, where that materiality is considered ontologically distinct from language, is to undermine the possibility that language might be able to indicate or correspond to that domain of radical alterity. Hence the absolute distinction between language and materiality which was to secure the referential function of language undermines that function radically. This is not to say that, on the one hand, the body is simply linguistic stuff or, on the other, that it has no bearing on language...But if language is not opposed to materiality, neither can materiality be summarily collapsed into an identity with language" (p. 68).

[11] "If, for Lacan, the name secures the bodily ego in time, renders it identical through time, and this "conferring" power of the name is derived from the conferring power of the symbolic more generally, then it follows that a crisis in the symbolic will entail a crisis in this identity-conferring function of the name, and in the stabilizing of bodily contours according to sex allegedly performed by the symbolic. *The crisis in the symbolic, understood as a crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility, will register as a crisis in the name and in the morphological stability that the name is said to confer*" (p. 138).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

real and play, as Victor Turner's work on the liminal as well as current performance theory demonstrates.[12] For the social is performative regardless of certain phenomena being center or margin, sacred or taboo, public or private; for every performance, there is always another which contests the previous, thus making identity always already plural:

> And so we find performances about performances about performances multiplyng. Of course, as Goffman and others have shown, ordinary life in a social structure is itself a performance. We play roles,occupy statuses, play games with one another, don and doff many masks, each a "typification." But the performances characteristic of liminal phases and states often are more about the doffing of masks, the stripping of statuses, the renunciation of roles, the demolishing of structures, than their putting on and keeping on. Antistrutures are performed too. But, still within the liminal frame, new subjunctive, even ludic, structures are then generated, with their own grammars and lexica of roles and relationships. These are imaginative creations,whether attributed to individuals or "traditions" (Turner, p. 107).

Different from Butler, Turner sees all identity as a play of simultaneously wearing

---

[12] In *The Anthropology of Performance* Turner writes: "This opposition between social life and dominant genre is also related to what I have called in several publications "liminality". A *limen*, as the great French ethnologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep has pointed out, is a "threshold,' and he uses the term to denote the central of three phases in what he called "rites of passage.' He looked at a wide variety of ritual forms, taken from most regions and many periods of history, and found in them a tripartite processual form. Rituals *separated* specified members of a group from everyday life, *placed them in a limbo* that was not any place theywere in before and not yet any place they would be in, then *returned* them, changed in some way, to mundane life. The second phase, *marginality* or *liminality*, is what interests us here, though, in a very cogent sense, the whole *ritual process* constitutes a threshold between secular living and sacred living. The dominant genres of performance in societies at all levels of scale and complexity tend to be *liminal phenomena*. They are performed in privileged spaces and times, sett off from the periods and areas reserved for work, food and sleep. You can call these "sacred" periods and areas reserved for work, food and sleep. You can call these'sacred" if you like, provided that you recognize that they are the scenes of play and experimentation, as much as of solemnity and rules. Western views of ritual have been greatly influenced by Puritanism. At any rate both the performances and their settings may be likened to loops in a linear progression, when the social flow bends back on itself, in a way does violence to its own development, meanders, inverts, perhaps lies to itself, and puts everything so to speak into the subjunctive mood as well as the reflexive voice. Just as the subjunctive mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility, rather than stating actual facts, so do liminiality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and "play" with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception" (p. 25).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and stripping identities, reversal and abolition of roles and even creation of structures and anti-structures. Indeed, Butler's thesis would certainly seem far more interesting and plausible were we to assimilate it with Turner's liminal, given that gender roles, reversals, and recreations are performances that neither fully adhere to nor negate the centers and margins of society. Rather, these performances (and performances about performances, and so forth) serve to highlight the impossibility of understanding gender as *real* any more than it is possible to understand gender as singular, homogeneous or binaried. Just as Butler cogently argues for a dissolution of older subject-positions in the effort of creating newer ones, she views the expropriation of language as an unstabling force in many communities, rather than as a strengthening force which coalesces difference under various rubrics of *community.* By denying the body language and the imaginary (since one is a rudiment of heterosexism and the other escapism, according to Butler), Butler denies the body access to a quotidian existence in which the performative might actually be not at all indistinct from the real. Turner indicates that a metalanguage is needed to discuss the "social drama", whereas Butler denies any such language[13]

---

[13] "The social drama, then, endures, while the genres which cultural development has detached from it, and thereafter elaborated, multiply in a manner consistent with Kurt Gödel's theorem on the impossibility (under certain circumstances) of formalizing a consistency proof for a logistic system (here in the sense of a system of symbolic logic) *within* that system. Such a proof demands a metalanguage for talking about the system in terms not derived from it. Similarly, the redressive machinery of spontaneous social drama, judicial and ritual, attains only a limited degree of reflexivity, lying as it does, on the same plane as the agonistic events being scrutinized. Other languages or metalanguages, nonverbal as well as verbal, other scrutinizing procedures are required—particularly when societies advance in scale and complexity, often with sharp increases in the rates of spatial and social mobility. Such languages and procedures have antithetical qualities to the spontaneous dramas which they have to deal with. They have not only to recapitulate the sequence of agonistic events, but also to scrutinize and evaluate them. The enactment is framed as a performance, but it is a metaperformance, a performance about a performance" (pp. 106-107).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In her study on gender and Nietzsche, Kelly Oliver contends that Butler's investigations into the cultural-linguistic construction of gender and sex evidences the dilemma of oppositions in nature/culture, and so forth.[14] Though I completely agree with Butler's impetus in denying the biological (sex) as pre-linguistic, I believe that Butler opens up dialogue about sex, gender and sexuality *only inasmuch as* one accepts certain gender performances as *real* and others as *subversive* within a very limited and homogenous cultural spectrum.[15] Butler's analysis of *Paris is Burning* clearly undermines her earlier position that ideological formation can be rearticulated in new terms since her reading of this film depends upon the very traditional references (language) of race, sex, and class while her reading of "kinship" as the meta-narrative of this performance minimalizes the subversive qualities of the balls *because she frames* the 'family' as a kind of transcendence, as a form of "belonging" despite her earlier critique of

---

[14] "In *Bodies That Matter* Judith Butler, describes how the subject is always sexed and how a subject's sex is constituted and normalized thorugh cultural institutions and prohibitions. She maintains that "the subject, the speaking "I,' is formed by virtue of having gone thorugh [such] a process of assuming a sex". For Butler, sex is not the biologically given material body on which the cultural asosciations of gender are overlaid. Rather, sex is a cultural norm that continually shapes bodies. Butler proposes that I will call a dialectic between material bodies and their cultural-linguistic construction. She does not commit to either the belief that (sexed) bodies are preculture or prelinguistic; rather (sexed) bodies are bother constructed by culture and language *and* in excess of that construction...We could say that both the material body and the subject or "I" emerge in the intersection "between" nature and culture, the encounter "between" matter and language. This emergence, or "between", serves to problematize, even deconstruct, the oppositions nature/culture, matter/language" (pp. 53-54).

[15] I turn to Elizabeth Grosz's reading of this very dilemma in *Space, Time and Perversion* to which I will return later: "Sex is no longer the label of both sexes in their difference, as in Foucault's writings, a generic term indicating sexed, as opposed to inanimate, existence; it is now the label and terrain of the production and enactment of sexual difference. Gender, it seems, is a redundant category: all its effects, the field that it designates, are covered by the integration of and sometimes the discord between sexuality and sex" (p. 213).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

transcendence.[16]

For what if gender were never real, always performative and only subversive depending upon the audience? I think of Bar d'O in New York's West Village, where today white heterosexual couples from New Jersey and Long Island come to see the spectacle of Joey Arias "channeling" Billie Holiday. Here the audience sees the conspicuous body of a hispanic man (as the lanky-bodied Arias is clearly unable to embody Holiday either as race or gender) while the audience "hears" Billie Holiday's voice for an evening (since Arias is able to perfectly imitate her voice even through the last years when Holiday's voice was marred by her heroine use). All this with the entire evening being peppered with lascivious gay references and one-liners and where the only real performance of identity is Arias' inimitable mastery in *sounding exactly like* Billie Holiday. Is this spectacle any more subversive today than it was eight years ago when only gay New Yorkers went to Bar d'O? Are the drag queens any more performative or less real than the heterosexual couples watching the show?

But gender can be subverted by various performances without necessarily having to "cross-dress" *per se*, as alterity takes on many manifestations. For instance, Matthew Barney's sculpture/video, *Cremaster I*, deconstructs gender as we see flying in a blimp, over a football field, the androgynous bodies of twiggy, modelesque, blonde women in stewardess uniforms who guard over a white banquet table into which grapes change colors and disappear into the

---

[16] She writes in *Bodies That Matter*, "The incompletion of every ideological formulation is central to the radical democratic project's notion of political futurity. The subjection of every ideological formation to a *re*articulation of these linkages constitutes the temporal order of democracy as an incalculable future, leaving open the production of new subject-positions, new political signifiers, and new linkages to become the rallying points for politicization" (p. 193).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

table's central orifice. Beneath this sterile banquet is yet another thin, blonde woman who remains affixed to the underside of the table (she is part of the table physically) as she takes in the grapes through the hole. And down below, we return to the football field where women in androgynous clothes fill the green as they form and reform the shapes of ovaries. Barney's sculpture is an amalgamation of theoretical language, high fashion, gender performances and erasures, while the bodies depicted deny singularity. *Cremaster I* serves to highlight a reading of the body while reinforming the importance of discourse as a means—perhaps as the only means—through which the somatic can be accessed and constructed in the late 20th century.

Tacit to Barney's study of the body is clearly the need to excavate and reexamine the links between the epistemological and performative artifacts of the body, the individual and the historical narratives of the somatic, as well as the rearticulations of the body which feminist and poststructuralist theory has recently evidenced. Sex and gender become a process which we do not passively see constructed or deconstructed within Barney's *Cremaster I*, but which we *actively* construct in rendering clearly versed statements and critiques regarding the gender specificity of body, fashion, privilege, and theoretical language. Barney's sculpture deals with the body as organic matter that can be stylized, ornamented, and integrated within the very "unnatural" surroundings that are consciously void of a social narrative or vision, ultimately questioning which is more artificial, which is more constructed, which is more gendered—the sexed body or the blue astro-turf? For when viewed from afar, Barney's bodies take on the technological impulses of dot matrices and mathematical arrangements within a playing field made to represent various gender symbols, and when

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

viewed up close these bodies resemble a 1930's water ballet actresses of Hollywood (bringing together the masculine trope of sports and the feminine trope of grace and "style") who don highly fashioned clothes so as to make paradoxical the relationship between sex as ontology and gender as a cultural topography.

Ultimately, Barney's sculpture manifests the body as a juncture between biological construction and cultural interpolation; between technology and aesthetics; between nature and artifice; and between the performative and the static. His sculpture evidences the body and its various physical valences—fashion, technology, work, sports—while consciously failing to provide a linear narrative linking one moment to the next and likewise denying the spectator any *truth* of gender.[17] Barney's work establishes the simultaneous gendering/genderless qualities of the body in an installation in which the viewer longs to make sense of the various events taking place, and instead is made to watch the slow paced film in which no narrative and no *real* emerges. The body is virtually melded within the frameworks of artificial physical spaces and technologies—we can no longer separate the physical anatomy from its sterile and mechanic surroundings

---

[17] Here I am referring to Foucault's *Histosry of Sexuality—Volume I*, wherein Foucault discusses this notion o f the "truth of sex" from ancient Greek culture where "truth and sexed were linked": "The transformation of sex into discourse, which I spoke of earlier, the dissemination and reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities, are perhaps two elements of the same deployment: they are linked together with the help of the central element of a confession that compels individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity—no matter how extreme. In Greece, truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another; sex served as a medium for initiations into learning. For us, it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations" (p. 61). I turn to this passage in particular since Barney's *Cremaster I*, similar to Adrian Piper's installation pieces which critique the *naming of race*, inverses this very paradigm to which Foucault refers. The body is neither knowledge nor visibility in Barney. Instead, Barney diffuses the body of knowledge by constantly contextualizing and decontextualizing gender such that there is *no body* to "know".

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

no matter how hard we wish to essentialize and isolate the "real" or authentic. The body, as such, is culture(d) and we, as spectators and performers, are the agents of this *naturalizing, gendering,* and *sexing* as we watch waiting for something real to emerge from the screen.

For certainly, at the very basis of the interrogations of sex and gender and of the real and performative, is the very fundamental question of nature versus artifice. Indeed, few feminist theorists have dealt with this question, though not surprisingly, in addition to Mathew Barney, land artists in the United States from the 1960's have been dealing directly with the form and function of public sculpture and the recreation, or rather reinvention, of nature through "artificial" constructions. Most notably, Robert Smithson, land artist and critic, worked and wrote about the constructed nature of "Non-site" during the 1960's and early 1970's until his death in 1973:

> *The Non-Site (an indoor earthwork)* is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract,* yet it *represents* an actual site in N.J. (The Pine Barrens Plains). It is by this three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it—thus *The Non-Site.* To understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three dimensional picture which doesn't look like a picture. "Expressive art" avoids the problem of logic; therefore it is not truly abstract. A logical intuition can develop in an entirely "new sense of metaphor" free of natural or realistic expressive content. Between the *actual site* in the Pine Barrens and *The Non-Site* itself exists a space of metaphoric significance. It could be that "travel" in this space is a vast metaphor. Everything between the two sites could become physical metaphorical material devoid of natural meanings and realistic assumptions. Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the *Non-Site* The "trip" becomes invented, devised, artificial; therefore, one might call it a non-trip to a site from a Non-site. Once he arrives at the "airfield," one discovers that it is man-made in the shape of a hexagon, and that I mapped this site in terms of esthetic boundaries rather than political or economic boundaries (p. 364).[18]

---

[18] Another excellent reading of Smithson's Non-Site is given here by Jack Flan: "The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus the Non-Site is the space where nature is reconstructed and where not only the Non-Site, but also nature (the *actual site*), are emptied of their "natural meanings and realistic assumptions". In other words, the Non-Site is released from the burden of having to refer to an original, a natural or a real and where identity is not charged with the obligation of having to respond to the real (since each real is found to be just as constructed as the Non-Site). Ultimately the *real* and *natural* for Smithson do not exist as romantic ideals and instead are merely "fictions" of past centuries.[19] In this way, the Non-Site is every bit as legitimate and real (and fictive) as the "original".

So I return to that which binds the problematic theories of gender from de Beauvoir, Irigaray and Butler: the lack (in language or the body). The insufficiency of language in de Beauvoir, the defectiveness of language in Irigaray, and the insufficiency of the body to signify gender in Butler, would seem to indicate that all three theorists are investing far too much meaning in a *true* representation which reveals a *real*. Alternately, using Smithson's Non-Site and translating this geography to the human body, we could easily fathom a Non-Body,

---

Non-Site represents the focused articulation of part of the site which to some degree comes to stand for the site itself; but which like all metynomic tropes takes on a life of its own and becomes a form of speech...The Non-Site to some degree brings the site from the geographical, psychological, and social margins to a "center" be it the artis's studio, an art gallery, a museum, or a page of a book. In fact, Smithson's conception of art in general allows for great fluidity between the various incarnations of a work and involves resistance to a single, simple time and place, even to a single physical form" (p. xviii).

[19] Likewise, Smithson wrote of nature in New York City's Museum of Natural History: "Both pre-and post-history, when I wrote in "Entropy and the New Monuments" (*Artforum*, June 1966), This sense of extreme past and future has its partial origin in the Museum of Natural History; there the "cave man" and the "space man" may be seen under one roof.' It didn't occur to me then, that the "meanings" in the Museum of Natural History avoided any reference to the Renaissance, yet it does show "art" from the Aztec and American Indian periods—are those periods any more or less "natural" than the Renaissance? I think not—because there is nothing "natural" about the Museum of Natural History. "Nature" is simply another 18th- and 19th-century fiction" (p. 85).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a body which is performative and always in construction and a site upon which all meaning is temporal, incidental, and subjective. If we divest our interest in naming the body, we make room for other bodies upon which multiple readings are possible and whereby language resonates, but does not weigh down in singularity, reduction or systems of logic. If we dispose with the idea that language or corporeality must express clearly or linearly, we would be opening up social discourse to understanding the body as a field of meanings upon which are vectored historical, linguistic and cultural traces. Just as the Non-Site, the Non-Body has no "original" gender, no true sex, and certainly nothing natural about it.

Why is it then, that feminist and queer theories so readily accept static bodies of sex and yet these same theories continually contest the "veracity" of monolithic constructions of gender and sexuality? Issues of transsexualism, for instance, address in a fascinating way the very same issues of land art, but are distinctly at the other end of the spectrum. Where land art is generally disinterested in origin and essential meaning, transsexualism is entirely gripped in the machinery of finding, replicating and assimilating the body, *making it real.*[20] Discordantly, queer theory aggressively tends to abolish any fixed sexuality,

---

[20] In *Bodies That Matter,* Butler maintains that though sex is always in construction, it is nonetheless normative and static: "In this sense, then, "sex" not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governns, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus "sex" is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, "sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reitertaion of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

investing its theoretical energy in creating spaces of play (nonetheless, play based upon very clearly "known" and codified bodies). Inasmuch as the language of theory is imbued with the same power to misrepresent the body as it is to construe it as known, as erroneous, and as confinable to the visible, much gender theory in the West has not ventured far outside of its cultural and theoretical confines in attempting to wrestle our seemingly fluid accessibility to sexuality and gender, while steadfastly holding on to and defending the very rigid bulwarks of sex. As much as I credit Western gender theories with opening up the many interstices of identity, I nonetheless do not believe that there can be *any* comprehension of fluid sexualities and genders, nor any liberation of gendered identity, as long as both gender and sexuality are anchored to very rigid concepts of corporeality.

That the somatic, to include sex, is a construct of language, a fiction of sorts, has been the focus of many debates throughout the past twenty years. For instance, interpretations of the symbolic uses of the body have been of great importance in historical investigations such as Caroline Walker Bynum's studies of the female body in the medieval period in Europe:

> As all medievalists are by now aware, the body of Christ was sometimes depicted as female in medieval devotional texts—partly, of course, because *ecclesia*, Christ's body, was a female personification, partly because the tender, nurturing aspect of God's care for souls was regularly described as motherly. Both male and female mystics called Jesus "mother" in his eucharistic feeding of Christians with liquid exuded from life. In the thirteenth century Margaret of Oingt described Jesus" pain on the Cross as birth pangs; Guerric of Igny in the twelfth century, and Catherine of Siena and the anonymous monk of Farne in the fourteenth-century English mystic Julian of Norwich spoke of creation as a maternal act because God, in taking our humanity in the Incarnation, gives himself to us as a mother gives herself to the fetus she bears (p. 176).

---

one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies the body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (pp. 1-2).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Indeed, Bynum's work is fascinating because it puts together the very constructedness of history and reassesses the space that the female body has occupied as symbolically significant within the landscape of gender politics and language. As we can see from Bynum's study, the maternal is not a "given" of female anatomy, but is every bit a fiction of reproduction that is recast upon bodies whose symbolic force is that of nurturing, caring and saving.

And there are many recent historical exegeses of science in which the construction of sex and gender are evidenced as constituents of language that have slowly entered into the economy of medical language from conterminous discourses of politics and religion. In *Making Sex* (1990), Thomas Laqueur historicizes the construction of sexual difference as marked by a language entirely based upon scientific, social and political realities that have through time come to form what we today know as the "nature of sex":

> Language marks this view of sexual difference. For two millennia the ovary, an organ that by the early nineteenth century had become a synecdoche for woman, had not even a name of its own. Galen [of Pergamum] refers to it by the same word he uses for the male testes, *orcheis*, allowing context to make clear which sex he is concerned with...By around 1800, writers of all sorts were determined to base what they insisted were fundamental differences between the male and female sexes, and thus between man and woman, on discoverable biological distinctions and to express these in radically different rhetoric (pp. 4-5).

Laqueur's historical exegesis of the construction of sex in the pre-Enlightenment period traces the formation of sex as evoked by scientific and legal language, to the turn of the nineteenth century when sexual difference marked within language emerged. Beginning with discussion of the Galenic two-seed theory which states that women produced semen, Laqueur traces the development of sex as a discourse

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in western culture.[21] Interestingly enough, it is the period prior to the seventeenth century which Laqueur particularizes as a time in which the body was actually viewed not as ontological, but as social:

> I want to propose instead that in these pre-Enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, *sex*, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while *gender*, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or "real". Gender—man and woman—mattered a great deal and was part of the order of things; sex was conventional, though modern terminology makes such a reordering nonsensical. At the very least, what we call sex and gender were in the "one-sex model" explicitly bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substrate—the strategy of the Enlightenment—was impossible. In the world of one sex, it was precisely when talk seemed to be most directly about the biology of two sexes that it was most embedded in the politics of gender, in culture. To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes. Sex before the seventeenth century, in other words, was still a sociological and not an ontological category (p. 8).

By situating gender as real and sex as a social construction, Lacqueur argues that the body, as it had been conceived in pre-Enlightenment texts, was a field onto which meaning was positioned and layered and through which science created "hierarchies of analogies" by charging the body with verisimilitudes of the universe. Yet, from the Englightenment on, the paradigm shift in which the universe ceased to be the center of interpretation and instead reason and meaning

---

[21] Bynum also writes on this quite pervasive theory of the period which maintains that both women and men produce seamen: "One of the reasons for the obscuring of the body/soul boundary in these treatments lay in Aristotle's theory itself, which actually worked less well to explain embryological development than the Galenic two-seed theory preferred by doctors. As part of their general adoption of Aristotelian philosophy, theologians were drawn to the idea that the father provides the form for the fetus and the mother the matter (or menstrual material), but the concept proved difficult to use in detail...In discussions of eschatology from the same period, we find the human person treated as a similarly tight and integral union of soul and body. Indeed, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body seemed to require a theory of the person in which body was integral. Accounts of the history of philosophy have long seen it as one of Aquinas's greatest achievements to utilize the Aristotelian form/matter dichotomy as a way of explaining that bodily resurrection after the Last Judgment is philosophically necessary" (1989, p. 191).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

necessitated the abolition of hierarchical readings, sex as male and female finally became viable within language.[22]

Laqueur maintains that sex was not "created" through merely epistemological shifts, however, as he notes the various social and political changes effecting European culture—all of which directly or indirectly brought about the construction of sex.[23] Laqueur's thesis hinges upon the evidence that gender, in Europe, precedes sex and thus everything understood about the body (sex) is necessarily intertwined with correlative values formerly posited about gender in Europe. It is understandable that the somatic, during the Enlightenment, was to be reflected entirely in a language which attempted to guard the boundaries of one sex from the other, as Laqueur remarks:

---

[22] "But social and political changes are not, in themselves, explanations of reinterpretation of bodies. The rise of evangelical religion, Enlightenment political theory, the development of new sorts of public spaces in the eighteenth century, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the cataclysmic possibilities for social change wrought by the French revolution, postrevolutionary conservatism, postrevolutionary feminism, the factory system with its restructuring of the sexual division of labor, the rise of free market economy in services or commodities, the birth of classes, singly or in comination—none of these things *caused* the making of a new sexed body. Instead, the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments...[I] want to show on the basis of historical evidence that almost everything one wants to *say* about sex—however sex is understood—already has in it a claim about gender. Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power" (p. 11).

[23] "But social and political changes are not, in themselves, expxlanations of reinterpretation of bodies. The rise of evangelical religion, Enlightenment political theory, the development of new sorts of public spaces in the eighteenth century, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the cataclysmic possibilities for social change wrought by the French revolution, postrevolutionary conservatism, postrevolutionary feminism, the factory system with its restructuring of the sexual division of labor, the rise of free market economy in services or commodities, the birth of classes, singly or in comination—none of these things *caused* the making of a new sexed body. Instead, the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments...[I] want to show on the basis of historical evidence that almost everything one wants to *say* about sex—however sex is understood—already has in it a claim about gender. Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power" (p. 11).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Stories of men becoming effeminate are more problematic, and it is difficult to ask of them what their authors thought "really" happened. In one sense they might be regarded as expressions of concern for the boundaries of what we would call gender roles. But this does not quite work in the textual contexts I want to consider because, if bodies were open to a wide array of astral and earthly influences, then why not open also to transgressions of gender? Bodies actually seem to slip from their sexual anchorage in the face of heterosexual sociability; being with women too much or being too devoted to them seems to lead to the blurring of what we would call sex. As for women changing into men, naturalistic explanations are also problematic...[T]hey presume also a fixed and modern, base-superstructure connection between gender and sex, which is again precisely what is at issue (pp. 123-124).

Given that sex during the Enlightenment was understood as a construction and not as a "real", the body as a signified space was a quite delicate sphere of inscription in that merely mingling with certain non-same bodies could cause the meaning of the body to slip away. Gender as a social construction was, to many, "contagious". Futhermore, sex had more to do with the general "architecture of the body" than with the genitalia, as is evidenced by hermaphrodites who were often subject to juridical as well as medical scrutiny throughout their lives.[24] One famous case, for instance, that of Herculine Barbin, came at a time when the French legal system was changing from a two sex, three gender system to a two sex, two gender structuring of legal and medical language.[25] Since Foucault maintains in his study of Herculine Barbin that the

---

[24] "Changes in corporeal structures, or the discovery that things were not as they seemed at first, could push a body easily from one juridical category (female) to another (male)...Maleness and femaleness did not reside in anything particular. Thus for hermaphrodites the question was not 'what sex they are *really*,' but to which gender the architecture of their bodies most readily lent itself. The concern of magistrates was less with corporeal reality—with what we would call sex—than with maintaining clear social boundaries, maintaining the categories of gender" (p. 135).

[25] Rosanne Alluquùere Stone discussses this case in her article, "In the Language of Vampire Speak": "Our understanding of the meanings of the terms "sex" and "gender" is time-bound: for example, we can refer to a time and place (e.g., France in the early 1800's) when there were two sexes and three genders, and identify the moment (roughly the time of Herculine Barbin, a particularly well-documented case of transgender)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

body precedes culture, it would seem quite paradoxical that he views Herculine's body as that which permutates history, rather than that which is the object of such history.[26] Hence Laqueur's thesis that the two sex system was "invented as a new foundation for gender" while the one-sex model was simultaneously maintained, demonstrating that sex as a linguistic construct was in a perpetual state of shift and realignment. But it was not until the late eighteenth century that anatomists produced illustrations of a specifically female skeleton, again underlining the point that sex was "more than skin deep", after which sex began to be understood in terms of reproductivity (p. 157). But as Foucault notes, the "nature of sex" was actually still bound to law as late as the nineteenth century effecting two seemingly contradictory social gestures: the legal registration of marriages, making "public" all heterosexual unions conterminous to the privitization of heterosexual "practices and pleasures", forcing sexuality and the sexed body into a posture of secrecy.[27] As such, the body of the Enlightenment

---

when the French system of constructing meaning *vis-à-vis* desire underwent a change to the present one of two sexes and two genders" (p. 63).

[26] Butler in *Gender Trouble* elucidates this argument: "By maintaining a body prior to its cultural inscription, Foucault appears to assume a materiality prior to signification and form. Because this distinction operates as essential to the task of genealogy as he defines it, the distinction itself is precluded as an object of genealogical investigation. Occasionally in his analysis of Herculine, Foucault subscribes to a prediscursive multiplicity of bodily forces that break through the surface of the body to disrupt the regulating practices of cultural coherence imposed upon that body by a power regime, understood as a vicissitude of 'history'" (p. 130).

[27] In *The History of Sexuality—Volume I*, Foucault writes: "Prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. The "nature" on which they were based was still a kind of law. For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime's offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union. The discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused this system centered on legitimate alliance to undergo two modifications. First, a centrifugal movement with respect to heterosexual monogamy. Of course, the array of practices and pleasures continued to be referred to it as their internal standard; but it was spoken of less and less, or in any case with a growing moderation. Efforts to find out its secrets were abandoned; nothing further was demanded of it than to define itself from day to day. The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was strictly regarded as symbolic of social relations while gender was the "real" space upon which somatic definitions were "read".

Today, antithetical to the Englightenment paradigm where gender is the only real and the body is in constant flux, destruction and reconstruction of sexed identity, we are facing a linguistic vicissitude in which gender and sexuality are constantly being reworked, reordered and molded and instead it is sex which remains intransigent to these reworkings. The body remains bound to the legal and scientific definitions of sex in which it is implicated and defined despite the fact that in certain areas of the world, sex is determined not only by genitalia, but also by chromosomes. We are currently witnessing the discourse of sex as encroaching upon every possible geography of the body and social network of language as a means of claiming itself. The language of science attempts to locate various "truths" of sex within the somatic topography of the body while political and social readings of the body are generally—but not always—dependent upon such scientific "truths". On the other side of this paradigm, gender has become the space of refusing the somatic, of performing difference and enacting diverse readings of the social markings *on the body*—sex, race, health, and so forth. As Donna Haraway discusses this very interesting struggle between the somatic and gender:

> The refusal to become or to remain a "gendered" man or a woman, then, is an eminently political insistence on emerging from the nightmare of the all-too-real, imaginary narrative of sex and race. Finally and ironically, the political and explanatory power of the "social" categories of sex, flesh, body, biology, race, and nature in such a way that the binary, universalizing opposition that spawned the concept of the sex/gender system at a

---

more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter... Although not without delay and equivocation, the natural laws of matrimony and the immanent rules of sexuality began to be recorded on two separate registers. There emerged a world of perversion which partook of that legal or moral infraction, yet was not simply a variety of the latter. An entire sub-race, race was born

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> particular time and place in feminist theory imploded into articulated, differentiated, accountable, located, and consequential theories of embodiment, where nature is no longer imagined and enacted as resource to culture or sex to gender (p. 148).

Thus the power of redefining the body, according to Haraway, was not founded in the restructuring of any firm believe in or undoing of biology, but rather constituted in feminist theory of the 1970's which evinced both gender and nature as constructions.[28] As we observe how the language of the body, specifically sex, is discursively framed within the social, it is not difficult to fathom how western culture embraces the somatic as absolute and real and almost never uncertain, while positing gender as that performative, at times excessive, and always exegetic of something.

In returning to drag culture, we notice the ways in which many societies have accommodated such performances of gender—that is, those cultures which have embraced such performances as "high camp" or parody, as one can easily

---

different—despite certain kinship ties—from the libertines of the past" (pp. 39-40).

[28] Important to Haraway's argument is what I outlined earlier regarding the sex/gender debates in the 1970's and how many, like Gayle Rubin, fought against the nature/culture culture distinction as read through a Marxist analysis of women being the "raw material" for acculturation: "*The sex-gender system* Another stream of feminist sex/gender theory and politics came through appropriations of Marx and Freud read though Lacan and Lévi-Strauss in an influential formulation by Gayle Rubin (1975) of the "sex-gender systerm" Her paper appeared in the first anthology of socialist/Marxist feminist anthropology in the United States. Rubin and those indebted to her theorization adopted a version of the nature/culture distinction, but one flowing less out of US empiricist life and social science and more from French psychoanalysis and structuralism. Rubin examined the "domestication of women", in which human females were the raw materials for the social produciton of women, through the exchange systems of kindship controlled by men in the institution of human culture. She defined the sex-gender system as the system of social relations that transformed biological sexuality into productsof human activity and in which the resulting historically specific sexual needs are met. She then called for a Marxian analysis of sex/gender systems as products of human activity which are changeable through political struggle. Rubin viewed the sexual division of labour and the psychological construction of desire (especially the oedipal formation) as the foundations of a system of production of human beings vesting men with rights in women which they do not have in themselves. To survive materially where men and women cannot perform theother's work and to satisfy deep structures of desire in the sex/gender system in which men exchange women, heterosexuality is obligatory.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

notice in much of the West Village today where drag is often "Disneyfied" for the (usually) heterosexual audiences "experiencing New York City". And then, there are many others societies where these performances are largely disregarded by the masses, as they remain in the margins and happily choose to avoid any sort of mass acculturation. I remember Cheops, a gay bar on the outskirts of Cholula, Mexico[29] where drag queens perform hits from Gloria Trevi to Azucar y Morena. This bar is frequented almost completely by gay men and women from Puebla. While both paradigms of "drag culture" have their clear advantages and disadvantages (depending on the subject), it is important to understand that gender performances such as these are understandable both from inside the performance and within the cultural markings that render these spaces of theatre as center or margin, as visible or invisible, as a product of popular expression or a fetish of material consumerism.

I now turn to Peggy Phelan's lucid study of the politics of performance, *Unmarked* (1993), wherein she maintains that Western culture constructs the real as a vector of visibility.[30] Phelan's text reveals the discursivity of the real as a positioning of certain truth values constituted by the subject's visual affirmation of this real: the act of verifying the visible. By looking for what she calls the "blind spot in the visible real", Phelan searches for the use of the real in Western

---

Obligatory heterosexuality is therefore central to the oppression of women" (p. 137).

[29] This bar, though named after the Egyptian pyriamid, Cheops, is situated at the foot of an Aztec pyramid where Cortés and his army massacred thousands of indigenous in 1519. In a certain irony, this bar names that which it is not and by virtue of the mis-naming, consciously travesties the pyramid as a non-Site.

[30] Phelan writes: "As a representation of the real the image is always, partially, phantasmatic. In doubting the authenticity of the image, one questions as well the veracity of she who makes and describes it. To doubt the subject seized by the eye is to doubt the subjectivity of the seeing "I". These words work both to overcome and deepen the provocation of that doubt" (p. 1).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

culture.[31] Since we can see transient genders and sexualities visible in West—in quotidian life, popular culture, media, politics, and marginal spaces as well—we generally understand this visibility of identity as an equivalent of freedom. Phelan stops all such fantasy, however:

> Visibility is a trap; it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonianist/imperial appetite for possession. Yet it retains a certain political appeal. Visibility politics have practical consequences; a line can be drawn between a practice (getting someone seen or read) and a theory (if you are seen it is harder for "them" to ignore you, to construct a punitive canon); the two can be reproductive. While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly underrepresented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities. A much more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility needs to be pursued than the Left currently engages (pp. 6-7).

Like Foucault, who in his analysis of the panopticon also concluded that visibility invokes the body into the field of politics,[32] Phelan expresses that identity emerges when the body "fails to convey meaning exactly" inasmuch as identity only exists *in relation to an other.* Identity is "a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss,

---

[31] Here she defines the "truth-effect" of culture: "I want to expose the ways in which the visible real is employed as a truth-effect for the establishment of these discursive and representational notions of the real. Moreover, I want to suggest that by seeing the blind spot within the visible real we might see a way to redesign the representational real. If the visible real is itself unable to constitute a reliable representational real its use-value must lie elsewhere" (p. 3).

[32] From *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault states: "The body is also directly invovled in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political reinvestment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use;it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (p. 25).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being" (p. 13). And the "unmarked" that Phelan theorizes is not at all a lack, as in Butler's assertion that the body is *never enough* therefore it cannot have meaning. Rather, for Phelan the unmarked is a cumulation of subjectivity and meaning which is always in excess of visibility and language:

> The unmarked is not the newest landscape vulnerable to tourists. The unmarked is not spatial; nor is it temporal; it is not metaphorical; nor is it literal. It is a configuration of subjectivity which exceeds, even while informing, both the gaze and language. In the riots of sound language produces, the unmarked can be heard as silence. In the plenitude of pleasure produced by photographic vision, the unmarked can be seen as a negative. In the analysis of the means of production, the unmarked signals the un(re)productive (p. 27).

The unmarked, therefore, is that which informs the vectors of language, visibility and performance. As identity, the unmarked is the inverse of the visible, the representable, the reproducible—it is that which is there but which we do not necessarily notice as different.

Phelan later examines the ontology of performance, which she distinguishes from the recorded document (of the original performance). Since performance is presence and cannot be repeated, performance is consequently "unmarked"—it is being and immediacy and is not reproducibility. Although the registration of the performance (the video recording, for instance) marks and renders the original, the recording can only serve to stimulate memory, whereby the referent is always the unmarked, past performance.[33] The notion of temporality, for Phelan,

---

[33] Phelan continues: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the ciruclation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance. The pressures brought to bear on performance to succomb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the "now" to which performance addresses

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is central to the understanding of performance, since performance is an act which cannot, in time, be repeated as the "same". In an intriguing conceptual move which makes more salient her earlier notions of visibility and the unmarked, Phelan asserts that performance of gender initiates its own "disappearance" by virtue of its unrepeatability and its attempting to *be real:*

> The gender play operative within *Paris is Burning*, therefore, involves much more than cross-*dressing*. And the stakes are higher than most theoretical speculation around generally allows. Driving the mechanism of these performed identities is a notion of "the real." Realness is determined by the ability to blend in, to not be noticed. Like the performance of passing more generally, the performance at these balls represents that which cannot be seen precisely by underlining that which is seen. The paradox of using visibility to highlight invisibility is complex and quite often misfires. Passing performances in general seek to use one form of invisibility to highlight a usually privileged form of visibility. Gays and lesbians who choose to pass as straight, are are employing the (relative) invisibility of the marks of sexual preference. But this very passing also highlights the "normative" and unmarked nature of heterosexuality. It is easy to pass as heterosexual because heterosexuality is assumed. In other words, what is made visible is the unmarked nature of heterosexual identity. The one who passes then does not "erase" the mark of difference, rather the passer highlights the invisibility of the mark of the Same (p. 96).

Here we notice, as in Butler, the division between performance and the real, with one major difference: for Phelan the real is established as a performance which maintains invisibility (no one notices), where for Butler performance is all about the cultural intelligibility of marking and legitimating the performance act itself.[34] In "passing performances" the body is inscribed with and also inscribes

---

its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera, the video archive.) Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different.' The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present" (p. 146).

[34] I would argue that Butler is so caught up in working out the issues of butch/femme dichotomies and recontextualization of heterosexual ideals of gender, that she ends up emphasizing the power of the visibility, eliding the dangers of such assimilations and their tangential readings. In "the Empire Strikes Back" (1991), Sandy Stone writes: "[J]udith Butler points out that the lesbian categories of "butch" and "femme" are not simple assimilations of lesbianism back into terms of heterosexuality. Rather, Butler

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meaning and it is the very performance which renders the body visible *by first* rendering it invisible.

Ergo, the question that really needs to be raised here, and that Phelan herself does not expound too deeply outside of "staged" performances, is the following: are not all peformances of identity essentially about passing? (And I am not limiting the paradigm of passing in the strict sense of Phelan's or Butler's examples of drag balls or butch/femme re-appropriations, but I wish to include the ways in which Western society has made quite conspicuous all identity *per se*.) Surely, it seems to me that Western identity is about creating totalized, homogeneous narratives into which individuals place themselves (if indeed they find a slot that suits them) and with which these subjects retain a certain discursive connection in order to claim *and perform* that identity. But there is clearly a problem with Western subjects accepting the plurality and/or instability of identity. For many people are accustomed to using language to describe themselves—queer, gay, African-American, Hispanic, Catholic—and these linguistic markers are the markers of identity that have become commonplace within, say, American society. Language incorporates meaning such that words

---

introduces the concept of *cultural intelligibility*, and suggests that the contextualized and resignified "masculinity" of the butch, seen against a culturally intelligible "female" body, invokes a dissonance that both generates a sexual tension and constitutes the object of desire. She points out that this way of thinking about gendered objects of desire admits of much greater complexity than the example suggests. The lesbian butch or femme both recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it. The idea that butch and femme are "replicas" or "copies" of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic power of their internal dissonance. In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gener, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body *which is itself a medically constituted textual violence*, generate new and unpredictable dissonances which implicate entire spectra of desire. In the transsexual as textx we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries" (p. 296).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

have all the weight of the body. As such, Phelan's concept of the unmarked is a most important element of reading identity politics—and not just queer identity, as she and others submit.[35] If we can begin to see how all bodies are necessarily implicated within the vectoring fields of social and political surveillance, we might begin to read passing as not a moment in which marginal or transigent identities are brought to the center, but instead we might begin to see how identity in Western culture is normalized and *made to agree* with certain philosophical and linguistic understandings of corporeality. Despite the many venues opening up the body as a site for reading antagonisms instead of linear narratives, for understanding complex matrices of language instead of repeating simplistic, unevolved trends, it would seem that most theoretical assessments of gender in the West are insufficient in opening up the spaces of discontinuity.

For this predicament has certainly been addressed in the West, mostly within French philosophical circles, where writers such as Bergson, Bataille, Barthes, and Kristeva examine the conjunctions yoking language and materiality. In *Ear of the Other,* Jacque Derrida fathoms how the relationship to the other might actually be charged with a multiplicity of meaning rather than an impulse to discriminate, to limit:

> What if we were to reach, what if we were to approach here...the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating. The relationship would not be asexual, far from

---

[35] In "The Empire Strikes Back", Roseanne Alluquère Stone writes: "The essence of transsexualism is the act of passing. A transsexual who passes is obeying the Derridean imperative: "Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres.' I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously "read," to read oneself aloud—and by this troubling and productive reading, to being to write oneself into the discourses by which one has been written—in effect, then, to become a (look out—dare I say it again?) posttranssexual. Still, transsexuals know that silence can be an extremely high price to pay for acceptance" (p. 299) I will return to this argument later in my reading.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing. As I dream of saving the chance that this question offers, I would like to believe in the multipolicity of sexually marked voices (p. 84).

Truly, convocations such as Derrida's to liberate the coding of binarisms have certainly been induced in many Western readings of gender and sexuality. But as I stated earlier regarding Butler, the destabilization of the body remains the one barrier that Western gender discourses elide. For at the bottom of most every queer sexuality or indiscernible gender is a codified, understood and articulated body.

Nonetheless, gender theory in the United States has painfully demonstrated how overturning binary oppositions of sexualities and genders, without addressing the materiality of the body, does not solve the issues of representing gender and sexuality. To the contrary, I would argue that the elision of the body obfuscates discussions of performance since the body of each performer, being invested with significant and definite cultural meanings, can very well undermine culturally invested meanings of both gender and sexuality. In a certain sense, drag is understood as "performance" *only because the subject is not biologically binaried to the gender performed.* And it is exactly this binding of feminine to woman and masculine to man which reveals the greatest vulnerability for such theorizing gender since it steadfastly maintains performance as that which *makes logical* (Phelan's unmarked) both the physical body and gender. Should I choose to wake up, don a wig and make-up, I am merely *being woman* (since rigid somatic readings of my body would ascribe to me such a gendered identity). Phelan is correct in stating that "visibility is a trap", but assuming sex's relationship to gender—female with feminine and male with

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

masculine—is an equally dangerous trap. The risk of establishing such sex/gender relations as is simply a form of ordering and affixing gender performances as either "normative" or "subversive" (as if "being" feminine for a woman is somehow more seamless for women than for men).[36] Arguably, Western society, despite all the polymorphous perversity pronounced in 1990's popular culture and the academic halls of highbrow theory, has yet to deal with bodies that refuse naming so as to inflect a certain freedom in their tangential—if even uncertain—relations with sexuality and gender.

This problematic is clearly demonstrated in a situation familiar to anyone who has used gay chatrooms, specifically those designated for women. After entering the chatroom, one of the first questions asked is: "Are you really a woman?" And if one answers, "No," quite often the voice having asked the question will immediately disappear from the screen because *he* is *really* looking for a "real" woman—specifically a "lesbian". When I enter queer chat spaces and am inevitably posed this question, I never answer it. Instead, I write: "Why are you using an instrument of virtual reality and fiction if all you are really looking for is security and truth?" I have yet to hear a coherent answer to this question since most every "male" I have "discovered" is generally confused by the uncertainty I propose—frustrated because he is or might be talking to another man who likewise is searching for "*lusty lesbo action*" (as he writes in his *comments* panel) and, moreso, he clearly seems frightened by the idea that he could be talking to a *gay man.* Indeed, cyberspace is a purely linguistic valence which is readily providing interesting debates regarding sex, gender and sexuality. Thus, what is

---

[36] In *Unmarked,* Phelan states: "Gay male cross-dressers *resist* the body of woman even while they make its constructedness visible" (p. 101).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

promising for Western theories of gender—and this cannot be understated—are the recent theoretical mappings of the body in terms of cyberspace, technology, art, and architecture in which the body is problematized in terms of its "divided presence".[37] For the interstices of nature and artifice, real and constructed, like Smithson's critique of the Museum of Natural History, are not only vestiges of past centuries, they are fossils embedded in our present (language, consciousness, and culture).

Like Smithson, Diana Agrest, in *The Sex of Architecture*, reads the American city as a seminal example of the relationship between nature and the urban space through the articulation and sharp separation of space: nature/city and order/disorder. In comparing the American city to Le Corbusier's architecture in Europe, Agrest notes that Le Corbusier utilizes nature as a "metonymic construct" wherein the natural becomes part of the urban discourse, concluding that America is a place where nature becomes the "negative sign": "Suddenly Americans came to the realization that as opposed to Europeans' historical past, their true past was nature itself" (p. 51). Agrest's critique of the architectural application of space in the United States evidences, much more vividly perhaps than gender theory per se, how the obfuscation of nature renders the body's cultural

---

[37] Ignasi de Solà-Morales discusses the somatic art of Rebecca Horn, Jana Sterback, Orlan and the Catalan experimental theatre group La Fura dels Baus: "For these artists, and especially for Horn, bodies are agents of exchange, suppurating nuclei from which tumors, liquids, blood, and waste pour forth. The body is not reduced to flesh, to raw material that has lost its theological form and its vitality; but in its partial appearances, its absent presence, in the delicate play of metaphors through which it is recalled as a place of affection, neither the dimension nor the self-control found in a system of signs or objective annotation makes much sense. This is not a question of the body's disappearance or cancellation but of its divided presence, diversified and differentiated as a result of annotations and external criterial. Bodies or rather their tracks and traces, constitute the only access to a language that is no longer that of subjectivity or objectivity but rather a chain of circulating episodes that evokes them, records them" (p. 24).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inscriptions as negative.[38] Interestingly enough, Le Corbusier's work is at the center of many debates in architectural theorizing of gender and sex since his notion of the city and its juxtaposition to nature relies on the organic being understood as every bit "artificial" as the urban space which replaces it.[39] Such separations of the "natural" from the "artificial" correspond to discussions of gender bifurcations within architecture in which the male body was distinctly opposed to the female body.

The clearest evidence of such architectonic design can be seen in Leonardo's Vitruvian figure whereby he evidences the male body as embodying both the perfect circle and square. As such, the Vitruvian figure was often utilized as the anthropomorphic basis of architecture and served to further interrogate spatial relationship between the constructed skin of man (architecture) and the body. The basis of classical architecture was the Vitruvian concept that all order is based upon the human body and that everything must adhere to the image of the absolute (God) which was reflected in the ideal body.[40] More specifically, the

---

[38] Agrest develops her theory of nature/city, feminine/masculine in architecture: "Nature, gendered female, has been seen in philosophy and throughout the history of science as either an organism or a mechanism. According to the first view, nature was feminine and passive while husbandry, the active exploitation of nature, was masculine. Thus, the male was made essential to the cultivation of nature's latent fertility, just as in procreation, where the egg was seen as passive and the sperm as active, making the male 'essential' to the process" (p. 53).

[39] Norman Crowe, also in a critical study of Le Corbusier, "The Idea of a Man-Made World," states: "The mand-made world is an alternative nature, so to speak, created by artifice and born as a human reflection of the wonder we find in the natural world—the heavens, the seasons, landscapes and seascapes, plants and animals"(7).

[40] De Solà-Morales discusses this idea of the Vitruvian body: "Classical architecture was based on the Vitruvian notion that the orders derive from imitating the human body, thus establishing a theological relationship between the body and architecture. The canonical body, as it appears, for example, in the well-known diagram by Leonardo da Vinci, is a perfect microcosm whose numerical order reflects the dimensions and parts within the whole. This same perfection governs the macrocosm. Everything coheres, simply, from the lowest levels of imitation to the total unity of the idea from which all

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

first half of the sixteenth century was particularly marked by this motif whereby the dialectic of sexual difference was both underscored in certain architectural designs and then broken down in others. Moreover, it is interesting to note that this same period of time is also characterized by the philosophical divisions of the natural from the man-made.[41] Aaron Betsky coherently questions these separations between sex in architecture and between the "natural" and "man-made":

> Our bodies are what we make out of them. On the facts of biology, we erect a complicated architecture in which we appear and act as men and women, and each has his or her own place...We make ourselves as men or women as we make ourselves as human beings, by separating ourselves off from nature, defining ourselves as something that is not the world but like other human beings, and then constructing a world for ourselves (p. 6)

Betsky's query would indicate that the very problems which gender politics pose are inextricably linked to the issues surrounding both the dialectical conception of masculine/feminine as well as the opposition of nature/artifice. And certainly anthropometry as the model for constructing sex in architecture might be the

---

levels of reality emanate. In classical culture, the body is the image of the absolute, of God, of the One that it imitates. Architecture, to the degree that it too is governed by this order determined by the human body—an ideal body of which real bodies are mere shadows—also imitates the perfect unity of the idea constituted by the cosmic order" (p. 18).

[41] Aaron Betsky, in *Building Sex*, makes the following observation about male and female figures in architecture: "Nowhere does the role of women and femininity become clearer than in the images of the Vitruvian figure produced by a series of architects in the first half of the sixteenth century. There were illustrations of Vitruvius's claim, at arms and legs, could define both the perfect circle and a perfect square in abstract space. Leonardo drew the most famous illustration of this text. A naked man, his symmetry adulterated only by the stance of his feet, creats the overlapping figures...It is in the 1521 version by Cesariano that the sexual overtones become explicit. Cesariano believed that domestic architecture was inferior to the creation of monuments and that architects were demigods. His version of the Vitruvian man has an erect penis. The circle here is the undefined, abstract and preexisting. It is the eternal, the all-encompassing, and, by implication, the feminine. Cesariano made the square not just with four lines but with a grid, as if it were Alberti's perspectival window. The male figure is impregnating the female circle to produce the square that reproduces endlessly and produces a new order in which even the male figure is caught" (p. 90).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

praxis through which dichotomies of natural/man-made and male/female are intersected, interrogated and possibly undone.

The concept of anthropometry is central to many architectural models throughout the past five hundred years, including of Le Corbusier's architectural and modular designs. As Fernando Pérez Oyarzun notes, Le Corbusier views architecture as a covering of the body, a type of "second skin" where the somatic remains central to the construction of the artifice and where both nature (body) and artifice (architectural body) are "inextricably and intimately linked".[42] Pérez Oyarzun establishes that in discussing the singular body, one is necessarily discussing a plurality of bodies in time, change, permutation, destruction, death and recreation. He views nature and architecture are inseparable and physically, contextually and perceptually interdependent:

> The architectural body at the same time depicts and fits the possibilities of the human body: relationships within the structure of the human body are embodied in architectonic relation between ground and wall, support and form. Buildings simultaneously contain and confront the bodies. On the other hand, the human body is not a static, uniform phenomenon but one that flows and changes. Similarly, our perception

---

[42] Pérez Oyarzun writes: "If the building is thought as a cloak, we are drawn into an experience as close as the body itself and therefore equally difficult to perceive. The building becomes a kind of body over a body, almost a second skin, that qualifies, shelters, serves as intermediary. From sensualism to anthropometry, from the eye of Ledoux to Le Corbusier's Modulor, we encounter and architecture that creates a body over a body, from a garment to a sarcophagus. History alternates between cases. In the tradition of classical treatises, including those of the Renaissance, the perception of the human body as a complex model for architecture assumes the dominant role and acquires the characteristics of a living poetics. During the 18th century, on the other hand, the so-called revolutionary architects lose faith in this paradigmatic role of the body and regard it as a categorical determinant of their project. With variations, a similar phenomenon occurs with the architects of the modern movement, for whom any explicit adherence to an anthopomorphic model is simply unacceptable. In the case of Le Corbusier's Modulor, the body's possibilites for action are those conceived as crucial to the project. Nonetheless, despite these historical oscillations—or in fact perhaps because of them—it seems impossible to eliminate completely one concept of the architectural body in favor of the other: both are inextricably and intimately linked" (pp. 221-223).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> of that body changes over time: the body grows and declines, changes context, moves, and gestures. To speak of the body is to speak of a multitude of bodies and the multitude of understandings and representations that surround them (p. 220).

Transposing Pérez Oyarzun's notion of the temporal, changing body to the context of sex and gender, we could surmise that the structural artifice of the building frames the spatial possibilities of the body. Similarly, George Bataille's article, "Architecture", also confirms that anthropomorphic architecture is not limited to the Neoplatonic form generally invoked by the term "anthropomorphism", but rather this architecture is the result of imitating multiple bodies "differentiated by their representative and expressive intentions".[43] Thus, if Le Corbusier's architecture and modular designs can frame the body, then so too can the vast expanses outside the structures of steel and concrete—both maintain different spatial relationships to the human body and psyche. As space marks difference, movement and performance mark continuity, dialogue, destruction, and innovation. It is with movement that the ontology of flesh and matter become displaced and redefined within architectural spaces. Le Corbusier's architectural bodies ultimately seek to improve and make healthy the mise-en-scène of the body while collapsing the spaces between the somatic

---

[43] De Solà-Morales writes: "George Bataille, in his well-known 1929 article Architecture," employs the notion of anthropomorphism to refer to the relationship between the body and architecture that occurs under the usual conditions in which this discipline produces its buildings. But the anthropopmorphism to which Bataille refers is not that of the rigidly ruled Neoplatonic human form. Anthropomorphic architecture, which accounts for a good part of contemporary production, simply imitates contingent, plural, multiple bodies differentiated by their representative and expressive intentions. The body in bourgeois culture, beginning in the late 18th century when the classical concept of the universe entered into crisis, is above all an imitation of what could be surmised as the real bodies of those in positions of power and ownership—those with the taste and the ability to hold themselves up as the image of social bonds" (p. 18).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(as well as the mind) and the constructed.[44]

But anthropometry is not limited to the architectural structure, for as Marcel Mauss has evidenced, *body technique* is every bit a part of the "man-made" world as it is part of the "natural" physical exercises of the body.[45] *Body technique* as a theoretical construct, like architecture and technology, evidences the blurring between that which is organic and that which is constructed. Likewise Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoğlu's article entitled, "Limits of (in)Tolerance," exposes the cultural mythology of "structure" where modern architecture opposes the cave. Using the cave dwellings in Ankara, Turkey as the basis for his study, Nalbantoğlu argues that structure as opposed to nature is a misconception which prefaces a linearity of progression, logic, order and civilization upon space:

> The cave, the cavern, and the carved dwelling have a long history in Western architectural discourse as the basis of an entire narrative of origins. Theorists from Vitruvius to the Enlightenment named the cave the most archaic form of shelter, representing a state of savagery. According to the Vitruvian narrative it took countless generations to evolve from the cave to the hut. The former is pure interior, structureless representation. The latter is

---

[44] In her article "The Medical Body in Modern Architecture," Beatriz Colomina writes of Le Corbusier: "Le Corbusier was sometimes dismissive of psychoanalysis, he repeatedly spoke of the intimate relationship between mind and body, portraying mental stability as the product of a healthy physical environment. In *Urbanisme* he argues that degeneration of the city leads to "physical and nervous sickness" and in *LaVille Radieuse* he proposes that the new living cell be a machine for the "recuperation of physical and nervous energy...the upkeep of the human machine: cleaning, draining the toxic substances, recuperating nervous energy, maintenance or increase of physical energy"" (pp. 235-236) (Citation, Le Corbusier. *The Radiant City*. New York: Orion, Press, 1967,p. 36.)

[45] See Sylviane Agacinski's article, "Incorporation": "To my knowledge, the first to have forged the notion of *body technique* was Marcel Mauss, in 1934. This concept does not restrict technology to skills requiring tools or instruments but defines it as an effective and traditional physical act. Everyone will agree, for example, that swimming is a traditional technique, that it is learned and does not require any instrument. Thus, if the body is indeed, as Mauss says, the most *natural technological object* and *technical means*, it ceased to be situated simply on the side of nature and opposed to technology and culture. The examination of body techniques used in everyday life and for the simplest actions, like walking, shows that *there is no natural use of the body*"(p. 35).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> constructed, visible, and objectifiable. Architectural truth has come to mean leaving the cave behind. At one level, the irreconcilable differences between these two prototypes can be linked to a family of binary constructions that lies at the basis of the architectural discipline: nature/culture, vernacular/high-style, rural/urban, and traditional/modern. At another level, however, the inhabited cave has an ambiguous status. It lies at the significatory boundary of architecture rather than simply falling outside. It is neither "natural" nor "man made,' both inhabitable and impossible to objectify. The inhabited cave is located at the border of architecture's grand narrative, which is inscribed by a desire for the autonomy of immortal architectural objects (pp. 89-90).

Discussing the conceptual boundaries that mark inside and outside, East and West, and so forth,[46] Nalbantoğlu demonstrates that like the body as natural, the cave also poses similar problems and challenges for urban architecture whereby the romanticization of the rural is no more possible than the strictly urban.[47]

---

[46] Nalbantoğlu continues this thought: " Along this line of thinking, I was captivated by three very different scenes that mark the history of the carved dwelling in Turkish architectural discourse. In these instances the intriguing status of the carved dwelling in Western architectural discourse is further complicated by the cultural status of Turkish architecture on the fringes of such discourse where, like in all postcolonial encounters, meanings are contested, negotiated, reinterpreted, and transformed. Hence the three historical scenes raise two significant issues. On the one hand they demonstrate certain repressions involved in the construction of proper architectural discourse. They are reminders that architecture, like all disciplines, continuously defers any interrogation of its externality. It draws boudnaries, erects walls, controls openings, and guards its foundations. On the other hand, they show that architecture's disciplinary inclusions and exclusions and their modes of legitimation are historically and contextually inscribed. These issues are rarely theorized outside a disciplinary desire to incorporate the unfamiliar either by an unabashed assertion of Eurocentric hegemony or by a humanistic celebration of cultural/architectural diversity. The former position perpetuates the hegemonic drives that underlie the binary constructions of East/West, culture/civilization, and vernacular/high style. The latter avoids all questions incommensurability and radical difference. The violence involved in the construction of the very boundaries of the discipline is rarely acknowledged" (pp. 89-90).

[47] Nalbantoğlu writes: "From an architectural viewpoint, the carved dwellings of the squatter areas disrupt historical accounts that delegate them to a premodern past. Here they are the very products of the modern city. Despite reproducing the form of rural carved dwellings, they do not symbolize a primitive or prearchitectural existence. In other words, the carved dwellings of the squatter settlements neither fulfill architecture's urban aspirations nor its romanticized rural image. On the other hand, they challenge the fixed polarities of traditional/modern and rural/urban. (Here they are both/neither traditional and/nor modern, both/neither rural and/nor urban.) On the other hand, they reveal the partial, precarious, and limited nature of architectural truths" (p. 98).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

What Nalbantoğlu's study focuses on, more specifically, is how these two spaces become polemicized by the presence of the squatter who turns urban spaces into "cave dwellings" and who displace traditional notions of modern/traditional, natural/urban. Similar to the relationship the body shares with technology, architecture and the "man-made", the cave also resonates a similar dynamic within the urban landscape of modernity indicating a greater problem of ontological conceptions of matter and the organic. As J. C. Beaune reminds us in his article, "The Classical Age of Automata", the boundaries between mind and body and nature and culture have become so "enduring" for the "social and intellectual automaton", that it is now impossible to regard the human body as "natural" since the myths of origin and utopic visions of body are no longer present. Instead, we are "rendered ghostly" by the presence of these boundaries.[48]

Georges Canguilhem's well-known essay, "Machine and Organism", evidences the empirical and ontological fields of consciousness and matter—ontological because of matter's thingness (*res*) and empirical because of the individual's construction of the first-person singular, consciousness.[49]

---

[48] J.C. Beaune states: "The social and intellectual automaton nowadays makes up the "third type of world" we inhabit, a world in which the frontiers and the limits between body and mind, as well as those between nature and culture, and between life and death, have grown so thick, so enduring and so dense that when we look in the mirror each day we confront portraits of the living dead. These are the same ones that the simplest, most archaic automaton maintains at the heart of its myth, but which the anarchic yet rational development of technology has transformed into unfamiliar visions, renderred ghostly by their own presence... If we turn now to "classic automaton,' as it existed between the Renaissance and the latter part of the nineteenth century—when the industrial norm really established its hold over people—we find something apparently quite unassuming. Nonethless, this automaton not only retains within it the myths of origin, which it preserves like a latent life, but it also clearly anticipates the utopias of the future" (p. 435).

[49] He states: "[I]t is unquestionably Aristotle who saw the congruity between animal movements and automatic mechanical movements, like those observed in instruments of war, especially catapults. This idea is treated rather extensively by Alfred Espinas

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Canguilhem's genealogy of technological and automaton bodies verifies the model of the human body as that which is neither purely physical, nor purely mechanical, as he evidences in his elaboration of Descartes' bodies as matter *born from* technology.[50] In fact, the most decisive moment in Canguilhem's essay is when he discusses the use of mechanical models to explain organisms:

> In short, with the Cartesian explanation, it might appear that we have not moved beyond the idea of finality or inner purposiveness. The reason for this is that if we limit ourselves to the workings of the machine, everything can be explained by the theory of mechanism; *the theory cannot account for the construction of the machine itself.* Machines do not construct other machines, and it could even be said that, in a sense, *explaining organs or organisms through mechanical models amounts to explaining the organ by means of itself* (p. 55, emphasis mine).

As Canguilhem confirms, the human body during the Industrial Revolution was mediated as if it were a machine in the effort to make more efficient the labor process. What was deemed wasteful action was simply eliminated from the stage of human labor. Workers were trained in how to be *more like a machine* and although the body did not cease to exist, the language of labor and industry

---

who discusses the connection between the problems dealt with by Aristotle in De Moru animalium and those in his compilation of Quaestiones mechanicae. Aristotle draws a clear parallel between the organs of animal movement and organa, or parts of war machines, like the arm of a catapult about to launch a projectile. Thus catapults, typical automatic machines of the period, seemed to be articulated like a human limb, as they were poised and made to release their great stores of pent-up energy...According to Aristotle, the soul is the principle of all movement. All movement first presupposes immobility and then requires a prime mover or some motivating force. Desire moves the body, and desire is explained by the soul, just as potentiality is explained by an act. Despite their differing explanations of movement, for Aristotle, the soul is the principle of all movement. All movement first presupposes that man is composed of automated mechanical parts reliant on an energy source that produces motor effects over time and continue to do so well after the original (human or animal) energy has dissipated" (p. 48)

[50] Canguilhem discusses kinematic devices; "For a long time, kinematic mechanisms were powered by humans or animals. During this stage, it was an obvious tautology to compare the movement of bodies to the movement of a machine, when the machine itself depended on humans or animals to run it. Consequently, it has been shown that mechanistic theory has depended, historically, on the assumptions that it is possible to construct an automaton, meaning a mechanism that is miraculous in and of itself and does not rely on human or animal muscle power" (p. 47).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

certainly changed the way the body was conceived, treated, and represented.[51]

Let us, first see how this body might function in today's theatre of labor. In translating Canguilhem's *machine-like body* of the Industrial Revolution[52] to the body of contemporary labor today, we might notice how the corporal in Europe and North America has become the habitus for quite different modalities of regulation and mediation. Instead of *being like* a machine which expedites mechanical processes of production, the body of the early third millennium is postured as a field which both *competes with and informs* technology. Given that machinery is dissipating and technology growing in the world labor market in the West, we see the body make a similar trajectory as more and more bodies are moving away from the soot-filled hulls of factories and are beginning to fill the micro-office structures of corporations where the body "operates" the controls of sleek, sterile technological surfaces. Nonetheless, this body must resist all forms of physical decrepitude and disease in order to produce and compete with a technological corpus that never rests and rarely ever breaks down (hence the

---

[51] Canguilhem expounds upon the reversal of machine and organism: "It must be added that the reversal of the relationship between the machine and the organism, brought about by a systematic understanding of technical inventions as if they were extensions of human behavior or life processes, is in some way confirmed by the belief that the generalized use of machines has slowly imposed contemporary industrialized society on man...It must be added that the reversal of the relationship between the machine and the organism, brought about by a systematic understanding of technical inventions as if they were extensions of human behavior or life processes, is in some way confirmed by the belief that the generalized use of machines has slowly imposed contemporary industrialized society on man" (p. 63).

[52] Canguilhem continues this thesis: "George Friedmann has shown very clearly the steps by which body gradually became a first-order term in the human machine-body equation. With Frederick Taylor and the first technicians to make scientific studies of work-task movements, the human body was measured as if it functioned like a machine. If we see their aim as the elimination of all unnecessary movement and their view of output as being expressed only in terms of a certain number of mathematically determined factors, then rationalization was, for all intents and purposes, a mechanization of the body" (p. 63).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

body aims to "keep fit" with gyms, yoga, diets, natural medicines, vitamins). Also, the body is an agent that *informs* the development and stylization of technology (Walkmans, Palm Pilots, ergonomics, Stairmasters) whereby it is difficult to understand if the body is an extension of technology or technology an extension of the body. Though it would seem that the body and technology are inter-referential since technology takes on the language of the somatic as much as the body mirrors the language of technology—computers and people *crash, catch viruses, sleep, wake up, get updated,* and *break down.* The somaticization of technology and the technologization of the body indicate a growing obsession in western culture with the protraction of life and a contemporaneous denial of death which is best evidenced by the technologization of war. This specific paradigm manifests a growing denial of mortality in western culture where the physical *western body* of death is sanitized and made invisible in media while conversely the death of the non-western body is not only commonplace, but it becomes framed within the neo-orientalist language of "poverty and corruption".[53]

---

[53] Avital Ronell comments upon the refusal of death via technology: And the problem with the concept of a "high tech war" is that it still hangs onto the ideology of progress, like: "We've made *progress* in our ways of destruction!' America is stuck in the denial of death—witness the preoccupation with health clubs, vitamins, "scientific" body building techniques, etc. If we refuse to recognize and acknowledge the Other as *fragile,* destitute, mortal, and finite—*that's* when you start bombing the shit out of them! Does this make any sense?...Like friendly fire—a full-on repression of death. The minute Americans see "live" blood, they freak out. They experience a denial of death which is absolutely *profound*—so that when death does take place, the vocabulary shifts to "collateral damage" (or a similarly abstract euphamism). America became really anxious when they thought there were Americans dead—but almost immediately this became translated into "friendly fire" which was within that syndrome of death denial. Americans cannot take blood—that's why censorship probably was absolutely necessary from the government's point of view. That's why the Gulf War had to be bloodless, precise, sutureless, high tech...The Gulf War *wasn't* just a media war—that's part of the "logic" fostered by *Nintendo* with its extremely regressive values; this war. like any war, inflicted barbaric, appalling ways of death. Postmodern readings of the war that limit

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus, when converting Canguilhem's earlier notion of physical and mechanical matter to the stage of the somatic and technology, understanding sex as *intractable* is problematic at best. Although Canguilhem views the idea and the mimetic (divine art) as fundamental to the construction of the body, he preferences the *idea of the body* as the real, since the body is the *model* of and for the machine.[54] In this fashion, the body is as real as it is performative—it is always *becoming*. Manifesting the body as a physicality whose only reference to the real is its very representation *as technology*, Canguilhem evidences "technological anthropomorphism" as the point of rationalizing the very mimetic function of production from which and within which the body operates, thus rendering the body like technology and technology like the body. It is this unstable plateau of matter that Canguilhem analyzes as he struggles with the telos of the pre-Cartesian physical world and Cartesian techniques of production and self-regulation of anthropomorphic mechanisms. Ultimately, Canguilhem asserts that the nexus between technological and organic bodies is a problem that pervades both facile interpretation of function within a holistic functioning and teleological understanding. By examining sex as a physical function or constituent of the body, we can see that sex has much more to do with the idea of corporeality than with its reality as manifested via technological representation. As I mentioned earlier, the body is a competitor with technology, yet I would

---

themselves to its "high tech media aspect" may be interesting and merit some thought, but they are complicity with the "enemy"... (pp. 141-143).

[54] Again, Canguilhem demands that Decartes' "unnatural" world be reexamined as a forum which may be every bit as "natural" and teleological as the physical human form, commenting upon Descartes' machinated body: "The model for the living machine is that body itself. Divine art imitates the Idea—but the Idea is the living body" (p. 53). And certainly for Canguilhem, like Aristotle and Descartes before him, the idea of the body is the real from which the effective matter, the flesh and wiring, is but a copy of that very idea.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

take this further and confirm that the inverse is also true: technology is being modeled to exceed the limits of the somatic coinstantaneously to the body being fashioned as technological. Given that technology has made possible the mutability of sex through surgery (while effectuating the legal language of sex), the cloning of flesh, and the reproduction of human life using the chromosomes of two sperm (instead of a sperm and an egg), it is implausible to view sex as any more *determinate* than sexuality or gender.

Interestingly enough, it is at the crossroads of where technology, nature and sex meet, that some of the most interesting theories on the body are being produced—more specifically, in the domain of transsexual cyber-bodies. Roseanne Alluquère Stone's article, "Virtual Systems," takes further this idea of technology and the somatic, evidencing the terrain where technology *is* nature:

> By entering into technology we tacitly agree to view certain imaginary movements as literal. This action activates the extreme permeability of boundaries between a politically authorized social entity and a technical prosthetics that characterizes the technosocial, in the space we find there, at once technological and social, we become aware of new kinds of beings who inhabit the phantasmic spaces of technology. They are at home in an environment whose existence has not even been recognized by those not deeply immersed in an age of instantaneous communication—they are beings for whom technology is nature, for whom elsewhere is geography, for whom the problematic tie between unitary awareness and unitary physical body has political consequences (p. 610).

And indeed, Stone's concept of the technological body functions as a Non-Body whereby all *assumed meaning* is divorced from the physical, and instead the body takes on multiple meanings depending on its relationship with real and imagined spatial surroundings, gesture and performance, other bodies, and desire.[55] The technological body necessitates that we dispose with the notion of

---

[55] Stone contines in this article, stating: "The cyborg, the multiple personality, the cyber-space cowboy suggest radical rewritings in the technosocial space—in which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a "real," sexed body and instead requires us to embrace the mixing of genres, forms and functions. Just as Mathew Barney's *Cremaster I* produces a universe of corporeal ambiguity and gender uncertainty, technological spaces offer a macrocosm for disavowing narrativized, fixed or real bodies. Instead of being a purely somatic space of skin, tissue, bones, and sex, the body is a field of physical and technological textures traversed by fictional and virtual signifiers in which the symbolic and the immediacy of presence and the imaginary of desire become inextricably intertwined, collapsed, and interdependent. Barney's *Cremaster I* bodies, like Stone's "Posttranssexual Manifesto", offer a poetics of the somatic as a possibility for undoing the bonds of traditional double binaries in western philosophy. For Stone this is a poetics which is not *directly* co-opted on the feminist battlefield of redemption, rectification, politicization, and rehistoricization, but rather this body is the corpus of fragmentation, simulation, transgression, destruction, and recreation in which access to both sex and gender is neither clearly defined nor absolute.[56]

---

everything is writing (computer code)—of the definition of body, the cutlural meaning of bodies, and of the bounded individual as the standard social unit and validated social actant.[...]Such fractured identities call attention to alternatives, always multiple, always in tension. Just as changes in complexreal-world political economies presage a radical simplification of biological diversity, the ramifications of complex social systems in the alter-space of communications technologies suggest a war between simplification and multiplicity...an explosion of actors and actants that includes the almost-living, the not-living and the never-living arising in the boundaries between technology, society and nature, in the architectures of multiple embodiments and multiple selves" (p. 611).

[56] In her manifesto entitled, "The Empire Strikes Back", Stone writes of the problematic in diagnosing the "wrong" body: "[N]either the investigators nor the transsexuals have taken the step of problematizing "wrong body" as an adequate descriptive category. In fact "wrong body" has come, virtually by default, to *define* the syndrome. It is quite understandable, I think, that a phrase whose lexicality suggests he phallocentric, binary character of gender differentiation should be examined with deepest suspicion. So long as we, whether academics, clinicians, or transsexuals, ontologize both sexuality and transsexuality in this way, we have foreclosed the possibility of analyzing desire and motivational complexity in a manner which adequately describes the multiple contradiciton of individual lived experience" (p. 297).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Such artifacts of bodily inscriptions and performances evidence the dilemma of Western discourse to break down the binaries of sex and gender. Instead of breaking apart the linguistic fetters binding sex and gender, Western culture has simply turned one gender against another in discourses of hegemony and marginalization such that our cultural politics have negotiated the "battle of the sexes", "women's rights", and so forth. (Of course, this is not to say that on the political frontier there are no problems of inequality between men and women that political discourses should address.) Simply put, the language of sex remains decidedly resolute in representing the difference between each sex and gender, such that there is nothing left to sex and gender *but difference*. In positing the masculine, against a weaker and oppressed adversary, the feminine (as in de Beauvoir), or in maintaining the feminine's marginality to the phallogocentric in all schemes of representation and language (as Irigaray would maintain), gender is taken out of one set of binaries (ie. mind/body) and in perpetuum catapulted into the machinery of identity politics and difference (ie. center and margin, empowered and disempowered).[57] Butler's reading of the somatic establishes

---

[57] Donna Haraway discusses this polemic of gender as related to nature and society: "The modern feminist concept for gender is not found in the writings of Marx and Engels, although their writings and other practices, and those of others in the Marxist tradition, have provided crucial tools for, as well as barriers against, the later politicization and theorization of gender. Despite important differences, all the modern feminist meanings of gender have roots in Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman" and in post-Second World War social conditions that have enabled constructions of women as a collective historical sugject-in-process. Gender is a concept developed to contest the naturalization of sexual difference in multiple arenas of struggle. Feminist theory and practice around gender seek to explain and change historical systems of sexual difference, whereby "men" and "women" are socially constituted and positioned in relations of hierarchy and antagonism. Since the concept of gender is so closely related to the Western distinction between nature and society or nature and history, via the distinction between sex and gender, the relation of feminist gender theories to Marxism is tied to the fate of the concepts of nature and labour in the Marxist canon and in Western philosophy more broadly" (p. 131).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that language cannot represent the somatic and that the body is dependent upon gender performances (representation) *as the only manner* of inflecting the body with meaning. Her reading becomes quite problematic, however, when she differentiates *realness* from *subversiveness* (relying upon traditional notions of sex as her *real* references), while demonstrating certain identity (and performance) as *more real* than others.

By making visible the polysemous nature of sex and gender across bodies, language, and performances, can we not begin to engage the poetics of the body within a sphere in which there is no longer access to any real? Ultimately, in attempting to draw comparisons and contrasts to and from bodies of maleness and femaleness we end up reaffirming their very discursive "natures" rather than unearthing something which might be more elemental, more intrinsic to the body physical in which difference is not the sole marker of identity. It is no surprise, given this adherence to traditional modes of reading bodies of sex and gender, that the words vagina and penis are decisively absent in many texts discussing sex. That the body as male or female has remained as entrenched within the language of its very simulation is what we have come to expect of sex and gender for these denominations still remain popularly conflated: *the sexed body and gendered behavior is intelligible either in its normative, traditional use or in its subversion.* In other words, we clearly recognize and *reaffirm* the woman as a sex if we were to see the shape of a breast underneath a dress. On the other hand, we are likely to question this authentic identity of woman if the this very same person were to turn away from the viewer and urinate, standing up, against a wall. At this moment then, there are many plausible readings, all of which force the reader to distinguish—even if unconsciously—between sex

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and gender: this person is transvestite, a pre-operational transsexual, an "unladylike" woman, and so forth. Readings of sexed bodies tend to reaffirm the cultural consignments of what sex relegates to gendered behavior as if there were a direct correlation between the sexed body and gender behavior of that body, as if one inflected meaning on the other. And indeed this is what happens in many cultural mappings of identity.

It is for this reason that I find a certain resonance of logic and, dare I say, freedom, in theories of technology and performance—for the natural and the performed are always in a state of construction. As Stone writes in the context of transsexualism:

> "The most critical thing a transsexual can do, the thing that *constitutes* success, is to "pass." Passing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a "natural" member of that gender. Passing means the denial of mixture. One and the same with passing is effacement of the prior gender role, or the construction of a plausible history...It is my contention that this process, in which both the transsexual and the medicolegal/psychological establishment are complicit, forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the *intertextual* possibilities of the transsexual body" (1991, pp. 296-297).

Stone's argument,I believe, needs to be brought out of its self-contained realm of transgendered bodies,[58] and thrown into the mainstream of "originary" gendered bodies. The social obligation to *have* and perform gender (unfortunately, the subject is generally limited to one) commits the subject to either confirming traditional notions of such, or negating one gender or the other. In examining the limitations and structures of gender as representability, we assume that gender, for the biological or "right" body to be assimilable as natural, that passing for these bodies goes unnoticed, unprocessed, unperformed.

---

[58] 'Transgender" is a term that means one having an ambiguous or undefined gender for various reasons from physical indecipherability or choice.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As much as the transsexual body is an arena of concomitant refusal and acceptance of physicality and performativity (pre-op and post-op), this also holds true for the invisible sutures guarding the body politic of "naturalized" sexes and "natural" performances of gender. Like the transsexual, sex for any *body* is always a performance which either reaffirms the ability to pass and the realness of sex or questions the plausibility of sexual coding while simultaneously creating newer languages of intelligibility and ataxia. For it is not Stone's "posttranssexual" which might serve as the terrain upon which to build future ideals for reading bodies, but rather the "postsexual"—a corpus upon which a plurality of readings are simultaneously crisscrossed and resisted as performance and temporality maintain the fluidity of meanings.

As sex becomes understood as more fluid and less affixed to some scientific and social "real", readings of gender and sexuality might more readily begin to advance a veritably fluid relationship to ambiguous bodies, desires, and gestures, in all "theatres" of gender performance. The nexus of masculine and feminine *as difference* is a purely discursive break which we engage in order to make logical the bodies of maleness and femaleness by naming through language. In the west, we embrace this reason as a means of linking "natural" genders with "natural" bodies and we tautologically enforce all readings of both gender and the somatic by reinflecting their *dédoublement* in meaning—that is, that a certain gesture or comportment can be clearly interpreted as something else. As such, we might argue that a gesture such as gesticulating one's hands in conversation is feminine. Likewise, this very same gesture performed by an Italian underscores her "Italianness" and performed by a gay man, it underscores his "gayness". In both cases, the cultural logic of reading the action reaffirms the system of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interpretation which attempts to decode and encode somatic gestures. The system of reading identity—and not only sexual identity—is rarely questioned simply because we invest a great deal of importance in the language which establishes difference as ontology, visibility and even community. Again, I return to Butler's assertion that because *Paris is Burning* reformulates kinship (community), the *real* is achieved *and* the subversivity takes a "back seat" to tradition.

Inevitably, I would argue that not only Western discourse exercises a certain power in maintaining the stasis of the sex/gender "double bind", but so too do arguments of gender theory which seek to establish a reading of the *real* through fundamentally conservative and equally problematic stereotypes of whiteness, wealth, and community.[59] Inevitably such positioning of this kind of *real* will only lead to representations that either confirm or debate that specific type of real. The use of language to identify bodies, a schema with which we are all too familiar due in large part to the work of Michel Foucault, is complicit in a certain ordering, surveillance and even control of such bodies. Likewise, cultural theory and political discourse is caught up in this as demonstrated by cultural

---

[59] I will return to this concept later. As well, I borrow this term from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwic's *Epistemology of the Closet*: "To understand these conceptual relations as irresolvably unstable is not, however, to understand them as inefficacious or innocuous. It is at least premature when Roland Barthes prophesies that once the paradigm is blurred, utopia begins: meaning and sex become the objects of free play, at the heart of which the (polysemant) forms and the (sensual) practices, liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. p. 133.) To the contrary, a deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possibile to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely themechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind. Nor is a deconstructive analysis of such definitional knots, however necessary, at all sufficient to disable them. Quite the opposite: I would suggest that an understandingof their irresolvable instability has been continually available, and has continually lent discursive authority, to antigay as well as to gay cultural forces of this century" (p. 10).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

politics of the past decade in the United States which has produced a social environment in which there is a strong sense that language *directly* and even *literally* marks and makes real identity. From the changes in names that we use within culture to refer to race, sexuality and even our virtual selves to the way we use naming to identify ourselves within a larger nexus of identity *as* empowerment, western society clings to language as sole the transmitter of the *real*.[60] The phenomenon of "outing" in the gay community in the 1990's, for example, evinces one of the ways in which the language of identity politics is often regarded as both a compulsory act of "admitting" identity and a way of belonging to a larger politicized community. Indeed, one could "out" oneself in postmodern act of confessing, of belonging to the larger group of queerness, for instance, or one could remain silent and risk *being outed*, humiliated for not claiming the "truth" of such "identity". This paradigm of evoking "truth" through the language of confession as an act of empowerment is a most problematic paradox today, for western culture privileges the visible and audible forms of sexuality and gender over those which are less visible and more silent. Foucault

---

[60] I am interested in this idea of vitual body as proposed by theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz who in her article, "Cyberspace, Virtuality, and the Real: Some Architectural Reflections", maintains that virtual bodies are not real or geometrical spaces, neither are they imaginary spheres, but rather they are "potentialities": "I am less concerned about this separation of mind from body, and of virtual from physical or real—although how it is possible to escape the body and the real is unclear to me, even or especially as one dons one's virtual gloves and gogles or lights up that necessary cigarette and prepares coffee to begin a heavy session on the computer—than I am about how cyberspace and the space of virtuality discussed here requries us to rethink matter and corporeality to accommodate their strange meanderings. I am less interested in the displacement from the physical to the conceptual, from the body to the mind, because I do not believe that such a displacement occurs now, or ever. If we don't just have bodies but are bodies (as I have argued elsewhere), there cannever be the threat of displacing body in favor of mind or abandoning the real for the virtual....The virtual is not a geometric, spatial, or technological concept, nor is it structured by phantasmatic or imaginary projections alone; rather, it is the domain of latency or potentiality, given that the boundaries between the virtual and the real or the physical are unsustainable" (1997, p. 115).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

confers this relationship between power and confession:

> Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom: traditional themes in philosophy, which a "political history of truth" would have to overturn by showing that truth is not a nature free—nor error servile—but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this (p. 60).

Indeed, confession in the west is the measure of freedom equating those subjects who confess as "free" and those who do not as necessarily politically impeded from exercising this freedom of self-identity to a larger social body. For instance, there is a widespread belief in the west that the "confession" of homosexuality implicates a necessarily "freer" subject than, for instance, someone in the Muslim world who is *assumed to be* sexually repressed and/or oppressed because he or she does not "speak the same language" of sexual liberation.[61] The cynicism in many "marginalized" communities towards those individuals who refuse naming under traditional categories is abundant and this same impulse to name is based on the theory that visibility *en mass* is tantamount to empowerment, while anything other is generally regarded as "closeting" and social conformism. This is, of course, an unsound coupling since we know that visibility simply neither evokes nor accompanies power.[62]

---

[61] Interestingly enough, Foucault discusses the social numbing of sexual discourses: "Is it not the aim of inciting people to speak of sex that it is made to mirror, at the outer limit of every actual discourse, something akin to a secret whose discovery is imperative, a thing abusively reduced to silence, and at the same time difficult and necessary, dangerous and precioiis to divulge? We must not forget that by making sex into that which, above all else, had to be confessed, the Christian pastoral always presented it as the disquieting enigma: not a think which stubbornly shows itself, but one which always hides, the insidious presence that speaks in a voice so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it...What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, whilte exploiting it as *the* secret" (pp. 34-35).

[62] In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the panopticon, which has become a valid model for understanding the discourse of power and visibility: "They are like so

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But it is precisely this impulse to name that western society utilizes in its pretense of exercising many freedoms of sexuality and gender while, all along, bodies remain steadfastly intractable to language of certainty and truth. In many senses, current gender discourse has ghettoized itself in claiming a certain "freedom" of identity by asserting the very tools of language and visibility that heretofore had marginalized that very identity. At the same time, however, the current discourses of gender have sought solidarity in varying topographies. We can see how the language of gender has become a neocolonializing force projected across various socio-economic strata and geographies, inflecting singular meaning upon "non-white" and "third world" bodies.[63] More specifically, we observe this trend in academia where "queering" texts and cinema across cultural boundaries is now commonplace and absolutely replicates the very colonial imperatives that mark, for instance, Cesaire Lombroso's nineteenth century investigations of criminality and race in Southern Italy. As Malti-Douglas writes, perhaps this obsession with "outing" is the veneer for a deeper problematic relationship to both homosexuality and homosexuality: "There is a tendency in the West to interpret examples of homosociality as indexes of latent or overt

---

many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap" (p. 200).

[63] Barbara Haraway writes: "The universalizing power of the sex-gender system and the analytical split between public and private were also sharply criticized politically, especially by women of colour, as part of the ethnocentric and imperializing tendencies of European and Euro-American feminisms. The category of gender obscured or subordinated all the other "others". Efforts to use Western or "white" concepts of gender to characterize a "Third World Woman" often resulted in reproducing orientalist, racist, and colonialist discourse" (p. 144).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

homosexuality. But this is really a reflection of the obsessional relationship of Western culture with homosexuality, and the culture's homophobia, since the later Middle Ages" (p. 15). Gender studies in the west, as such, would seem to be in crisis as our will to free meaning through language has, somewhere down the road, taken a wrong turn and become an absolute imperative to name, confirm and stabilize as "ours".

It is not enough, as Butler endeavors, to claim that the performance of gender is somehow always either transcendental or subversive of contemporary social relations since her analysis of drag culture—despite what she claims to theorize—necessarily implicates the performing subject's body in either sameness or opposition.[64] If we are to understand the multi-dimensionality of Non-Bodies, we must be willing to relinquish our hold on language and the tropes for defining singular, *real,* and natural identities. As well, we must forego monolithic perceptions and expressions of the human body as any more natural than the body's surrounding geographies, technologies and architectures. Instead, what I am proposing is a release of language as the sole bearer of identity and an embrace of the constructed, fashioned, technologized, performed and topographically embellished body. For language is but one of many tools for impressing and reflecting identity—and it just may be the very nature of language to inscribe which is the danger for those who advocate fluid bodies of non-identities. For language is an instrument of encoding, of transiently inflecting

---

[64] Butler writes "Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (1993, p. 241). But clearly her use of traditional modalities of male/man/masculine and female/woman/feminine are highly problematic and are arguably shadowed by her theory.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meaning, but coupled with the power of discourse—which records meaning and reinflects it time and time again—language carves out a deeply entrenched texture of place, time and history. In a certain way, we need to conterminously believe and disbelieve language in order to leave open the possibilities of temporal rewritings and silences, but perhaps this is a most awesome task to ask. Likewise, I would suggest that identity politics which are tethered to the every letter and hyphen of newly named races, sexes, genders and sexualities ought to be rethought. Simply put, these are not solutions to a much deeper paradox.

The problem with the incommensurability of bodies or language, the "lack" as it were, has everything to do with the way that language and bodies are objectified quite literally. This lack is manifestsed because of the ways in which we have discursively aligned identities diachronically in the language of history, science and politics *to specific bodies, through specific language.* Butler's work initially opens up many possibilities of perpetually re-reading gender and sexuality through performance and language, but then this structure entirely collapses as if a house of cards because she has eliminated from her discourse the very arbitrary nature of all bodies and identities (to include those of "masculinist domination"). Performativity is simply not about belonging or opposing some prior ideal or tradition. Performativity is also about discovering the potentialities of such traditions and re-performing them, it is about confusing order, and it is mostly about bodies enacting temporality, consciousness, and desires while also interacting in a world of *other bodies* with their own trajectories of temporality, consciousness, and desires. The west is a culture where, at times, language is used far too literally and where utterances are really believed to *be* what they *say.* Indeed, this can be useful to effect business. In fact, at times language can

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

seem like a crystal ball in the west. But there are severe downfalls to a cultural use of language in which naming presupposes essence and in which all identity *must* necessarily give into the public act of identifying oneself, confessing to be like *x*, and yes, even of belonging.[65] It is Butler's shaky positing of "kinship" as "oppositional discourse", that ultimately is the site for reprocessing language, social relations and bodies under the rubric of the normative, the stable, the same. Not only do I fail to see anything "oppositional" or subversive in this gesture of redeeming togetherness as identity, I believe such romantic visions of belonging (to a larger nexus of *same-identied bodies*) form part of the very ideological substratum upon which sex/gender binaries are also constructed. Identity politics of the late twentieth century have evidenced that marginal identities which coalesce and form united fronts against social and political

---

[65] Walter Benjamin's essay, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man", focuses on naming and the "mental being of man": "The linguistic being of things is their language; this proposition, applied to man, means: the linguistic being of man is mental being *in* his language. However, the language of man being (insofar as it is communicable) by *naming* all other things. But do we know any other languages that name things? It should not be accepted that we know of no languages other than that of man, for this is untrue. We only know of no *naming* language other than that of man; to identify naming language with language as such is to rob linguistic theory of its deepest insights. *It is therefore the linguistic being of man to name things* ... Naming, in the realm of language, has as its sole purpose and its incomparably high meaning that it is the innermost nature of language itself. Naming is that by which nothing beyond it is communicated, and *in* which language itself communicates itself absolutely. In naming the mental entity that communicates itself is *language*. Where mental being in its communication is language itself in its absolute wholeness, only there is the name, and only the name is there. Name as the heritage of human language therefore vouches for the fact *that language as such* is the mental being of man; and only for this reason is the mental being of man, alone among all mental entities, communicable without residue. On this is founded the difference between human language and the language of things. But because the mental being of man is language itself, he cannot communicate himself by it but only in it. The quintessence of this intensive totality of language as the mental being of man is naming. Man is the namer, by this we recognize that through him pure language speaks. All nature, insofar as it communicates itself, communicates itself in language, and so finally in man. Hence he is the lord of nature and can give names to things. Only through the linguistic being of things can he gain knowledge of them from within himself—in name" (pp. 317-319).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

oppression are fraught with the very problems of splintering, of non-conformism, and of, justly, non-like identities. To offer kinship as a way of recreating community that somehow conjoins the "marginalized", we fail to recognize that the center/margin dichotomy artificially imposes the center as normative and the marginal as difference and that amongst the so-called "marginalized" are a great many different bodies and voices. Ultimately, we fail to understand the very complexities and discontinuities that metanarratives of ulterior identity can never bring *out*.

One example that comes to mind is the massive gather of the Promise Keepers, a gathering of American Christian men in October 1997. I was in Washington D.C. when the Promise Keepers convened in a weekend which was dedicated to "healing" and "bonding". I noticed how the first few Promise Keepers I came across on the streets looked very white, very male, very Christian. Then I saw a few dozen more of these similar bodies, all having the same aesthetics of fashion—shorts, sneakers, t-shirts and baseball caps. And I thought, "More white, male Christians." Then after the day progressed and my passages around D.C. became increasingly more dense as by mid-afternoon I and my friend were surrounded by several thousand of these men. What was supposed to feel Christian solidarity suddenly did not feel like this at all and at once I turned to my friend, Bruno, and remarked, "Doesn't this feel like Gay Pride?" Bruno confessed he was thinking the same thing but did not want to say it out loud. There we were in an epistemic conflict surrounded by thousands of men who in their very masses were no longer readable to me as straight, white Christian men—for I noticed few other ethnicities present, I noticed the drab fashion statements contagious amongst the masses, and I read the various

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Christian sloganed t-shirts. Yet, compositely I could only read this gathering of men as "gay male". I could no longer see straight men before me, but instead I saw a very homophilic atmosphere, a very queer space of men loving men. Ironically, the very mechanisms which would render my interpretation as false conterminously rendered it as true for the signs of straightness and gayness—the actions of the love of Jesus and the love of fellow man—were truly conflated.

Indeed, performance, like language, is a field into which we invest a polyphony of meanings, textures, and nuances from which the readings of such actions and language will forever retain the traces of the past while invoking the present through newer hues and designs. The social fabric of reading bodies and creating identities is necessarily part of a cultural *métissage*[66] in which narratives are not to be perceived as linear, time not frozen, and meaning certainly not fixed or limited to the binaries of real/subversive. Unless we understand all language as necessarily *other* and all bodies as necessarily constructed, we risk repeating the discursive conjunctions of center/margin, hetero/homo, that gender theory is precipitously transmitting in the effort to free and make visible the queer subject. Perhaps we, as a culture, are so obsessed with queering identity, that we fail to recognize the queerness in all bodies and language, for neither the body nor speech was every really *real* and neither was ever a true referent to a singular, opaque, normative experience. Let us return to the Non-Body as that constructed site of being and language. Let us release ourselves into space.

---

[66] I take the term fro Edouard Glissant's *Le discours antillai* in which he describes *métissage* as a form of cultural creolization through which he describes cultural hybridity in the Caribbean (pp. 462-464).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter Two

Language and the Body in Barthes, Khatibi and Sarduy: The Intertextual and Intersexual

J'ai rêvé, l'autre nuit, que mon corps était des mots

—Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La mémoire tatouée*

Barthes' analysis of Balzac's "Sarrasine", *S/Z*, is a text which seeks to understand both corporeality and writing as multifarious bodies upon which meaning is vectored. In *S/Z*, Barthes presents Balzac's orginal story, line by line, while intercepting Balzac's text with his own narrative, giving possible readings of Balzac's text and the body of Zambinella. From his introduction to *S/Z* Barthes challenges the reader to understand the plural as that which lies not only in the representation—the *métissage* of texts presented—but also to understand the plural as that which takes place in the reading of the text:

> Ceux qui aiment les belles histoires pourront certes commencer par la fin et lire d'abord le texte tuteur, qui est donné en annexe dans sa pureté et sa continuité, tel qu'il est sorti de l'édition, bref tel qu'on le lit habituellement. Mais pour nous qui cherchons à établir un pluriel, nous ne pouvons arrêter ce pluriel aux portes de la lecture: il faut que la lecture soit elle aussi plurielle, c'est-à-dire sans ordre d'entrée..." (p. 22).

As such, Barthes sets the stage where meaning is invoked from the process of representation, the text, and the process of interpretation—for Barthes the text is not a static issuance of language, but a space upon which meaning and identity are continually traversed. Likewise, Barthes' reading of the text is mirrored in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the interpretation of the body whereby he claims that language, like the body, is always cutting away meaning, as if castration: "Le champ symbolique n'est donc pas celui des sexes biologiques; c'est celui de la castration: du *châtrant/châtré*, de l'*actif/passif*. C'est dans ce champ (et non dans celui des sexes biologiques) que se distribuent d'une façon pertinente les personnages de l'histoire" (p. 43). Language, like the body, invokes meaning that will always occupy a poetic space of interpretation and play in which the active and passive readings of the body and of the text will necessarily be both too little and too much.

Barthes initiates his narrative with the story of Sarrasine, a man who has fallen in love with Zambinella, a singer from a nightclub who is endowed with all the virtues of femininity as well as a voice which embodies her "perfection": "Un être si parfait existe-t-il?" (p. 237). But it is this "perfection" which becomes the basis for the synchronic creation and destruction of the very meaning of language (of "perfection") and of the very body of Zambinella as it is the space upon which meaning of the feminine, the real, and finally, the "ideal" are represented. Barthes states: "Ainsi Zambinella est la Sur-Femme, la Femme essentielle, parfaite (en bonne théologie, la perfection est l'essence, et la Zambinella est un «chef d'œuvre»)..." (p. 78). Zambinella is the "Sur-Femme" who surpasses all expectations—while also meeting them—of her adorer, Sarrasine. That is, of course, until he later learns that his lady-love is not, in fact, a "lady" after all as one evening sees *her* dressed *en homme*, the body transformed, the image destroyed. Barthes continues:

> [L]e *plus* et le *moins* peuvent être rangés génériquement dans une même classe, celle de l'excès, ce qui est *au-delà* ne diffère plu de ce qui est *en deçà*, l'essence du code (la perfection) a finalement même statut que ce qui est hors du code (le monstre, le castrat), car la vie, la norme, l'humanité ne sont que des migrations intermédiaires, dans le champ des répliques. Ainsi Zambinella est la Sur-Femme, la Femme essentielle, parfaite (en

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> bonne théologie, la perfection est l'essence, et la Zambinella est un «chef-d'œuvre»), mais en même temps, du même mouvement, elle est le sous-homme, le castrat, le manque, le *moins* définitif; en elle, absolument désirable, en lui, absolument exécrable, les deux transgressions se confondent. Cette confusion est juste, puisque la transgression n'est rien d'autre qu'une *marque* (Zambinella est marquée à la fois par la perfection et par le manque); elle permet au discours un jeu d'équivoques: parler de la perfection «surnaturelle» de l'Adonis, c'est en même temps parler du manque «sous-naturel» du castrat (p. 78).

Language, like Zambinella's body, is both marked because it is too much—perfection, the *Sur-Femme*, the being who is, in her perfection, excess—and too little because of *la manque*, that which is *sous-naturel*. Sarrasine cannot "define" her and passes several minutes pondering the possibility, pondering the other: "C'est une femme," he reassures himself and then, confronted with further suspicion, fear of the "truth," he asks her: "Dis-moi la vérité...Tu es une femme?" (p. 255). A question posed in the affirmative, awaiting only one response—an affirmation, a consent reifying Sarrasine's object of love:

> La Femme coupée en morceaux, tel est l'objet offert aux amours de Sarrasine. Partagée, écartée, la femme n'est qu'une sorte de dicitonnaire d'objets-fétiches. Ce corps déchiré, déchiqueté (on se rappelle les jeux de l'enfant au collège), l'artiste (et c'est là le sens de sa vocation) le rassemble en un corps total, corps d'amour enfin descendu du ciel de l'art, en qui le fétichisme s'abolit et par qui Sarrasine guérit (pp. 118-119).

The body of Woman, like language, is torn asunder, and then is represented for its reading, remaking, and rendering of the *corps total*, and likewise the recreation of the text which also undergoes this incessant process of reading, undoing, and reconstructing. The body of Zambinella *as incomplete* becomes the contiguous object of love and gender identification for Sarrasine—hers is a body that mirrors the feminine, but also that which tricks the eye, tricks the heart, and displaces the firm separation between the real and the imaginary, the somatic and language: "Le corps zambinellien est un corps réel; mais ce corps réel n'est total...que pour autant qu'il descend d'un corps déjà écrit par la statuaire; il est lui aussi une

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

réplique, issue d'un code. Ce code est infini, puisqu'il est écrit" (p. 121). Indeed Zambinella is the text incarnate that issues forth meanings of and on the body (her body) and likewise mirrors Sarrasine's desire, sexuality and language. As such, Balzac's text is also the space of similar readings and misreadings of the sexual and intertextual readings that one can evidence upon the identities of both protagonists and the meanings of the texts. The body and the text manifest themselves as temporal inflections, meanings which are always plural.

Through this analysis of Zambinella's sex, Barthes examines the *dédoublement* of sex by joining the opposing codes of sex and gender and inserting them "in the same sentence" (p. 203). The transgression of the symbolic economy can only be realized through the human body which is traversed and vectored by the marks of gender—the body is performed, contorted, dressed and postured. As such, Zambinella represents the possibility for the relativistic positions of sex and gender to move and shift, thus persistently redefining each other.[1] Barthes manifests the Zambinellian body as that which is conterminously real and incomplete, as that which is a replica of something other. And it is both Balzac's story and the body of Woman (Zambinella) that is the space of perpetual representation and interpretation within an economy of signs whereby the "topological transgressions" embody various spaces of meaning: language as separated by opposites, genre as embodied by the neuter, and the body marked

---

[1] Barthes writes of Zambinella's gender and sex: "Sarrasine est cependant encombré d'un nouveau terme, le castrat, qu'il lui faut situer dans la hiérarchie morale des êtres biologiques; ayant besoin de placer la faiblesse abolue, dernière, dans la Femme, il donne au castrat une place intermédiaire (*«même un castrat ne serait pas aussi lâche»*); l'enthymème, fondateur de toute preuve, s'organise alors ainsi: c'est la Femme qui occupe le dernier degré de la pusillanimité; or Zambinella, par l'humiliation de sa posture, la bassesse de son comportement, se place à ce dernier degré; donc Zambinella est bien une femme" (p. 201).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by sex.[2] The body, therefore, like language, is never singular. Thus, Barthes embraces the idea of a *langage poétique* which offers the possibility for representing and interpreting bodies that are simply not singular and utterly impossible to code. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,* he comments upon this very notion of the multiformity of body:

> «Quel corps? Nous en avons plusieurs.» J'ai un corps digestif, j'ai un corps nauséeux, un troisième migraineux, et ainsi de suite: sensuel, musculaire (la main de l'écraivain), humoral, et surtout: *émotif:* qui est ému, bougé, ou tassé ou exalté, ou apeuré, sans qu'il y paraisse rien. D'autre part, je suis captivé jusqu'à la fascination par le corps socialisé, le corps mythologique, le corps artificiel (celui des travestis japonais) et le corps prostitué (de l'acteur). Et en plus de ces corps publics (littéraires, écrits), j'ai, si je puis dire, deux corps locaux: un corps parisien (alerte, fatigué) et un corps campagnard (reposé, lourd) (p. 65).

The body maintains a performative link to the world inasmuch as it is both real as it is iconic, the body is a copy inasmuch as it is consumed, and the body is always performative inasmuch as it is artificial. Like the body, Barthes maintains that language occupies a space of multifarious meanings, for he espouses the neuter as the locus of intercultural inscriptions and erasures, where meaning comes and goes, and where meaning, like Zambinella, loses its "anatomical character".[3]

---

[2] Barthes comments: "De ce corps, *Sarrasine* raconte les transgressions topologiques. L'antithèse du *dedans* et du *dehors:* abolie. Le *dessous:* vide. La chaîne des copies: interrompue. Le contrat du désir: truqué...En somme la nouvelle *représente* (nous sommes dans un art du lisible) un effondrement généralisé des économies: l'économie du langage, ordinairement protégée par la séparation des contraires, l'économie des genres (le neutre ne doit pas prétendre à l'humain), l'économie du corps (ses lieux ne puevent s'échanger, les sexes ne peuvent s'équivaloir)..." (pp. 220-221).

[3] In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,* he maintains that language loses it "anatomical character", language becomes a space of both moving through activity and passivity: "Le Neutre n'est pas une moyenne d'actif et de passif; c'est plutôt un va-et-vient, une oscillation amorale, bref, si l'on peut dire, le contraire d'une antinomie. Comme valeur (issue de la région Passion), le Neutre correspondrait à la force par laquelle la pratique sociale balaye et irréalise les antinomies scolastiques (Marx, cité dans *SR,* 61: "C'est seulement dans l'existence sociale que les antinomies telles que subjectivisme et

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Throughout much of Barthes' writing, we are confronted with this notion of the neuter as that which defies nature, refuses singularization and homogeneity, and operates outside of opposition. Barthes asserts the neuter, not as a third term, what he calls the *degré zéro*, but rather he confirms the neuter as part of yet "another wave in the infinite chain of language"—both the body and language are neuter, canvases upon which diverse meanings are necessarily inscribed and taken:

> Pas de Nature. Dans un premier temps, tout se ramène à la lutte d'une *pseudo-Physis* (Doxa, naturel, etc.) et d'une *anti-Physis* (toutes mes utopies personnelles): l'une est haïssable, l'autre est désirable. Cependant, dans un temps ultérieur, cette lutte elle-même lui paraît trop théâtrale; elle est alors, sourdement, repousée, distancée par la défense (le désir) du Neutre. Le Neutre n'est donc pas le troisième terme—le degré zéro—d'une opposition à la fois sémantique et conflictuelle; c'est, *à un autre cran de la chaîne infinie du langage*, le second terme d'un nouveau paradigme, dont la violence (le combat, la victoire, le théâtre, l'arrogance) est le terme plein (p. 136).

Where nature ceases to exist, desire takes over and the violence of meaning is born. And it is this intersection of language and the body that presents the reader with certain dilemmas since much contemporary western literary and gender theories necessitate oppositions, demand perspicuity and reduce all meaning into finite parcels of language. Barthes' neuter, however, defies any such claims to certainty or dialectical engagements of meaning since there is, according to his theory, absolutely no determinate meaning to be taken from either corporeality or language. Indeed the neuter is the terrain of *différence* as the it becomes the pivotal space for understanding both the slippage and displacement of language, and likewise the neuter is the coetaneous construction

---

objectivisme, spiritualisme et matérialisme, activité et passivité perdent leur caractère antinomique...')" (pp. 135-136).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and escape of meaning.[4]

Throughout his writings, Barthes has demonstrated that somatic and linguistic meanings are always appropriated and borrowed from other bodies and substances since all matter inhabits various domains in which the antithetical spaces of the real and artificial worlds are made paradoxical. It is not that the "man-made" world is any less real than the so-called "natural world", it is simply that Barthes positions both the natural and fabricated worlds as moments which are intertwined and as loci where meaning is entirely relative and often dependent upon the juxtaposition of these perceived antitheses—natural and constructed bodies.[5] In *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, for instance, Barthes maintains that modern writing is independent from the act of writing itself—writing is always double and likewise is a space of perpetual superimposition of meanings and signs. For writing does not evoke a true meaning or image to behold, but instead presents an environment in which the form represented might diverge

---

[4] Barthes, in *Roland Barthes*, writes of this conflict which *différence* embodies: "De même, la *différence*, mot insistant et très vanté, vaut surtout parce qu'elle dispense ou triomphe du conflit. Le conflit est sexuel, sémantique; la différence est plurielle, sensuelle et textuelle; le sens, le sexe sont des principes de construction, de constitution; la différence est l'allure même d'un poudroiement, d'une dispersion, d'un miroitement; il ne s'agit plus de retrouver, dans la lecture du monde et du sujet, des oppositions, mais des débordements, des empiétements, des fuites, des glissements, des déplacements, des dérapages" (pp. 73-74).

[5] In "Le monde-objet", Barthes discusses this problem of the antithetical space of nature and the "man-made" in classical Dutch painting: "Il y a dans les musées de Hollande un petit peintre qui mériterait peut-être la renommée littéraire de Vermeer de Delft. Saenredam n'a paint ni des visages ni des objets, mais surtout l'intérieur d'églises vides, réduites au velouté beige et inoffensife d'une glace à la noisette. Ces églises, où l'on ne voit que des pans de bois et de chaux, son dépleuplées sans recours, et cette négation-là va autrement loin que la dévastation des idoles...Saenredam est un paradoxe: il fait sentir par antithèse la nature de la peinture hollandaise classique, qui, elle, n'a nettoyé proprement la religion que pour établir à sa place l'homme et son empire des choses. Là où dominait la Vierge et ses escaliers d'anges, l'homme s'installe, les pieds sur les mille objets de la vie quotidienne, entouré triomphalement de ses usages. Le voilà donc au sommet de l'histoire, ne connaissant d'autre destin qu'une appropriation progressive de la matière" (p. 19).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

or combine with other trajectories of meaning—and the intention of the author is not necessarily that of the reader.[6] Again, it is not that Barthes is invested in a system where language conflictually engages the world by hopelessly combatting one *real* with another, but rather Barthes bestows the reader the possibility of understanding meaning through movement, rupture and ambiguity where the true meaning of language comes not in the construction of the image, but rather its very destruction, the ruination of that which one wishes to possess:

> Il y a donc une impasse de l'écriture, et c'est l'impasse de la société; la plupart comprennent qu'il ne peut y avoir de langage universel en dehors d'une universalité concrète, et non plus mystique ou nominale, du monde civil. Il y a donc dans toute écriture présente une double postulation: il y a le mouvement d'une rupture et celui d'un avènement, dont l'ambiguïté fondamentale est qu'il faut bien que la Révolution puise dans ce qu'elle veut détruire l'image même de ce qu'elle veut posséder... La multiplication des écritures institue une Littérature nouvelle dans la mesure où celle-ci n'invente son langage que pour être un projet: la Littérature devient l'Utopie du langage (pp. 65-66).

Thus, the multifarious nature of writing necessitates that literature be understood as a realm for a Utopia of language in which that which one wishes to possess is that which one destroys. Multiple bodies and plural identities necessitate an understanding of language that coinstantaneously seeks to destroy meaning and create another, that searches for meaning in each representation and allows for an entirely different meaning in interpretation as the text flows and opens itself to meaning.[7] Likewise this impasse of meaning sets the scene for a seduction

---

[6] Herein Barthes writes: "L'écriture moderne est un véritable organisme indépendant qui croît autour de l'acte littéraire, la décore d'une valeur étrangère à son intention, l'engage continuellement dans un double mode d'existence, et superpose au contenu des mots, des signes opaques qui portent en eux une histoire, une compromission ou une rédemption secondes, de sorte qu'à la situation de la pensée, se mêle un destin supplémentaire, souvent divergent, toujours encombrant, de la forme" (p. 62).

[7] Antithetical to the text, however, Barthes posits the stereotype which demonstrates a body of lack. In *Roland Barthes*, he writes: "La fatique et la fraîcheur: Le stéréotype, c'est cet emplacement du discours *où le corps manque*, où l'on est sûr qu'il n'est pas.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of bodies and language where either there is too much or too little and where—regardless of excess or deficiency—meaning is constantly traversing binaries, contesting the very division between words, bodies, gender, sex and sexuality.

As I assert in Chapter One, discussions of gender, sex and sexuality in the west are highly problematic because of the west's allegiance to maintaining binaries through language (if even discretely so, through various attempts to deconstruct such binaries). Given such faithfulness to language and body as absolute constructs in the west, I have found that any theory which portends to have liberated identity vis a vis language seems a purely fantastical posture, laden with the typical narratives of absolute freedom and democracy typical in many discourses of liberation. As contemporary western discourse has embraced difference as an agency for understanding various bodies and fields of language, the concept of difference ultimately maintains distinct separations between sexes, genders and sexualities disallowing dialogue, fluidity, change and destruction. Clearly we have seen how difference in the west has operated to undermine the freedoms that many assume with language and as such difference comes back to "haunt" the speaker—for the very moment difference is evoked, there are necessarily bodies which contradict their inscriptions and likewise language that disaffirms these bodies.[8] Today queer or feminist theory is simply not enough,

---

Inversement, dans ce texte prétendument collectif que je suis en train de lire, parfois, le stéréotype (l'écrivance) cède et l'écriture apparaît; je suis sûr alors que ce bout d'énoné a été produit par *un* corps" (p. 93).

[8] Salah Stétié in *Archer aveugle* ellaborates this point: "Qu'il y ait, par ailleurs,une crise de l'amour de la langage, comme le certifia Roland Barthes, qui songerait à le nier? Peut-être seulement ceux qui croient à la montée des nouveaux langages: codes et signes dont est en train de se constituer, jour après jour, le vocabulaire redoutablement elliptique de l'Occident. La civilisation technique et technologique n'a pas de temps à perdre pour aller à l'essentiel de son message: elle interpelle au plus bref les robots de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for where "queerness" might define certain bodies, for example, it also creates an even larger abyss of other bodies for whom naming becomes difficult if not impossible. Clearly, the work of Roland Barthes has, over the past forty years, served to open up dialogue to understanding the problems of signification of language, bodies and desire. However, it would seem that much western theory has elided the importance of truly negotiating new and even ambiguous spaces of identity, rather than reinstalling the old *as new.*

Thus, studying a figure such as Balzac's Zambinella, we are presented with a body which reads on many levels of the "real" and upon which the identity of others (ie. Sarrasine) likewise inflects meaning upon other bodies. Indeed, it cannot be stressed enough that Barthes' study is really about the "/" dividing Balzac's protagonists, the line dividing Sarrasine from Zambinella, for clearly each body inflects the other's body with meaning, as each gender and sexuality in turn reproduces this cycle of signification and contestation. And Balzac's text itself, "Sarrasine", is not only the space of inscribing Zambinella's identity, it is also another terrain upon which desire transmits and transmutes all fixed identities, including the written word upon the page. Barthes' rereading of Balzac's "Sarrasine" reaches beyond any simplistic or systematic theorization of meaning and instead looks towards signification as that which opens up language and corporeality in *all their senses,* exposing the underside of meaning while breaking up facile binaries into fragmented spaces of incoherence, construction, dissolution and excess. Barthes' theorization of language and the body offers a viable vision for identity politics in that signification of sex, gender and sexuality will always mirror language and vice versa—all are necessarily plural and irreducible

---

demain que déjà nous sommes" (p. 175).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to fixity.

In this way, the subversion of somatic codes vis a vis language sets into motion an amorphous symbolic identity of gender (and often of sexuality) and likewise, gender would reciprocally be affected by these fluid reference points (signifiers)—hence the equally amorphous construction of the body. It is this indeterminate structure, this dialogic fluidity *between* the denominations of "gender and sex" which I find neglected within current feminist inquiries: sex seems to occupy a static space upon which arguments of gender and sexuality are then based. Also, more recent inquiries into feminism attempt to conflate gender and sexuality into one cohesive unit, thus losing the affectual relationship between the two.[9] Barthes clearly evidences the slippage between sex, gender and sexuality and has advanced a *langage poétique* as that which works to free meaning and unshackle identity. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,* for example, he sees the dichotomies placed upon the body (sex) and the social (gender and sexuality) as modalities which limit the body and the sensibilities, rather than free them.[10] His solution, however, lies in refusing binaries—of neither

---

[9] See Gayle Rubin's article entitle "Thinking Sex" in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality.* Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Pandora, 1989.

[10] Herein he writes: "Actif/passif: *Viril/non viril*: ce couple célèbre, qui règne sur toute la Doxa, résume tous les jeux d'alterance: le jeu paradigmatique du sens et le jeu sexuel de la parade (tout sens bien formé est une parade: accouplement et mise à mort). "Ce qui est difficile ce n'est pas de libérer la sexualité selon un projet plus ou moins libertaire, c'est de la dégager du sens, y compris de la transgression comme sens. Voyez les pays arabes. On y transgresse aisément certains règles de la "bonne" sexualité, par un pratique assez facile de l'homosexualité...; mais cette transgression reste implacablement soumise à un régime du sens strict: l'homosexualité, pratique transgressive, reproduit alors immédiatement en elle...le paradigme le plus pur qu'on puisse imaginer, celui de l'*actif/passif*, du *possédant/possédé*, du *niqueur/niqué*, du *tapeur/tapé*...' Dans ces pays, donc, l'aternative est pure, systématique; elle ne connaît aucun terme neutre ou complexe, comme s'il était impossible d'imaginer à cette relation d'exclusion (*aut...aut*) des termes extra-polaires. Or, cette alternative est verbalisée surtout par des garçons bourgeois ou petit-bourgeois qui, placés dans le champ de la promotion, ont besoin d'un discours à la fois *sadique* (anal) et *clair* (arquebouté sur le

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

accepting one subject position nor the other—and as such Barthes sets out to create a "happy sexuality" in which meaning is neither obliterated nor elided, but rather expanded and collapsed into temporal shiftings, redefinitions and polysemous forms.

Taking Barthes' opus as a starting point for discussing identity, I would argue then that between the binaries of gender, masculine/feminine, and of sexuality, homosexual/heterosexual, lies a plethora of unspeculated possibilities, a plurality of identities upon which there is neither a formulaic pattern of signifying *one* gender based on a *certain* sex (and vice versa), nor a device for inscribing *one* identity, sexual or gender-specific, since inasmuch as sexuality is linked to gender, it is also linked to race or class. Any attempt to explain the dichotomies of gender and sex usually end up reinforcing these paradigms without carefully examining their interfarious symbolic orders within culture. What Barthes gives us then in *S/Z* is access to a *langage poétique* which radically calls into question the language of empiricism and which challenges the division between the symbolic and Nature, opening up the somatic to the social and creating a poetics of the body in which clarity is superceded by the baroque excess to which he refers as the *texte gongorien.*[11] As Barthes contends in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture,* the

---

sens); ils veulent un paradigme pur du sens et du sexe, sans fuite, sans faute, sans débordement vers les marges. Cependant, dès lors que l'alternative est refusée (dès lors que le paradigme est brouillé), l'utopie commence: le sens et le sexe deviennent l'objet d'un jeu libre, au sein duquel les formes (polysémiques) et les pratiques (sensuelles), libérées de la prison binaire, vont se mettre en état d'expansion infinie. Ainsi peuvent naître un texte gongorien et une sexualité heureuse" (pp. 136-137).

[11] Paul Julian Smith discusses Barthes' use of the Spanish baroque versus what he calls "French clairity": The transgression which will transcend transgression itself and free the subject from the binary prison is thus given a name: happiness, or alternatively, Góngora. Barthes' use of the name here is no doubt (to use his own term) "reactive". It serves a rhetorical function in his argument, by denoting the exclusion of the term he rejects. The "Gongorine" text is implicitly opposed to the supposed characeristics of French classical writing attacked in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, 32-40, and in the essays

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

diversity of writing institutes a "new literature" that invents its own language and its own space, "la Littérature devient l'Utopie du langage" (p. 65), I would argue that the body, for Barthes, similarly becomes a text upon which discourse and desire are inscribed to create a utopia of sex, gender, and sexuality.

What many theorists argue regarding Barthes' *S/Z*, however, is that the creation of a space of the neuter simultaneously bars men's access to the feminine and further abandons any question of homosexuality.[12] What I find more interesting, however, is not what Barthes' analysis does not say, what it does not explicitly or statically *name*, but instead how this space of *langage/corps poétique* opens up a space for renaming identities in an age when traditional channels of naming are being challenged, when human rights of groups previously thought perverse are being vindicated, when ideas of race and nation are being reformulated, restructured, and when boundaries and currencies are constantly being rewritten and exchanged. For gender discourse, as Butler points out, evidences a dilemma in *representation* inasmuch as identity is plural and fragmented and thus the peril for understanding the economy of signification lies not in an encroaching masculine which deteriorates or marginalizes the feminine (or the other), but rather in the impetus to consolidate the voices of opposition under a homogenizing narrative which suffuses the space of particularity with the markings of the larger, and often antagonistic, narrative. Thus, I find it much more engaging to look at the ways in which other culturally

---

on La Bruyère and La Rouchefoucauld: continuity, metonymic progression, closure. French "clarity", ridiculed by Barthes in *Critique et vérité*, is superseded by Spanish "baroque" convolution, its obscurities suposedly more open to the free-play or sense or meaning (p. 47).

[12] See D.A. Miller's critique of Barthes' "neuter" in *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (1992)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

specific readings of Barthes distend and reinvent a *langage poétique* which at once reevaluates the position of gender, sex, and sexuality, and that likewise renders visible the markings of a cultural *métissage* in which the polarity of language and the body are reenacted in order to evoke performances which subvert the dichotomies of sex and gender while retaining a cultural apparatus of reading these bodies.

In his book, *Bringing Out Barthes* (1992), D.A. Miller criticizes Barthes' analysis of "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* by compelling Barthes to definitively *prove* the existence of the "gay material," the "homosexual thematics," within Balzac's text. Yet, recognizing what he calls Barthes *discretion* or "disappearing act," Miller argues that current reception of Barthes' work makes the "social symbolic space allotted to gay men as impossible, impassable" (pp.3-15). Chronicling current politics of the body, pornography, AIDS, and his own life, Miller evidences the Barthesian neuter as a mode of repressing the "gay male gender bind" through Barthes' language play ("pseudo-linguistics") whereby the "*male* [gay] experience" is not defined through a barred access to the "feminine," but instead is understood as the blurring of the "double-binding" of the masculine and the feminine whereby "meaning and sex become the object of a free play." Barthes' neuter, according to Miller, does not demonstrate a lack of gender, a *genderless* subject, but instead embodies the "*male* experience of such deprivation," a maneuver which discretely elides the homosexual body. For Miller this move despecifies the gay experience, cloaking the gay moment in binaried *heterosexual* paradigms of active/passive, what Miller terms a Barthesian "paradise of indeterminacy" (pp.14-16). Miller rejects the elision of the discrete, gay specificity within Barthes' texts, whereby through the release of the "double-binding exigency," the neuter

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

obfuscates the "specificity of women" thus retaining the trace of "a man's barred access to 'femininity'" (p. 15). In other words, sex, gender, and sexuality seem to impose ontological limits upon each other, whereby a theatre of gender conceals certain "secrets," experiences, and desires in order to *discretely* maintain the "Open Secret."

Miller's project presents us with a *sex-gender-sexuality* paradigm in which the "gender aporia" of masculine/feminine preserves the double-bindings of current social discourse which is likewise reflected in contingent physical and social inscriptions: homosexual/heterosexual, private/public, knowledge/passion, same/different, and secrecy/disclosure. In recent discussions of sex, gender, and sexuality, the issue of *sex* has been relegated to the chromosomal or the reproductive (Foucault), *gender* to the behavioral, and *sexuality* to the behavioral *in relation to* the chromosomal, or as physical conduct relates to the sexed body.[13] Eve Sedgwick posits that indeed we might locate the sexual as a far more radical position of social construction that had previously been assessed to gender:

> But to the extent that, as Freud argued and Foucault assumed, the distinctively sexual nature of human sexuality has to do precisely with its excess over or potential difference from the bare choreographies of procreation, "sexuality" might be the very opposite of what we originally referred to as (chromosomal-based) sex: it could occupy, instead, even more than "gender" the polar position of the relational, the social/symbolic, the constructed, the variable, the representational (p. 29).

Through this analysis of sexuality, the Barthesian neuter could be viewed as the possibility for the relativistic positions of sexuality and gender to move and shift, thus redefining one another in the process. Sexuality would either reaffirm

---

[13] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's text, *Epistemology of the Closet*, in which she discusses the various analyses of biological versus cultural construction of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the discursive constructions of sex and gender through a "normative" performance (i.e. heterosexuality), or undermine these constructions through a "transgressive" act (i.e. homosexuality). For example, heterosexual practices *often* underscore the man's identity as "man" and the woman's identity as "woman", and likewise the man's relation to the "masculine" and the woman's relation to the "feminine." Yet, the popular reading of two men, for instance, engaging in a homosexual act would necessarily call into question their "masculinity" and in many cultures their identity as "men." Likewise, sexuality would reciprocally be affected by any subversion of gender (*"He acts very feminine... Could he be gay?"*) or sex (for instance, transsexuals who "confuse" these binaries altogether); hence the equally indefinite construction/performance of sexuality. It is this indeterminate structure, the fluidity *between* the denominations of "gender and sexuality" and "sex and sexuality," which I find neglected within current readings of gender that attempt to fix sex and gender as static entities *upon which* arguments and constructions of sexuality are then based.

To view sexuality within a purely dualistic rationale is to subsume any investigation of sex or gender *within the matrix of* sexuality since both sex and gender are discursively conceived as "givens"—they are already established, assumed, and "known." Thus, sexuality has historically fallen prey to these double binds, correlatively positioned as a constituent of sex and gender. Yet, much recent fiction and film has attempted to turn the tables on this "gender bind" through fantastic and real possibilities of sexualities which are played out through a concealed, unknown, hermaphroditic, or altered *sex* and through various tactics which shift gender roles or confuse the double binding of masculine/feminine through androgynous identity. Through the blurring of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

gender and/or sex, the relationship that sexuality shares with these two reference points, although often oblique, is none the less challenged and decentered from the homo/hetero dichotomy. While theorists such as Irigaray and Sedgwick are quick to point out that it is often the heterosexual matrix which serves as the basis for male homosocial and homosexual bonds, the identity of homosexuality is nonetheless played out through these static binaries of masculine/feminine whereby the homosexual and homosocial moments are surrendered to the functions of gender and the needs/desires of men, what Irigaray terms "hom(m)o-sexual monopoly" (p. 169-172).

Current narratives that play with traditional notions of sex and gender do not, in fact, conclusively bind sex and gender to sexuality, but rather they open up possibilities, offering new currents for examining the margins of sex, gender, sexuality through the heterosexist-based discourse of masculine/feminine, active/passive, public/private, and concealment/disclosure. Through the displacement of gender and/or sex, these dichotomies are emasculated—they lose the mummifying power of preserving the symbolic structures of sexuality. We can no longer rely on these "safe havens" of binaries to speak of sexuality through traditional object-choice discourse when the "object" (or subject) is cross-gendered, transsexual, or androgynous. More so, this paradigm becomes much more complex when the object-choice extends into the autoerotic/alloerotic, or when object-choice is completely disregarded for other themes such as: noncommercial/commercial, public/private, etcetera.[14] Bisexuality would seem to upset the binarisms inherent within sex and gender, as often we hear the

---

[14] Again, see Rubin's "Thinking Sex."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

critiques levelled at those who disrupt the purity of either homosexual or heterosexual desire. However, bisexuality does nothing more than legitimate the binaries in the very act of accepting both as modalities to embrace. It seems to me that we need to examine the manners in which these binaried social structures are discursively utilized to interpret sex, gender, and sexuality (as well as the definitional links between each) and furthermore, to scrutinize the modes of symbolic representation which form these stayed and carefully situated bases of analysis. Through an inquiry of the symbolic and the discursive, we can unearth the relational positions which reveal *not* the virtual identities of sex, gender, and sexuality, but rather the "knowledge," the construction of these spaces, which reinforces both the static binaries of identity and the interstitial dimensions which coextensively legitimate and which forms the empirical and epistemological architecture of identity.

By uncovering the traces of identity-formation we can then begin to look at sexuality as a fluid structure, as a *poly-sexual* space informed by *both* the physical and the social. Likewise, the double-bindings of gender and sex can be viewed as less inertly positioned to sexuality, as less determined by and determinant of sexuality. This notion of the bi-sexual, then, would reflect Barthes' notion of the neuter in such a way that we are not denied the ingrained dichotomies of sex, gender, and sexuality (not that we could ever do away with such binaries or histories thereof), but that the differences not accounted for by these dichotomies may be explored and understood as alternative, creative, and subjective spheres of being. In her introduction to *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Jacqueline Rose proposes that "[t]o understand subjectivity, sexual difference and fantasy in a way which neither entrenches the terms nor denies

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

them still seems to me to be a crucial task for today" (p. 23). Taking up Rose's challenge, I intend to evoke the various "paradises of indeterminacy" which, contrary to Miller's assertion, do not bar access to heterosexist paradigms of active/passive, homo/hetero, and masculine/feminine, but engage these dichotomies through the credible and fantastic, the real and the imaginary, by playing into a decisive critique of these very binarisms, thus revealing their limitations within current western feminist and queer theories.

It is not surprising, then, that Barthes' theories of language, often thought to be a product of French structuralism and western philosophical discourse, should become one of the paradigmatic bases upon which theories of gender, sex and sexuality in many non-western cultural settings are grounded. Indeed, I would argue that post-structuralism is as much a phenomenon of many non-westerns culture as it is of western cultures. The systematic examinations of intractable binaries in the west—specifically current in feminist and gender theory—have been influenced by literary, theoretical, and visual production from outside the west for much of the twentieth century. It is not only that Barthes' work has had a great effect upon many writers, artists and theorists in non-western regions of the world, but it is also essential to understand how non-western culture has effected readings that have inflected Barthes' own system of thought. Since much of Barthes' writing is a collection of ethnographic *récits* that traverse the globe—most commonly Japan, Latin America, and North Africa—we might be able to understand not only how Barthes' work has been interpreted in these regions, but also how Barthes' writing might have been influenced by specific culturally driven interpretations of language and the body. As such, I believe it is important to note how dialectical spaces of the somatic and language are

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

deconstructed and, to a large degree, usurped in specific cultural, sexual, and social politics of Latin America and the Maghreb. Indeed it would seem that Latin American and Maghrebian cultural politics of the body and language have had every bit an influence upon post-structural theory as have French cultural politics. What is most important, however, is not the crediting or the making linear of a type of progress towards or recession from a certain way of thinking about language and the body, but rather to note how the body and language in these cultures are inter-related terrains upon which identities are manifested as plural due to specific cultural and sexual politics.

Barthes' theories of language and the body evidence numerous affinities to two writers whose work has come to change the scope of literary production and cultural theory in Latin America, the Maghreb, and France: Severo Sarduy and Abdelkebir Khatibi. Not only have these writers lived between cultures, national boundaries, and languages—Severo Sarduy is a Cuban who lived most of his adult life in Paris and Abdelkebir Khatibi is a Moroccan who has spent his life between Paris and Rabat—but both writers had intellectual (not to mention personal) rapports with Roland Barthes from the early 1960's onward. Most importantly, Sarduy and Khatibi have largely worked to theorize language and the body within the specific contexts of Latin American and Maghrebian cultures respectively, ultimately affecting contemporary readings of sex, gender and sexuality in ways that western gender and feminist theory has not even approximated. Yet, what makes Sarduy's and Khatibi's writings provocative is how both these writers theorize the body and language as spaces upon which identities are traversed and inscribed while simultaneously being scrutinized, destroyed, and reconstituted. This paradigmatic space of ruptured and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

polysemous identity is not coincidental, but is rooted in the very colonial pasts of both these regions. Indeed, the somatic and language in both Sarduy's and Khatibi's writings are bodies which both maintain and destabilize the nexus of sexual, racial, linguistic and national identities.

Khatibi's *Maghreb pluriel* advances the notion of the *bi-langue*, a domain in which western and non-western discourses interact, review and recast the traditionally dichotomized notions of gender, sexuality, language, and culture without reformulating a new, stagnant identity. In many respects the *bi-langue* as Khatibi utilizes it is exactly how Michel Foucault conceived of discourse—as a "series of discontinuous segments, who tactical function is neither uniform nor stable".[15] For Khatibi, the *bi-langue* evidences the process of decolonization of the Maghreb through a perpetual analysis (and consideration) of both western and non-western texts and bodies—the *bi-langue* presupposes the fluid space of destruction, reflection, and recreation in which writers and critics of both the "East" and the "West" must interact and participate critically in constructing a polyphony of language, systems of thought, and alterities:

> Si donc l'Occident habite notre être intime, non point comme une extériorité absolue et dévastatrice, ni comme une maîtrise éternelle, mais bel et bien comme une différence, un conglomérat de différences à poser en tant que tel dans toute pensée de la différence et d'où qu'elle vienne; si donc l'Occident (ainsi nommé, ainsi situé) n'est pas la réaction à un désarroi incalculé, alors tout reste à penser: questions silencieuses qui souffrent en nous. Tout reste à penser en dialogue avec les pensées et les insurrections les plus radicales qui ont ébranlé l'Occident et continuent à le faire, selon des voies elle-mêmes variables. Engageons-nous d'emblée dans ce qui est

---

[15] Foucault writes of discourse: "Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments, whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (1978, p. 100).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> *réalisé* devant nous et essayons de le transformer selon une double critique, celle de cet héritage occidental et celle de notre patrimonie, si théologique, si charismatique, si patriarchal. Double critique: nous ne croyons qu'à la révélation du visible, fin de toute théologie céleste et de toute nostalgie mortifiante. Pensée-autre, celle de non-retour à l'inertie des fondements de notre être (p. 12).

Like Barthes' *langage poétique*, Khatibi's *bi-langue* maintains a constant shifting of center and periphery whereby linearity and order are subverted and the *double critique* of history, language, and difference begins. *Maghreb pluriel* requires the subject to think *other* as the basis for the liberation of meaning, identity and difference: "[T]rouver autre chose, se situer selon une pensée-autre, une pensée peut-être innouïe de la différence. Oui, oui, une telle libération est rigoureusement nécessaire pour toute pensée qui se réclame ainsi de sa volonté, en un risque qui ne peut qu'être grand, de toutes les manières" (p. 12).

Like the sufis who questioned the relativity of meaning and the rupture of the nexus between language and meaning, Khatibi's *bi-langue* maintains a space of reading in which plurality and rupture of singular meaning is necessarily part of the process of understanding identity.[16] Much of Khatibi's exploration of the *bi-langue* is quite caught up within the specific sufic reading of the body and

---

[16] Ibn Sīnā (981 (Afshana, near Bukhara)-1037 AD (Hamadas); also known in the West as Avicenna) in his *Remarks and Admonitions Part One: Logic* writes: "It must be known that every predicative proposition must have, in addition to the idea of the subject and that of the predicate, an idea of the union between the two. This is a third idea in addition to the other two. / If one presumes that words correspond to ideas in number, then this third [idea] must have a third word signifying it. In some languages this word may be omitted, as in the case at times in the original Arabic language. An example of this statement, *"Zayd kātib"* (Zayd a writer), when it must be said, *"Zayd huwa kātib"* (Zayd is a writer). But in some languages this word cannot be omitted. For example, in original Persian, "*ast*" (is) [cannot be omitted] from the statement, *"Zayd dabīrast"* (Zayd is a writer). This word is called "copula""(p. 84).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the lower soul (*nafs*)[17] as somehow connected yet separated, as that which acts outside of the body while taking on other forms and threatening to take over the body's reason:

> "Allah a créé d'un seul être (*nafs*) Adam et son épouse innomée. Le mot *nafs*, du genre féminin, désigne plusieurs connotations: esprit, âme, le mauvais œil, le sang, le corps, sans oublier toute une série d'expressions: par exemple, *nafs ach-chay'*, l'essentiel d'une chose... Bref, étymologiquement, ce mot rassemble en lui l'idée d'être, à la fois corporel et spirituel (p. 161).

Khatibi posits the *nafs* as that which is both real (material, corporeal) and yet part of language, both physical and spiritual, forever bound together.[18] And according to the sufis, the *nafs* had to be trained and was usually controlled by disciplining the body through fasting and sleeplessness. Indeed, sufic tradition had relegated the spiritual journey of the soul as necessarily taking place across binaried spaces of the physical body which connects to the spiritual self. The body inevitably became the intermediary for all communication to the soul: the recollection with the tongue (*dhikr jalī, jahrī, ʿalanīya, lisānī*), the recollection in the heart (*dhikr khafī, qalbī*), and hearing and dancing (*samāʿ*) in which the body erupts in spiritual movements are just a few of the ways that the sufis

---

[17] The *Hans Wehr* dictionary defines *nafs:* نفس *nafs* f., pl. نفوس *nufūs*, انفس *anfus* soul; psyche; spirit, mind; life; animate being, living creature, human being, person, individual (in this sense, masc.); essence, nature; inclination, liking, appetite, desire; personal identity, self.

[18] Annemarie Schimmel in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* writes: "The *nafs* is something very real, and many stories tell of its having been seen outside the body. Sometimes it took the form of a black dog that wanted food but had to be trained and sent away; other mystics saw their *nafs* coming out of their throats in the form of a young fox or mouse. The *nafs* can also be compared to a disobedient woman who tries to seduce and cheat the poor wayfarer (the noun *nafs* is feminine in Arabic!)...Sometimes it is likened to a disobedient camel—Rūmī compares the struggle of the intellect with the *nafs* to the attempts of Majnūn to turn his camel in the right direction..." (pp. 112-113).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

linked the body to the divine spirit.[19] Indeed material reality as both part of the path towards the absolute as well as the incompleteness, the rupture of the body. As Annemarie Schimmel notes in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Louis Massignon's analysis of Junayd's notion that God is affirmed more by Not-being than by Being resulted in Massignon concluding that Islamic theology tends to affirm God through destruction rather than through construction.[20] Schimmel writes: "The *nafs* has to be broken, the body has to be broken, and the heart, too, has to be broken and everything in it is naughted so that God can build a new mansion for Himself in it. For the ruined house contains treasures—such treasures can only be found by digging up the foundation..." (p. 190). As such, meaning of the spiritual world depends upon the body, through its destruction, reflecting this meaning. And it is this destruction that becomes the site of recreation of a newer body.

Likewise, Khatibi posits language and corporeality as located in an *intersémiotique*, a space between performance and language, yet a place where the body and writing are evoked through *jouissance*.[21] Continuing this

---

[19] Schimmel writes on *dhikr*: "[*D*]*hikr* is generally divided into two branches: recollection with the tongue (*dhikr jalī, jahrī, ʿalanīya, lisānī*) and recollection in the heart (*dhikr khafī, qalbī*)...The *dhikr* should permeate the mystic's whole being, so that in constant *dhikr* he forgets the recollection of everything else" (p. 171). And she also discusses *samāʿ*: "Once the fetters of the body are broken by means of enthusiastic dance, the soul is set free and realizes that everything created takes part in the dance—the spring breeze of love touches the tree so that the branches, flower buds, and stars start whirling in the all-embracing mystical movement" (p. 184).

[20] See *La passion d'al-Hosayn ibn Mansour Al-Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922*. 2 vols. Paris, 1922, p. 631.

[21] In *La blessure du nom propre*, Khatibi writes: "D'un système sémiotique à un autre: quelque chose comme l'intersémiotique existe-t-il? Et plus précisément pour nous cette question: à quel moment le savoir est happé par un texte, une écriture? Articulation du savoir à l'écriture, et par laquelle un émoi feutré et une jouissance méditative s'accordent à un art de vivre. En premier, la dépense par le rire hilare et la dispersion scripturale du

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intersémiotique of language and the body in *La blessure du nom propre*, Khatibi defines binaries of the spiritual across the borders of the body, developing much more profoundly the idea of the body as the space of propagation of meaning:

> L'eau est la première séparation, l'opposition pur/impur hiérarchise le corps, les parties du corps (chaque lieu aura son *manque*); et en ce discours tendu du désir, la prière s'avère une parole impossible: elle finit, nous le savons, par le jeu circulaire du chapelet (dans le chapelet, la main vide un et agressivité si sangrenue), par le marmonnement, et la psalmodie dont on ne saisit que la rime chuchotante: ainsi se déploie le corps du Prophète Muḥammed, dans le souffle du *chaj°* (prose rimée)...La psalmodie n'est pas une montée verticale, comme nous le laissent entendre les mystiques; c'est plutôt une dispersion, une propagation du corps (le discours est ici un corps, toujours un corps), une propagation truquée, travestie au plus haut point en ce détachement pédagogique du croyant (p. 30).

Water is that which marks the pure and the impure body, dividing space and temporality, just as chanting or prayer is a cultivation of the body through time. Again, as for the sufis, the body reaches spiritual heights through the physical exercise of recitation, while it maintains a certain hold on its physicality while losing the soul in the phyisical perpetuation of the chant, the repetition that pulls one closer to spiritual ecstasy.

As Khatibi's *bi-langue* evidences the impossibility of language to fully represent the soul,[22] we can see strong resemblances between this contemporary move to understand the complexity of identity and that of Ibn ᶜArabī (1165AD Andalusia Spain-1240AD Damascus) whose writings evidence a similar drive to separate, yet also join, the body (*jism*) from its potential being (*maᶜdūm*).

---

corps" (p. 11).

[22] In *Amour bilingue*, Khatibi writes: "La bi-langue? Ma chance, mon gouffre individuel, et ma belle énergie d'amnésie. Énergie que je ne sens pas, c'est bien curieux, comme une déficience; mais elle serait ma troisième oreille. Atteint par quelque désintégration, je me serais développé—j'aimais à l'imaginer ainsi—en un sens inverse, dans la dissociation de tout langage unique. C'est pourquoi j'admire, chez l'aveugle, cette gravité du geste; et chez le sourd, cet amour désespéré, impossible de la langue" (p. 11).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ultimately Ibn ᶜArabī creates a space for spiritual love in which identification implicates a "reunification" between that which is loved and the lover, just as between the body and the virtuality or potential of the "loved being" :

> La finalité de l'amour spirituel est la réunification ou identification (*ittiḥād*) qui implique que l'essence de l'aimé (*ḍāt al-maḥbūb*) devienne l'essence même de l'amant (*ᶜayn ḍāt al-muḥibb*) et l'essence de l'amant l'essence même de l'aimé. C'est à cela que font allusion ceux qui professent la doctrine de l'infusion ou incarnation (*ḥulūliyya*) mais ils ne connaissent pas en quoi consiste la forme impliquée dans cette identification. Sache que la forme naturelle—quel que soit son mode d'apparition: corps (*jism*)ou corporalisation (*jasad*) et quel que soit son mode de relation—impose que l'être aimable, qui est encore potentiel (*maᶜdūm*) et même s'il devait rester virtuel, puisse être représenté dans l'imagination. Car il s'agit, en l'espèce, d'une des sortes possibles d'existence appréhendée par le regard imaginatif dans le monde imaginal (*fī al-ḥaḍrat al-khayāliyya*) mais avec l'œil (*ᶜayn*) qui convient à ce monde intermédiaire (pp. 105-106).

As such, it is the eye (*ᶜayn*) which maintains the bridge between the real and the virtual body, and likewise between real and virtual love. Meaning for Ibn ᶜArabī works on the level of essence in which the self, the *ᶜayn*, captures and confirms possible existences within the world and as such, the body as essence is always present. But it is the body's potential which maintains its importance—for the body is but a vehicle for the soul which must be available to the imagination and desire, just as the world is. Existence, therefore, depends upon the eye which confirms, contradicts, and recognizes the intermediate world of somatic spaces and their possibilities through movement and gesticulation. As such, Khatibi's writing confirms the plural of language and the body as necessarily interdependent spaces which cannot be undone or disentangle, and which, more importantly, move off one another, inflecting readings of identity that in turn destruct the former reading. As for Ibn ᶜArabī , the eye in Khatibi is the center of such force, for the very process of decolonization and recognition of bodies, depends upon

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the eye to occupy the intermediary world of imagination and configured identities.

But in Khatibi, different from Ibn ᶜArabī, the body is much richer, more complex in that it is fractured through language, sex, and gender and it is equally a terrain traversed by identities which refuse coupling. In her astute essay on Khatibi, "Fitna ou la différence intraitable de l'amour", Christine Buci-Glucksmann discusses Khatibi's *Amour bilinque* in terms of the body. Herein, Buci-Glucksmann maintains that for Khatibi the body becomes the site for resisting simplistic binaries (or deconstructions thereof). The body is likewise a topography upon which fluid interactions between the perceived meanings and the possible meanings which both body and language take place. Buci-Glucksmann, in fact, turns to Roland Barthes in unveiling the space through which language and the body maintain a sense of rigid coding and yet a freedom of meaning, of infinite possibilities:[23]

---

[23] See Barthes' definition of the *obvie* and *obtus*: "La signification et la signifiance—et non la communication—m'intéressent seules, ici. Il me faut donc nommer, aussi économiquement que possible, le deuxième et le troisième sens. Le sens symbolique (l'or versé, la puissance, la richesse, le rite impérial) s'impose à moi par une double détermination: il est intentionnel (c'est ce qu'a voulu dire l'auteur) et il est prélevé dans une sorte de lexique général, commun, des symboles; c'est un sens qui me cherche, moi, destinataire du message, sujet de la lecture, un sens qui part de S.M.E. et qui va *au-devant de moi*: évident, certes (l'autre l'est aussi), mais d'une évidence *fermée*, prise dans un système complet de destination. Je propose d'appeler ce signe complet *le sens obvie*. *Obvius* veut dire: *qui vient au-devant*, et c'est bien le cas de ce sens, qui vient me trouver; en théologie, nous dit-on le sens obvie est celui "qui se présente tout naturellement à l'esprit", et c'est encore le cas: la symbolique de l'or en plui m'apparaît depuis toujours dotée d'une clarté "naturelle". Quant à l'autre, le troisième, celui qui vient "en trop", comme un supplément que mon intellection ne parvient pas bien à absorber, à la fois têtu et fuyant, lisse et échappé, je propose de l'appeler *le sens obtus*. Ce mot me vient facilement à l'esprit et, merveille, en dépliant son étymologie, il livre déjà une théorie du sens supplémentaire; *obtusus* veut dire: *qui est émoussé, de forme arrondie*; or les traits que j'ai indiqués (le fard, la blancheur, le postiche, etc.) ne sont-ils pas comme l'émoussement d'un sens trop clair, trop violent? Ne donnent-ils pas au signifié obvie comme une sorte de rondeur peu préhensible, ne font-ils pas glisser ma lecture? Un angle obtus est plus grand qu'un droit: *angle obtus de 100°*, dit le dictionnaire; le troisième sens, lui aussi, me paraît *plus grand* que la perpendiculaire pure, droite, coupante, légale, du récit: il me paraît ouvrir le champ du sens totalement, c'est-à-dire infiniment; j'accepte même, pour ce sens obtus, la connotation péjorative: le sens obtus

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Le double comme pensée oblique, comme "oubli actif" (Nietzsche) déconstruit les oppositions métaphysiques par trop simples qui régissent le même et l'autre, l'universel et le particulier, le masculin et le féminin...Car, dans l'écart de ce que Roland Barthes appelait *sens obvie* (voulu, codé) et *sens obtu* (ouvert à l'infini du langage), surgit "le dialogisme...un mode de construction de l'autre". Quelque chose qui brouille l'origine, le sens, la filiation et nous introduit à la bifocalisation permanente des signifiés historiques, à leur traductibilité possible, à ce pouvoir de la lettre antérieur à l'objet et au référent qui va "du signe à son évanouissement". Et ce n'est peut-être pas par hasard, que l'ambiguïté sémantique propre à la langage arabe—à ses «*addâd*» (mots contraires possédant soit deux significations contraires, soit plusieurs significations dont deux contraires)—aboutit à faire vaciller la barre du sens, à retrouver *dans la* langage l'ambivalence freudienne propre à l'inconscient. Ainsi, le «*siwâ*», est-il même et autre comme le «*schaumam*» est proximité et éloignement, et «*amaqua*» l'acte d'écrire et d'effacer l'écriture (pp. 19-20).

The *sens obvie* and *sens obtu*, therefore, underscore the simultaneous preciseness and ambiguity of language—for language is never enough to fully represent in that the *sens obvie* is limited, and yet always too much in that the *sens obtu* is infinitely open to myriad readings and reconstructions. Khatibi's writings on somatic spaces confirm that language, like the body, is the site of cultural inscriptions and shiftings, decoration and destruction, upon which meaning is hinged and undone. And this body is one of nationalism, race, gender, and sex—all of these identities are, however, necessarily reflected in a language which problematically attempts to embrace the performativity of the body within the staticity of the word. As language that embraces one specific meaning, Buci-Glucksmann demonstrates that indeed these very same words can also mean the antithesis of that prior meaning. Language opens up to its own destruction in allowing for its very reformulation and rendering within a constantly shifting

---

semble s'employer hors de la culture, du savoir, de l'information; analytiquement, il a quelque chose de dérisoire; parce qu'il ouvre à l'infini du langage, il peut paraître borné au regard de la raison analytique; il est de la race des jeux de mots, des bouffonneries, des dépenses inutiles; indifférent aux catégories morales ou esthétiques (le trivial, le futile, le postiche et le pastiche), il est du côté du carnaval. *Obtus* convient donc bien" (pp. 45-46).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

terrain of meanings.[24]

Indeed this opening up of substance to multiple readings—even while acknowledging "impossible matter"—is part of the philosophical tradition of sufi thinkers, most notably Ibn Sīnā's work in this field. As Khatibi's understanding of the plural identity of the Maghrebian subject as integral to the composition of personhood, Ibn Sīnā also makes clear that the relationship between language and its subject is a field vectored by myriad possibilities where language must in some way come to indicate necessity, possibility or impossibility.[25] And as such Ibn Sīnā marks the distinction between the thingness of an object and the name with which we use to name that *thing:*

> There is a difference between that which is stated as the answer to the question, "What is it?' [*Al-maqūl fī jawāb mā huwa*] that which enters the answer to the question, "What is it?' or that which is stated on the way [to the answer] to the question, "What is it?" For the answer itself is other than that which enters the answer or that which falls on the way

---

[24] It should be noted here that Ibn Sīnā in his *Remarks and Admonitions,*discusses this very dynamic between language and meaning using the example of "figure" and "triangle" and "corporeality" and "human being" in what is known in sufism as the *constitutive:* "By "the constitutive" I do not mean the predicate which the subject requires for the realization of its existence, such as the fact that a human being is begotten, created or made to exist, and the fact that black is an accident. I mean a predicate which the subject requries for the realization of its quiddity, and which enters its quidity as a part of it. Examples are "figure" for "triangle," or "corporeality" for "human being". That is why, in conceiving the body as body, we can strip creaturehood from [our conception of] it inasmuch as we conceive it as a body. But in conceiving the triangle as triangle we cannot strip figure from [our conception of] it, even though this is not a common difference" (p. 54).

[25] Ibn Sīnā states: "In a proposition, whether affirmative or negative, the predicate and what resembles it cannot fail / to have [one of three] relations to the subject: [1] a relation of that whose existence is necessary in the thing itself such as "animal" in the statements, "Human being is an animal;' or "Human being is not an animal;' [2] a relation of that whose existence and non-esistence are not necessary, such as "writer" in the statemtents, "Human being is a writer;' or "Human being is not a writer"' or [3] a relation of that whose non-existence is necessary, such as "stone" in the statements "Human being is a stone,' or "Human being is not a stone.' All the matters of the propositions are, then, these: [1] a matter necessary in existence; [2] a possible matter, and [3] an impossible matter" (pp. 90-91).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> to you. You must know that, in accordance with the requirements of every language, the question of him who asks "What is it?" corresponds to "What is its essence?" or "What is the comprehension of its name?" A thing is what it is only by virtue of the union of what it has in common with other things and what is proper to it, such that its essence which is sought in this question is realized (p. 60).

There is a certain dissymmetry between that which language portends and that which *is*. In this way, language will always be inadequate in its naming of the essence, in representing the name of essence. Yet, language will always be the province in which possible meanings are projected, tested, uprooted and reformulated—a conterminous *sens obvie* and *sens obtu* where neither moment can be verified with certainty, but where meaning continually traverses the open spaces of communication, evocation and meaning.

And it is through writing, the ambiguous act of coding (and miscoding), through which Khatibi constructs both the body and language as plural and where both inflect the other—writing becomes corporeal and the body becomes part of writing. Analyzing *tatouage* of the body in the Maghreb,[26] Khatibi maintains the corporal space of language and the linguistic spaces of the body as central to understanding the plurality of identities, bodies, and sexualities. In *La blessure du nom propre*, Khatibi states:

> Engendrer un corps demande dans notre cas un certain choix divin; le corps musulman tatoué obéit à des règles particulières de déploiement et d'espacement; au Maroc, on tatoue surtout un seul côté, le devant du corps, alors que chez les Polynésiens, le tatouage est généralisé. A ce partage s'ajoute un autre: la femme peut se tatouer le devant du corps, et l'homme ne dispose que de la main, du bras et de l'avant-bras. C'est dire que la main ne quitte pas le champ de l'écriture. On tatoue également comme on écrit, c'est-à-dire en privilégiant le côté droit, ce qui ne détruit pas la symétrie; le corps est barré par un motif qui lui est parallèle et qui passe sur le front, le menton et entre les seins (p. 80).

---

[26] *Tatouage* of the face and body was a common practice in the Maghreb among girls upon reaching puberty, though in recent years is slowly falling out of practice.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Khatibi's notion of *tatouage* creates the body as a textual body, a terrain upon which signs (language) is directly imprinted upon the body and where the body performs, quite literally, language. The body of *tatouage* is a body which is at once singular and plural, individual and collective—for it forms part of a larger group in which the sign marks its belonging. The body is a parchment upon which the collective unconscious is scripted and through which the body exercises a simultaneous conformism and heterodoxy, depending on the geographical positioning of this body and the type of *tatouage* implemented. Once again, like language, the *tatouage* of the body can be a permanent rendering upon the body, or in the case of henna, a temporal marker where meaning is necessarily undone through time.[27]

According to Khatibi, writing and the body are inextricably linked moments of the same phrase, for both are temporal performances within the continuum of space and time. Yet *tatouage* also qualifies the body within an economy of theatre, a space of performance, in which the body is marked by nature, blood, and desire where the erotic is ritualized and *tatouage* becomes the fiction of such ritual:

> Le tatouage permet ce duel érotique entre symétrie et asymétrie, cette économie vive d'une dépense amoureuse et d'un désir dédoublé, théâtralisé. Le corps tatoué est une graphie qui défigure la notion d'appropriation, il est une écriture qui exige d'être lue, aimée, désirée dans son mouvement le plus émouvant, le plus trouble. A deux occasions, la jeune Marocaine (encore fidèle à la culture populaire) peut se faire tatouer: au moment de la puberté, et au moment du mariage (1974, p. 97).

---

[27] Khatibi writes in *La blessure du nom propre:* "*Wachma* (verbe: *wachama*): le dictionnaire encyclopédique *lisāan al'arab* donne les indications suivantes:—*wachma* désigne le tatouage qu'imprime la femme sur ses *bras* (lequel tatouage est appelé lignes de gazelle) avec une aiguille enduite de suie de graisse. C'est également un décor au henné (tatouage provisoire)" (p. 71).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Khatibi argues that cultural inscriptions upon the body are part of a *dédoublement* whereby ritual and fiction are interwoven and where language and the body are both symmetrical and asymmetrical, both real and performative. While Khatibi's notions of writing and corporeality are certainly not new to the Maghreb since the practice of *tatouage* and writing has been theorized and argued by many scholars, it is important to note that Khatibi maintains that the *dédoublement* of identity depends upon, not the dissolution of binaries, but rather their constant coexistence and the spaces through which these plural identities negotiate the somatic and language.[28] Likewise, as Hassan Wahbi's study of *La mémoire tatouée* evidences, the language of desire for and violence against the occident, common in much of Khatibi's work, engages a poetic violence on the body of both the self and the other while introducing disorder and madness : "Car l'autre est redevenu un paradigme de soi".[28]

As Buci-Glucksmann notes, it is this space of *dédoublement* which renders Khatibi's notion of the body and language as spaces of illusion and disillusion, a field of meaning where the baroque necessarily emerges:

---

[28] Wahbi writes: "Toutes les variation sur l'Occident sont semblables par leur joie mortifière. La violence amoureuse qu'exerce le narrateur sur le corps de l'Occident est une violence dans l'union, dans l'étreinte. Le corps soumis, la main vengeresse, les cheveux brûlés revoient à un choc de corps, à une érotique funèbre (baudelairienne). Le personnage dans sa position de sujet saisi, a un désir extrême de troubler, défaire, détruire son objet d'amour. C'est une façon d'introduire dans l'ordre des rapports, un désordre, une folie, une différence de traitement. Accaparé par l'Occcident, le narrateur à son tour s'accapare de lui. Cette réciprocité, ce massacre à deux sont à la fois une réponse limitée à l'arrachement du narrateur et la joie de brûler ce qui le brûle, de meurtrir ce qui le meurtrit. Nous sommes en face d'êtres de langage; c'est le langage qui permet d'éclore une position personnelle d'altérité, le ton apocalyptique de certains propos, et de changer l'occident en destinataire féminin suivant une parole tumultueuse normalement dévolue à la poésie lyrique. Au delà de l'entité historique, l'Occident comme corps est ainsi le moyen de réaliser une violence poétique sur le corps imaginaire de l'autre à partir de son propre corps, en permettant le passage à partir de son propre corps, en permettant le passage à une réalité autre dont les termes sont à connaître. Car l'autre est redevenu un paradigme de soi" (p. 155).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Aussie le double—l'impossibilité de séparer le figural et l'écriture, l'objet désiré et l'objet de pensée—définit-il son économie et son défi. La duplicité fonde une herméneutique historique de la désillusion/illusion (desengaño/engaño), puisque le baroque surgit sur fond d'une histoire saturnienne vouée à la précarité, à la mort, à la dissipation des illusions du Tout, du Sens, de l'Un (p. 22).

It is this baroque, this excess, that Buci-Glucksmann names as the force behind Khatibi's dissipation of singular identity. Like her discussion of ***addâd***, words which have two opposing signifiers, Buci-Glucksmann views language and corporeality in Khatibi as necessarily in conflict—a conflict which does not result in terror or violence, but rather one which produces a fluid movement between and within divergent identities. The baroque manifests itself in the Maghreb upon the body in forms through which sexuality and desire are as inflected across the temporality of language and the effacement of the body through language written on the skin.

For instance, *tatouage* of the face serves, in part, to guard against the evil eye; yet Khatibi reminds us that since the "third eye" *(Toe)* is exchanged for the missing "third eye", somatic and linguistic signs are necessarily interdependent in their abundance and/or lack, though these signs are never entirely compatible.[29] Likewise, in the Maghreb it is not uncommon in rural areas for people to hold up their hand while saying ***"khamsa ʿla ʿaynik"*** (five in your eyes) to ward off the evil eye. But when a similar warding off is uttered such as ***"zob ʿla ʿaynik"*** (the

---

[29] Khatibi writes: "La marque centrale du tatouage marocain est inaugurée par la *ʾayyacha* (l'intersourcilier). Le partage du corps est d'abord frontal et intersourcilier. Celui-ci obéit souvent à une forme élémentaire: *trois points verticaux* ou *trois points horizontaux*. Herber signale l'emploi aussi du chevron pecturé, rappelant un motif du tapis, ou bien la circonférence ornée de motifs cruciformes. Appelons *troisième œil* (Toe) le signe retenu par nous. Traditionnellement, le Toe protège contre le mauvais œil (mais quel est le mauvais dans notre cas?). Le Toe est ici simplement un double parcours, dont le prélude à l'économie graphique échange un signe (l'œil) contre un autre signe (le Toe), médian rythmant le corps, de part et d'autre" (1974, p. 87).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

penis in your eye) in guarding against the evil eye, one begins to see how the *dédoublement* of language and the body spirals into multiple references and fictions in which meaning becomes entangled amidst the panoply of signifiers and references.[30] Likewise, in sufism, the eye is central to being since it is understood as the essence of the spirit that necessarily cannot separate itself from its meaning, nor from its contexts. In Sufism, one cannot conceive of identity without embracing the essence (ᶜayn).[31] Hence this eye reflects both physicality and spirituality as the physical refers to the spirit and the spirit necessarily is already linguistically inscribed with the physical by virtue of its name.

Malek Chebel in his well known study of the body in the Maghreb, *Le corps dans la tradition au maghreb*, also views the eye as the root of "visual emissions" in the Maghreb since it is both the center of desire and also the focal point for visual performances and cultural interpretations, such as the evil eye.[32]

---

[30] Again, Khatibi discusses the "third eye": "Pas de prééminence de la main droite, mais substitution à celle-ci de la scène phallique du médius. Lorsqu'on te dit «*khamsa ʾla ʾaynīk*» (cinq sur tes yeux), ou plus littéralement *zobʾ ʾla ʾaynīk* (la verge sur tes yeux), on déclare sans doute un grand désir, celui d'une lettre imposée dans le geste dédoublé: médius et phallus se renversent dans une même insulte, le même rire hilare" (1974, p. 91).

[31] Ibn ᶜArabī writes: "Seule alors l'Être vrai subsiste contemplé par Sa propre Essence (ᶜayn). D'une manière analogue, (l'illusion) de l'eau dans ce mirage cesse d'exister et celui-ci est contemplé dans ce qu'il est en soi sans être de l'eau" (p. 140).

[32] Chebel writes: "*L'œiel*: L'œil et le symbolisme qui lui est rattaché dans les représentations de la sphère maghrébine sont d'une extrême étendue. Les traditions orales et, *a priori*, mentales, psychologiquement stables et structurées, procèdent directement de l'œil, non pas seulement comme organe anatomique doué d'une fonction, d'une physiologie originale et complexe, mais aussi et surtout parce qu'il est l'élément identificatoire d'une force suprahumaine qui siégerait dans l'axe même de sa focale, à un plan précis de l'"«émission visuelle»; car l'œil a toujours été provoqués par l'œil et concrétisés par ceux de la main qui reste douée d'un pouvoir salutaire. Ce rapport antinomiquede l'œil et de la main est exprimé par ce proverbe qui dit: "L'œil est chargé de désir, la main ne peut le servir", et par cette autre expression, autrement plus usitée, "khamsa fi aïnik, rabbi ya'mik" (Cinq dans tes yeux, que Dieu te donne cécité)" (p. 41).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Examining manifestations of the evil eye in the Maghreb, Chebel discusses the extent to which the body is traversed by superstitious beliefs of the occult. And indeed, during infancy children in the Maghreb, as in many parts of Latin America, are given amulets to ward off the "evil eye"—in both cultures the hand serves to ward off evil, encasing the child's body in symbols that protect, while also invoking the body within a discourse of "good conduct". The "hand of Fatma",[33] as it is known in the Mediterranean region, is often the knocker on front doors, "protecting" houses throughout the Maghreb and the Mashriq, not to mention Spain, southern France and Italy. Between the spoken invocations, the physical gestures, the *tatouage* of the body, language, and the architectural markers that ward off evil, it is quite interesting to note how the reflexivity between the symbolic, the somatic, materiality, and language function to strengthen belief systems inscribed within this matrix of the body and language.[34] We can also

---

[33] Jean-Michel Hirt writes of the *main de Fatma:* "[I]l faut noter combien est usitée, dans la tradition populaire au Maghreb, l'expression "*khamsa fi aïnik, rabbi ya'mik*" (cinq dans tes yeux, que dieu te donne cécité). Par elle, est nettement marquée l'opposition main-œil, le pouvoir salutaire de la main contre le mauvais œil, après le renversement de la domination de la main sur l'œil. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas sans importance que cette main soit devenue un bijou—appelée depuis la colonisation *main de Fatma*—et qu'elle soit portée par les femmes. Avec ses cinq doigts qui symbolisent le cinq piliers de l'islam, cette main salvatrice témoigne de la vertu de la séparation des cinq sens contre l'œil unique qui enchante" (pp. 188-189).

[34] Chebel discusses the superstition of the "evil eye" and its cultural effects: "Il est une réalité au Maghreb, et probablement en toute terre, que le corps est profondément travaillé par la pensée superstitieuse et par la croyance en des forces occultes. Ce dressage, car il s'agit bel et bien d'un dressage, commence dès la naissance et se termine à la tombe. C'est dire qu'il recouvre toute l'étendue de la présence corporelle incarnée et parfois la précède et lui subsiste. Dans l'enfance, les amulettes, les aspersions ainsi que les fumigations, pour ne citer que les conduites les plus générales, constituent l'aspect visible de cet échafaudage. Nous observons la persistance de cette pensée (reléguée hâtivement vers les zones sombres des croyances paralogiques) dans une infinité de moments précis, d'instant fugaces et pourtant séculaires et tenaces. Ce travail sur le corps, opéré par le phénomène superstitieux, agit sur les plans de l'inhibition par interdiciton et l'inscription inconsciente. Dans l'un et l'autre des cas, le postulat anxiogène est présent. Le corps et mis sur les rails de la bonne "conduit" et subit l'interdit dès qu'il s'en écarte" (p. 172).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

see how the eye is linked to symbolic/real powers of language and even then, other parts of the body and physical matter outside the somatic. For while the symbolic eye occupies an imaginary space which transmits or fights evil, it also maintains its reference to the real, to corporeality, and to language since its power to embody or cast away the ominous exists through its very reference to a real eye, words and actions of the body that push away the evil. It would seem that the artifacts of the body and language—the eye as anatomy, the eye as symbolic, the *tatouage* of the chevron as a "third eye", the hand that is raised in protection, the architectural symbols of the hand, and the body invoked by language—together manifest a constant shifting between corporeality and language while evidencing a perpetual space of illusion and disillusion in which the unseen evil remains both present in its invocation through these symbols yet auspiciously absent as proof that language and the body are functioning "properly".

Aside from examining the "evil eye", Chebel also discusses how the diverse compositions of *tatouage* on the body maintain an "anatomical configuration" through which each formation refers to another—amidst the references upon the body there are intercorporeal references which both include and exclude the body.[35] More interesting,however, is how each somatic space is named—the body is written with one code *(tatouage)* while language names this writing on the body with another:

---

[35] Chebel writes: "Le tatouage du menton (*bu-ârroj*) qui signifie le boiteux, l'unijambiste tranche avec les tatouages du cou *ûsam er-regba* (tatouage du cou) et celui de la poitrine qui n'est autre que *sder* (ou poitrine): l'imagination s'est irrégulieèrement déployée dans la nomination d'un tatouage porté sur une partie du corps avec un autre tatouage, car la configuration anatomique constitue un élément déterminant de ce folklore nominatif ainsi que, du reste, sa fonction et la puissance suggestive qu'elle libère" (pp. 154-155).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Les tatouages intersourciliers sont appelés *sêhdo elèh* (témoignez contre lui). C'est une expression empruntée au langages des hétaïres, *gummâz* (celui qui cligne de l'œil), *jebha* (front), *jebbâhîya* (frontal), *ûsâm bîn lâ-nîn* (tatouage entre les yeux). Le tatouage du nez est *di šêrgiya* (l'orientale), *nqeita* (petite pointe), *šemmâma* (celle qui flaire); celui de la joue est imagé par l'expression *ljem sidi* (la bride de monsieur) ou tout simplement *hdâd, hdûd* (joues) en ce qui concerne le tatouage de l'apophyse mamalaire (p. 154).

Chebel's study, replete with references on *tatouage* which mark the body through inscribing physically, naming verbally, and effacing somatically,[36] ultimately serves to demonstrate how the body in the Maghreb serves as a terrain for imagination, destruction, renovation and discord. Both Chebel and Khatibi regard language and corporeality as a space whereby meaning is as transparent as it is opaque and whereby national, sexual and linguistic identities remain in constant movement and negotiation.[37] In Morocco, for example, linguistic identity is not

---

[36] Chebel continues his archeology of *tatouage:* "Le tatouage du dos est appelé *ûšam la-hmel* ou tatouage du milieu du dos, de la partie lombaire, le tatouage de l'épaule est à la fois le *ktef* (épaule) et la *âwwâma* (celle qui nage). Quant aux tatouages du bras, de l'avant-bras, du poignet et de la main, ils sont appelés successivement: *ûsâm ez-zend* (tatouage du haut du bras), *ûsada* (oreiller, tatouage de la face interne du bras sur lequel repose la tête de l'amant connu en Tunisie sous le terme évocateur de *chehda* ou gâteau de miel), *ûsam ed-dre'ên* (tatouage des avant-bras), *hniyyaš* (petit serpent), *ḫalḫal* (anneau des pieds), *warda* (rose) pour le tatouage de la main et du poignet. Le tatouage des membre inférieurs est évoqué en des termes similaires. Nous avons le *ûsam-el-ḫat* (tatouage des cuisses), dit encore *ûsam dyâl es-serroual* (tatouage du pantalon) à l'endroit où le pantalon serre le genou. Quant aux tatouage du genou, des jambes et des pieds, ils sont connus sous les termes de *šbika* (petite dentelle ou petit filet) et *metreq* (bâton). Le tatouage sus-pubien est celui qui aura les plus nombreuses appellations: il y a la *hammaqa* (le tatouage qui rend fou ou "affolante"), la *snisla* (chaînette) suggère que l'amant est épris d'amour pour sa bien-aimée grâce à ce tatouage symbolisé par le maillon d'une chaîne et le fameux *wâšma fûgo*, littéralement "tatoué au-dessus de lui" (le vagin)" (p. 155).

[37] Khatbi writes of his own body: "Si mon corps est périsphrastique, je vais user d'une série de figures *mūzāwaqāt* (littéralement *décoration*; en français, c'est une figure d'accouplement) et principalement de la paronomase (simple ou combinée)...Mais si je suis en compagnie d'une bande de garçons, je parlerai en contrepèteries et métaplasmes qui, en arabe, altèrent la consonne radicale, mais qui assurent à mon corps un plaisir androgyne" (1974, p. 43).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

homogeneous, given the pervasiveness of many languages throughout all sectors of social and private life—dialectical Arabic *(derija)*, three different Berber languages, French, Spanish, and Modern Standard Arabic (*fuṣha)* in media and education—not to mention the incredibly divergent cultural heritage, the many colonizations of the country, and the ethnic diversity of the people. For Khatibi, language and the body are baroque superficies that necessarily embody a plurality of identities within the Maghreb. Yet, the Maghreb is not only a mosaic of cultures, languages, genders, and sexualities, but it is a region which represents the world since, according to Khatibi, all cultures are necessarily linguistically, historically, culturally and sexually plural.[38] Even the word "Maghreb" means many things depending on one's position to language: in English and French, for instance, "Maghreb" is synonymous with "North Africa" and in Moroccan dialectical Arabic *(derija)* or Modern Standard Arabic *(fuṣha)* it either means "Morocco" or "West" depending on the syntax and grammar. Given the title, *Maghreb pluriel,* it is most difficult to understand to which "West" Khatibi is referring. As such, language necessarily invokes and reflects a multiplicity and collapse of meaning within somatic performances of bodies that similarly negotiate and violate the very language from which these bodies are effectuated.[39]

Ibn ᶜArabī's *Traité de l'amour* addresses this very play between the "domain

---

[38] Nevertheless, we must question to what extent the French colonial presence promoted the plurality of Morocco and to what extent plurality was an effect of postcolonial politics of the state.

[39] Khatibi writes in *Penser le Maghreb:* "Toute nation, en principe, est une pluralité, une mosaïque de cultures, sinon une pluralité de langues et de modes de penser. Mais cette pluralité n'est jamais résolue en termes d'égalité (entre groupes, ethnies, cultures, sexes, pouvoirs), mais elle est toujours régie par une relations de hiérarchie et de dissymétrie. L'Etat (centralisé ou non) doit gérer cette conflit latent entre les différentes composantes d'une nation. Dès qu'un groupe perd son point de gravité dans le temps et l'espace, il explose, en raison même de sa force de vie et de survive" (p. 54).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of the body" (*ʿālam al-ajsām*) and its incorporated entities (*ajsād*) as Ibn ʿArabī distinguishes between the "elementary body" (*ajsām ʿansariyya*) and the "natural body" (*ajsām ṭabīʿiyya*). The elementary body is necessarily part of the natural body, but the natural body is not imperatively elementary. The celestial Spheres (*aflāk*) and the Dominations (*amlāk*), for Ibn ʿArabī, are two examples of the natural body which are not elementary. In fact, we can see how sufist theology imparts separation of the body into mulifarious bodies, each of which maintains its own distinctions and actions, each of which has its own set of somatic and symbolic functions:

> Le délabrement qui s'empare de leur corps est dû à l'abandon des aliments agréables et appétissants, onctueux et rafraîchissants, délice pour l'âme et qui donnent au corps le lustre de la santé et du bien-être...Ils ont bien conscience que les humeurs sécrétées dans leur corps produisent des vapeurs qui montent au cerveau en émoussant et obnubilant leurs sens. Le sommeil s'empare d'eux au point de les empêcher de se tenir devant leur Bien-Aimé, en état de veille, pour l'intime entretien en Sa seule présence, dans leur retraite solitaire. De plus, ces vapeurs soulèvent dans leurs corps des énergies qui se répandent dans toutes leurs facultés d'action (*jawāriḥ*), provoquant l'incontinence dont le Bien-Aimé a interdit le libre exercice (p. 141).

From Ibn ʿArabī we can see how the body of spiritual and somatic functions are seemingly intertwined to the extent that the body and the spirit are, virtually, inseparable and similarly incomprehensible if taken "apart". Thus, there would seem to be a certain necessity in keeping the body inextricably caught up with the symbolic as a means of communicating the body in metaphysical terms, as maintaining the somatic body within levels that might be more accessible, closer even, to the spiritual.

As Ibn ʿArabī creates this communication between the body and spirit in order to sustain a reading of the eternal spirit as accessible, Khatibi instead maintains a fluidity between the body and language as a means of not maintaining

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the eternal structure of identity, but rather in maintaining incongruence, unevenness, dissymetry and contradiction as the vehicle through which singularity is effaced and both the body and language continually inflect meaning through movement, performance and temporality.[40] In *L'arte callagraphique arabe*, Khatibi writes: "Avec d'autres nous pensons que l'écriture (calligraphique ou non) est *double*, toujours double dans ses instances. Il serait vain d'en marquer la violence irrécupérable. L'écriture se scinde dans le texte à jamais" (p. p. 21). Indeed, Khatibi aspires not to a purely spiritual subversion of identity, but rather seeks to understand the plurality in language and physical inscriptions on the body, to include sex, gender, sexuality, language, and cultural identity through the necessary *dédoublement* inherent within language and corporeality. Through his study of *tatouage* and calligraphy, Khatibi invokes the body and identity (Ibn ᶜArabī's spirit) as interdependent modalities of being, performing, and embodying for this space of representation is always conflictual and forever in movement:

> Écriture souveraine, la calligraphie dénonce, subvertit, renverse la substance même de la langue en la transportant en un espace autre, un combinatoire autre, qui soumettent le langage à une variation surdéterminée. C'est ce mouvement vacillant entre phonie et graphie que nous interrogeons ici. Comme la chinoise, la calligraphie arabe est une écriture inouïe du signe et la rhétorique d'une sur-significaiton. Rhétorique? Ce mot est réservé habituellement au fait littéraire. Mais c'est là une étrange dérive; le savoir occidental origine, fixe le sens dans la clôture de la parole, qui aurait la

---

[40] Khatibi confirms the non-universal nature of identity: "Ainsi, l'identité ne se définit pas par une structure éternelle, mais, d'après notre propos, elle est régie par des relations dissymétriques entre le temps, l'espace et la culture structurant la vie d'un groupe, d'une ethnie, d'une société. Traduction du mouvement d'être et de sa flexibilité, de son adaptation aux événements, à sa propre énergie de renouvellement. "Hospitalité" veut dire ici une écoute de l'autre en tant qu'autre. Lui prêter l'oreille pour l'accueillir dans sa singularité. Parole venant d'ailleurs et de loin, apprentissage initiatique à ma propre énergie de renouvellement. "Hospitalité" veut dire ici une écoute de l'autre en tant qu'autre. Lui prêter l'oreille pour l'accueillir dans sa singularité. Parole venant d'ailleurs et de loin, apprentissage initiatique à ma propre identité en devenir, à ma propre prétention à l'universalité, qui que je sois, muni ou démuni de force, de stratégie et de puissance sur les autres" (p. 83).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> double vertu d'être le réservoir du sens et d'être antérieure au graphe. Celui-ci est ainsi occulté, éloigné en une fonction secondaire, une fonction de travestissement (1974, p. 177).

For Khatibi, writing is the domain where signs are subverted, where somatic spaces are inscribed, and where language is never fixed but instead remains continually in flux. Indeed the lack of closure between the spoken versus the written word means that language is necessarily caught up in a incessant process of movement, rupture and recreation. However, given that linguistic closure is part of western tradition in understanding and constructing identity, the fluidity that Khatibi names could be necessarily viewed from a purely western perspective as a type of "transvestitism" of meaning, of taking one word and invoking a completely different meaning (as demonstrated by the divergences in spoken and written Arabic, for example).

Thus, if we examine the *dédoublement* of *tatouage* we notice that identity is not only limited to a facile interpretation of language and the somatic, but extends to the space of seemingly contradictory signs written upon the body. As *tatouage* is a cultural practice which takes place upon the body of young women who have reached puberty in the Maghreb, it is impossible to ignore the economy of symbols within the tradition of *tatouage*—for as *tatouage* marks the body, it exchanges discourses of desire while contemporaneously invoking a violence upon the body. This lack of closure in language yields identities which are perpetually implicated in a symbolic game of sorts, where desire traverses language and the body, and where the body and language inscribe themselves within the framework of violence and desire:

> L'inscription sur le corps supplée à l'économie de la nature, le graphe marquant dans un cas le cycle du sang, dans l'autre l'effacement de l'hymen. La puberté est un désordre des signes somatique. Ritualiser l'érotique consiste à redoubler de souffrance par la pointe de l'aiguille. La peur de la

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> pubère est d'être emportée par un fleuve de sang; le tatouage est ainsi la fiction de ce fantasme, de ce désordre somatique (1974, p. 97).

This *dédoublement* of symbolism written on the body embraces both discourses of desire and violence as the somatic moves away from erotic symbolism and towards an exchange of the violence of desire *"dédoublé par un autre désire"*.[41] Again, this movement is in continual shifting and mutation, for as identity is inscribed it immediately becomes dislocated, violated. Meaning within Khatibi relies upon *dédoublement* as a force through which gender and sexuality is maintained in a constant state of intelligibility and non-intelligibility.[42]

Herein lies the challenge for the western subject who attempts to interpret postcolonial, gendered or linguistic spaces: that it is essential to understand identity *without* invoking a certain fixity of language and body that would necessarily frame identity as necessarily "crossing over" or subverting *some "original"* meaning. Indeed, it would seem that Khatibi prompts for an understanding of the fluidity of language and identity *not* as a dialectical struggle, but rather as an engagement of difference whereby the "economy of identity"

---

[41] Khatibi writes: "Ce qu'on appelle vaguement la magie est cette transfiguration du corps par le vol de signes érotiques (la propriété en est la monnaie d'échange). L'économie de ce système est le même jeu symbolique engagé dans le jeu de cartes: on trafique continuellement le discours du désir, en échangeant la violence d'un désir dédoublé par un autre désir. D'où la violence mortelle: l'érotique du henné se fonde, dans ces exemples, dans un rapport de la couleur au philtre (poison et aphrodisiaque), l'un et l'autre se déterminant souvent dans un véritable tourbillon de codes" (1974, p. 100).

[42] Khatibi comments upon Jacques Derrida's theory of *parole* and *langue* in relationship to the graphic nature of *tatouage:* "J. Derrida a bien démontré comment le savoir occidental (depuis les Grecs) est noué à la question de l'écriture; les catégories fondamentales (intelligible/sensible, présence/absence, etc.) renvoient à un système idéologique par lequel l'Occident a lié son histoire (son épitémè) à une aventure logographique, refoulant ainsi toute écriture graphique irréductible à une telle emprise métaphysique. Puisque la parole est première et que la langue est «l'expression» de celle-ci (d'un contenu qui lui est transcendant), la graphie devient simplement le travestissement d'un tel geste: elle est le double travesti d'un «contenue» qui est toujours ailleurs" (p. 63).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

invested in fixed language is completely overthrown. As Buci-Glucksmann's analysis of *addâd* educes language in Khatibi as an "art du rien", identity would seemingly lie in the terrain of everything and nothing, of belonging and exile. Ultimately, identity is a discourse where the politics and practices of meaning lie in not naming and in not totalizing meaning, and as Buci-Glucksmann borrows from Lacan, in "*sé-parer de l'autre*".[43]

It is through writing—both literature and the body—that Khatibi exposes his system of the "intersémiotique" as that which bridges the *sémiotique graphique*, writing on the body, with the semiotics of literature. In *La blessure du nom propre*, Khatibi identifies the fragmentary systems of the erotic and of *tatouage* and reveals a the "corps *doxologique*," a body marked by the traces of desire, language, and violence, where:

> L'officiant prend son corps pour le corps de l'autre. Que cette illusion soit divine pour lui, nous lui accordons cela, mais en sachant qu'une telle appropriation du corps risque de faire disparaître Dieu. Là se loge la fêlure du désir. Là aussie notre différence avec le récitant: entre le souffle divin et la pourriture du désir, nous choisissons le rire hilare... qui, *lui*, sait" (p. 31).

Following Khatibi's reading, therefore, writing the *corps doxologique* and revealing somatic desire is to subvert both the religious lexicon of *ḥram*, the illicit, and the authoritary dialectic of language (pp. 36-38). Instead of remaining inside the constraints of a *ḥram/ḥlal* dialectic of desire, Khatibi evidences—both in his theoretical writings and fiction—a corporeal space of sexual ambiguity, a

---

[43] Buci-Glucksmann details "*pensée-autre* in *Amour bilingue*: "Khatibi nous introduira à cette "pensée-autre" par un travail de dé-nomination qui bouleverse l'économie identitaire de la langage française, au profit d'une sorte de parler—français—en "*addâd*", au profit d'un art du rien: consolation et inconsolation, aimer et désaimer, liaison et déliaison, totalisation et détotalisation, nomination et in-nomination. *Amour bilingue* n'est plus le livre de la séparation, mais celui du travail du deuil accompli. Le *se séparer* de l'autre devient un *sé-parer de l'autre*, pour reprendre une expression de Lacan" (p. 35).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

performative space of gendered subjectivity wherein the "plaisirs androgynes" are realized with the *corps doxologique*. Bodies are interchanged, identity mistaken and from this madness desire and laughter are produced. In Khatibi, the body is immersed in the codes of desire, rhetoric, and poetry, while its signification relies on its immersion in the imaginary and its breaking with social, religious, and gender codes.

In this process of cultural inscription, the body and language continually implicate each other in a game of free-play. Sex and gender, like language and desire, are at once separate and unified, at once hierarchized and confused: "Égalité certes dissymétrique entre les deux sexes, mais symétrique sur le plan du système et de la théorie, dans la mesure où le cercle de l'échange réalize le cercle métaphysique, et inversement" (1983, p. 174). Khatibi sets out to subvert the hegemonic practices of linguistic and cultural domination by advocating a Barthesian *langage poétique*, the *pluriel*, as a force through which one can interact with the other and through which alterity necessarily inhabits every language, nation, culture, subjectivity, and body. As such, transgression of the body for Khatibi frees a space in which the *mélange* of discourses, languages, and philosophies forges a poetics of "other-thought" (*Maghreb pluriel*) and of "other-literature" (*Amour bilingue*) through which sex, gender, and cultural identity is fashioned. Khatibi's *dédoublement* delineates the body of desire as an *intersexuality* while envisaging language as an *intertexuality*. Language, the *intertextual*, is drawn from culturally specific readings of the somatic, just as sex and gender, the *intersexual*, are actions and somatic surfaces that inflect the language which we use to create specific meaning and identity.

For Khatibi, identity thus depends on the perpetual process of attempting

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to become other while synchronously fighting against the grain of this idealized other—whether it is an other of a colonizing discourse imported into a specific cultural context (i.e. language, western theory) or an other *already seated within* a culture that elides or suppresses the feminine, the homosexual, or politically counter-hegemonic gestures. Khatibi's theory of the body and language ultimately essays to decolonize not only Maghrebian identity, but also identity of the non-western subject long colonized by and inscribed within western discourse. Yet, many critics such as Winifred Woodhull remain skeptical of Khatibi's move to undermine hegemonic discourse through a poetic production, claiming that Khatibi's theory idealizes the feminine and intractable difference through a faithfulness to the other which in turn also engenders a totalizing force of a "new" singularity or a homogenizing teleology of difference.[44] But it is exactly this move away from singularity that critics like Woodhall fail to recognize (perhaps because they are quite invested in their own form of feminist singularity?). More specifically, identity in Khatibi is a *dédoublement* in which poetic language and the feminine body become scenes of locating oppression while also embodying *multiple possibilities* of escaping the very oppressive definitions or roles that language and the corporeal in the west have heretofore maintained. Identity engenders a persistent shift, an unrelenting unearthing of differences (histories, languages, bodies, sexes, and desires) which the mimetic forces of language and performance seek to uncover while attempting to draw these differences into a sphere of similarities, a space in which the self and other can copy, reproduce, and re-present one another.

---

[44] See Winnifred Woodhull's study on Khatibi which I will discuss in the following chapter, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For as Buci-Glucksmann asserts, Khatibi creates a "theatre of the impossible" where *dédoublement* and equivocation construct a new logic of identity in which this rationale is intersected by other bodies and desires whereby identity is necessarily fragmented by "its own object".[45] Inasmuch as Buci-Glucksman maintains that Khatibi's theory of plurality is grounded on his notion of "intractable difference", it is essential to understand that Khatibi's *différence intraitable* is not an arrogation of one identity as somehow "better than" another.[46] Instead, Khatibi's *différence intraitable* is offered as a democratic forum for understanding the plurality of identities both in and outside the Maghreb. Out of all his works, *Maghreb pluriel* is Khatibi's attempt to democratize use of and access to language (and hence identity) by circulating a quite anti-romantic spin to past rhetoric of decolonization and feminist theory while also addressing the very basis upon which all identity remains paradigmatically and insolubly linked to language and the body. In other words, identity is representable only at the "threshold of the untranslatable" *(Amour bilingue)*, at the point in which becoming

---

[45] Buci-Glucksmann writes: "Ce recours à un véritable *théâtre de l'impossible*, cette mutliplication sans fin mais très contrôlée de l'ambiguïté, de l'équivoque, du hasard et du double, construit une rationalité travaillée par l'autre et fracturée par son propre objet. La «différence intraitable» est une véritable «*hétérologie*» selon la formule de Michel de Certeau" (p. 22).

[46] Khatibi locates intractible difference in terms of the feminine/masculine and orient/occident dichotomies throughout much of his wriitng. In *Maghreb pluriel* he writes: "Il faudrait penser le Maghreb tel qu'il *est*, site topographique entre l'Orient, l'Occident et l'Afrique, et tel qu'il puisse se mondaliser pour son propre compte. D'une certaine manière, ce mouvement est depuis toujours en marche. Ma ce mouvement historial exige une pensée qui l'accompagnerait. D'une part, il faut écouter le Maghreb résonner dans sa pluralité (linguistique, culturelle, politique), et d'autre part, seul le dehors repensé, décentré, subverti, détourné de ses déterminations différences informulées. Seul le dehors repensé—pour notre compte—est à même de déchirer notre nostalgie du Père et l'arracher à son sol métaphysique; ou du moins l'infléchir vers un tel arrachement, vers une telle différence intraitable qui se prend en charge dans ses souffrance intraitable qui se prend en charge dans ses souffrances, ses humiliations, et dirai-je, dans ses problèmes insolubles" (p. 39).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the other deconstructs the hegemonic discourses of representation by re-embodying similarities and differences within a new language, a new body, a new gender which emerge from a corpus of baroque excess.

Agnate to Khatibi's *dédoublement* of language and the body, Severo Sarduy evinces the somatic as a baroque field upon which signs, referents and language persistently intersect one another. Although Sarduy's writing maintains the space of *intersexuality* and *intertextuality*, his approach to language and the body differs considerably from that of Khatibi. Sarduy is not so much invested in the rupture, conflict and recreation of signification as he is in the *trompe l'œil* of the visible and the carnivalesque bodies which are necessarily produced by such conflicts. In discussing Khatibi's sense of writing and the body, Buci-Glucksmann notes that Sarduy's *dédoublement* of the body and language does not parallel Khatibi's in which identity negotiates desire, jouissance and memory. Instead, Buci-Glucksmann posits Sarduy's *dédoublement* as much more involved in simulation, masking, mirroring and doubling the body whereby the somatic is an anamorphic space of reading, writing, and watching—the body in Sarduy is a baroque space of "anamorphic writing".[47] Moreso, Sarduy invokes the body as

---

[47] Buci-Glucksmann discusses Sarduy in terms of an *écriture anamorphique:* "Installer l'écriture dans la *scène du voir* pour excéder les codes, des référents et sens du langage en une pratique carnavalesque et «cannibale» qui produit des corps, un surcroît de matérialité et de jouissance, une «suspension vibratoire», du sens en une Babel heureuse: n'est-ce pas précisément le principe baroque de l'écriture?...En ce sens, le baroque comme paradigme n'est jamais que le redoublement infini et simulé d'une écriture qui dilapide ses moyens et atteint «la science des jouissances du langage, son kamasutra»...C'est pour quoi, on pourrait distinguer ici avec Severo Sarduy deux types d'écriture et de relations au texte, à sa lecture: la relation frontale, intéressée au référent et au monologisme, et ce qu'il appelle «la position anamorphique» de l'écrivain/lecteur/voyeur, qui se déplace de biais, pour décrypter une écriture elle-même de biais: je de doubles, de miroirs, de masques et de simulacres, investissement de corps. Le baroque comme *écriture anamorphique* serait cette opération limite sur tel langage qui aboutit à «sodomiser une normalité linguistique» selon une formule de Juan Goytisolo, en permutant le jeu linguistique enjeu érotique et récriproquement" (p. 38).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both the agent and the object of its own transformation—the body as artist and the body as art. In his book, *La simulación*, Sarduy discusses his theory of corporeal mimesis, likening organic modification to baroque painting:

> El hombre puede pintar, inventar o recrear colores y formas que dispone en su exterior, sobre la tela, fuera de su cuerpo; pero es incapaz e impotente para modificar su propio organismo. El travestí, que llega a transformarlo radicalmente, y la mariposa, pueden pintarse a sí mismos, hacer de su cuerpo el soporte de la obra, convertir la emanación del color, los aturdidores arabescos y los tintes incandescentes en un ornamento físico, en una "autoplástica", aunque esas obras, indefinidamente repetidas, no pueden evitar una fría e immutable perfección (1982, p. 15).

The physical space upon which the colors and arabesques are imprinted are, for Sarduy, simulation of an ideal whereby the end result is inevitably a "cold and immutable perfection" and whereby the transvestite is always marked as excess above the original canvas (the body). In Sarduy, unlike Khatibi, the body demonstrates its own plasticity in that the act of simulation is marked so as to show all layers of the representative act and—most importantly—to underline that the representation is, in fact, both *unreal* and *hyperreal*.

All identity for Sarduy falls into this space of imitability, destruction and play amidst a baroque panoply of visual and performative effects. Like Khatibi's study of the Maghreb as a plural sphere of identities, languages and bodies, Sarduy situates his notion of Cuban identity within the matrix of race and nation (African, Spanish, and Chinese) using the body as a symbolic catalyst of such cultural, racial, and political inscriptions that are necessarily *already* synthesized (*mezclada*) and codified.[48] Yet, contrary to Khatibi's *bi-langue* which erases

---

[48] Sarduy writes that the Baroque serves as the representational edge for understanding Latin American identity: "Ese barroco furioso, impugnador y nuevo no puede surgir más que en las márgenes críticas o violentas de una gran superficie–de lenguaje, ideología o civilización—: en el espacio a la vez lateral y abierto, superpuesto, excéntrico y *dialectal* de América: borde y denegación, desplazamiento y ruina de la superficie renaciente

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contours and assimilates difference of language and the somatic, Sarduy's concept of simulation draws out and structures difference, calling attention to the artifices embedded within writing, speaking, viewing, (cross-) dressing, and painting. Sarduy's *La simulación* is dedicated to an eclectic analysis of the mechanisms of visual and linguistic representations of sex, gender, sexuality and mortality upon the transvestite, transsexual and tattooed body through a study of baroque imagery.

Sarduy suggests that representation of the body is necessarily marked since mimesis functions as a *trompe l'œil*, an imitation of an other which erases the contours of the somatic, assimilating the body into the stage upon which it is set: "Pero esa mirada que el trompe l'œil nos dirige, ese modo de enfocarnos, tiene su especificidad o su límte: surge como desde un centro, de un punto de fuga, o tangencial o desplazado, como en la anamorfosis, siempre coherente y apretado: un láser" (p. 43). Sarduy's concept of *anamorfosis*, writing which transforms the physical space, tightly adheres to and reflects the codes of the spectator's body through which simulation appears to be seamless. As such mimesis is seamless, virtually inconspicuous and it leaves the spectator all too comfortable, transformed and set upon the stage of the spectacle, such that the line between the spectator and spectacle become blurred—in mimesis limits are abolished, and performance "forgotten" such that everything is reduced to the "artifice":

> En algunas películas de Andy Warhol la diégesis, el tiempo del relato, la duración de la ficción, corresponde con el tiempo real del espectador: si un hombre duerme, el sueño dura ocho horas; el tiempo no admite elipsis ni contracción, corre paralelo al de la sala, solidario del que transcurre fuera de la pantalla, indistinguible—esta coincidencia es el "tema" del

---

española, éxoco, trasplante y fin de un lenguaje, de un saber" (p. 77).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> filme—de él. El trompe-l'œil postula esta analogía, esta identidad, pero con relación al espacio: para que la ilusión se configure, el aire que rodea a los objetos debe ser el nuestro, las sombras que proyectan proporcionales y conformes con las del cuerpo espectador, sus relaciones coherentes con las que van a establecer con él, como si la voluntad del género fuera precisamente la de olvidar eso a que no puede escapar y sin cuyo límite queda annulado, o reducido a una impostura: el marco (p. 44).

Like diegetic time in Warhol, simulation for Sarduy is always hinged upon the performance which manifests the seamlessness of the imitation within the spectator's own perception of space. In observing the spectacle, the spectator is drawn into the performance and soon forgets which stage is "real" and which is "play"—she becomes part of the theatre as this "third wall" of gender is broken. The *trompe l'œil* confirms both that which is seen, performed and interpreted while simultaneously underscoring the essence of simulation as a genre that has no limits and requires the spectator to forget the forgery, the mark. This is how *dédoublement* functions in Sarduy—a simultaneous consciousness of the real, painted and performed for the spectator while the very performance itself, as genre, relies on the very act of regarding this spectacle as real. The *dédoublement* of the body as real and the body as imitable nonetheless allures the spectator into using quotation marks around this "reality"—simulation as the "representación de la invisibilidad".[49]

As we have already seen, this problematic terrain of mimesis is frequently taken up in studies of "crossings"—sex, gender and sexuality—in Roland Barthes, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Peggy Phelan, for instance. However, Severo Sarduy

---

[49] Sarduy writes: "El simulacro se ha realizado. Esa conversión sería suficiente: nungún pájaro, ni siquiera el más perspicaz, descubriría la ilusión, ninguna serpiente. Sobre el tallo, simétricia de la hoja verdadera—tentación de escribir ese "verdadera" entre comillas—, la mariposa travestida ha logrado su teatro: representación de la invisibilidad" (p. 61).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

has, more than all the above writers, focused the core of his œuvre on the fissure *between* mimesis and simulation as evidenced by his work on transsexualism and transvestitism of language, aesthetics, and the body. Along with studying mimesis, Sarduy tackles the question of simulation as a means of elucidating the baroque—and even the Latin American *neo-barocco*—and conversely, he utilizes theories of baroque aesthetics in his reading of the sexed and gendered body. Here, Sarduy problematizes quite lucidly that space of identity as rhetorical, a domain which is *always already simulated:*

> *¿Simulo? ¿Qué? ¿Quién? ¿Mi madre, una mujer, la mujer de mi padre, la mujer? O bien: l mujer ideal, la esencia, es decir el modelo y la copia han entablado una relación de correspondencia imposible y nada es pensable mientras se pretenda que uno de los términos sea una imagen del otro:* que lo mismo sea lo que no es. *Para que todo signifique hay que aceptar que me habita no la dualidad, sino una* intensidad de simulación *que constituye su propio fin, fuera de lo que imita: ¿qué se simula? La simulación* (p. 11).

Sarduy demystifies gender—he deromanticizes it in fact—by firmly asserting that there simply is no real. Moreover, Sarduy takes the *dédoublement* of identity, this contradictory space of performing sex and gender, and he refuses both the referent and the representation as real: "El travestí no imita a la mujer. Para él, *à la limite,* no hay mujer, sabe—y quizás, paradójicamente sea el único en saberlo—, que élla es una apariencia, que su reino y la fuerza de su fetiche encubren un defecto" (p. 13).[50] This disavowal of the real occurs because

---

[50] Sarduy continues this argument of simulation: "El travestí no imita a la mujer. Para él, *à la limite, no* hay mujer, sabe—y quizás, paradójicamente sea el único en saberlo—, que *ella* es una apariencia, que su reino y la fuerza de su fetiche encubren un defecto. La erección cosmética del travestí, la agresión esplendente de sus párpados temblorosos y metalizados como alas de insectos voraces, su voz desplazada, como si perteneciera a otro personaje, siempre en *off,* la boca dibujada sobre su boca, su propio sexo, más presente cuanto más castrado, sólo sirven a la reproducción obstinada de ese ícono, aunque falaz omnipresente: la madre que la tiene parada y que el travestí dobla, aunque sólo sea para simbolizar que la erección es una apariencia. El travestí no copia; simula, pues no hay norma que invite y magnetice la transformación, que decida la

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Sarduy distinguishes between simulation and mimesis: mimesis is merely a direct representation whereas simulation is a transformation. Mimesis erases contours—such as Warhol's diegetic films in which the spectator's body becomes part of the projection—whereas simulation evidences them.

It would seem, therefore, that in discussing mimesis and simulation, we must interrogate exactly what is represented (or even appropriated) in each action. More importantly perhaps, we need to consider how identity functions *as a represented artifact* rather than as a fluid, temporal space of encounter, dialogue, and contention. Peggy Phelan studies this very shaky terrain of representing identity in her analysis of *Paris is Burning:*

> By linking the appropriated, metaphorical name with the masquerade of stylized, performed identity, the balls underline the violence of language and, more specifically, the rhetoric of identity. Neither metaphor nor performance can summon the proper name which will reveal ourselves to ourselves. There is no transparent document which contains our image, our name. Always we are struck trying to find ourselves within and through the realm of the Other, which is to say within the other-sign, the metaphor (p. 108).

Inasmuch as performance takes on identity in both temporal and spatial fields, it seeks to represent *that which was already there:* the performance itself. Phelan points out that in performance identity is visibly more rhetorical (not that it is not always) and as such the performance of identity is always about representing the *image of the other.* In both Phelan and Sarduy, there can be no pretense of *really* capturing identity, for identity itself is never real, but is a product of the cross-fire of language, metaphor, and signs. Yet, contemporary queer and feminist theory, for instance, grapples with the very basis of identity *as real* versus identity

---

metáfora: es más bien la inexistencia del ser mimado lo que constituye el espacio, la región o el soporte de esa simulación, de esa impostura concertada: aparecer que regula una pulsación goyesca: entre la risa y la muerte" (p. 13).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as simulated, co-opted.

Clearly, there is a theoretical quagmire regarding the body and performativity in terms of identity politics which needs to be brought into light, since it is clear that language and what it is *supposed to represent* are dissonant. In the United States, for instance, names have come to be quite important in the frontier of *identity-speak.* As such, language of identity in the United States changes quite frequently to represent groups whose former nominatives are no longer "acceptable" or "specific enough". We have seen the metamorphosis of language as words have changed within the landscape of cultural politics: "handicapped" to "disabled" to "differently-abled" and "colored" to "black" to "African-American". Words are embraced in the United States as having a resonance that is true for all whose bodies are inflected by the syllables of their phrasing. Yet, their very frequent readjustments and makeovers attest to their inability to fully express meaning and likewise for that meaning to have a stable fixed referent. Such phenomena are not new, as Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the grotesque body has shown that the modern body has been privatized, pulled away from the vernacular of the social, and has become "self-sufficient" in that it speaks for itself.[51] Given that the modern body has slowly moved from the

---

[51] In *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin writes: "In the modern image of the individual body, sexual life, eating, drinking, and defecation have radically changed their meaning: they have been transferred to the private and psychological level where their connotation becomes narrow and specific, torn away from the direct relation to the life of society and to the cosmic whole. In this new connotation they can no longer carry on their former philosophical functions...The body of the new canon is merely one body; no signs of duality have been left. It is self-sufficient and speaks in its name alone. All that happens within it concerns it alone, that is, only the individual, closed sphere. Therefore, all the events taking place within it acquire one single meaning: death is only death, it never coincides with birth; old age is torn away from youth; blows merely hurt, without assisting an act of birth. All actions and events are interpreted on the level of a single, individual life. They are enclosed within the limits of the same body, limits that are the absolute beginning and end and can never meet" (pp. 321-322).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

popular sector of the carnevalesque towards the sterilized, quiet sectors of the private, we might note how the somatic has been transformed into an agent of ultimate closure as reflected in the very specific language we use to represent our bodies today in terms of race, sexuality, and medicine. As Bakhtin points out, the orifices of the modern body are closed, the borders are finite and do not meld with other bodies, and most importantly, precise acceptable language has been developed with which to discuss the body.[52] As such it would seem quite a leap for Sarduy's theory of simulation to have resonance in a time when the body *is* understood as all too real.

But we need to understand what is this "real" is and how this real interacts in the universe of matter and flesh. Here, Bakhtin discusses Rabelais' materialism as central to his insistence in reading all matter as necessarily somatic, as real by virtue of their corporeality:

> [Rabelais] was consistently materialistic, and moreover approached matter only in its bodily aspect. In his mind the body was the most nearly perfect form of the organization of matter and was therefore the key to all matter. The material components of the universe disclose in the human

---

[52] In discussing the "new bodily canon", Bakhtin states: "The new bodily canon, in all its historic variation and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body's "valleys" acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world. All attributes of the unfinished world are carefully removed, as well as all the signs of its inner life. The verbal norms of official and literary language, determined by the canon, prohibit all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth. There is a sharp line of division between familiar speech and "correct" language. The fifteenth century was an age of considerable freedom in France. In the sixteenth century the norms of language become more strict, and the borderline between the different norms grew more evident...There is no symbolic, broad meaning whatever in the organs of this body. If they are referred to on the merely practical level in brief explanatory comments. Generally, speaking, all that does not contain an element of characterization in the literary image is reduced to a simple bodily remark added to speech or action" (pp. 320-321).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> body their true nature and highest potentialities; they become creative, constructive, are called to conquer the cosmos, to organize all cosmic matter. They acquire a historic character (p. 366).

This form of materialism as found in Rabelais exercised the body as the basis upon which to decipher the universe as, say, we use the tools of technology to do so presently. In a sense, the body of the medieval period was viewed as a more perfect matter than that which surrounded it, thus the body became an instrument against which to measure and create hierarchy in the outside world. Bakhtin also delineates how later, during the Renaissance, especially in Italian schools of philosophy, the grotesque body was the epicenter for undoing the medieval hierarchical ordering of the world. For the Renaissance evidenced the body of natural phenomena in which there was no order, linearity or boundaries in understanding phenomena as "natural magic" in which the body was just one microcosm of a larger magnitude.[53]

It is during the Renaissance when the body begins to move away from its natural and religious inscriptions, and instead move towards discourses of love and eroticism as De Certeau's study, *Le fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe Siècle* evidences.[54] De Certeau demonstrates that language during the Renaissance

---

[53] Bakhtin writes of the body's development in the Renaissance: "The grotesque concept of the body in some of its essential elements represented the humanist and, above all, the Italian philosophy of that period. It had conceived, as we have seen, the idea of the microcosm (based on ancient tradition) as adopted by Rabelais. The human body was the center of a philosophy that contributed to the destruction of the medieval hierarchic picture of the world and to the creation of a new concept" (p. 364). And in discussing the idea of "natural magic" he writes: "Ideas of "natural magic" and of "sympathy" between all phenomena, were widespread during the Renaissance. These ideas, as expressed by Giambattista Porta, Giordano Bruno, and especially Campanella, played a considerable role in destroying the medieval notion of hierarchical space in which natural phenomena had their own distinct levels. The new ideas brought together that which was divided, effacing false boundaries, contributing to the transfer of all to one horizontal plane of the becoming of the cosmos in time" (pp. 364-365).

[54] De Certeau writes: "Depuis le XIIIe siècle (l'Amour courois, etc.), une lente

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

made this transformation from religious desire to erotic desire whereby the body played a more direct role in the creation and undoing of somatic meaning in language. More specifically, De Certeau discusses how from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the *foule* (crowds) became the scene for understanding dissimulation and subversion of identity:

> Une pratique contemporaine (IVe-VIe siècle) donne à cette simulation un répondant féminin. Pélagie, Marina, d'autres encore à l'époque, se déguisent en hommes et elles passent encore à l'époque, se déguisent en hommes et elles passent pour des eunuques. Autant et plus que de cacher une identité féminine sous une apparence masculine, il s'agit pour elles d'abolir la différence et de surmonter la loi de "l'un *ou* l'autre". Un aphorisme de l'Évangile de Thomas en déclare l'objectif: "Que le mâle ne soit pas mâle et que la femme ne soit pas femme.' Homologue à la proposition paulinienne—'devenir fou pour devenir sage"—, l'injonction de deux premier: la multitude est l'universel où doit se perdre la différence entre homme et femme comme entre sage et fou. Tous travestis, hommes ou femmes, sages ou fous, masques et dérision d'identités, *disparaissent* dans un entre-deux public et commun. L'essentiel n'est donc pas la transgression d'un ordre (qui, en effet, s'impose toujours en distinguant des places), mais la *perte* du défini dans un *non-lieu* où les identités jouent entre elles comme des semblants. La foule, gouffre où les différences s'effacent, est l'éclipse du sexe (masculin ou féminin) et l'éclipse du logos (sage ou fou). Évagre le note à propos des idiots, habitués des bains publics: "Ils veulent être hommes avec les hommes et femmes avec les femmes, et participer à l'un et à l'autre sexe sans être eux-mêmes d'aucun.' Sans doute faudra-t-il s'interroger sur le corps qui instaure ce non-lieu absolu et absous de la différence. Il ressort déjà de ces textes qu'à la manière de la femme travestie en homme, la simulation de la folie outrepasse l'ordre du "l'un ou l'autre", pour osciller entre "ni l'un ni l'autre" et "l'un et l'autre". Alors qu'elle est, pour de bonnes raisons, circonscrite dans le dérisoire par chez l'idiote, qu'une disparition et, chez l'idiot, qu'un rire (pp. 64-65). (Citations

---

démythification religieuse semble s'accompagner d'une progressive mythification amoureuse. L'unique change de scène. Ce n'est plus Dieu, mais l'autre et, dans une littérature masculine, la femme. À la parole divine (qui avait aussi valeur et nature physiques) se substitue le corps aimé (qui n'est pas moins spirituel et symbolique, dans la pratique érotique). Mais le corps adoré échappe autant que le Dieu qui s'efface. Il hante l'écriture: elle chante sa perte sans pouvoir l'accepter; en cela même, elle est érotique...Sa littérature a donc tous les traits de ce qu'elle combat et postule: elle est l'épreuve, par le langage, du passage ambigu de la présence à l'absence; elle atteste une lente transformation de la scène religieuse en scène amoureuse, ou d'une foi en une érotique; elle raconte comment un corps «touché» par le désir et gravé, blessé, écrit par l'autre, remplace la parole révélatrice et enseignante. Les mystiques luttent ainsi avec le deuil, cet ange nocturne. Mais la propédeutique médiévale d'une assimilation à la vérité devient chez eux un corps à corps" (p. 13).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from *L'Évangile de Thomas.* Ed. and trans. A. Guillaumont. Paris: Logion, 1959. pp. 56-57)

In this specific context, De Certeau demonstrates that act of crossing boundaries was not at all viewed as transgressive since in this specific cultural logic crossdressing in the public sphere simply marked the *non-site* of difference where identities were intermingled and played off one another such that "the simulation of madness surpassed order" and identity was neither "one nor the other". The *foule*, therefore, is the cultural neuter from which the plurality of bodies emerges, thus filling public space with a heterogeneity of shapes, masks, clothes and identities. Moreso, the *foule* in the Renaissance is the "other" since it has no access to specific identity as it is the *corps publique*, the *corps originaire* which produces the very "power and will to leave" and yet harbors the non-identity of —and impossibility of identifying—its totality.[55]

De Certeau's analysis of the *foule* opens up the possibilities for reading politics of identity today in terms of Sarduy's notion of simulation. Indeed both readings attempt to understand the spaces between the cultural logics of the body and individual performances thereof. Like De Certeau's *foule* which functions as the social mass in which identity is mixed and transgressions do not really have any weight in the cultural economy of meaning, Sarduy's theatre of performance presents a similar public sphere in which gender identities and

---

[55] In discussing the *foule*, De Certeau writes: "La foule est ainsi, par le corps perdu qui en "reçoit" la folie, le site paradoxal de l'absolu. C'est le commencement et la fin de ces histoires. À évoquer les caractéristiques de ce non-lieu telles qu'elles ressortent de ces récits, on ne fait que retracer, en termes d'espace, le fonctionnement de la séduction. La foule est un corps *neutre* (*neuter*) qui est toujours l'autre (le "reste") et "ni l'un ni l'autre" par rapport aux lieux privilégiés où se tiennent les discours de sagesse. C'est un corps *public*: n'importe qui, n'importe quoi, tous et chacun, par rapport aux identités particulières qui se distinguent de ce fond indéterminé. C'est un corps *originaire* qui fait figure de commencement indéfini par rapport aux effets que produisent le pouvoir et le vouloir d«en sortir»" (p. 68).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sexed bodies are always "on", be it in the social loci of meeting places or on the stage of a transvestite bar. However, Sarduy's theory of simulation does not depend upon the masses as being heterogeneous and vaguely dissimilar as De Certeau's theory advances, but instead it relies upon the spectator, the reader, or the individual interacting with the text, taking in the spectacle. Sarduy is much less concerned with creating a social center in which identity, inevitably discernible and traceable to a specific moment or space, is ultimately homogeneous in its mass interpretation. Rather, Sarduy is invested in understanding identity as that which is created *by* language and the discourses which cultures use to frame and normalize identity. Indeed, this is what makes Sarduy's readings of representation through either mimesis or simulation so interesting—that he incorporates two sets of social readings of the body: that which marks difference and that which diffuses it. Simulation of the body is difference marked by this linguistic separation, and mimesis is assimilation into the social structure as marked by linguistic sameness.

Through a reciprocal relationship to language, Sarduy, like Khatibi, ultimately maintains the body as the site of cultural, sexual, gendered and linguistic inscriptions against which the identity is marked. But it is writing on the body, as in *tatuaje*, where Sarduy strongly differs from Khatibi—for Sarduy envisions the end of ritual in *tatuaje*. And it is in this loss of ritual where Sarduy paradoxically positions somatic identity:

> El tatuaje, pues, hoy, con su auge y automatización, ha invertido su signo: ya no es un acto sagrado que exige el consentimiento de las divinidades, ni el testimonio de una prueba iniciática, ni la garantía de pertenencia a una tribu, a una varonía, o a un clan, ni el simulacro ideográfico que da al guerrero un aspecto terrible y rememora sus hazañas, ni el signo indeleble que proteje de toda agresión: así lo empleaba un emperador chino, como pasaporte o salvoconducto para atravesar los países enemigos: no; robustece al tatuado en tanto que proprietario, acumulador taimado de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> ornamentos que sólo la escaramuza agresiva hace viriles, que no conmemoran el coraje—si de verdad la inscripción es indolora—de ningún sacrificio, la sangre de ningún pacto, el horror de ninguna escarificación (p. 68).

Tatuaje is a historically significant rite upon the body which transgressed the body, marking, violating, and initiating it through aggression and terror. Indeed, this act committed the body to a metamorphosis from which there was no escape. Today, however, Sarduy envisions *tatuaje* as a painless act of splendor that has become automatized and is no longer sacred. The body no longer takes on the permanence of its mutations but rather enters and exits temporalities of inscription which are now regarded more as decorations on the body, rather than rites of passage. But the contemporary body of *tatuaje* erases itself, it forces the body to become other, losing itself to the baroque. The body, therefore, is rendered with an overabundance of signs, overrun with a baroque language that is the site of loss and excess of the object.[56]

Sarduy's earlier work on baroque aesthetics discusses the baroque in terms of subverting an established order while "deforming the trace" of this former order: "El barroco subvierte el orden supuestamente normal de las cosas, como la elipse—ese suplemento de valor—subvierte y deforma el trazo, que la tradición idealista supone perfecto entre todos, del círculo" (1974, pp. 99-100). It is also in the baroque where Sarduy examines the literary text, like the body, as a topography of superimposition, modifications and editing. It is in the disorder

---

[56] In *Barocco*, Sarduy states: "El espacio barroco es pues el de la superabundancia y el desperdicio. Contrariamente al lenguaje comunicativo, económico, austero, reducido a su funcionalidad—servir de vehículo a una información—, el lenguaje barroco se complace en el suplemento, en la demasía y la pérdida parcial de su objeto. O mejor: en la búsqueda, por definición frustrada, del *objeto parcial*" (p. 100).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and reconstruction wherein he envisions creation as "*la reminiscencia*".[57] And it is within this parody of reproduction, transgression and "natural dialogue", that Sarduy locates the erotic:

> [E]rotismo en tanto que actividad que es siempre puramente lúdica, que no es más que una parodia de la función de reproducción, una transgresión de lo útil, del diálogo «natural» de los cuerpos. En el erotismo la artificialidad, lo cultural, se manifiesta en el juego con el objeto perdido, juego cuya finalidad está en sí mismo y cuyo propósito no es la conducción de un mensaje—el de los elementos reproductores en este caso—sino su desperdicio en función del placer: Como la retórica barroca, el erotismo se presenta como la ruptura total del nivel denotativo, directo y natural del lenguaje—somático—, como la perversión que implica todo metáfora, toda figura. No es un azar histórico si Santo Tomás, en nombre de la *moral*, abogaba por la exclusión de las figuras en el discurso literario (1999, p. 1402).

Antithetical to De Certeau's interpretation of the Renaissance body as that which breaks from the neuter of society into the heteroglossic public sphere, Sarduy's body of the baroque emerges already charged with meaning, artificiality and cultural signifiers whose excess and lack necessarily produce eroticism. Sarduy manifests the erotic as a rupture from denotative language in which the object of desire is lost—it cannot be recuperated but can only be manifested through metaphor and play. Like simulation, desire is not representable in any totality, but is only understandable as a simultaneous absence and presence, as both insufficiency and excess.[58]

---

[57] In "El barroco y el neobarroco," Sarduy considers the issues of superimposition of language, text and body: "Consideraremos en primer lugar la incorporación de un texto extranjero al texto, su *collage* superposición a la superposición del mismo, forma elemental del diálogo, sin que por ello ninguno de sus elementos se modifique, sin que su voz se altere: *la cita;* luego trataremos de la forma mediata de incorporación en que el textxo extranjero se funde al primero, indistinguible, sin implantar sus marcas, su autoridad de cuerpo extraño en la superficie, pero constituyendo los estratos más profundos del texto receptor, tiñendo sus redes, modificando con sus texturas su geología: *la reminiscencia*" (p. 1396).

[58] Similarly, in *Barocco*, he writes: "Juego, pérdida, desperdicio y placer: es decir, erotismo en tanto que actividad puramente lúcida, que parodia de la función de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Though he develops a theory of the baroque through a language of painting which transgresses authority and defies closure,[59] it is Sarduy's conception of the neobarroco wherein he evidences space, like the body of simulation, which is the possible locus for creating disharmony, breaking homogeneity, and inaugurating imbalance:

> [E]l barroco actual, el neobarroco, refleja estructuralmente la la inarmonía, la ruptura de la homogeneidad, del logos en tanto que absoluto, la carencia que constituye nuestro fundamento espistémico. Neobarroco del desequilibrio, reflejo estructural de un deseo que no puede alcanzar su objeto, deseo para el cual el logos no ha organizado más que una pantalla que esconde la carencia. La mirada ya no es solamente infinito: en tanto que objeto parcial se ha convertido en objeto perdido. El trayecto—real o verbal—no salta ya solamente sobre divisiones innumerables, sabemos que pretende un fin que constantemente se le escapa, o mejor, que este trayecto está dividido por esa misma ausencia alrededor de la cual se desplaza. Neobarroco: relfejo necesariamente pulverizado de un saber que sabe que ya no está apaciblemente cerrado sobre sí mismo (p. 103).

This *fin*, closure, assumed by the ligaments that representation maintains with the real, is what Sarduy denies in his theories of the baroque and simulation. The aesthetic of the *neobarroco*, like the transvestite body, manifests itself in being *like* something else while "covering up the lack" with an excess of signs. The *neobarroco* reflects a consciousness that, amidst this space of disharmony and absence, the subject's own displacement is maintained—there is no center or periphery, there is no original. The *neobarroco* dispenses with linearity and

---

reproducción, transgresión de lo útil, del diálogo "natural" de los cuerpos. En el erotismo la artificialidad, lo cultural, se manifiestan en el juego con el objeto perdido, juego cuya finalidad está en sí mismo y cuyo propósito no es la conducción de un mensaje—el de los elementos reproductores en este caso—, sino su desperdicio en función de placer. Com o la retórica barraca el erotismo se presenta en tanto que ruptura total del nivel denotativo, directo y "natural" del lenguaje—somático—, como la perversión que implica toda metáfora, toda figura" (p. 101).

[59] Sarduy writes: "Barroco que en su acción de bascular, en su caída, en su lenguaje *pinturero* a veces estridente, abigarrado y caótico, metaforiza la impugnación de la entidad logocéntrica que hasta entonces lo estructuraba desde su lejanía y su autoridad; barroco que recusa toda instauración, que metaforiza al orden discutido, al dio juzgado, a la ley transgredida (1974, pp. 103-104).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

origin and instead embodies the trace as fragmented, unrecognizable and erased.[60]

As such, the writing on the body of the transvestite is the *neobarroco* incarnate. The body is traversed by the excess and paucity of meaning—language and signs mean nothing and everything. Discordantly, the mimetic function of performance merely dissolves the body into space—it pulls the somatic into the backdrop assimilating the body. In discussing transvestitism in terms of writing on the body, Sarduy notes:

> El mimetismo borra los contornos, disuelve el cuerpo en el espacio que lo rodea, lo asimila, lo identifica con su soporte; la escritura corporal, al contrario, lo marca, lo señala, lo destaca como objeto cifrado, perteneciente al lenguaje y ajeno a seres y cosas. El mimetismo, fijando al animal, identificándolo con el vegetal, lo rebaja en la escala de lo vivo; la escritura corporal, al contrario, al dibujar la letra muerta sobre la piel, sitúa al hombre en su cenit: el reino del símbolo (pp. 63-64).

Sarduy perspicuously differentiates between performance which is seamlessly "absorbed" into the social body and the writing on the body which necessarily marks the dichotomy between live flesh and the "dead letter", situating the body in its perfection: "the kingdom of the symbol". Body writing marks the subject and emphasizes him as coded, situating him within a symbolic order—identity is bound up in the creation of subjectivity as reflected from the outside world onto the speaking or performing subject who is already exceeding the limits of the real. Sarduy promotes writing as that which precedes the word: the non-transcribable, intransitive, and untranslatable. Writing is the logo of violence, that which changes the superficies forever, that which signifies

---

[60] In his essay, "La emigración de los tatuajes," Sarduy examines Gustave Moreau's bodies of *tatuaje:* "Derivan los cuerpos cifrados, se van marchitando, desfallecen, hasta que mueren pronunciando un nombre; los tatuajes se borran. O no: como si temieran degradarse con la piel que los soporta, los tatuajes frente a la muerte, con ese *instinto que atraviesa toda escritura,* se han exilado, han emigrado hacia otro cuerpo, vital y fornido, pájaros de tinta hacia el verano" (p. 1431).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and marks. Like transvestitism, writing is a cosmetic action that evinces itself through presence.

However, Sarduy takes a paradoxical approach to the "body work" of the transvestite by framing the transvestite as negotiating new boundaries under the rubric of "the natural" while also confirming her as every bit a "graphic" as language:

> Relacionar el *trabajo corporal* de los travestís a la simple manía cosmética, al afeminamiento o a la homosexualidad es simplemente ingenuo: esas no son más que las fronteras aparentes de una metamorfosis sin límites, su pantalla "natural". Detalle accesorio: la mariposa javanesa de que se trata—Inachis o Parallecta—se conoce popularmente con un nombre idea para un travestí: Kallima (pp. 62-63).

Here Sarduy plays with language as "Kallima", the Arabic word for "word" (كلمة), implicates that the coding of the body through language is akin to the representation of sex and sexuality through somatic metamorphosis.[61] But this entire process of simulating sex and gender through the transvestite performance takes place at the limits of representation where performance is a "fetishism of inversion." The transvestite is an imaginary apparition that converges with three simulatory possibilities of: *travestí* as an act of limitless metamorphosis that constantly transcends its own limits in acknowledging the impossibility of reaching an end (telos); *camuflaje* wherein the cosmetics, or surgery, from man to woman do not pretend to mask the disappearance or effacement of the macho; and *intimidación* as the adjustment of certain affectations wherein the visible of the artificial is emphasized, such as Sarduy's examples of Canadian drag queens who simulate Doris Day or Moroccan transvestites who dance to the

---

[61] He also plays with names throughout his novels, as I shall discuss later in my analysis of *Cobra*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

songs of Miriam Makeba (pp. 13-14).[62] Again, simulation is not mimesis—it does not seek to embody, but rather essays to perform the abstract image of woman, the iconicity of woman rather than the "real", the quotidian. The transvestite never tries to perform women, but searches for the symbolic of woman that many "biological" females also seek to reproduce:

> Así sucede con los travestís: sería cómodo—o cándido—reducir su *performance* al simple simulacro, a un fetichismo de la inversión: no ser percibido como hombre, convertirse en la aparencia de la mujer. Su búsqueda, su compulsión de ornamento, su exigencia de lujo, va más lejos. La mujer no es el límite donde se detiene la simulación. Son hipertélicos: van más allá de su fin, hacia el absoluto de una imagen abstracta, religiosa incluso, icónica en todo caso, mortal. Las mujeres—vengan a verlo al *Carrousel* de París—los imitan (p. 62).

Sarduy's simulation in its eccentric familiarity, produces meaning at the threshold of excess whereby appearance forms both a reality and a space of absolute excess and loss. It is this collapsing of cultural symbols that synchronously delineate and displace meaning whereby the body of simulation, like the page of a text, are open to inscriptions, editings, erasures, and readings.

Similar to Sarduy's notion of simulation is Baudrillard's vast body of writing on this subject. Instead of locating simulation within the visual and tactile of art

---

[62] Sarduy delineates the three possibilities of mimesis of the transvestite here: "El travestí humano es la aparición imaginaria y la convergencia de las tres posibilidades del mimetismo: el *travestimiento* propiamente dicho, impreso en la pulsión ilimitada de metamorfosis, de transformación no se reduce a la imitación de un modelo real, determinado, sino que se precipita en la persecución de una irrealidad infinita, y desde el inicio de "juego" aceptada como tal, irrealidad cada vez más huidiza e inalcanzable—ser cada vez más mujer, hasta sobrepasar el límite, yendo más allá de la mujer, "folie douce" que denunciaba un ex travestí del Carrousel; —pero tamién el *camuflaje*, pues nada asegura que la conversión cosmética—o quirúrgica—del hombre en mujer no tenga como finalidad oculta una especie de desaparición, de invisibilidad, *d'effacement* y de tachadura del macho en el clan agresivo, en la horda brutal de los machos y, en la medida de su separación, de su diferencia, de su deficiencia o su exceso, también en la de las mujeres, desaparición, anulación que comunica con la pulsión letal del travestí y su fascinación por la *fijeza* a su vez fascinante; finalmente la *intimidación*, pues el frecuente desajuste o la desmesura de los afeites, lo visible des artificio, la abigarrada máscara, paralizan o alterran..." (p. 14).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the body, Baudrillard hypostatizes simulation as "the event": simulation is something which both did and did not happen, which is correspondingly real and hyperreal. Simulation retains a realness in what Baudrillard denominates the hyperreal—a sphere where origin is not only unknowable, but it is also negligible:

> Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation. To begin with it is a play of illusions and phantasms: Pirates, the Frontier, Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. But what draws the crowds is undoubtedly much more the social microcosm, the miniaturized and *religious* revelling in real America, in its delights and drawbacks. You park outside, queue up inside, and are totally abandoned at the exit. In this imaginary world the only phantasmagoria is in the inherent warmth and the affection of the crowd, and in that sufficiently excessive number of gadgets used there to specifically maintain the multitudinous affect. The contrast with the absolute solitude of the parking lot—a veritable concentration camp—is total. Or rather: inside, a whole range of gadgets magnetise the crowd into direct flows—outside, solitude is directed onto a single gadget: the automobile. By an extraordinary coincidence (one that undoubtedly belongs to the peculiar enchantment of this universe), this deep-frozen infantile world happens to have been conceived and realised by a man who is himself now cryogenised: Walt Disney, who awaits his resurrection at minus 180 degrees centrigrade (pp. 23-24).

Indeed, Baudrillard's vision of Walt Disney could be read easily through Sarduy's notion of simulation as excess, as artifice. Here, Baudrillard evidences simulation on many levels as: the body of death and putrification which awaits a possibly imminent resurrection, the microcosm of "fantasy" worlds recreated within the theme park, and the parking lot completely devoid of human life. This entire spectacle houses all the interstices of real and simulated worlds while leaving the participant unable to discern the real from the simulation. Ironically, Baudrillard makes this distinction for the "real" is not, as we might think, the cryogenised body of Walt Disney, but instead is the vast, empty, lifeless parking lot of Disneyland. Baudrillard's paradoxical situation of the organic body as simulation and the dead parking lot as real indicates that real and artifice have absolutely

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nothing to do with organic and non-organic substance. It seems to me that the real and simulation have nothing to do with matter and essence at all, but instead are allegories for reading the body, for diverting language.[63] The real and simulation are located within the multifarious possibilities of not only writing, performing and observing, but they are also to be found within the simultaneous destruction (and deconstruction) of these temporarily fixed moments in which identity is fixed by language.

As Baudrillard postures this domain of the real and hyperreal within geographic space, Sarduy likewise substantiates simulation upon the body as a province where producing identity is neither allied to a linear trajectory in time nor is it a replication of an other. Catalyzing his notion of simulation through *el travestí humano*, Sarduy contends that the transvestite neither imitates nor copies the woman, but rather he *simulates* her by becoming a baroque body incarnate where gender is hypostatized through performance. For Sarduy, identity lies in the trick, the *trompe-l'œil*, of the subject's self-creation through which the polyphony of signs, marking the body and setting into motion a continuous play of the subject's body and performance within imaginary, the symbolic, and the real spaces. The transvestite as a baroque figure is "*plus vrai que nature*", a figure which "terrorizes" and reinvents nature by making visible the artifice through which identity comes into being (1982, p. 35). Indeed, Sarduy renders the violence of marking, of scarring, the body as part of a ritual of *becoming* while this simulation of identity engenders a space which is

---

[63] In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson highlights allegory as a dialogical mode of history telling: "Allegory is here the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations" (pp. 29-30).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

simultaneously sacred and profane.[64] Yet Sarduy carefully distinguishes between the transsexual and the transvestite noting their discursive differences:

> Para el travestí, la dicotomía y oposición de los sexos queda abolida o reducida a criterios inoportunos o arqueológicos; para el transexual, al contrario, esa oposición no sólo se mantiene sino que es subrayada, aceptada: simplemente el sujeto, tomando el "corte" al pie de la letra, ha saltado del otro lado de la barra. El travestí remite a la arqueología, a otro mito complementario y reconfortante, el del andrógino, que se sitúa en un tiempo adánico, en un tiempo antes del tiempo y de la separación fisica de los sexos, en su indiferenciación latente; el transexual se sitúa al final de la parábola de los sexos: en su oscilación, en ese punto en que su contradicción es a la vez mantenida, acentuada y borrada (p. 65).

The transvestite breaks down dichotomies of gender by interchanging their valences, corroding their meaning and violating the very separation of sex. The

---

[64] I am interestsed here in this difference between Khatibi and Sarduy as Khatibi releases the body from violation where Sarduy renders the somatic as marked, violated and terrorized. Sarduy's marking of the body is similar to *The Tremulous Private Body* in which Francis Barker notes how the body of the Jacobean stage was both sacred and profane, physically marked by punishment while also celebrated, maintains itself as the residue of domination and resistance: "The glorious cruelties of the Jacobean theatre thus articulate a mode of corporeality which is structural to its world. Although the involvement of the body in punishment is only an essential and typical section across the way in which discourse invests it with a fundamental (and therefore, in this world, *superficial*) meaning, it none the less represents a generalized condition under which the body, living or dead, is not that effaced residue which it is to become, beneath or behind the proper realm of discourse, but a materiality that is fully and unashamedly involved in the processes of domination and resistance which are the inner substance of social life. The stage of representation and that other scaffold of corporal punishment are...effectively continuous with each other. On both, the spectacularly visible body is fully in place with signification, coterminous with the plane of representation itself" (pp. 20-21). In this way, we might come to see how the flesh, like in Sarduy, maintains iself as sacred through the ritual of violence, the segregation of the spiritual from the profane as we shall see his literature. Again, Barker distinguishes between practice as non-representational (as quotidian) and practices which are symbollic: "The Jacobean body is at once sacred and profane, tortured and celebrated in the same gesture, because it traverses even the polarities of the culture's investments: or rather, it is the medium and the substance in which, ultimately, those meanings are inscribed. It has this polyvalent but unambiguous status because drawn on its surface are the means by which the culture, even at its most metaphysical, can determine not only its consonances but its inner discords as well. The underpinnings of the more quotidien disputes which texture the life of this society return in their grounding to that unseparated word made flesh which is the principle of its representational practices (practices which cannot, thus, be regarded as *representational* in the strictest sense). A mode of discourse operates here which, basing itself in incarnation, exercises a unitary *presence* of meaning of which the spectacular body is both the symbol and the instance" (p. 21).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

body of the transsexual, however, has "jumped to the other side of the slash"—for the identity of the transsexual is that of maintaining and underlining difference. Indeed, the transsexual is often invested in maintaining gender roles as real and the somatic spaces of sex as clearly defined and separated. But as Sarduy notes here, in undergoing a surgical transformation, the transsexual necessarily commits the body of sex as transitory, lying at the interstices of the sexes. The transsexual's body, therefore, is a sign which is simultaneously "maintained, accentuated and erased".

For Sarduy, somatic identity is everywhere—it is sex, gender, sexuality, language and culture. The transvestite body is a somatic text upon which subjectivity is created and where Language and the body are interdependent—for without the signifying economy of language, arabesques and *khôl*-painted eyes, there would be no subject. As such, the transvestite reduces the performance of *being* woman to a fetishism of inversion whereby woman is *not* the limit of this simulation: the transvestite goes beyond the limit, reaching toward the iconic, the imaginary, the religious. In so doing, the transvestite embodies the *hiper-mujer*, the idea of "woman" as appropriated sign, as the ideal to which both transvestites and many ostensibly women aspire, but never fully realize. Sarduy's writing promotes the creation of identity within a socially symbolic sphere in which the freedom of signification lies within the domain of the imaginary—a field where identity is *hipertélica* and can never be contained to or defined within a single moment, nor can identity be assigned by an individual subject. As he posits the *hipertelos* of body, gender and baroque art, Sarduy likewise parallels cultural and racial identity as also being part of the violent spaces of creation, negation, exile and recreation. In discussing José Lezama Lima and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"barroco furioso" Sarduy states:

> Ese barroco furioso, impugnador y nuevo no puede surgir más queen las márgenes críticas o violentas de una gran superficie—de lenguaje, ideología o civilización—: en el espacio a la vez lateral y abierto, superpuesto, excéntrico y *dialectal* de América: borde y denegación, desplazamiento y ruina de la superficie renaciente española, éxodo, transplante y fin de un lenguaje, de un saber (1982, p. 77).

Sarduy manifests the body of racial, cultural and linguistic identity as part of a universe of violence where these signs are undermined, frozen, transplanted, denied and ruined. Like sex and gender, the valences of identity in Latin America are contained within a dialectic which is interminably recovering and finding itself. In this way, Sarduy's writing converges on simulation as a performance of sexed and gendered identities whereby meaning is resurrected and destroyed, whereby identity forced into exile and repudiated. Simulation hinges upon the endless chain of signifiers and signified in which the embellishment of language (*neobarroco*) and the body of the transvestite or transsexual perpetually undergo change, movement, fragmentation, and even reconstructive surgery to effect the *hiper-mujer* who is, ultimately, more Woman than the ideal of "women".

Barthes, Sarduy and Khatibi demonstrate the "feminine" as a space of free-play in which the rigid, homogenizing voice that has traditionally been allotted phallocentrism is subverted by the polyphony of bodies, voices, and identities that heretofore had been obfuscated in histories and mythologies, conquests and colonizations. The "feminine" becomes an identity that is not polymorphic, but rather fluid, whereby the conscious space allotted it becomes knowable and namable only through individual experience, utterances, and performances. For Khatibi the feminine maintains a pluralistic, fragmentary structure in which the body is the central impulse to the liberation of mind and spirit and whereby freedom can be achieved on both physical and symbolic

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

levels. Yet, all traces of difference and subjectivity are absorbed and lost within the jouissance of language, play, and the imaginary in recreating a paradise where Khatibi's feminine "ideal" ends up eliding any contingent, or other, desire. For Sarduy, the body is space upon which language inscribes its codes—the subject is determined by the code and plays at will with such tropes, metaphors, and shades. Sarduy demonstrates the discursive opacity of the feminine and the empirical structurings inherent within any performance thereof in which the artist sculpts the feminine, carefully selecting the gown, applying the lip liner, then almost as easily taking it all off. The posture of woman for Sarduy is performance which incorporates the body which undertakes the process of realizing and invoking the feminine—a performance which has no limit and which ultimately whose goal remains to outdo nature while retaining the most possible natural, "real" look.

Yet, how can we discuss the relationship between the body and gender without constructing yet another monolithic discourse which seeks either to reverse the dichotomies of feminine passivity and corporeality to masculine activity and intellectual energy by eliding the body or to nullify the historical remnants of these discursive markings which might possibly serve as an arena of subversion? Like Barthe's utopia of language, Sarduy and Khatibi offer a poetics of the body as a possibility for undoing the bonds of traditional double binaries of thought—a poetics which is not *directly* co-opted on the battlefield of redemption, rectification, politicization, and rehistoricization, but rather as the corpus of fragmentation, simulation, transgression, destruction, and recreation in which access to the feminine is not barred, and which for Khatibi serves as the plane of contiguous cultural liberation and subversion while for Sarduy the feminine

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

maintains it's status as a purely signifying act. Perhaps these poetics of bodily inscriptions and performances evidence the dilemma of western discourse to break down the dichotomies of sex and gender in positing a greater evil, the masculine, against a weaker and oppressed adversary, the feminine, as in de Beauvoir's case, or in maintaining the feminine's marginality in all schemes of representation and language, as Irigaray maintains. By making visible the polysemous nature of sex and gender within a poetic language which seeks to buttress identity within a discourse of subversion, albeit poetic, can we not begin to engage the poetics of the body within a sphere of politicization and subversion which would free the feminine from the binds of being a purely embodied, a purely sexual subject, allowing the feminine access for all bodies while synchronously *not encoding* or reading all bodies through the feminine? For the other side of Sarduy and Khatibi evidences a woman's body whose social construction does not reveal the strictly coded topographies of the feminine. Instead, these writers offer the body as the physical surface upon which meaning passes, identity is inscribed, and notions of representation—real and imaginary—form the basis for understanding the necessarily temporal and inconstant nature intrinsic to all cultural constructions, destructions, and dialogues.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter Three

The Body of *Fitna* and the Intractable Feminine: Exile, Nomadism, Memory and the *Bi-langue* in Maghrebian Literature

> L'identité...peut être l'objet d'une variation oxymorique sur le temps irréparable, l'origine dérobée et l'événement de l'étrangeté de soi. Et ceci au-delà du malaise mais dans le sillage des emblèmes qui touchent tout homme pluriel (p. 151).
>
> Hassan Wahbi, *Identité Culturelle au Maghreb*

In the introduction her book, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, Winifred Woodhull elucidates Abdelkebir Khatibi's notion of the *bi-langue* as a discourse which works against the hegemonic monolith of French language, literature, and culture through its resistance to the limits of dualism and binaried identities. Woodhull views the *bi-langue* as a "process of unnaming" through which decolonization necessarily takes place and the universalizing and colonizing discourses of language, culture, body, gender and sexuality are dismantled. Accounting for Khatibi's deconstruction of western metaphysics and Arabo-Islamic philosophy and cultural institutions, Woodhull adroitly sums up Khatibi's theories of the Maghreb *pluriel* and the *bi-langue:*

> For Khatibi, the effort to pluralize the Maghreb is synonymous with decolonization, a process requiring a double critique of Arab-Islamic institutions and cultures on the one hand, and of the universalizing, colonizing dynamics of Western metaphysics on the other. In his account, decolonization of the Maghreb through a process of unnaming is inseparable from a necessarily global challenge to transnational capitalism and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> deadening, or even deadly, uses to which it puts science, technology, and the mass media. In Khatibi, the process of decolonization is associated with the *bi-langue*, a space in which body and language, voice and writing, feminine and masculine sexualities, native and foreign languages, hegemonic and marginalized cultures mingle without merging to form a new unity (p. ix).

Although Khatibi's *bi-langue* provides for a liberatory postcolonial reading of culture, according to Woodhull, it nonetheless fails to recognize completely "intractable difference", the plurality of *identities* which stretches far beyond any universalizing national or linguistic boundaries. Woodhall claims that the recent current of French post-structuralism in North African literary criticism has resulted in the representation of Maghrebian identity through a theoretical *rather than* through a historical or cultural vein. Ultimately, as I read Woodhull's analyses of Maghrebian literature, I note that what begins as a critique of French post-structuralism and Maghrebian scholarship, ends up evolving a method of isolating theory *from* history and culture, of distinguishing "western" discourses from autochthonous "historically" or "culturally" informed discourses of the Maghreb. It becomes quite clear in her reading of Maghrebian scholarship Woodhull's assumption that post-structuralism is not discursively informed by Maghrebian culture, history, or language. Though she claims that French theory "colonizes" readings of the Maghreb, she nonetheless negates the possible inter-cultural and theoretical interstices inevitably emerging from well over a century of colonial ties. Treating theoretical interpretation as if it could be merely excised geographically and sorted into a sterile category of "French" ultimately renders Woodhull's argument void of any historical or intercultural vestiges ineluctably emerging from the colonizing culture's interactions with the colonized. In short, Woodhull's argument is based upon the assumption that post-structuralism is *soley* a product of French and European culture, denying the necessary *inter-*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cultural inflections that post-structural and postcolonial theory has manifested for well over the past forty years. Woodhull writes:

> The problem is that, in Cixous's writing as in Khatibi's, the "link between the "libido of the other" and writing" is made in such a way as to obscure or even obliterate the difference between various manifestations of intractable difference, with the result that various figures of otherness—femininity, Arabness, Jewishness, blackness—circulate indifferently in a space of "immemorial bewitchment" divorced from the particular intersecting histories of these groups... Because dehistoricized poststructuralist readings of Maghrebian texts have dominated the critical scene for some years now—in response, it is true, to pressures to read them only in terms of the quest for national identity—I worry that, in the name of affirming the resistant poetic force of Maghrebian writing in French, critics have developed a habit of reading this body of work in strict conformity with current French philosophical and literary norms as a way of "elevating" it... Rather than arguing against theory, I am making a case for a consideration of the historical contexts from which a cosmopolitan Maghrebian writing emerges, and of the national and global conflicts that encumber its efforts to displace restrictive identities (pp. xxiii-xxiv).

Woodhull's argument, however, becomes quite confusing, for as one reads her critique of Maghrebian scholarship it is not clear whose theory she critiques. For on the one hand, she mentions—but never specifies—this "body of work" which attempt to "elevate" Maghrebian writing through French theoretical exegesis, and on the other, she indirectly includes Khatibi in this agglomeration of "orientalizing" writers. Of all the critiques that could be make of Khatibi, a major force of Maghrebian literary and cultural critique, to accuse him of relying solely on "French philosophical and literary norms" that "elevate" Maghrebian literature is quite fantastical given that his work clearly is about negotiating both Maghrebian and western theories.

However, when one reads further into her argument, it seems that Woodhull engages in her own form of "elevating" certain cultural critiques since in distinguishing *theory from culture*, she inevitably establishes the theoretical as western and the cultural as Maghrebian (as if the west were devoid of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

culture and the Maghreb devoid of theory or, more strangely, as if theory and culture were somehow divisible). Woodhull reiterates that these texts have "taken a postfeminist approach...analyzing "woman" as a textual marker of intractable difference without considering its relation to women's historical and material reality" (p. 1). Woodhull spends much of her critique examining the long-elided issues of women as historical subjects in Maghrebian literature using as her framework feminist analyses from an array of theorists from Judith Butler to Fatima Mernissi and various literary texts, many of which autobiographically dissolve any danger of aspecificty or fluid ambiguities. Yet, her analysis seems to engage the very indifference to the multiplicity that she accuses Khatibi of eliciting in his readings of Maghrebian culture. For Woodhull simply avoids post-structuralist theory by maintaining a feminist reading of the texts at hand. In short, Woodhull offers her readers feminism as a "culturally informed" discourse, while vituperating post-structuralism as colonizing, French discourse. In discussing Assia Djebar's writing, for instance, Woodhull states: "Without question, Djebar's novels are feminist and are highly critical of women's situation in Algeria" (p. 79). But the very polemic upon which this query is based demands that we ask several fundamental questions: What are the uses of "feminism" as a discursive model for reading texts and cultures aside from the very stereotypical use of the word to critiques women's position in certain Maghrebian and Islamo-Arabic societies? To which "women's situations" is Woodhull referring since there are distinctly very different visible socio-religious practices of Islam among women of upper and lower classes, for instance? And of course the most obvious question would be to ask: Upon whose feminism is Woodhull relying? I cannot help but reject many of the arguments that Woodhull

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

proposes regarding her historical and cultural interpretations of Maghrebian literature since what she names as feminism is no more culturally or historically informed by the Maghreb than the spectre of "French" post-structuralism which she ardently battles. Woodhull's resistance to what she delineates as "French literary" theory merely assembles a *mélange* of North African cultural images superimposed with American and French feminism—as if feminist theory were immune to criticism of hegemonic interpolation or inclusion amidst a popular current of reading these texts.

Although I admire Woodhull's desire to bring an ethnographic and historical voice to the fore, it seems to me that she is quite selective in what she deems as part of Maghrebian culture and what is embedded in western theory. Ironically, Woodhull's study elides much discussion of the current discourses of gender, culture, and nationality *as argued by* Maghrebian scholars today which are still of major concern in North African cultural politics. We can see this demonstrated in the work of Traki Zannad, Fatna Aït Sabah, Hanneta B'nouni, and Abdessamad Dialmy, just to name a few. In fact, it is this very intersection of Woman/Nation/Islam which serves as the juncture for current feminist discussions in North Africa, sometimes steeped in Islamic doxa, other times in post-structuralist theory, and more often than not, a combination of the two. Yet, one could hardly argue that feminism is somehow a "less appropriated" or "less appropriating" theory than post-structuralism, for the use of theory in the west is generally about dismantling another theory, positing the new theory as "redemptive", and basing this theory upon certain cultural and philosophical assumptions that all theory—including feminism—make. The most bizarre twist to her study is that after attempting to dismantle all use of French theory to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

understand Maghrebian literature and culture, Woodhull refers to feminisms emerging from the Maghreb as "latent" or "protofeminism[s]", as if there were a diachronic progression between European and Arabo-Islamic feminisms. Woodhull's positing of Maghrebian feminism as a "protofeminism" sadly manifests a quite typical regard for power whereby history is progressive and linear, hence all progressive thought originates in the west and is re-produced in North Africa. This "liberation" of the female Maghrebian subject by rejecting a previous signifying system is an too familiar dynamic that western subjects have repeated upon non-western objects time and time again. Indeed, there must be some skepticism for theories that invoke men and women to "shed" colonial memory and to "reinvent" themselves through signifiers that are just as "foreign" as those of their colonial past.[1]

A major problem in *Transfigurations of the Maghreb* is that Woodhull elides cultural specificity within North Africa, as if Morocco, Algeria, and Tunis embodied the very same social,cultural and political dynamics. These are simply fantastical notions because anyone having travelled merely within one of these countries can notice that each nation harbors many cultures that vary greatly even within the scope of just one hundred kilometers. Yet, when Woodhull discusses "women's rights" mentioning certain legal restrictions for women within

---

[1] Françoise Vergès' article, "Chains of madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom," discusses this very dynamic in terms of French Psychiatry and colonialism: "The rejection of imperialism's signifiying system, proposed by Fanon, supposes that the possibility exists of creating an entirely new one. Such a project begs questions of this new signifying system's conditions of formation. Fanonian theory depends on a system which organises history as a progressive development. It implies that women and men have the power to reinvent their symbolic and material world: to shed memories. Fanonian theory contrues memory as a series of lifeless monuments, a morbid legacy, a melancholic nostalgia for a past long gone" (pp. 62-63).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Maghreb, she elides any historical or cultural specificity and stops at a very brief mention of the *Sharī'a* and certain interpretations of women by fundamentalist groups in Algeria such as the FIS. To take modern day Algeria and to represent the current situation of women could be useful to understand the recent political and social position *of Algerian women,* but this would admittedly be hyperbolic to describe the experiences of women in the Maghreb in general—of women in Tunisia or Morocco—and of women in certain privileged social classes. In fact, I find that Woodhull's study, more than demonstrating the very complex issues of feminism and women in the Arab World, ultimately reveals the neo-colonial agenda evidenced by the western "feminist" ethos present in her critique which completely elides many of the historic and contemporary Islamic-based feminisms and cultural theories pertinent to her subject. For instance, to discuss the veil as a rhetorical device, an orientalist fantasy, and as an object of oppression might make for an interesting critique, but certainly not if one elides the history of the veil and those critiques which fervently argue that women are empowered by the *hijāb.*[2] In addition, Woodhull's chapter devoted

---

[2] In 1899, Qasim Amin argued against the veil with his well known publication "La Libération de la femme" in which he suggest that instead of women, *men* ought to wear the veil: "Pourquoi ne demand-t-on pas aux homme de porter le voile ou de dérober leur visage au regard des femmes s'ils craignent tant de les séduire? La volonté masculine serait-elle? La volonté masculine serait-elle inférieure à celle de la femme? L'homme serait-il plus incapable que la femme de se maintainer et de gouverner ses passions? La femme lui serait-elle supérieure en tout cela, au point de permettre aux hommes, si beaux qu'ils soient, de montrer leur visage aux femmes, et d'interdire catégoriquement aux femmes de dévoiler les leurs de peur de déchaîner la passion de l'honneur et le voir tomber dans la seduction , si laide que soit la femme recontrée?" (pp. 17-18). And speaking against Amin, Talat Harb's تربية المرأة و الحجاب (tarbīyat al-mar'ah wa-l hijāb) clearly argues for the veil as an emulation of the West sighting statistics of German women who betray their husbands (seven times on the average). In a more recent study on this subject, "Discourse of the Veil," Leila Ahmed critiques Qacim Amin's "liberation" of women as a guise of early 20th century Egyptian politics of colonialism

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to a critique of Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* completely ignores even the most basic culturally-specific and indigenous discourses regarding the issues of women's body through Arabo-Islamic cultural, linguistic and religious interpretations. While Woodhull's use of feminist theories might serve as an interesting basis upon which to place her readings of North African literature and identity, it is nonetheless problematic to imbue readings of liberation of the Maghrebian subject through discourses such as western feminism that are every bit as problematic as the colonizing discourses that Woodhull essays to dismantle. How, then, can we resolve the dilemma of favoring certain theories over others—of supporting certain feminisms as "true" and others as "regressive"? How can we confront the limits of our own academic *traditions* of examining other cultures and literatures using the very same discursive apparati through which we view and critique our own? Or perhaps the more important question to ask is: are we capable of undertaking investigations of *all* feminisms without utilizing western feminisms as tools of social moralizing or discursive hierarchizing?[3]

The text that Woodhull criticizes most vituperatively of Abdelkebir

---

and engaging Western ideals of progressivity and "advancement". Ahmed also deconstructs the historical arguments of veiling/anti-veiling voices as not metonymic to anti-feminist/feminist. For as Ahmed points out, Amin was very invested in "women's roles" as much as Talat Harb.

[3] Here I am thinking of what Khatibi writes in *Penser le Maghreb*, wherein he evokes a rethinking of tradition that emerges from mourning the metaphysical tradition, a necessary step in the process of decolonization. I see Woodhull's argument in completely minimalizing the importance of looking into the margins of tradition—and I do not mean feminism per se—for the thinking of an "us" becomes a complex operation when one co-opts the margin as center (as Woodhull does with the feminine) in order to displace historical discourses of oppression. Khatibi writes: "La pensée de "nous" vers laquelle nous nous tournons ne se place, ne se déplace plus dans la métaphysique, mais à sa marge. Une marge en éveil. "Nous", cet espacement inédit, impensé au-delà de l'altérité tyrannique et des identités aveugles. La pensée de ce "nous" est cet enchaînement historial qui tisse l'être—et que l'être tisse—à la marge de la métaphysique. Nous ne pouvons mériter notre mort sans endeuillement de la métaphysique. C'est cet endeuillement qui fait vaciller notre relation à la tradition" (p. 124).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Khatibi's is his 1983 publication, *Maghreb pluriel.* In this text, Khatibi advances the notion of the *bi-langue* as a domain in which western and non-western discourses interact, review and recast the traditionally dichotomized notions of gender, sexuality, language and culture without reformulating a new, stagnant identity.[4] For Khatibi, the *bi-langue* evidences the process of decolonization of the Maghreb through a perpetual analysis and consideration of both western and non-western texts. The *bi-langue* presupposes the fluid space of destruction, reflection, and recreation in which writers and critics of both the "East" and the "west" must interact and participate critically. Khatibi sets out to subvert the hegemonic practices of linguistic and cultural domination by advocating "poetic language" as a force through which one can welcome the foreign, or the other, which, according to Khatibi, exists in every language, nation, culture, and every subjectivity. As such, his reading of Maghrebian texts gives rise to the possibility of reexaming the epistemological constraints that western theory has commonly manifested in examining non-western practices and literatures while still accounting for the many contributions that have, to a large degree, enlightened his analyses. Much of what Khatibi scrutinizes—for instance, the cultural aspects of literature—is exactly what Woodhull claims to undertake in her book. Yet, these two theorists' arguments diverge at the moment when Khatibi's construction of polymorphous sexualities, genders, and bodies is interpreted by Woodhull as a masking of individual faces, of individual experiences, and even

---

[4] In the introduction to her book, Woodhull states: "Regarding the interpretation of Maghrebian literary texts written in French, Khatibi's notion of the bi-langue is indispensable, for many of these texts produce what Khatibi calls identités folles, mad identities that resist the constraints of a dualistic sex/gender system, as well as those of other bounded systems such as language, nation, and culture" (p. xxii)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the specificity of the woman's body. However, to read Khatibi's work as an attempt to name women's experience as singular, rather as an effort to forge a poetics of "other-thought" through which post-colonial identities are or *might be* formed, elides the very core of Khatibi's argument. The fluidity of the somatic for Khatibi does not manifest a totalizing obfuscation of identity as Woodhull argues, but instead offers what he calls "intractable difference" as an option for uprooting western hegemony wherein the post-colonial subject might reconstruct herself.

Unlike Lyotard's definition of "intractable difference" in which Woodhull also bases her use of the term, Khatibi's *bi-langue* is not a space which pervades all representation as homogeneous. Instead, the *bi-langue* is a sphere which enables expression and movement, destruction and construction, and where conflicting possibilities might meet, revealing new struggles, and manifesting new possibilities for discussing identity that are not encoded as universal or obligatory. Creating language as the body and the body as language, Khatibi weaves the somatic body and the linguistic as interdependent expressions of identity. Moreso, he constitutes the somatic body as the social body through which the individual body connotes the community and the community implicates the individual, much like in Islamic theology where the *'umma* which is the body, the community of Muslims throughout the world which embraces both the singularity of the individual and the collectivity of the masses. Yet, *'umma* is derived from the Arabic word *umm*, the word for "mother" which makes even more paradigmatic the identity of the individual as both free of the feminine and yet inevitably linked to it. As Khatibi discusses *'umma*, he underlines the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

importance of understanding community as inclusive of all including the "division in division":

> [L]e nom «Arabe» désigne une guerre de nominations et d'idéologies qui mettent au jour la pluralité active du monde arabe. Pluralité et diversité, sur lesquelles nous reviendrons—quant à l'élément subversif d'une pensée-autre. Car l'unité du monde arabe est chose du passé, si on la considère du point de vue théocratique de la «Oumma», communauté matricielle et idéale des croyants sur terre. Cette unité est donce, pour nous, du passé, à analyser dans son insistance imaginaire. Et d'ailleurs, cette prétendue unité tant réclamée englobe non seulement ses marges spécifiques (berbères, coptes, kurdes...et marge des marges: le féminin), mais elle couvre aussi la division du monde arabe en pays, en peuples, en sectes, en classes; et de division en division, jusqu'à la souffrance de l'individu, déserté par l'espérance de son dieu, à tout jamais invisible (1983, p. 13).

The *'umma*, for Khatibi, is comparable to the *bi-langue* as it is the conterminous breaking and melding of cultures, languages, genders and bodies. This metaphor is not uncommon as writers such as Abdelfattah Kilito have also discussed the somatic body in terms of that which pertains to the social body—as that which blurs the edges of identity in which all members of the *'umma* (habitat) are indistinguishable.[5] Creating a poetics of language and the body, the *bi-langue* maintains the fluidity identity not as a dialectical struggle, but as difference,

---

[5] In *L'auteur et ses doubles*, Kilito states: "Comment savoir alors que tel panégyrique a été composé pour X et non pour Y? Seule la notoriété peut en décider. Le lien entre un prince et un panégyrique est contingent, et, à la faveur de cette contingence, un jeu de cache-cache voit le jour. Les poéticiens arabes placent des cloisons étanches entre les divers types que le poète est amené à louer: le roi, le vizir, le général, le secrétaire chancellerie, le juge et le vulgaire. Ce serait commettre une lourde faute que de louer un vizir au moyen des qualités du roi ou du générale. Il ne convient pas non plus de louer un roi en disant qu'il a une table bien garnie: c'est là un trait qui s'appliquerait tout juste à l'un de ses chambellans. Ce serait également lui faire injure que de dire qu'il tient ses promesses, car ce trait s'appliquerait tout au plus au vulgaire. A chaque type correspond un discours approprié, une série d'attributs qui lui sont propre et qui ne doivent pas être appliqués aux autres types. La comparaison du discours à l'habitat s'impose ici. Le poète Abû Tammâm (XIe siècle) donne le conseil suivant à l'un de ses disciples: "Sois comme le tailleur qui coupe les habits selon les mesure du corps.' Quel corps? Encore une fois, il ne s'agit pas du corps individuel; l'habit qu'il s'agit de confectionner est un habit *corporatif*, dans lequel tous les corps qui appartiennent au même corps social peuvent se glisser" (p. 33).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

while maintaining the social body as mutually implicated by the somatic body.

As Khatibi relies on traditional and western readings of the body, he also refers to these discursive vectors in his analysis of language as plural. As language and writing are caught up in the impossibility of singular interpretation in Khatibi's theory of Maghrebian identity and language, so too are they are impossible to singularly interpret according to Islamic theology. In the Maghreb language is a terrain which clearly marks identity—education, geography, ethnicity, heritage. Speaking Arabic to a shopkeeper in Rabat's Agdal will often result in one being answered in French, though in Rabat's *medina qdima* (the old city), *derija* would necessarily be the only language of communication. Khatibi's notion of the *bi-langue* constitutes a tradition in which there is neither a "wrong" nor "correct" identity; instead, Khatibi studies the interstices of languages thus manifesting the plurality of Maghrebian identities which can only be understood in terms of the larger social body. Without the *ʾumma* as a means of contextualizing this linguistic and somatic plurality, all meaning is lost. This interdependence between singular and plural enunciations mirrors the process of textual, oral and performative interpretation according to Islamic law. According to Islam, the meaning of the religion is to be taken from three basic sources: the *Qurʾān*, the literal words of Allah that the angel Gabriel channelled to Mohammed; the *ḥadīth*, the words and deeds of the Prophet as told through a *isnad* (chain); and the *Sunna*, the actions of the Prophet, the way he lived his life. These traditions maintain a different relationship to truth since *ʿilm* (knowledge) and *bqa* (understanding) are interminably involved in a dialectical struggle as *ʿalm* is fixed in time whereas *bqa* is more fluid and subjective.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As such, the *ḥadīth* serves as the theological basis of Khatibi's *bi-langue* given that *ḥadīth* is dependent upon both a physical disparity and a physical plurality of the somatic—of bodies divided throughout history and geographies—in order to be considered valid.[6] For the many *ḥadīth* in existence are the words and deeds of the Prophet as told by those who report these words in writing spanning time and space. This reporting takes place through a chain of reporting *(isnad)*—each piece of which is legitimated as either "valid" or "invalid" according to the transmitter. Ultimately, the *ḥadīth* are texts upon which singular, temporal meanings are based while emanating from a series of strictly coded and guaranteed bodies that are translatable only as plural identities within the singular community, *'umma*.[7] And it is this very contradiction between the singular transmitter and that which he signifies as representative of the *'umma*, the greater body of community and meaning. If accepted as legitimate,

---

[6] Kilito writes: "Cette procédure n'est pas sans conséquence pour la définition du texte. L'énoncé du *ḥadīth* doit émaner du Prophète et doit être correctement transmis par des rapporteurs intègres et sans tache. Un *ḥadīth* se compose ainsi nécessairement de deux parties: le *matn* ou énoncé des paroles du Prophète, et la *sanad* ou chaîne des garants, c'est-à-dire la séquence ininterrompue des transmetteurs dignes de confiance, qui se clôt par le nom du Prophète" (1985, p. 45).

[7] Kilito continues this delineation of the transmitter of ḥaddith: "Le transmetteur doit être musulman (l'adepte d'une autre religion est virtuellement un ennemi de l'Islam, même s'il n'existe aucune preuve étayant la méfiance dont il fait l'objet). Il doit être pubère et en possession de toute ses facultés: l'enfant et le fou, irresponsables, ne sont nullement autorisés à témoigner. Les traditionalistes ne sont pas d'accord sur l'attitude à adopter à l'égard de l'hérétique, mais, dans l'ensemble, ils pensent que les *ḥadīth* qu'il transmet sont acceptables quand ils ne confirment pas la doctrine qu'il professe; dans le cas contraire, ils sont irrecevables. Le transmetteur doit en outre être connu pour son sérieux et sa gravité; un homme qui passe son temps à plaisanter est supposé avoir une forte propension au mensonge, et donc à la forgerie" (1985, p. 46).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both the transmitter and *ʾumma* render identity as complete; if incomplete or if part of the *isnad* is broken, the *ḥadīth* is viewed as missing limbs:

> La chaîne des garants, on le voit, n'est pas moins importante que l'énoncé, puisque, sans celle-là, on ne peut rendre aucun jugement sur l'authenticité de celui-ci. Elle est considérée, par rapport à l'énoncé, comme les "jambes" par rapport au corps. Un *ḥadīth* qui en est privé est un corps sans jambes, qui ne eput ni se mettre debout ni se déplacer. Rejeté piteusement sur le sol, il crie sa diformité et son incomplétude châtrée (Kilito, 1985, p. 47).

Kilito manifests the text as the somatic—complete or incomplete, healthy or deformed—upon which identity is rendered *to incorporate and to be interpreted by* the larger social body. In rendering visible singular meaning (each individual *ḥadīth*) through the plurality of texts (the tens of thousands of often contradictory *ḥadīth* in existence),[8] singular religious interpretation is necessarily pluralistic and heterogeneous despite the singular body of the *Qurʾān*.[9] In addition, many *ḥadīth* are contentious topics in Islamic scholarship due to a plethora of contradictions found in other texts and the life of the transmitter which is often found to be morally questionable.[10] Therefore, the corpus of *ḥadīth* can be seen

---

[8] See Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* for a thorough discussion of the problems of *ḥadīth* and feminist rights in Islam.

[9] Though the *Qurʾān* is a singular text, its very meaning comes from the word "to read" (قرأ) which manifests its meaning in the plurality of readings. In part, because of this heterological structure of the *Qurʾān*, Islam is not a centralized religion where "official interpretations" are ordained as truer than others. The *Qurʾān* maintains the pluralitly of its interpretation by virtue of its naming.

[10] Again in Mernissi's study (1975), she evidences many examples of the illegitimacy of many *ḥadīth* such as Abu Hurayra who claimed the Prophet said that the "dog, the ass, and the woman interrupt prayer if they pass before a believer." Mernissi finds this particular *ḥadīth* to be problematic since Abu Hurayra was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as a *dédoublement* of signification since each text conjugates the language and the body of the transmitter to those of the Prophet, while coinstantaneously *ḥadīth* lie prey to being discounted, challenged and delegitimated. Likewise, Maghrebian identity for Khatibi is necessarily a *dédoublement* in which poetic language and the body become scenes for locating meaning while simultaneously incorporating the possibilities of escaping the very definitions and roles that language and the somatic have heretofore maintained. Both *ḥadīth* and the *bi-langue* engender language and identity as unstable. For Khatibi, identity engenders a persistent shift, an unrelenting unearthing and renegotiation of differences—nations, bodies, sexes, and genders—which the mimetic force of language and performance seek to uncover while attempting the draw these differences into spheres of simultaneous similarity, seduction and subversion.

It is this space of shifting, proliferation, destruction, and generation of meaning which produces identity in the Maghreb and it is in *Amour bilingue* where Khatibi details the very instability of identity. Utilizing the concept of *fitna* as this symbolic construct which represents the complex and multifarious nature of Maghrebian identity, Khatibi's text searches for identity:

> Il n'oubliait pas que, dans son lexique, la séduction (fitna) est cette homographie de guerre et de séduction proprement dite, cette passion chevaleresque qui ne chante que les absents du déserts, les aimés inconnus. En cela, la séduction les portait sur une double scène, dans la volupté de la langue. Comment savoir? Cherchait-elle en lui le paradis de quelque orient d'enfance? Un désire inoublié? Comment savoir dans la moindre parole, le moindre fait, l'ordre des lois mortelles—leur désordre? Mort: et pour se donner la vie dans ce mot, il fallait parcourir toute la force destructrice de la bi-langue (pp. 17-18).

Fitna is beauty, charm, and creation, while it is also the antithesis of these

---

known to have beaten his wife.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

characteristics—*fitna* is seduction, war, sedition, disorder, and revolution.[11] It is the discursive space of the *bi-langue* whereby not only sex, gender and language is plural, but where *all identity is* multifarious. As Fatima Mernissi's work and much Arabo-Islamic scholarship demonstrates *fitna* is a term long employed in describing women in the *Qurʾān* and many *ḥadīth* such as by Al Bukhari to nominate the war led by the Prophet's widow Aisha when fighting against the Fourth Caliph, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, after the assassination of the third Caliph, ʿUthman (1975, Mernissi, pp. 4-5). It is also repeatedly used in the *Qurʾān* to refer to a woman's power over man blocking him from God's light, dismantling his reason, or embodying a stronger power of beauty or seduction.

Although *fitna* has historically marked women's political potential and danger within both literary and cultural discourses, it has simultaneously represented the possibility for empowerment and for subverting the homogenizing narratives of language, nation, and gender. For example, Christine

---

[11] The definition of *fitna* according to the *Hans Wehr* dictionary:

فتنة *fitna* pl. فتن *fitan* temptation, trial; charm, charmingness, attractiveness; enchantment, captivation, fascination, enticement, temptation; infatuation; intrigue; sedition, riot, discord, dissension, civil strife. And the relative meanings to *fitna:* فتن *fatana* i (*fatn*, فتون *futūn*) to turn away (من ه s.o. from); to suject to temptations or trials, seduce, tempt, entice, allure, beguile (ه s.o.); to enamor, charm, enchant, capativate, enthrall, enrapture, fascinate, infatuate (ه s.o.); —*fatana* I (*fatn*) to torture, torment (ه s.o.); to denounce (على s.o.), inform (على against s.o.); pass. *futina* to be charmed, be enraptured, be infatuated (ب of), be in love (ب with); to be crazy (ب over), be like mad (ب after) iv to enamor, charm, enchant, captivate, enthrall, enrapture, fascinate, infatuate (ه s.o.) viii to subject to temptations (ه s.o.); to be charmed, be tempted, be infatuated; act. *iftatana* and pass. *uftutina*: to be subjected to temptations, be lead from the right course; pass. *uftutina*=futina.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Buci-Guildsmann's article, "Fitna ou la différence intraitable de l'amour", postulates *fitna* as both seduction and sedition, a loyalty to and a betrayal of meaning.[12] *Fitna* in Buci-Glucksmannn's reading is necessarily a word of double meaning, like *addād*, which invokes the contradictory nature of things, of meaning—where reason is subject to the other, to ambivalence and disappearance:

> Fitna: un mot-passeur, un mot-rêvé, un mot-double qui fit surgir en moi cet apprentissage en langues, ce voyage et cette traversée de l'autre à partir d'une «raison baroque» soumise au double, à l'autre, à la disparité et à l'ambivalence. Etrange pacte, où fait toujours retour une scène infantile: ces moments d'éblouissement ravi devant les traces sibyllines en arabe ou en persan, qu'un père «orientaliste» inscrivait patiemment dans le silence ouaté des soirées, sur le blanc des pages (p. 42).

Emerging from a surplus of meanings, a baroque landscape of language and body, *fitna* incorporates signification in the traversing of the other where temporality and diverse topographies necessarily change, challenge and reformulate the somatic and linguistic spaces of meaning. *Fitna* embodies the contradictory space of contestation, delegitimation, excess, destruction, and recreation. Signification passes through the *isnad* of diverse bodies and languages, the *'umma* is legitimated by virtue of the acceptance of these words, the body of transmission is viewed as authentic, the text, by virtue of the body's authenticity, is likewise legitimated, and meaning is contested challenging the scope of all the above valences.

In Khatibi's *Amour bilingue, fitna* is the poetic and somatic totality of war and seduction, that which draws one into disorder as well as into the search for

---

[12] Buci-Glucksman writes: "Fitna donc, puisque tel était le nom, en sa polysémie infinie. *Séduction*: jeter le trouble, fasciner, perturber. Feten: le diable, donc tromper, ouvrir à la démence, à la démonie, à la folie. *Sédition*: "Etat de rebellion contre la Loi divine, où les faibles risquent toujours de se laisser entraîner". Exciter à la sédition, au tumulte, à la révolte, et ce, jusqu'au châtiment divin, à la guerre civile" (pp. 17-18).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

paradise as it embodies the impossibility of putting a full-stop to language while suggesting the end of sterile, monolithic definitions of sexed and gendered identity. *Fitna* is the "syntax of the body" that Khatibi frames as anatomically part of language: "Parler n'est pas écrire, et d'opposition en opposition, jusqu'à la scansion: syntaxe du corps" (p. 19). The destruction of neatly divided genders, sexes and languages where transsexual, bilingual bodies engender the necessary moving between fixed space, time and the corporeal, *fitna* evokes movement between meanings, corruption of the clearly defined—it presupposes its own violent undoing and seduction:

> Ceux qui l'avaient connu furent nombreux, en surnombre même. Plus il mélangeait ces bribes de langues—il en riait, il en sanglotait—plus on cherchait à le laisser parler. Le plus étrange, c'était qu'il parlât. Oui, il parlait avec une intrépidité étourdissante. Chacune de ses pérégrinations en était corrompue. Nous étions de la même espèce bâtarde et d'un croisement insensé: la bi-langue de nos ravissements transsexuels (1992, p. 57).

The ambiguity of sex is part of the cultural and somatic amnesia that Khatibi sets forth in *Amour bilingue* where the division between sex and gender, the feminine and other, are constantly contested and perpetually in a "pilgrimage", in search of meanings that are inevitably revealed as corrupt, insufficient, excessive, and violent.[13]

Fitna is a term which has long represented women's space in the world, positing her as simultaneously powerful and weak, sexually active and pure, imprisoned and free. Yet,Khatibi evokes the feminine as that sphere in which non-meaning is written and viewed: "Peut-être, en ce temps, avait-il construit

---

[13] Buci-Glucksmann wirtes of the amnesia between sexes: "*Amour bilingue* est cette anamnèse inversée qui libère la recontre du féminin en soi et en l'autre, jusqu'à la perte des frontières entre le «masculin» et le «féminin»" (p. 37).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cette scène de parade vis-à-vis des femmes, pour quelque mirage de l'androgynie; peut-être aussi, cette duplicité—du corps et de la langue—avait-elle envoûté son enfance, sans que grandît en lui l'être de l'amour, sans qu'il fût aimé par l'amour" (1992, p. 30). Khatibi evokes the feminine body as the other, that physical space of transgression and desire, of what Buci-Glucksmann posits as the "imaginary body" in which language is pluralized:

> Un corps féminin, un corps imaginaire car Image du désir de l'Autre, celui de Shéhérazade, enchante le Roi en l'investissant, en l'hallucinant, en occupant l'espace même du simulacre. La topique de l'impossible à l'œuvre dans le conte comme construction de «merveilleux réel» et celle qui se déploie dans l'objet d'amour fitnique relèvent d'un même mécanisme: la production sensuelle du sens, l'Eros dans une langue pluralisée, poussée à ses excès d'imaginaire et de simulacre..." (p. 37).

As Buci-Glucksmann maintains, Khatibi's feminine is not the "faceless" body of woman, but rather the embodiment of a baroque chain of signifiers, the magically real space into which meaning is invested and from which meaning proliferates. For Khatibi, the space of liberation lies not in the definition or representation of a particular posture of woman or the feminine, but rather rests in the *impossibility* of locating one specific identity as either paradigmatic or enigmatic. The feminine, like language, is irreducible to one for Khatibi—to the contrary, the feminine is the topography upon which all meanings cross and upon which the fragmentary nature of identity passes.

In reading Khatibi's feminine body as a baroque corpus of the plural, it becomes clear that the multifarious and reproductive nature of identity is analogous to the productive force of the feminine body, the imagery of creation. Sufist philosophy understands the feminine as central to the universe, for the word ***dhāt*** (essence) is feminine in Arabic giving way for interpretations of the ***Qur'ān*** in which, for example, **Ibn ᶜArabī** views Adam as female since he "gave

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

birth" to Eve.[14] But then, the association of the body with woman was not limited to the Arabo-Islamic world of this period as Caroline Walker Bynum's study, "The Female body and Religious Practice", evidences that the feminine in Europe of this period was associated both with the body and with God.[15] It is this province of evoking the feminine as body and language where potential spaces for creation evoked by sufist philosophy are evidenced and through which gender is confused and displaced—the linearity of production and creation ordained in western discourse is toppled and alternative feminine readings of origin are offered. For corporeality in sufism is often a confinement of identity from which the spirit must flee. As al-Ġazālī (1058, Khorman, Iran-1128, Bagdad) writes:

> Preoccupati, o figlio, dello spirito e sconfiggi gli appetiti, mortifica il corpo perché tua dimora sarà la tomba e i morti nei cimiteri attendono che tu là pervenga da un momento all'altro. Guardati bene dal raggiungerli senza viatico. Disse Abū Bakr il Giusto—sia Dio compiaciuto di lui—: "I corpi sono come gabbia di uccelli o stalla di bestie. Rifletti sulla tua condizione: a quale delle due specie appartieni? Se sei degli uccelli celesti, quando

---

[14] Here Annemarie Schimmel notes: "One aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's theories deserves special mention: it is the role attributed to the female element (the word for essence, *dhāt*) being feminine in Arabic, he could speak of the "woman creator,' the secret of the compassionate God through which God is revealed. His modern critics define such interpretations as "para-sexual symbolism which about in his thought" (Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (London, 1966), p. 146); even Adam is, so to speak, "female,' since Eve was born from him. And indeed, it is quite embarrassing for an unitiated person to read, in the *Fuṣūṣ*, the final chapter on Muhammad, the seal of prophets and saints, where the meditation centers around the *ḥadīth*: God has made dear to me three things: perfume and women, and my heart's consolation is in prayer" (p. 272).

[15] Bynum writes: "There were intellectual traditions that conditioned women *and men* to certain expectations of women's bodies. Medieval thinkers associated *body* with *woman*; they therefore expected women's expressiveness to be more physical and physiological than men's. They also associated body with God, through the doctrine of the Incarnation, and eshewed sharp soul/body dichotomies more than did either patristic theologians or those of the early modern period. They could, therefore, give to the bodily experiences of members of both sexes a deeply spiritual significance" (p. 174).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> sentirai il suono del tamburo che ti richiama al tuo Signore, volerai in alto fino a posarti sulle sublimi torri del Paradiso, e sarà come disse l'Inviato di Dio—sia a lui benedizione e salute eterna—: "Gioì il Trono di Dio alla morte di Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh." Dio non voglia che tu sia nel rovero delle bestie, Dio eccelso avendo detto: "Sono come armenti, anzi di quelli ancor più traviati" (Coran vii, 179)" (p. 55).

Like al-Ġazālī's invocation to fly above the somatic and material spaces of the universe, Khatibi's feminine is that space through which the body can be—if only temporarily—fled in search of identity, jouissance, and a renegotiation of the somatic.

Sufi mystics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries maintain that finding the "ocean of the soul" is not the end of the quest for the absolute. Instead, sufist philosophy maintains that after the soul is found, the seeker must then begin a journey in God through *baqā* in which the soul will then move interminably across the infinity of the divine being "which no tongue can speak".[16] Khatibi's *Amour bilingue* invokes this state of *baqā* as a the spiritual quest for an absolute—a voyage which takes the seeker through the uncertain spaces of meaning, estrangement and history:

---

[16] Annemarie Schimmel discusses the *Muṣībatnāme*, the sufi tale of the absolute: "The *Muṣībatnāme* is the story of the Sufi's quest for the absolute: in an objectification of the experience of the forty days" seclusion, the mystic wanders through the world of created beings, from the divine spirit down to the lowliest of creatures. The wayfarer listens to the *lisān ul-ḥāl*, the "tongue of the state" of wind and earth, of fire and sea, and hears the endless yearning of all creatures, who in a state of confusion long for their original home. The experiences that result from discussions with the forty created beings are submitted, one by one, to the *Pir*, who explains them. Finally, under the guidance of the Prophet Muhammed, the seeker finds his way into the ocean of his own soul, where all longing ends. But even the union with the ocean of the soul is not final—when the soul has finished its journey to God, the journey in God will begin—the state that the mystics call *baqā*, subsistence in God—and the soul will traverse ever new abysses of the fathomless divine being, of which no tongue can speak" (1975, pp. 305-306).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Je sui convaincu qu'à ces moments, mon regard s'était altéré, et que ce repli secret me rendait d'une traitabilité très passive. En me dévastant, ma fureur ne m'avait pas vraiment mis à nu. Ce simulacre de la panique me cachait à moi-même, à toi. C'est cette nouvelle image de notre étrangeté qui me déroutait. *Étrangeté qui était déjà le lot de notre passé; mais là, j'étais invité à disparaître, en quelque sorte, devant mes yeux. Ce regard qui s'annule, quelle vacuité impitoyable*! (Emphasis mine, p. 104-105).

Indeed, this seeking is a search for identity, but it likewise a quest for the soul. For it is the soul—in Ibn ᶜArabī the "eye"—which sees, which seeks and hears from all sides. The soul—as it is bound with the heart in Ibn ᶜArabī—is the locus of the search for the divine being.[17] For other sufi scholars, such as al-Ġazālī, the intellect is deemed as superior to the "external eye" but when coupled with the intellect, this pair perceives the road to "curing the heart".[18] Sufism reveals the conflicting paths to truth in which the body, the "eye" of the soul, intellect and the light are necessarily implicated and reflected.

---

[17] Ibn ᶜArabī writes: "Le cœur de l'amant, qui reçoit cette désignation en raison de la richesse des modes de la liberté d'action et de son aptitude variée à changer d'état, possède une multitude d'aspects et d'orientations qui définissent l'attribut de cet être éperdu d'amour. Ce qualificatif convient n'importe quelle face ver laquelle il s'oriente et en n'importe quelle face vers laquelle il s'oriente et en n'importe quel être libre d'agir comme il l'entend. Cet amant contemple alors l'essence (ᶜayn) de son Bien-Aimé en toute face" (p. 225).

[18] al-Ġazālī writes: "Insomma i profeti sono i medici delle malattie dei cuori. L'utilià e l'azione dell'intelletto consistono solo nel fatto che esso ci istruisce su queste cose, attestando, in merito alla profezia, che essa è da credere e, in merito a se stesso, che è incapace di percepire quanto con l'occhio della profezia è incapace di percepire quanto con l'occhio della profezia è percepito. Esso ci ha preso per mano e ci ha consegnato alla profezia come si consegnano i ciechi a chi li guida, i malati titubanti ai medici compassionevoli. Fin qui il cammino su cui procede e avanza l'intelletto. Esso è escluso da tutto quanto è al di là, salvo che dalla comprensione di quel che il medico gli comunica" (p. 127). *He also discredits the eye as the sole guide of the soul*: "Orbene, sappi che nel cuore dell'uomo v'è un occhio perfetto per codesta qualità. Esso è chiamato talvolta intelletto, talvolta spirito, talvolta animo umano. Ma lasciamo da parte questi termini, giacché, quando abbondano, fanno immaginare a chi è poco sagace che abbiano in corrispondenza una quantità di concetti....Diciamo quindi: l'intelletto, più che l'occhio esterno, sarebbe da chiamarsi "luce", perché la sua capacità supera i sette difetti di cui s'è detto" (p. 569).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Khatibi's location of *fitna* as the spiritual and erotic scene for shifting meanings and creating identity weaves a narrative of love between the somatic and language, between *jouissance* and order in which identity emerges as intractable difference—the in-between of meaning. The narrator speaks across gender, time and geography embracing the universe as community through which rupture is a quotidian performance—rupture is the space of desire. Here Khatibi notes this nostalgic relationship, the "intractable reality", in which the subject desires an estrangement of meaning from the word and a temporal separation of mortality from the body:

> Crier désormais à une heureuse séparation, à une rupture douce et tendre—nostalgie de l'éloignement—serait nier le désordre de la langue qui ravit le corps à sa réalité intraitable, à son autonomie de jouissance. Avec toi, je juoissais entre deux langues, l'une traversant l'autre, sous l'autorité de leur belle cérémonie, si réjouisante à l'occasion. Rappelle-toi, au début, tout au début, tu riais durant l'orgasme. Rire resté incompréhensible (1992, pp. 87-88).

Like the carnavalesque laughter that Rabelais' world manifests, the laughter of Khatibi's universe is the *jouissance* of disorder, of indeterminacy, of the doubly symbolic modalities of the body. The subject finds itself unable to belong to a single space of *either/or* since the infectious nature of *fitna* necessarily lends itself to a chaotic indeterminacy of meaning, an irrepressible force that destabilizes signification and ushers forth the baroque excess of the unrepressed.[19]

Amour bilingue extends to the reader a recreation of the body through

---

[19] Buci-Glucksmans elicits this space of *bilingue* as the decomposition of the body melding with *jouissance:* "Si bien que le récit de la passion bilingue n'est plus mimésis de transgression et de mort, mais mimésis de l'oublié: «ça» part, «ça» revient, «ça» repart. Le passage, l'écoulement et non la transgression; la scénographie du double symbolisée, reconnue et non sa caption et fascination mortifères; la rencontre en jouissance et non la décomposition mortelle du corps; le souvenir et non la surprésence de l'image: tel est le saut, le voyage en écritures, qui permet d'aller du *Livre du sang* à *Amour bilingue*" (p. 33).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

language and reciprocally of language through the somatic. Ultimately, this text offers a *littérature-autre* as the poetic domain for re-creating and destroying identity:

> Le portrait type de l'écrivain, je l'avais prélevé dans un bouquin acheté au marché aux puces, un jour d'adolescence. Je lisais: l'écrivain entrait, sortait, parlait, tombait. Faire d'un absent la figure de quelqu'un qui fut vivant et qui fut mort, et qui, de nouveau, doit apparaître, me semble encore tout à fait vivable. La littérature? Pourquoi pas! Rien n'est condomnable, voyons! Une littérature-autre selon une pensée non moins autre, jusqu'à la fin des temps (pp. 130-131).

Intractable difference marks not only the body, but also the text. *Fitna* is exteriorized as a polysemous rupture from which flows possibility and loss, union and separation, meaning and chaos. *Fitna* is where language offers the possibility of identity through its many inscriptions and recreations. *Littérature-autre* opens up language to the body and the somatic to the pen—identity is perpetually inscribed, erased, edited and recast. And through the textual interface, like the narration of ethnography, Khatibi summons identity as that which is open to interpretation—identity is either accepted or destroyed as the interlocutor of his text is both self and other, inseparable entities in the whirlwinds of signification.[20]

Like his *Amour bilingue,* Khatibi's *Le Livre du Sang* evidences *fitna* through the spaces of sex, gender, and sexuality which are socially[21] inscribed onto the

---

[20] Jeanne Favret-Saada in *Les mots, la mort, les sorts,* writes: "C'est dire qu'il était exclue que l'ethnographe soit partie prenant dans une affaire de sorcellerie. Or il se trouve que la situation est moins confortable dans le Bocage: parler de sorcellerie, ce n'y est jamais pour savoir, mais pour pouvoir. Questionner, tout aussi bien. Avant qu'il n'ait prononcé un mot, l'ethnographe est inscrit dans un rapport de forces, au même titre que quiconque prétend parler. Qu'il parle, et son interlocuteur cherche avant tout à identifier sa stratégie, à mesurer sa force, à deviner s'il est ami ou ennemi, s'il faut l'acheter ou le détruire" (pp. 28-29).

[21] Implicit within my use of the social as the terrain for my analysis is, of course, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

body through the various determining categories of: active/passive, secrecy/disclosure, purity/impurity, tattooed/un-tattooed, visible/invisible, identification/repulsion (or identification/repudiation), and abject[22]/sacred. In this text, the body becomes the field of play, of creation, whereby performance determines and often alters the perceived traditional identities of gender, sexuality, and sex and their relationship to the somatic. *Fitna* is evidenced in this text as the constant rupture and creation of the binaries, each one corroding the other, each one inflecting meaning onto the other.

To clarify, I am not proposing the absolute rupture of gender binaries advocated by many gender theorists in the west. For instance, Judith Butler establishes a distinction between gender as *identity* and as *performance*,[23] in which she examines the correlative relationships that sex, gender, and sexuality share, both as cultural, legal, and biological *identities* and as individually created, consciousness-forming, self-realizing *performances*. According to Butler, the performance of a sex, of a gender, or of a sexuality causes a rupture between the clearly distinct Cartesian models of identity which western society abstrusely maintains, hence forcing us to question the heterosexist condition of "being"[24] purely masculine or feminine, straight or gay, and even man or woman. The

---

biological. However, I do not explicitly name biology as an independent epistemological construct of sexuality since I maintain that the biological is contingent upon, or rather, it is a physical construction of the social. Thus, any discussion of biological sex would necessarily embrace the social *and* biological rather than purely rely on the chromosonal or reproductive features.

[22] I take this term from Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

[23] See Butler's *Gender Trouble* — especially the chapter entitled "Subversive Bodliy Acts."

[24] My use of the word "being" is meant both in a Heidegerian way and also as "being" relates to performance.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

problem with Butler's theory is that in allegedly breaking down the binaries of these valences, she maintains a strict allegiance to traditional modes of viewing sex such that the very subversion of the body by a "non-traditional" sex act, for instance, automatically falls under the rubric of "subversive". Butler's analysis, ends up locating identity in a "new" yet far too familiar terrain: identity depends upon an allegiance to traditional ways of viewing sex in order to inscribe subversive narratives above the very fixed and constant body. In short, Butler's location of "normative identity" is a type of subconscious through which all identity must pass in order to be recognized as adhering to or breaking from this code of normativity. Unlike Butler's obsession to subvert and freely play upon the entrenched body of western metaphysics, Khatibi's *Le Livre du Sang* maintains the body as a space for polysemous inscriptions of culture, language, desire, and sex. In Khatibi there is no subversion because there is no fixed identity to subvert—there is only a constant rendering, corrosion and shifting of meanings. Or, as Elizabeth Grosz states: "Corporeality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity, and the subordinated term in the opposition, can move to its rightful place in the very heart of the dominant term, mind" (1995, p. 103). To elide the body as the site of sex, the locus of meaning, is to deny certain modes of corporeality to the subject that western theories are far too invested in "undoing".[25]

Khatibi's writing materializes intractable difference as that space of

---

[25] Grosz writes: "It is not enough to reformulate the body in non-dualist and non-essentialist terms. It must also be reconceived in specifically *sexed* terms. Bodies are never simply *human* bodies or *social* bodies. The sex assigned to the body (and bodies are assigned a single sex, however inappropriate this may be) makes a great deal of difference to the kind of social subject, and indeed the mode of corporeality assigned to the subject" (1995, p. 84).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

impossible love, of the unrealizable reconciliation of language with the body, and of the transgressing the region's colonial past. In Khatibi, there is no "knowing"—there exists only a meditative, spiritual feeling whereby the "eye" of the soul meets with that of the body. This problematic of "naming identity" is well known in western culture that has recently been the focus of study in anthropology and performance studies. In her book, *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan examines the current discourse of *knowing* sexual difference—a discourse she claims synchronously stabilizes "difference" while repressing the "sexual" as a means for securing, reproducing, and *marking* self-identity. Phelan writes: "[C]ultural representation seeks both to conceal and reveal a real that will 'prove' that sexual difference is a real difference" (p. 4). Thus, representing sexual difference for Phelan becomes a process of securing a hiatus between the "real and the representational":

> Representation functions to make gender, and sexual difference more generally, secure and securely singular—which is to say, masculine. (She ghosts him.) Representation tries to overlook the discontinuity between subjectivity and the gendered, sexual body, and attempts to suture the gap between subjectivity and the Real (p. 172).

Representing sexual difference preserves the impossibility of representing the woman and hence marks her as Other, as *unmarked*. Reworking the contradictory narratives of representation from both "identity politics" of the Left which emphasize visibility and the psychoanalytic/deconstructionist critiques which doubt the power of visibility, Phelan contends that the unmarked occupies a position of indeterminacy which maintains a certain allegiance to the visible since it eludes fetishization, surveillance, reduction, or possession.[26] As useful as

---

[26] Although Phelan limits her argument to visual representation, I am borrowing from

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the unmarked might be in understanding identity as visually understandable, Phelan's conception of the unmarked nonetheless maintains an omnipresent consciousness of "realness"—whiteness, heterosexuality, etc.—which I believe in western culture is not always separate from the subjective and which might indeed not be as static as she maintains. Phelan's study is quite useful in examinations of gender performance (see Chapter One), however the unmarked might very well inflect or reflect not an underlying real, but rather a *cultural desire to name the real.* Certainly western culture's current obsession with naming racial, ethnic, gender, and sexed identities are but several instances of our reaffirming experience through the autobiographical and inscribing identity as a means of asserting a democratic right to speak thereof. Though the unmarked does not "erase the mark of difference", it nonetheless depends upon very fixed notions of what gender, sex and sexuality are in their "real" and performative states (as if these two were always necessarily disparate). For discussing the real and the imaginary as separate spaces causes one to question if indeed these spaces are always, necessarily separated.[27]

A trope for understanding sexed, gendered, and sexual identities, *fitna*

---

her performative theory and transposing it to the linguistic sphere since what I am examining within literary texts is the representation of visibility/invisiblity as related to sexual difference and the inscription onto the body that sexual difference attempts to make singularily whole, monolithic, or same.

[27] Vincent Crapanzano in *Tuhami: A Portrait of a Moroccan* discusses this very split: "History can be conceived, somewhat too simply to be sure, as the opposite of the fairytale. It is concerned with reality, even reality that doth not flatter, with men and women of all stations, wealth and beauty, and it ends as it did *in fact* end, however satisfying or unsatisfying that ending may be. It is objective, morally neutral, and certainly not a product of "wishful thinking." It is to be believed. The contrast here depends on the absolute distinction between the *imaginary* and the *real* that has dominated Western thought. The imaginary—the product of unconstrained desire at its limit—is relegated to a status inferior to that of the real, which parades under the standard of truth. The problem of what is or is not real is left to the philosopher. To Everyman, the real is both distinct from the imaginary and at one with truth" (pp. 6-7).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bridges the gap between the body and the real since *fitna* abandons the fixity of knowledge. In her anthropological study of language and community in southern Morocco, Stefania Pandolfo's *Impasse of the Angels* opens up current readings of *fitna* from outside the body of woman and onto the social body, the community and narrative:

> *Fitna*: a polysemic concept at the limit of representation and thought, mark of an intractable difference, fracture, rift, schism, disjunction, or separation—separation from oneself—the figure of an exile that is constitutive of the position of subject, as both a possibility and a loss. Ambivalent and paradoxical to the end, in the *Qurʾān al-fitna* is the excess, the testing and ordeal that is both the transgression and the foundation of God's law. In its colloquial use, it evokes the other states of madness and love, the cutting force of discord, violence, and war, and speaks of a straying off familiar paths—a straying which is also that of language and which, in the words of Sheikh Moḥammed the poet, is that poetry itself.... The purpose is not to map a territory, nor to unravel the symbolic fabric of a given cultural system—to grasp and circumscribe the other's anthropological difference. It is to travel on the boundary of what Maghribî writers of decolonization have called a *différence intraitable*: a hiatus which destabilizes the assignment of places and parts, which displaces the categories of classical and colonial reason and opens a heterological space of intercultural dialogue—an atopical intermediate region that might be called a *barzakh*. There, in that interstitial mode of identity between languages and cultures, between genders and categorizations, a certain listening becomes possible. And concepts and figures from the *qṣar* can act as epistemological and aesthetic guides in a hermeneutical journey that, not unlike the journey of an Arabic *riḥla*, is a departure from one's place and oneself (pp. 5-6).

Here Pandolfo locates *fitna* here as a "hermeneutical journey" in which the traveller metaphorically takes the *qṣar* (community) with her and carries the concepts from this space as part of the intercultural dialogue necessarily emerging from topographies crisscrossed by a plurality of bodies, languages, memories and histories. Unlike Butler who ultimately locates representation as fixed and Phelan who regards it as a performance that necessarily inflects a real, Pandolfo's notion of representation is far more fluid and accessible to indeterminacy and subjectivity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pandolfo demonstrates *fitna* as a "mode of identity" in which reading and inscribing is *modular*. It is not that Pandolfo advocates *fitna* as a recuperable form of representation that necessarily redeems the subject—for she certainly elucidates the many readings of *fitna* as illness, disorder, and illusion—it is that she employs *fitna* as that which may very well be lost, irrecuperable, and, at times, abstract.[28] Moreover, Pandolfo's use of *fitna* as indeterminacy in language allows for the interpretation of cultures to be read through local and individual structures of thought, language and rhetoric, rather than through a western theoretical imposition of these valances which necessarily loses the rhetorical structures of local tongues, histories and bodies. For Pandolfo, *fitna* simultaneously poses a risk and presents possibility:

> But one of the classical definitions of *fitna* is itself that of the work of fire upon metals: Ḥadda is aware of this. On the one hand, fire melts metals, it deconstructs them; on the other, it purifies metals sorting out alloys.

---

[28] Pandolfo writes of *fitna* as disorder and chaos: "Fitna: semiotic disorder, a mad proliferation of signs, an infectious spreading producing a sort of entropy that fissures the community and may lead to war. An alien force, anonymous and blind, external to the will and the control of individual subjects: "Everybody seems to mind his own business, then, all of a sudden, Qâb Qarqallâb, *l-fitna* breaks out!' Automatic once its machinery is set in motion: "It sets forces to work that not even weapons can stop...' It is the trope of growth out of control. The medical analogy is cancer: *ila msha l'klâm ḥetta iwlad, kaynuwweḍ l-fitna,'* if words develop to the point of reproducing [literally, having children], they awaken fitna.' (In the local vocabulary of the body *l-maraḍ lli kaywled* is an illness that reproduces, that spreads.) It is the straying of language, when representations take on a life of their own and start creating worlds. This is the sense of the double-edged expression *l-biᶜ u shshrâ f l'klâm*, "the buying and selling of words,' a paradigmatic glossing of fitna in the historical imagination of the qṣar. In the days of (political) fitna, days of instability and intrigue *l-klâm*, "words,' meeaning in this context "political influence,' the efficacious capacity to control others, could be literally bought and sold for money. Power was the result of monetary speculation. (*L-bîᶜ u shshraᵓ*, "buying and selling,' is an idiom of commerce.) But the "buying and selling of words" is also metaphorical speculation. At this limit of fitna, the object world dissolves under the tongues of speaking subjects; or this same world is born from the illusory play of language. Worlds—Ḥadda seems to suggest—are born into a theater of words, but become compellingly real" (p. 91).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Without the fitna of fire, it would be impossible to isolate silver and gold from lead. This is the *Qur'ān* meaning of *fitna* as "testing" and "trial", the trial of fire. *Fitna,* in this sense, is the inscription of a difference without which life, and society, would be impossible, but a difference that poses a mortal risk (p. 92).

Positioning *fitna* as a cultural inscription which both poses a threat and is necessary for life, Pandolfo seats her reading of identity in that which is paradoxically linked to its very unreading. *Fitna* here is a rhetorical structure whose very textual and somatic readings embody the interwoven nature of life to death, of active to passive, of masculine to feminine, and of meaning to aporia. Unlike the western deconstructive method of trying to "untie" binaries as much gender theory has executed over the past twenty years, readings of *fitna,* such as Pandolfo's and Khatibi's, leave binaries intact as discursive references within culture and language. After all, theories of gender such as those subversive driven theories of Judith Butler stubbornly hinge their allegedly fluid identities upon a dismantling and dismissal of binaries rather than a movement around them. Through examining cultural and textual metaphors of the masculine and feminine, for instance, Pandolfo illustrates the power of language to infuse identities in between cultural coordinates of knowledge.[29]

---

[29] Pandolfo discusses *ḥasab* and *nasab* as readings for woman and man respectively: "*Ḥasab* is abstract value, what remains, the balance. It is the archive of memory, of things recorded, of proper meanings, of fixed reference points. It is the law of vertical relation (*muḥâkamât,* "proper meanings,' belong to the order of *ḥasab*). But *ḥasab/ḥsâb* is used also in the more openly contractual sense of being accounted (counted) within a social community, the qbîla or the Fourth. *L-ḥsâb dyâl qbîla* is the count of adult males capable of working for the community and responsible for paying taxes, digging irrigation canals, fighting in times of war, performing the village *'âmma. Nasab*: tie, knot, implication, connection, pact, junction, relation, agreement, compromise, comparison, metaphor. *Mutashâbihât,* "resemblances,' belong to the order of *nasab. Nasab* is the implication with the other, the horizontal relation (syntagmatic), the knot of the feminine. What is your *nasab,* that is, where is your knot, tie, connection. *Nasab* implies betweenness.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moreso, instead of dealing with identity as linear, Pandolfo works through identity as both horizontally and vertically inscribed where the horizontal is the fluid order of identity and the vertical is the fixed, intransigent order:

> *The principles of ḥasab and nassab seem to be set in dialectical opposition, at least in the economy of Ḥadda's argument. While the account is vertical and represents the enduring order of the name, the Law, the tie is horizontal and depicts the fugitive order of the event, the concrete happening in its unaccountable particularity. Ḥadda identifies this unaccountability with the feminine. Yet, perhaps despite his own convictions, Ḥadda shows that not only is the name/capital or account menaced by the nasab as something external to it—the destructive work of temporality in the shape of Woman* (p. 111).

Allowing for multi-directional narratives and interpretations, Pandolfo's reading necessarily makes room for the undoing of identity, as evoked by her interlocutor, Ḥadda, without imposing a reading of gender imposed from outside. Pandolfo's text shows the contradictions in Ḥadda's narratives as each one effects a reading of the feminine that, ultimately, is never stable. As Pandolfo notices above, Ḥadda's readings are in fact often in dialectical opposition whereby the feminine is that which binds, *nasab* (the tie), where previously the tie was the *ḥasab*. *Fitna* is evidenced as the contradiction, the death of meaning, the temporal.

Fitna as a discursive model for reading identity not only seems to offer a

---

If the account is a place to be called, the tie doesn't have a place of its own. *Nsîb* is a relative by marriage, *be-nisba* is an adverb of relation" (p. 106). And then, theorized by Ḥadda, her interlocutor, discusses *ḥasab* and *nasab* in terms of tea: "Tea is reckoned as tea [*teḥsâb atây*], it sits in the teapot without sugar, useless, barren, a poison. You can't drink it: BUT YOU CAN NAME IT! You see, here is the difference, you can call it *tea*!...Its fruition is secondary in all this, Ḥadda replies coldly. Similary a woman: if she is not "tied" to a man, without her "knot,' she remains barren, she does not give life and doesn't even come to life" (p. 111). And: "Without *nasab* a woman doesn't exist, she is simply not a woman! As for the *ḥasab*, yes she is "accounted for", but without the "knot", if she is not tied to a man, she is wandering about aimlessly in the wide desert" (p. 117).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

more culturally informed understanding of the identity than western theoretical approaches, it is also a much more practical tool for understanding representation in that *fitna* opens identity to undermine and be undermined by the network of meanings, bodies and languages that invariably intersect and undo subjectivity at its core. In this way, I wish to use *fitna* as a rhetorical tool for reading sex, gender, sexuality, and their interrelated significations, for the power of their remaining unmarked mystifies the traditional methods of designating a body with a *specific* identity in the same fashion that Barthes' neuter evades specificity and determinacy. The concept of *fitna* makes lucid the *impossibility* of "knowing" certain sexualities, and thus reveals the aporia of representing static identities that are not empirically included or "established" within current discourse. Thus, in order to extricate the bonds binding subjectivity to the sexed, gendered, and sexual body, we must scrutinize the limits of difference by interrogating the very designation of "sexual difference"—how sexual difference functions both to maintain a "singular" identity of the body as well as create a hiatus in which fixed points are destabilized. By freeing the body from a static relation to sex, gender, and sexuality, Khatibi demonstrates sexual difference not as a process of assimilation and adaptation, but as a space of heterogeneity and creativity.

I should add here that what I am attempting to do is *not* to efface sexual difference in favor of a universal sexual androgyny, but instead I wish to inform the slippage between the visible and the invisible of difference and to disclose the body as a vector traversed and policed by standards of the visible—a visible which is not at all male-centered and heterosexist as many western feminists maintain.[30] Furthermore, I do not propose that examining the synapses between subjectivity and the body would consequently open up the field for everyone to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

realize a "happy sexuality" where all signification floats between identity and performance. I do, however, intend this space of *fitna* to offer the opportunity, the *possibility*, and the space for such significations. Also, by discussing this body of *fitna*, I necessarily reveal *bi-langue*—that is, I transiently *mark the unmarked*—in order to widen the scope of difference and expose the necessarily disparate, contradictory, and heteronomous possibilities of the difference *within difference*. By making this move towards a theory of sexual heterogeneity, we might recognize the weaknesses and the misinformative nature of the bonds which maintain the *connections between* and *identities of* sex, gender, and sexuality through falsely constructing the body *as pure identity* rather than letting the body speak and perform itself.

Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Le Livre du Sang* imparts a notion of sexuality through the performance of the biological and the spiritual—a sexuality which in Islam, to quote Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, is "diversity in unity" (p. 12). The *bi-langue* of Khatibi's text is Muthna, a figure of indeterminate or amorphous sex and sexuality—Muthna's gender is constructed by the many narrators whose interpretations at various moments attempt to designate Muthna as woman, man, beauty, spirit, chaste, carnal, real, imaginary. Yet, the absolute impossibility for any of the voices to "know" or to define Muthna, frees her body from the oppressive forces of identifying it, naming it, and then, possessing it. Khatibi's text offers us a reading of Islamic ideology of body, gender, sexuality, and spirituality which attempts to segregate man from woman, to differentiate

---

[30] See De Lauretis (pp. 1-26) where she examines the movement between gender as ideological representation and what this representation elides.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

masculinity from femininity, and to codify the sacred from the impure act.[31] As Islam, contrary to Christianity, makes no division between mind and body, the spiritual from the biological,[32] Khatibi sets out to explore the potential for a fluidity of identity, of individual consciousness, within the physical-spiritual world on earth which would allow the antipathetic dichotomies of male/female, masculine/feminine, and natural/unnatural to enjoy the same interactive freedom that Islam allows the physical and the spiritual.[33] He takes these dichotomies and demonstrates the qualities that each embodies in mirroring and in performing

---

[31] In *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Fatima Mernissi comments upon the division of space from early interpretations of the *hijab:* "[T]he Prophet, during a troubled period at the beginning of Islam, pronounced a verse that was so exceptional and determining for the Muslim religion that it introduced a breach in space that can be understood to be a separation of the public from the private, or indeed the profane from the sacred, but which was to turn into a segregaton of the sexes" (p. 101). Likewise this notion of the segregation of the sexes, is a much discussed issue in terms of sexuality. As Abdelwahab Bouhdiba writes: "C'est que la dichotomie sexuelle est elle-même d'essence anxiogène. Comme nous sommes loin de la magnifique harmonie promise par la belle et vigoureuse conception coranique de l'accord des sexes source de vie et d'existence! Dans ce contexte le travesti n'est que signe d'hermaphroditisme psychologique aggravé par le contexte culturel. Il indique un trouble profond de la sexualité. Le refuge dans le vêtement de l'autre sexe est un refus d'assumer sa propre condition sexuelle. C'est jouer le rôle du sexe opposé. La virilisation de la femme, le besoin de s'habiller en homme, c'est-à-dire la recherche des formes extérieures de la masculinité, sont une révolte plus ou moins assouvie contre la féminité et le statut qui est fait au sexe faible. C'est de cela que témoignent ces innombrables femmes garçonnes de l'islam (*ghulâmyât*). *Les milles et une Nuits*, le *Kitâb al aghâni* par exemple nous en ont, entre autres, laissé des exemples plus savoureux les uns que les autres" (p. 54-55).

[32] For a more profound argument on this subject, see Bouhdiba's *Sexuality and Islam.* However, for the best illustration of the interrelationship of sexuality and spirituality in literature, see Nafzâwi's *La Prairie parfumée* (1976).

[33] This is not to say that Islam condones the *mélange* of masculine and feminine, for there are strict prohibitions both in the *Qur'ān* and various *ḥadīths* forbidding certain acts and dress by men , and others for women. Yet, there is an absolute fluidity within these texts and other Islamic tenets through which the spirit and the body are interconnected, thus evincing a space of social and physical ambiguity. Tunisian sociologist, Traki Zannad writes: "En Islam, c'est le corps qui est le lieu d'élection. L'Islam se porte dans l'âme mais aussi dans le corps du musulman, le corps en mouvement, celui qui va vers la prière l'action, vers la vie!...Tout en soulignant que le corps n'est pas seulement sexe, sexualité. La sexualité demeure le carrefour de plusieurs plans de represéntations parmi lesquels le social" (1984, pp. 16-65).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

its other, radically rethinking and repositioning *Qur'ānic* and *ḥadīthic* tenets. Ultimately, Khatibi excises the limitations that Islam imposes on sexuality by examining the performative signs within each segregated, differentiated milieu while exposing the "cross-performative," creative moments that necessarily emerge from certain constricting structures. Khatibi bestows many Islamic beliefs of textual (*Qur'ānic*) and somatic plurality within his work, thus reflecting exponentially the possible readings of Islam, Moroccan culture, and the socio-somatic spheres of intertextuality[34]. If nothing else, Khatibi's narrative argues against the steadfast heterosexist identity of the body which much western gender theory imparts and instead he seeks to opens up the space of play, of performance, and of consciousness between the sex, gender, and sexual divisions of "difference" wherein the body represents both the various identities of gender and sexuality and simultaneously epitomizes identity through social and religious contradictions. Or, as Barthes writes: "[C]e qu'il propose, paradoxalement, c'est de retrouver en même temps l'identité et la difference".[35]

In Arabic, Muthna signifies *effeminate, double, hermaphrodite,* and *androgyny.*[36] Muthna is an apparition in whom each voice, each narrator, views

---

[34] Jean-Michel Hirt, in his book *Le miroir du Prophète,* focuses on the polyvalence of visibility/invisibility and Islamic doxa, stating: "[L]'image visible ne vaut que par son reflet lisible dans l'invisible miroir que le Coran constitue... Le texte coranique rend cette image énigmatique en jouant par rapport à elle le rôle d'un miroir qui la fait passer du plan visuel au plan textuel. Ce miroir a en effet le pouvoir de décomposer l'image initiale en rendant invisible Jésus et visible l'instrument du supplice avec sa victime. Là où l'œil voit ou non, le Coran propose une autre vision qui supprime l'alternative: l'œil voit et ne voit pas, comme un miroir qui par son angle de réfleion de la scène montre autre chose que ce qui en serait frontalement visible. Cette ubiquité de la vision qui traduit le point de vue de Dieu confère au Coran toute sa puissance spéculaire" (pp. 49-50).

[35] Cited as "un texte intitulé" on the jacket of *Le Livre du Sang.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

him/herself. The narrators, like Muthna, remain unnamed—the use of the plural "nous" pervades any naming, any categorization, for the voices are polyphonic, each sounding, overlapping the next. Identity forms within their narratives and in the spaces of silence—the identity of androgyny, hermaphroditism, and effeminacy is the space of interaction with this apparition, it is the expanse of self-creation, of freedom.[37] The story begins in the Garden of Refuge where a voice addresses Muthna: "Enfant inoubliable, avance vers nous en souriant. Avance avec la même complicité secrète...Enfant inoubliable, nous te demandons définitivement la nécessaire loi du silence—avant ton égorgement" (pp. 13-14).

---

[36] The *Hans Wehr* dictionary gives the following definitions for "Muthna" and its composite meanings:

مثنى *maṯnīy* folded; plaited, pleated; doubled; مثنى *muṯnannan* double, twofold; in the dual (*gramm.*); مثنى *muṯana* f. hermaphrodite; مذكر *muḏakarun* m. hermaphrodite; خنثى *ẖunṯa* pl. خناث *ẖināṯ*, خناثى *ẖināṯā* hermaphrodite; انوثة *unūṯa* femininity, womanliness; خنث *ẖaniṯa a* to be soft, effeminate v to display effiminate manners, become or be effeminate; متخنث *mutakanitun* effeminate. Bouhdiba also describes the hermaphrodite according to Islam: "Plus grand encore sera l'embarras des foqahas devient les cas limites de l'hermaphroditisme vrai. L'hermaphrodite, le *mukhannath*, qu'est-ce? Un homme? Une femme? Autre chose encore? S'agit-il d'une malformation de la nature? Dans un monde où se trouve au juste sa place et quel est son statut? Héritera-t-il comme un mâle (le double) ou comme une femme (la moitié). Portera-t-il le voile? Où fera-t-il sa prière, avec les hommes ou en compagnie des femmes? Qu'est-il au juste?" (p. 55).

[37] Fatna Aït Sabbah's *La femme dans l'inconscient musulman* discusses the "omnisexual" as woman that maintains the status of a type of imaginary hermaphrodite: "L'omnisexuelle est une femme qui a une santé à toute épreuve, une chair généreuse, enveloppante et une stature solidement soutenue par des cuisses-piliers. Ses attributs physiques (épaules, bras, avant-bras, bouche, lèvres, joues, visage, sourcils, front, chevelure, cou, poitrine, taille, seins, ventre, mains, pieds) sont minutieusement fixés dans un rigide portrait-robot où priment la blancheur du teint et la noirceur de la chevelure" (p. 54). However, critiquing this ideal, Fedwa Malti-Douglass writes: "The term *omnisexual*, proposed by Fatna Aït Sabbah to characterize a vision of the female heroine of the sexual manuals, is appealing. Its use for a being whose personality and behavior are determined by its sexual organs needs, however, to be nuanced. Woman is not alone in this sexual category" (p. 47).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The voice demands of Muthna to keep this "law of silence" which precipitates a sacrifice of the body—a silence which is both the construction and ultimate destruction of Muthna. Her body is a slate upon which the voices attempt to inscribe Muthna's identity and desires *in order to* confer their own. Muthna is the "enfant inoubliable" whose beauty is consecrated by each singular narrative—"une étrange beauté nous invite à briser notre parole"—her beauty and silence invite the narratives contained within this story. Her silence sustains her life leaving the space of identity-formation open to be created by the narrators who, reflecting themselves in her, can often find no line between their body, their desire, their death, and hers: "Quand le silence nous découpe, est-ce de toi ou de nous que frémiront les vêpres de sang?"

The Maître summons the apparition of Muthna through a contemplative trance-like state, a type of mental ablution from desolation and carnal desire, whereby secrecy secures the space for both the body and language and whereby the disclosure of the secret would necessarily destroy the nostalgia of paradise. The Maître recalls his first vision of Muthna in one of the primary social scenes of absolute sexual division, the *ḥammam*. Within this male sphere, the narrator recalls the Maître's encounter of seeing Muthna naked, immobile, encompassed within the vapor, head turned away. To the Maître, Muthna is a man—he addresses her as such. Beauty embraces the vapor and each fragment of steam reflects the other (l'autre)—"comme un jeu de miroirs embués." The *hammam* is a homosocial space where the darkness conceals the secret acts and the "entretiens secrets," and where the Maître invites Muthna to their "Asile des inconsolés," a secret country which is part desert and partially irrigated. More so, the *hammam* is the place of purification where Muslims go to purify their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bodies — it is, according to Bouhdiba, "la médiation nécessaire entre la jouissance sexuelle où le Musulman devient impur et se perd la "*h'açâna*"[38] et le moment où il fait sa prière, lit le Coran pour récupérer cette "*h'açâna*" (1964, p. 11). Yet, the division of the sexes within the space of the *hammam* does not, in fact, prevent "impure" thoughts or acts—this space works as a dialectic of the spiritual and the impure whereby the acts taking place within the walls must remain ever so secret. In the Asile, Muthna joins the voices where she is the "fiancé à langue secrète," she penetrates the stone walls of the Asile—Muthna becomes the physical trace for the repatriation of the dead, of the gods, and of lovers within an earthly paradise: "Ce sera le chant, puis l'incantation convulsive, puis le silence, puis le passage, puis l'errance, puis l'éclair, puis l'annonce, puis l'unisson, puis la rupture, puis la transmutation, puis la séparation des éléments et des formes, puis le ruissellement de ton corps" (p. 18). Muthna manifests the "ruse démonaique" against Islam in which the physical and the spiritual come together in an earthly paradise, where between the barren and moist lands there is a spiritual-physical sphere for "les amants éperdus."

The disclosure of the secret, the unveiling of Muthna, depends on her voice, her performance. Yet, she refuses to be named, she shifts between Feminine and Masculine, her movement illuminates "la Figure de l'Androgyne" (p. 21). Her silence permits the transferential inscription of desire—the markings which the narrators impose on her body, on her person, are clearly reflections of *their own* desire. For some Muthna is a man, a woman, a young boy, a masculine

---

[38] *H'açâna* refers to an individuals "security" or position of spiritual and physical immunity against the many dangers that the social world presents the individual. The physical ablustions before prayer serve to cleanse the individual of both physical and spiritual ills, making him invulnerable until he engages in the subsequent act of impurity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

woman, and for others a feminine man: "Notre ange n'est-il pas semblable à jeune adolescente masculine?" (p. 52). This is reminiscent of Al-Hassan Ibn Dhakwam who writes: "Do not sit next to the sons of the rich noble: they have faces like those of virgins and they are even more tempting than women" (Bouhdiba, p. 32) or of the *fiq* who warns against the temptation of pretty boys.[39] As Androgyny, Muthna can never be both man and woman, both masculine and feminine, but her identity depends on temporality, the shifting of voices, of positions, of narratives which weave a heteroglossic fabric of consciousness. Muthna embodies the possibility for both an amorphous and static identity wherein the subject may either remain unmarked or retain the traces of cultural identity. The naming of Muthna is, however, a coding of the speaking voice, a linking between the subjective desire and the body that each envisions, that each creates, for whom Muthna is but a fantasy, a space of indeterminate desire and possibility.

Muthna absorbs the scope of invisibility throughout this text—she is invisible as the Hermaphrodite, unnameable as Androgyny. She is only visible as realized by a desire which attempts ultimately to name her, precipitating her death. She is double, "puisqu'on ne vit VISIBLEMENT qu'une seule fois" (p. 68). When one tries to make Muthna visible, the speakers are forced to acknowledge

---

[39] Michel Foucault discusses the physical beauty and temptation of boys in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume* 2 in the historical context of Western Civilization. Although he locates his analysis within Greek philosophical and medical practice of the Fourth Century B.C., I mention this study of the sexual status of boys within Western culture simply to communicate that the "temptation" of young boys is an integral part of sexuality in Western culture as well as is the Arabo-Muslim World since notions of active/passive are maintained through the relations that older men have with younger boys. Also, as chronicled by Westermarck in his study of ritual in Morocco, in the northern mountains of Morocco a young boy cannot properly learn the *Qur'ān* "unless a scribe commits pedastry with him" (p. 198).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

thier own subjectivity, the speaker wants to be unnamed, and the voice says: "[J]e voulais...parure de toutes les femmes qui m'adoraient et de tous les homme qui m'embrassaient...Alors prend-moi comme tu veux, mais prends-moi. Prends! Ne suis-je pas à portée de main!" (p. 54). Muthna's lovers encounter their sexuality, gender, and sex within the indefinite space of her body, under the darkening night, in the Cimmerian corners of candle-lit rooms, and "dans le vide et...la torsion [du] corps coupé, mutilé de part et d'autre par une ligne invisible" (p. 63). They attempt to make known her sex, hence inscribing their own. They constantly foretell of her inevitable "égorgement," the moment when "le chant lumineux" will reveal the truth. For Muthna's beauty is the only substantial sign which marks her body, the only *named* object of desire. Her beauty, however, is also her death, her "maladie fatale" (p. 56) which refuses a sexed or gendered designation.

And it is this refusal to name herself which results in her being nominated through ritual sacrifice, a trope of the Moroccan sacrificial rites, *l'Aid-al-kabir* and the *'Achoura*.[40] Just before Muthna is *égorgée*, a voice demands her visibility, it demands her to name her sex, her identity: "Il faut choisir le mot mortel pour

---

[40] Abdellah Hammoudi discusses the symbollic relevance of ritual in these two rituals: "L'antithèse qui s'ébauche ainsi est celle qu'au Maghreb la fête des sacrifices (*l'Aid-Lekbir*), très souvent, forme avec les mascarades qui lui font suite. L'immolation d'une victime couronne le long rite du pèlerinage, l'un des devoirs canonique que tout musulman, s'il en a les moyens, se doit d'accomplir. Et bien qu'aucune obligation religieuse stricte ne les y astreigne, partout les croyants, restés chez eux, imitent cependant le geste de ceux qui sacrifient dans les lieux saints de l'islam. En fait, le sacrifice sanglant inaugure un cycle rituel auquel mettent fin, quelque trente jours plus tard, les cérémonies de l'*Achoura*. Fêtes des morts où l'on distribue des aumônes, consomme des fruits secs et achète les jouets que les enfants ne manquent pas de réclamer. Sacrifice et *'Achoura*, d'autre part, scandent le temps: l'un ferme l'année qui s'achève, l'autre ouvre celle qui commence" (pp. 15-16).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

tout détruire, avec la brièveté d'un coup de couteau... Recule, qui que tu sois! Recule! Es-tu femme? Es-tu homme? Ou bien l'Androgyne EST-il vraiment? Qui tu sois, déclare ton sexe!" (pp. 156-157). She says nothing. Then, the narrator adds: "Où es-tu encore VISIBLE?" (p. 161) for Muthna can only be visible through death—the *specific* identity cannot breath in time but can only exist in a deteriorated state. To make Muthna visible is to kill her: "Qui prononce le nom de Muthna une fois, une seule fois, est déjà ensorcelé par l'enchantement du Mythe. Je te nomme, je te tue. Je te nomme, tu tombes" (p. 62). Khatibi demonstrates that to name necessarily marks the end, the death of indeterminacy and of *certain* kinds of sexual splendor. In addition, this ritual sacrifice also invokes a marking of community in the Maghreb which, like transe, establishes the tribe—inside and outside are marked and Muthna's body is situated between these two spaces.[41]

Like the visible and invisible, purity and impurity engage the sexed and gendered body. In order to disclose Muthna, the Maître must penetrate her, he must be able to see her as (or make her) pure. She is examined with the equal scrutiny that one undertakes in making ablutions, the ritual of physical cleansing before prayer, a passage to somatic and spiritual purity:[42] "pure, sans crachat,

---

[41] Rachid Boudjedra in *La répudiation* writes: "L'Aïd représentait pour nous l'épreuve la plus terrifiante, car on nous obligeait à assister à la cérémonie durant laquelle on tuait plusieurs bêtes, pour perpétuer le sacrifice d'un prophète prêt à tuer son fils pour sauver son âme; nous nous montrions hostiles pour mieux marquer la différence entre nous et les autres membres de la tribu. Nous étions reniés, et la cécité du patriarche malveillant nous mettait dans des transes d'épileptiques trop sûrs de leur bon droit; nous appréhendions ce jour de fête où nous barboterions dans le sang, épaissi déjà dans la gorge des bêtes bien avant de se coaguler sur le sol en plaques vermillon qui tournaient à l'ocre, puis au noir au fur et à mesure que le soleil montait au zénith" (p. 194).

[42] Jean-Michel Hirts discusses the rite of ablutions which he reads through the sacred adn the profane, the spiritual and the somatic: "D'une génération à l'autre, le rite se transmet: les extrémités visibles du corps, pieds, mains, fisage, extrémités de contact

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sans maladie aucune, sans excréments" (p. 132). Through the performance of sex, the symbolic gestures of purification become overwhelmed by the vision the narrator has of Muthna's double role as man/woman, active/passive[43]: "[C]oup à coup réveillée dans le battement de tes veines, coup à coup envahie par la vision obsédante de son frère" (p. 132). Yet, she also penetrates the Maître spiritually, physically, and mentally casting a "shadow" of femininity onto his body, social identity, and spiritual wholeness while synchronously reconstructing, reshaping these identities. The consumption of the body marks it through the penetration of the flesh, the making passive of the flesh, the molding of identity through an active inscription of desire. Yet this writing identity onto the body maintains the negative space of identity, for it is the passive that can subvert its own identity, change, mutate. The passive field of identity is the domain in which the confines of sexual and gendered identities are negotiated and upon

---

par le toucher et la vue, mais aussi les parties plus secrètes, sexuelles et anales, doivent être lavées pour séparer les activités profanes du sacré de la prière et rendre le corps *propre* à entrer en communication avec la pureté absolue du divin. Le croyant ne peut être vu, ni se voir souillé. Mais par quoi est-il souillé, sinon les matières du corps, et celles liées au commerce des corps, ou à la maladie, ou aux fatigues du voyage? On le voit, il y a une imbrication entre le matériel et le spirituel telle que le constat d'impureté *dressé à l'endroit des humeurs corporelles—élimination, excrétion, sudation—emporte* avec lui, ou matérialise, les impuretés morales impalpables" (pp. 178-179).

[43] There is a plethora of readings on passivity and activity in the Maghreb, much of which is linked directly to sexuality. Jalil Bennani's study, *Le corps suspect*, brings an interesting twist through the reading of activity and passivity as related to the somatic, the social body, literature and sickness: "Toute cette importance du corps, tout ce potentiel trouve un écho au sein des instances médicales. Ce corps se parlera comme un langage: ainsi les états dépressifs s'expriment par le biais du corps et des symptômes qu'il offre à l'écoute. Le langage parlé est là près de sa source et la coupure entre le corps et son symbole, le langage parlé, semble être moins importante que chez le malade occidental. Mais tout ceci ne suffit pas pour expliquer ce qu'on appelle "l'importance de la somatisation chez le Maghrébin". Car il y a aussi la rencontre avec le corps médical et le corps social. L'importance et le pouvoir de la médicine occidentale doivent aussi être questionnés. Au sein de ces instances le corps du Maghrébin est un corps dit "passif". Or il conviendrait d'être plus nuancé et de faire la distinction entre corps actif et corps passif. Le corps actif est celui qui parle, le corps passif, celui qui se donne et qui subit" (p. 44).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which desire as transient is inscribed. The passive is not only negative, but like *fitna*, it maintains a double-edged meaning—it is that which threatens, it is that which both is penetrated and penetrates meaning and bodies, space and time, language and silence.[44] Muthna has now opened the Asile to "une secrète transfiguration du Mal...tout en coïtant dans l'ordre des choses vouées à la corruption érotique" (p. 133). She takes the Mal, what is regarded as impure—her body—and proceeds towards jouissance, towards a field of play where the markings of purity and impurity, the confines of masculine and feminine, and the antagonistic divisions of heterosexual and homosexual love have no alliances to cultural paradigms of good and evil. The voice questions the purity of the Maître who lies in the arms of Muthna, he is revolted by the freedom she offers with her body, and he wonders exactly to whom she offers it. The beauty that all have granted her is shattered by the sexual acts she undertakes. The Maître asks "N'ai-je pas—pour toi—confondu le Mal et le Bien?" (p. 136). As interrelated constituents of her identity, Muthna's body, gender, and sexuality threaten to disrupt the traditional parallels drawn between: femininity, passivity, beauty,

---

[44] The passive sexual role of homo- or heterosexual acts is commonly understood within the West and other non-Western cultures as an effeminization of the person being "penetrated". Yet, in the Arabo-Muslim world, the fact of being penetrated (including homosexual activity) is not necessarily deemed as "evil" since passing on *baraka* (good fortune) is often a healing process or spiritual endeavor for the individual and often the community. For an excellent discussion on this subject see Westermarck. Likewise, Crapanzano details how sick, impotent, or "inadequate"-feeling men are equated to *being* or *acting like* women. Treating the legend of a Moroccan marabout, Sidi 'Ali, Crapanzano discusses the various endowments of *baraka* as related to male identity and and the desire for female characteristics in *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry*. Also, the word "homosexual" in Arabic is defined as such: سلبي *salbī* negative (also *el.*); passive;لوطي *lūṭī* sodomite, pederast; لواط *liwāṭ* and لواطة sodomy, pederasty. Thus these meanings indicate a contradiction in the commonly professed ideal that homosexual only means the passive role, but in fact, can mean both the sodomized and the pederast.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and woman; between masculinity, activity, reason, and man; between heterosexuality, procreation, sacred, and social order; and between homosexuality (among other forms of sexuality), death, impurity, and chaos.[45] Maintaining the borders between the above models, the antagonistic vigor between purity and impurity constructs the drive towards a homogeneous identity that unconditionally bridges the subjective and the real by simply barring access to the other. It is only through Muthna that we can escape this paradox.

In the section entitled "Nuit de l'erreur," Muthna escapes a Carnival and sleeps with her brother. This is the only time where she speaks, but only to equally imagined and mythical figures. She then address Yaqout[46] and discusses

---

[45] Malek Chebel's *Le corps dans la tradition au Maghreb* ellicits many discussions of the body of seduction and the collective as ritual: "Cette parenthèse close, rappelons que la fête et la séduction font souvent bon voisinage au Maghreb. Nous n'avons jusqu'alors qu'effleuré la question. Qu'il nous suffise seulement de penser, en guise d'illustration concrète, aux fameuses *chikhat"* ou *chouikhat"* de l'Oranais, véritables joutes oratoires à caractère érotique, centrées sur l'évocation de thèmes sexuels par une chorale féminine en présence des hommes. Il faut préciser que la présence masculine n'est que spatio-auditive puisque ces derniers sont soustraits à la vue des poétesses par une palissade, une cloison opaque, un mur qui interdit la proximité corporelle et visuelle. On assiste aux joutes oratoires à caractère poético-érotique connues sous le terme de *chikhat"* (de *chikha*, féminine de *chikh*, Maître, Seigneur) aussi bien dans l'Oranais que dans toutes les autres régions du Maghreb, d'Est en Ouest, du Nord au Sud. La séduction collective, ritualisée par la médiation du chant, constitue un véritable exercice de tauromachie entre les deux communautés qui transgressent ingénieusement et délicatement l'incommunicabilité traditionelle instituée entre elles. Il y a la "passe" et ses lois, les coups inventaire complet des subtilités qui se mettent au service d'une courtoisie amoureuses préfèrent la mort sublimée le l'adversaire, une mort-soumission, aux foudres passionnelles et aux flux instinctuels anarchiques. Le corps de la séduction est d'abord un corps qui contient les expressions archaïques de son "animalité". Le corps est un élément de la procédure de socialisation de l'être, non de sa dissolution" (p. 135).

[46] Yaqout (d. 626/1229), also spelled Yâqût, is famous for his geographical dictionary, the *Mu'jam al-Buldân*, in which he discusses al-Waqwâq, a fictional island created by Ibn Tufail in *The Journey of the Soul*. On this island Ibn Tufail establishes a type of sexual utopia where women grow on trees and where a male couple, Asal and Hai, spend their days dreaming of this place in which they may live together. Although the paradise of al-Waqwâq is a recurrent theme within Islamic texts, this specific story excludes women from the overall vision. Fedwa Malti-Douglas notes that the asexual topography of this story make women's body and word enter the story through a "different real": "Perhaps the best solution to this ever-present threat in woman's body

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

her virginity:

> Ai-je oublié la mienne? Ma virginité étoilée! Dans le sang radiée....C'était bien le ciel qui tombai sur moi. Mais Lui, qui était-il? *(Elle compte sur ses doigts.)* Mon père? *(Rieuse)* Non...il était déjà mort. Un oncle ivre et débauché? Un esclave de ma mère? Un fou? Un prince? Un poète errant?...Pour que tu résistes à tous les amants, à tous les bordels ouverts, tu dois construire pour ton image une autre image qui, elle, doit glorifier le Mal. Image qui te sépare en deux, de haut en bas...éclairant ta détresse. Oui, le Mal est une pensé angélique...Et la Beauté, infiniment belle, infiniment dévastrice, n'est-elle pas...la clarté du Mal! (pp. 117-118).

Muthna refuses to be an inert force placed amidst the paradigms of good and evil, pure and impure, and instead she creates her own identity by performing it, working within the binaried structure in order to subvert it. Unlike the Maître, Muthna does not simply confuse good and evil but instead she demonstrates cultural "norms" by emphasizing them, even perverting them, taking them to their "extremes." For instance, sleeping with her brother could be viewed as a natural extension of *cousinage*—Muthna ingests the cultural practice of absolute endogamy which perpetuates the life of a tribe and she takes it through its "extreme" form, evincing the taboo of incest which is considered equal to murder: "Cet acte sans loi a la force d'un meurtre, d'un meurtre qui renaît de sa propre infamie" (p. 119). Likewise, Muthna as male, would pose an equally accursed threat to the religious and social order since homosexuality is not ordained

---

is that of the Andalusian philosopher-physician, Ibn Tufayl (d. 581/1185-1186). His mystico-philosophical allegory, *Hayy ibn Yaqzân*, is one of the monuments of classical Arabo-Islamic civilization to weather the test of time. The story has the makings of a fairy tale: a young boy on a desert island is nurtured by a gazelle and groups up learning all he needs to learn, eventually turning to the mystic way of life, which he shares with another male. A disturbing negation, when not an absence, of sexuality characterizes this text... Though Ibn Tufayl's text has one foot in geographical and cosmographical works, its other foot is just as solidly planted in the Arabo-Islamic philosophical consciousness. Hence it is that woman's body and woman's word enter a different real, that of the flight from sex, the female, and corporeality. Asexual philosophy and sexual geography are but two facets of the same phenomenon" (p. 7).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

according to Islamic doctrine though it is often mentioned in *ḥadīth* and forms part of a general cultural knowledge that simultaneously acknowledges homosexual practices while marking them as taboo.[47] Muthna demonstrates that which is not natural, the "surnaturelle" of ecstasy: her body as male and female, her gender as masculine and feminine, and her sexuality as beyond the law—neither purely heterosexual or homosexual, evading the castigation of cultural taboos and *Qur'ānic* prohibitions.[48] Thus, Muthna takes the religious,

---

[47] There are many discussions of homosexuality beginning with Bouhdiba's well-known study: ""Dieu a maudit ceux qui changent les frontières de la terre". En cas termes le prophète condamne le viol de la séparation des sexes. La tradition veut que quatre catégories de gens tombent sous le courroux de Dieu et sont objet de sa colère: "Les hommes qui se travestissent en femmes et les femmes qui se travestissent en hommes, ceux qui couchent avec les animaux, et ceux qui couchent avec des hommes". L'homosexualité (*liwât*) fait l'objet de la condamnation la plus vive. Elle est assimilée au *zinâ* et on préconcise d'appliquer à ceux qui s'y livrent les châtiments les plus horribles. Le *liwât* finit même par désigner toutes les formes de perversion sexuelle et parasexuelle. Néamoins la pédérastie bloque en islam toutes les perversion et constitue en quelque sorte la turpitude des turpitudes. L'homosexualité féminine (*musâ h'aqua*), tout aussi réprouvée, est traitée cependant avec une relative indulgence et celles qui s'y livrent n'encourent que la réprimande au même titre que l'auto-érotisme, la bestialité, ou la nécrophilie (pp. 44-45)." Having mentioned this, however, it cannot be emphasized enough that in the Maghreb, not to mention many non-western cultural spheres, homosexuality is not "exhibited" as it is in the west and for many homosexuals, the idea of "sexual liberation" is not at all related to a visible manifestation of sexuality (which raises interesting questions for the western ethic which equates visibility and public expression of desire as "freer" than those spaces in which this is simply not practiced).

[48] Marianna Torgovnick, in her book, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*, suggests that in the west has taboos with "crossings" of gender that suggest a possible "flirtation" with the homoerotic: "The female masks, sometimes accompanied by false breasts, would also have been worn by men...which appears in Leiris's *African Art*. From a Western perspective, this is cross-dressing; but that is a category that would make little sense in most African cultures, where few of the social formations that use masks are open to women. As in periods when women were barred from the Western stage, female roles must be performed by men in almost all African dances and rituals. The masquerade here is not "transvestite" n the usual sense of the term. But the masks and costumes, and the dances in which they appeared, may well accommodate an interest in the opposite sex and, hence, a host of curiosities and ambivalences that have needed to find other outlets inour society, including the outlets suggested by Leiris's poses and prose in *Manhood*. In the West, the hermaphroditic potential of the cross-dressed dance (in Africa or among South Pacific groups like the Iatmul) or the double-sexed implications of some primitive objects (like nIgerian Ekoi masks) suggest crossings and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cultural, and physical designations forcing all to see the perversity of such divisions within her world and the inevitability of such acts, for the "Nuit de l'Erreur" is the "cris qui reviennent" (p. 119).

Ultimately, Muthna is the embodiment of the abject, for as Kristeva contends: "Abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse...each one determining a specific form of the sacred...It takes on the form of the *exclusion* of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up" (p. 17). The abject, like *fitna*, is a space which allows for negation, collapse and renegotiation—the abject is the space of auto-exile in which the subject finds himself divisible and heterogeneous.[49] As such, Muthna realizes that she is taboo incarnate: she is aware of her sexual ambiguity and the threat she poses to those around her, those who desire her, those who are possessed by her: "Je suis toi" (p. 32). "La beauté du Mal" upsets the order of the those surrounding Muthna—especially of the Maître whose sensual thoughts threaten to prevent him from his prayers. One voice acknowledges that the Masculine and Feminine are not complementary, but instead inhabit an aporetic

---

connections taboo with our society. In the West, they suggest violating the rigid sexual roles the West has created as norms and provide, perhaps, a flirtation with homoerotic desires" (p. 118).

[49] Kristeva furthers her definition of the abject subject: "An Exile Who Asks, Where? The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter—since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaen, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations. Instead of sounding himself as to his "being", he does so concerning his palce: "Where am I?' instead of "Who am I?' For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic" (p. 8).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

space—the same voice summons Muthna to return to the Asile for consecration. The abject is confronted by the sacred[50]—those surrounding Muthna attempt to bless her through marking her body both metaphorically and literally: "Par la circoncision, n'avons-nous pas offert notre prépuce devant l'autel paternal? Par l'adoration de la Beauté—loi de notre secte—n'avons-nous pas voué notre chair à la transfiguration?" (p. 146). Those surrounding her cannot accept the double-nature of her body, of her gender, and sexuality—they cannot accept the secretions of the body without purification: "Baigne-toi, Muthna, baigne-toi dans la circulation de votre sperme. Tu tomberas" (p. 66).[51] For the abject embodies a defilement of the body which likewise embodies the terrain for performing sacred remedy—the sperm, the shit, the saliva, and finally, the blood[52] all compose the abject within Muthna as physical, cultural, and religious symbols. Abjection is "a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence"

---

[50] Moncet Gouga writes: "Ainsi le sacré envolit peu à peu l'espace de la vie profane jusqu'à envelopper toute la sexualité de l'individu dans un tissu brodé d'interdits et de tabous...La sacralisation de l'acte sexuel commence en fait par la sacralisation du corps de la femme." (pp. 49-64).

[51] Chebel discusses the contradictory narratives of the superfluity and value of sperm: "Si le sperme est considéré par Ar-Râzî comme une superfluité dont la longue station dans le corps est cause de nombreux troubles, le sperme est, pour Ibn Sîna, un capital précieux dont il ne faut jamais se défaire. Cette idée de la rétention est évoquée dans ce vers qui lui est attribué et qui se formule ainsi: 'Garde ta semence tant que tu pourras, c'est l'eau de ta vie que te prend la femme'" (p. 99).

[52] Also Bouhdiba mentions the varioius impuities of bodily discharge such as sperm: "Les foquaha distinguent traditionnellement deux sortes d'impuretés (*h'adath*). L'impureté majeure (*janâba*) résulte de toute émission de sperme, des menstrues et des lochies. L'impureté mineure est contractée à la suite de toute exécration quelconque par "l'une des deux voies principale" (*ah'adi al sabîlayn*). Tout ce qui sort du corps humain, gaz, liquide ou solide, est perçu par le fiqh comme impure. Nous retrouvons là une horreur universellement éprouvée à la vue de tout ce qui est à base de pourriture, de putréfaction, de déféfaction. Les excreta du corps sont toutes impures et dégoûtantes: gaz, sang des menstrues, urine, matières, fécales, sperme, sang, pus...." (p. 61).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(Kristeva, p. 9). The narrators have created, or perhaps, imagined Muthna and thus are left either to purify their bodies or are themselves to remain marked.

Kristeva locates the heterogenous nature of *jouissance:* "[W]hen I *seek* (myself), *lose* (myself), or experience *jouissance* —then "I" is *heterogeneous.* Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against,* demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise" (p. 10). The sign of the revolt, of the repudiation, of Muthna's body and subjectivity is necessarily a repudiation of the self—a denial of *jouissance,* an attempt to snuff out that which is Other, that which possesses another. Muthna possesses these narrators: they enter a trance which frees them from the constraints of the sacred—they enter into the space of creating their bodies or, as storytellers, speaking and writing their bodies.[53] The Transe du Même is a forbidden state of jouissance in which one perpetually orbits the "ordre implacable du Mal" within which memory of the past and the past's imminent repetition into the future coalesce the knowledge of the *malheur* of the divisions of masculine and feminine, male and female, the loved and the lover, and "livre et sang d'ou

---

[53] As Michel Leiris notes, trance is often a pretext to allow for its subjects to pronounce certain words or perform certain actions: "Tra la possessione "autentica" (cioè spontanea oppure provocata e subita in buona fede, in un'ottica magico-religiosa in cui la trance non dipende da un'azione cosciente del paziente) e quella, al contrario, "non autentica" (simulata deliberatamente per dar spettacolo o per esercitare su altri una influenza da cui trarre benefici morali o materiali) vi sono troppi stadi intermedi perché sia possibile tracciare una demarcazione netta. In molte circostanze, per esempio, la possessione per il posseduto è un alibi che gli permette di pronunciare parole, o di compiere atti da cui si asterrebbe se dovessero essere messi in conto alla sua personalità normale. Ma egli ricorre a questo alibi premeditatamente (nel qual caso la possessione di cui lui stesso ha stabilito la sceneggiatura diventa solo una rappresentazione)? Oppure si limita a mettere a profittto, più o meno lucidamente, una situazione che non ha creato (nel qual caso, pur senza esserci una buona fede totale, sarebbe quanto meno imprudente accusarlo di frode)?...A quanto pare simili casi intermedi son odecisamente i più diffusi e la possessione da parte di *zar*—quella almeno praticata quasi apertamente a Gondar nel 1932-33—può essere definita come un teatro vissuto, non come un teatro recitato, né come l'espressione di un delirio collettivo" (p. 67).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

coulera encore et toujours notre séparation infinie...transformés dans la Mort...c'est-à-dire assassinés à la naissance" (pp. 143-144). The Transe du Même embodies the possibility of rebirth—it takes what is conceived as misfortune and turns it into creation: "Alors tu connaîtras...l'irradiation du vide et la joie immense de la Transe" (p. 145). The Maître, in love with Muthna, soon becomes nauseated by his abjection—he must purify himself from the defilement he perceives within Muthna and within himself. For this impurity is simply the inability to name as he finds to make clear the fitnic space of language and desire where nothing maintains a clear identity. The Échanson, Muthna's brother, awakens from his trance and vomits his blood, her blood, his abjection. Unable to move, he is forced to look into a mirror:

> Beau miroir, je suis brisé! Veux-tu m'initier à l'art du Simulacre? Peut-être as-tu pris forme humaine pour t'admirer toi-même. Suis-je un rêve? Dois-je mourir, me regardant mourir?.... Telle est la pensé funèbre... dans l'inceste. Quand le vertige d'un malade appelle la mort, elle ne vient pas toujours selon la cérémonie attendue. Le malade se réveille et s'endort, attendant encore son exécution (pp. 116-117).

Like entering and withdrawing from a trance, the Muthna's double awakens and falls asleep, awaiting its execution. The Échanson, becoming dizzy, confused, soon abandons the mirror as he realizes his image of Muthna is of "un ange déchu" (p. 117). Analogous to sanguine relations and procreation, the act of incest, like Muthna's body, confuses and blurs the divisions of natural and unnatural, of the "malade" and the pure. The Échanson can no longer look into the mirror.

Likewise, the Maître, the figure most confused and most possessed by Muthna, weaves in and out of abjection and the drive for the sacred. He wants to be dominated by her, by his desire: he exposes his jugular vein to her, he wishes to be restrained by her, to be penetrated by her, and finally, when

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

descending into his tomb, he supplicates her to provide him with a last thought. Yet, he also repudiates her: she confuses Good and Evil, she keeps him from directing his energy toward God, and she embodies, for him, a living death—"*[C]haque fois je te pénètre dans la mort vive*" (p. 142). Despite the fact that the Maître addresses Muthna as masculine, as male, he finds within her, within himself, a dialectic of masculine and feminine, of active and passive, and ultimately the uncertainty of her "true" identity. Yet, the echoing of the "malheur" throughout his narrative results in his abjection of Muthna, his refusal of "l'Amant mystique" for the Maître has lost his senses according to the one narrator—he has entered into absolute chaos. As Islamic doctrine and thought conjoins women with chaos (*fitna*), the amorphous body and identify of Muthna is similarly equated with *fitna*. For the absolute danger that she poses is not merely a corporeal, gendered, or sexual chaos, but what these entanglements of identity threaten: the flow of men's energy toward God and the male-dominated social order. The Maître believes that Muthna must be "consommé par le dieu qui l'a élu, dans le même rite d'absorption" (p. 146) in order for her to be made sacred; hence the purification of his body, the "exorcism" of his memory.[54] And it is in this consummation, this devouring of the somatic, that Muthna's body becomes part of the group's identity as *'umma*—for the language of consuming is the language of sexuality through which spaces and bodies are dominated, and passive bodies are those which are "eaten".[55]

---

[54] In *La mémoire tatouée* (1971), Khatibi declares: "[L]a mémoire est le refuge troublé et obligé de toute interrogation qui tente d'exorciser l'identité."

[55] In the Maghreb, there are many terms to refer to the homosexual, all of which inflect the passive relationship to the sexual act and many of which are related to the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Purification is ritual—it is the struggle against death, against the "misfortunes" of the body, or as one voice in this narrative states "[un] peur d'être abject" (p. 145). Like the ritual of cleansing the body of the dead, as Abdelfattah Kilito postulates, death is tested and secrets of life and death are exchanged. Thus, the purification of the body maintains this in-between status of fighting against death in the efforts of resonating the body with symbolic meaning of life.[56] Muthna is viewed as death, a *malheur* of the body and the spirit. Thus, as the Prince instructs the Fou who finds a sheep, "[é]gorgez la Mort et vous vivrez éternellement" (p. 151), Muthna will also be ritually slaughtered like a mouton for the *Aid el Kebir*.[57] The Transe must be put to its end: "Il faut choisir le mot mortel pour tout détruire, avec la brièveté d'un coup de couteau" (pp. 156-157). Words are the manner of Muthna's death—the words she must

---

consumption of food: *zamel*, boys who are passive; *inṭwī* a married man who is effeminate; *ḥliwa* an effeminate man who is (literally) sweet; *ītkāl* sexual foreplay, literally to be devoured sexually; *flifla* effeminate, derived from the stereotype of gay men nervously walking and flitting their arms wildly as if they had just eaten a *filfla* (hot pepper)

[56] Kilito delineates this imaginary scenario: "Imaginons un individu en train de procéder au lavage rituel d'un mort. Si l'une des mains de celui-ci est fermée, la curiosité du laveur sera piquée et il n'aura de cesse qu'il n'ait ouvert le poing qui le défie. L'épreuve ne sera pas facile, car, si le mort a fermé sa main, c'est qu'il avait une raison de le faire; il ne voulait pas qu'on voie ce qu'elle renferme quoique mort, il défendra jalousement son secret. Un combat va donc s'engager entre la laveur et le cadavre, entre le vivant et le mort, l'un cherchant à savoir, l'autre s'efforçant de protéger son secret. L'issue du combat ne fait cependant aucun doute, les deux adversaires étant de force inégale: le laveur se sert de ses deux mains, alors que l'une des deux mains du mort ne lui est d'aucun secours. L'eau lustrale sapera la matière inerte. Le vivant l'emportera sur le mort et violera son secret; il ouvrira la main et saura ce qu'elle cache. Le mort, dépouillé de son secret, sera ensuite entrerré" (p. 83).

[57] Literally, the *Great Feast*, which celebrates God's command to Brahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son, Ismael, as a test of Brahim's faith in God. which marks the beginning of Islam. The Great Feast celebrates Brahim's act of faith in which every year, on the Muslim calendar, traditionally the oldest male of the family (or today, any male member who is pure) sacrifices a sheep in the family's house or courtyard. Ironically, this scene in the *Qur'ān* is similiar to the story of Isaac in the Old Testament. Khatibi also plays with the *doublure* of religious motifs and imagery in this text.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

utter to "declare" her sex, the words which attempt to rupture the Transe eternally. Muthna is slaughtered by "les Fidèles", her blood flowing on the mosaic tiles, she is purified through ceremony.[58] The narrator, however, merges with Muthna's voice and one identity is momentarily indistinguishable: "Quoi puis-je arrêter l'écoulement du sang? Regarde, mon amour: ma tête se détache de ma nuque" (p. 158). Then the voice shifts again: "Enfant inoubliable, mort assassiné, tu marches maintenant dans l'Au-delà...L'Au-delà n'est pas séparable de la vie terrestre; en survolant tout paradis et tout enfer, il advient dans la Transe du Même" (p. 158). Through death then, Muthna is freed—the life beyond breathes with the Transe du Même that was suffocated for her on earth, but more importantly for those creating her, envisioning and writing her, writing themselves. The Transe du Même is the space of *fitna* whereby identity is heterological and where identity "vacillates between two mirrors".[59]

The voice, now repentant, wants to follow her and asks where she is, "Où es-tu encore VISIBLE? Où te joindre désormais? Je t'ai fait partire—et tu es partie—pour en finir" (p. 161). The narrator envisions a return of Muthna to earth when she will not speak through "une voix inhumaine", but will address all

---

[58] Kristeva writes: "The various means of *purifying* the abject — the various catharses — make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art..." (p. 17).

[59] Buci-Glucksmann gives a beautiful reading of *fitna* both of Khatibi's texts analyzed here: " Imaginez donc que la fitna soit cette utopie coupante, faiseuse de schismes et d'innovations, qui me sépara de moi-même. Ce texte est la trace d'une rencontre en deux langues: celles de la "Raison baroque" propre à une écriture en excès sur tout sens et toute forme, et celle d'une *esthétique de la fitna* à l'œuvre dans les récits de la "différence intraitable" propre au *Livre du sang* et à *l'Amour bilingue* d'Abdelkébir Khatibi. Dans la construction de l'impossible objet d'amour, cet entrecroisement de scénographies ouvre à une sorte "d'hétérologie" du savoir, à exhiber, à parcourir. Bref, un théâtre de la fitna en ses figures: double, séduction, sédition, épreuve. Tel ce lieu de mémoire où "le signe et le sens éclatent", où "l'image pure vacille entre deux miroirs""(p. 18).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

humans in a voice that might be heard. Muthna is then envisioned as Orpheus:

> Orphée mon divin maître, laisse le Livre du Sang tomber goutte à goutte sur chacun de mes mots—à déchirer mes tempes et mes veines. ...Orphée, accorde-moi le Signe, le grand Signe qui éclate à l'horizon, le signe de l'Androgyne ailé. Aimer un androgyne n'est-ce pas défaillir à tout! Quelle force d'amour faut-il pour supporter un beauté inexplicable? (p. 162)

The narrator, attempting to make "explicable" the tragedy of Muthna's life and death and her amorphous identity, finally realizes his own Transe du Même: "Suis-je un homme? Suis-je une femme?" (p. 163). The voices speak the Livre du Sang where words and Transe become indistinguishable from one another—as indeterminate as the body and desire. The attempt to extinguish their desire results in the end of their vision, the death of Muthna, hence the decline of their trances. *Fitna* is the tempting of desire and thus each character fights this temptation embodied in Muthna, for she threatens their union with the supreme being and make them deviate from their duties to the Other World.[60] The expulsion of the abject from their bodies, the blood from Muthna's body, forces them to view the abjection, the hatred, within themselves, for themselves, thus uncovering the source of their abjection which "is huddled outside the paths of desire" (Kristeva, p. 11).[61]

The body is a locus of symbols from which we are born into being, through which we are forced to identify. Muthna is the other for those experiencing and

---

[60] Pandolfo writes: "And [fitna] is also that which makes Muslims be tempted/seduced by the beauty of the material world [*zînat ad-dunyâ*], its appetites [*shahawât*], that which makes them forget the Other World, and makes them deviate [*yuftanûna*] from what they should do for the Other World" (p. 160).

[61] Buci-Glucksman notes that *fitna* in khatibi is the "heterodoxy of the feminine" which manifests itself as a fusing of blood: "Que la fitna soit cette séduction séditieuse liée à l'hétérodoxie du féminin en sa plus grande métaphore: contamination des sexes et des langues, c'est ce qu'indique la fin d'*Amour bilingue* et sa sortie de la mystique fusionnelle du sang" (p. 36).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

surviving her, carrying the symbolic force of the somatic, retaining the abject nature of Muthna's body. As Kristeva states, abjection is "an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession *causes me to be*" (p. 10, emphasis mine). The memory of Muthna, therefore, is the trace em-bodied through the performance of identity in the Transe du Même and the writing of *Le Livre du Sang.* For Abdelhaï Diouri reminds us of the intimate relation between écriture and transe:

> L'écriture alors, de par la frénésie ou la ferreur qui lui donnent le jour, et par delà le travail d'ascese sur elle retranche le corps, est une pratique qui participe et procède de la transe. La relation entre transe et écriture pourrait n'être qu'un jeu réciproque de métaphores. La transe est une écriture du corps dans le corps et hors de lui, écriture gigantesque, hierogliphique, à la dimension de l'homme qui l'éxecute dans l'éspace; par ailleurs n'écrit-on pas comme on danse? (pp. 5-6)

As the voices are addressing us, the reader, they are simultaneously—and more directly—addressing Muthna. She is the "tu" to whom the narrators speak. Giving her the name Muthna indicates androgyny and moreover, the effeminate—the feminine that would otherwise be inaccessible to these speakers without their dreams of her body, of her movement. Through their creation of Muthna, they enter a trance reflecting and creating their own bodies, language, and desire.[62] Her silence does not give them this language, but lets them discover and create their own language and perform their subjectivity. Thus, Muthna's silence is not a position of weakness, but a state of strength through which she empowers the narrators by disseminating the potential of desire which they, in turn, realize, experience and then attempt to make *oubliable,* to cleanse, and to

---

[62] See Aïssa Ouitis' book entitled *Possession, magie, et prophétie en Algérie* in which she discusses the symbolic language of trances which confers men's access to the feminine, ultimately pointing out that the "conduites de possession constituent bien un langage symbolique, signifiant des contradictions sociales" (p. 153).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

distance from themselves. Just as forgetting or losing memory of this "enfant inoubliable" is impossible, Muthna is consigned to the Paradise beyond and likened to a black-eyed *hûrî* who will there fulfill the earthly lacks of desire as do the *hûrîs* in the *Qur'ān*[63] and the women in Ibn al-Wardî's conception of the island paradise of al-Wâqwâq.[64] Muthna is envisioned moving through Paradise shrouded in white linen. Here, she sustains the fluid nature of her identity and of the narrator's desire, inasmuch as white, in the Moroccan sub-Sahara region, is the color advocated for *only* men to wear *except* when a woman is mourning her husband.[65] The final vision of Muthna is one of a man and of a woman in mourning with no spouse to mourn—yet, she grieves her own loss, the re-embodiment of both the cultural and religious constructions and contradictions of man and woman, masculine and feminine, mind and body, and birth and death. Muthna brings the cultural taboos of her sex, gender, sexuality, and even cross-dressing, to Paradise forging an earthly, adjoining space for dreaming, writing, and jouissance.[66]

---

[63] In the section of *Qur'ān* entitled "That Which is Coming," the pleasures of the *hûrîs* and young boys await the multitudes who "shall recline on jewelled couches face to face, and there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls and ewers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason); with fruits of their own choice and flesh and fowls that they relish. And thier shall be the dark-eyed houris, chaste as hidden pearls: a guerdon for their deeds" (p. 379).

[64] For a complete explication of his interpretation of al -Wâqwâq, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas' *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*

[65] حداد *ḥidād* is the mourning period in which a woman cannot marry so as to ensure that the widow is not pregnant by her deceased husband. If she is to marry after this time has passed, literally *four menstrual cycles and ten days*, it shall be known who is the father of the child. In certain regions of Morocco, especially in the south, women will often wear the very clothes of their deceased husband during this period.

[66] In *La Blessure du nom propre* (1974), Khatibi analyzes the language of Nafzâwi, author of *La Prairie parfumée* (also entitled *Le Jardin parfumé*), asserting that the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hossain Bendheim asserts that there exists a prohibition of the maternal language within Islam which suspends the desire for such language within the after-life where there shall be a complete union of the body with "la mère retrouvée" (p. 198).[67] The Transe du Même could be viewed as the dialogic space between the earthly and the heavenly as well as between male and female, masculine and feminine, the real and the imaginary, and the various practices of eroticism and desire. Through subversive acts then, one may realize subjectivity by having access to the feminine and marginal sexual practices that had been previously elided, made illicit and accessible as *fitna*. Simply put, it is *not* sexuality, but the *feminine* which becomes the locus of interrogation, in both Islamic and western culture, wherein a man's access to femininity as a subjective identity and *not* an object of conquest, threatens the social order as much as—if not more than—the woman's body alone.[68] Certainly the language with which women and the feminine are discursively inscribed within Arabo-Islamic culture needs to be examined, as does this very notion of "transgressing" the feminine spaces of identity. For the *feminine as transgressive* is indicative of the imaginary

---

rhetorical force of his language serves to mirror both the reality of earth and the dream of paradise in creating an eroticism that is a movement towards God, dreaming, writing, and desire: "Rêver, c'est, comme il est dit, parler le désir de l'autre. L'être rêvant est le mouvement même de ce partage, de cette fissure. En se dévoilant la nuit, le corps s'angélise, se transporte dans la vapeur euphorique qui sanctifie même l'inceste: Nafzâwi fait miroiter un paradis incestueux à propos du mot *ar-ham*. Et en même temps que ce dévoilement du corps se construit dans le rêve, celui-ci, à son tour, donde le texte. Coïter, rêver, écrire sont liés au même mouvement: le transport rhétorique et la vapeur mystique" (pp. 173).

[67] A common Moroccan proverb: *"Ici, sur terre, nous portons le Nom de notre père, et dans l'au-delà, nous portons le Nom de notre mère"*

[68] Fatima Mernissi also comes to a similar conclusion about the woman's body in *Beyond the Veil*, stating of woman's identity in the world: "The irony is that Muslim and European theories come to the same conclusion: women are destructive to the social order—for Iman Ghazali because they are active, for Freud because they are not" (p. 44).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and real spaces that women occupy in language and culture, inasmuch as the "feminine" is the space of permissible transgression in many cultures to which men believe they have no access.[69] Indeed this paradigm brings up many more questions of separations not only between the sexes, but moreso between mind and body, the physical and spiritual , given that in certain periods in Islamic history there was a certain value in separating the earthly from the spiritual and not allowing the "world to interfere".[70] Khatibi's text offers a reading in which both the earthly and spiritual worlds collide and in which identities continuously

---

[69] Ratiba Hadj-Moussa writes of this space of transgression and women in Algerian cinema: "La transgression des frontières établies par l'Islam est reconvertie dans les pratiques et le langage quotidiens. Ainsi la femme qui circule sans voile est dite *aryana* (littéralement: nue), et l'une des expression qui sert à décrire la prostituée est *fasda*, c'est-à-dire "pourrie", comme si elle incarnait le corps pourri, défectueux. Ce terme provient du champ sémantique de l'alimentation. On dit plus couramment d'un aliment qu'il est *fased*, autrement dit, qu'il est non comestible, inconsommable. Le rapport avec le corps "pourri" de la prostituée s'inscrit dans la consommation illicite, *zinâ*, interdite par l'islam. Cet état de pourriture, c'est-à-dire du corps atteint en lui-même, est plus proche de l'état du corps gangreneux que du corps enveloppé d'une pellicule, certes sale mais détachable, à laquelle renvoie un terme comme *khamjà*, qui correspond *grosso modo* à "salope". Le saleté se nettoie par l'effet de l'eau, ou par la foi retrouvée et sans cesse renouvelée. Il y a comme une sorte de non retour pour tout corps "pourri" qui a perdu le sens de la communauté, un corps qui ne fait que glisser vers la marge, par exemple la rue autrefois interdite au corps féminin. Au Maroc, rapporte F. Mernissi, on dénomme la prostituée par l'expression *rajla zahga*, c'est-à-dire "un pied qui glisse". Non seulement le glissement du pied brouille l'espace, mais évoque aussi une véritable érotisation du membre lui-même. Le pied ne glisse pas impunément dans la rue, il entraîne avec lui le glissement de tout le corps" (p. 35).

[70] Annemarie Schimmel notes how the division of the world from the spiritual affected Fāṭima of Nishapur (d. 849): "In the formative period of Islam, the most impressive figure among the married Sufi women is, no doubt, Aḥmad Khiḍrūya's wife Fāṭima of Nishapur (d. 849). She consorted with Dhū'n-Nūn and Bāyezīd Bisṭāmī and seems to have guided her husband in religious and practical matters. It is said that Dhū'n-Nūn once refused a gift sent by her because it was given by a woman; she informed him that the true Sufi is he who does not look at the secondary causes—in this case a female—but at the Eternal Giver. The most famous story told about her is that she used to discuss mystical subjects freely with Bāyezīd Bisṭāmī; during the discussion she would lift her veil without restriction, until the day came that the great saint remarked that her hands were stained with henna. From that moment onward free spiritual conversation was no longer possible between the two mystics, for "the world" had interfered" (p. 427).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

struggle with each other.

Both *Amour bilingue* and Le *livre du sang* offer the possibility of accessing a language of the feminine in which the performative action of self-creation is necessarily indeterminate, unrepresentable, unnameable for all subjects and participants in the theatre of identity.[71] Khatibi essays to expand the liberation of gender and language from outside a certain western political pragmatism and to the province where we might view the feminine and the *bi-langue* within the mirror, rather than projecting these identities as abject spaces that must be repressed, or even viewing the feminine and *bi-langue* as a fleeting textual apotheosis of freedom. Khatibi's notion of the body and language begins and ends where all traces of difference and subjectivity are absorbed within the jouissance of language, thus recreating a different type of paradise for this poetic space of intertextuality and intersexuality.[72] Perhaps, it is through understanding *fitna* as a cultural artifact which the traverses and contradicts meaning—both the poetic and the real—that we can look to other cultures and other bodies in

---

[71] Artaud's theory of transe and theatre is most useful for my reading here, for his theory of possession is one in which the spectator is part of the stage of belonging:"Savoir par avance les points du corps qu'il faut toucher c'est jeter le spectateur dans des transes magiques. Et c'est de cette sorte précieuse de science que la poésie au théâtre s'est depuis longtemps déshabituée. Connaître les localisations du corps, c'est donc refaire la chaîne magique" (p. 211).

[72] Bouhdiba discusses the idea of intersexual relations which is quite different from that which I wish to evoke here—that of a fluid space of sexual encounter and self-realization: "D'où cette constatation que les relations homosexuelles se sont développées dans les sociétés arabo-musulmanes favorisées finalement par les faites et ce au détriment des relations intersexuelles. La non-mixité finit par valoir promiscuité. Il est difficile à ceux qui ne l'ont pas vécue d'imaginer ce que peut être la vie soumise à une stricte séparation des sexes. Mais on peut comprendre que l'homosexualité si violemment condamnée par l'islam ait pu être une pratique fort courante tant en milieu féminin qu'en milieu masculin. Le *mujûn* intègre presque normalement la pédérastie et le saphisme en dépit des remonde la condamnation de l'homosexualité ne prouve qu'une chose: ni la conscience religieuse ni la conscience collective n'arrimique réprouve mais sur lesquels la société finit bien par fermer les yeux" (p. 245).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

forging a language emancipated from the undertow of binaries.

In addition to Khatibi, many Maghrebian writers have explored sexual androgyny and "marginal" sexualities in order to evoke identity as an intersubjective space of writing, what Khatibi terms "une écriture du Dehors".[73] The nexus of gender and cultural identity is not only a mere passing phenomenon in Maghrebian literature, but at least fifty percent of French language and literary production from the Maghreb deals with questions of the body, gender, sexuality and women's political and social rights as discourses contiguous to a greater politics of cultural, national and linguistic identity that generally work through the very paradox of the *dédoublement* of identity.[74] Tunisian writer, Abdelwahab Meddeb, likewise evokes *fitna* as a rhetorical reading of language and the body in *Talismano.* In this text, there is a struggle between memory, identity, writing, and the body as the narrator of this tale weaves a series of fragments of desire and language in a postcolonializing effort that seeks an understanding of language as the death of identity to oneself.

Meddeb's narrative manifests a violence of identity in which bodies are visibly non-romanticized—they are impure, fat, and blood flow from within—and they effect their meaning throughout the urban spaces. Architecture marks the body as the body negotiates the flowing spaces of the city:

Prime rupture. Comme de hantise, le portail vert rouge blanc du hammam

---

[73] See Khatibi's *Figures de l'étranger.*

[74] Among the many literary works in this genre are: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *La nuit sacrée, Harrouda* and *L'enfant du sable,* Rachid Boudjedra's *La répudiation,* Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartements,* Rabah Belamri's *Femmes sans visage,* Driss Chraïbi's *La civilisation, ma Mère* and *La mère du printemps,* Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer,* Leïla Sebbar's *Le silence des rives,* Abdelhak Serhane's *Messaouda,* Abdellatif Laâbi's *LŒil et la nuit,* and Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> où ma mère m'emmaenait enfant: devant ce spectacle indélébile, corps nus, femmes grosses, retenues de violence qui parfois éclate querelle de seaux. Et le sang coule (p. 16).

The multitudinous bodies compose the city, embody its center. Hidden amidst the institutions of the urban landscape, Meddeb paints an image of the *medina* which engenders polysemous physical spaces—the separation of public from private, the hidden *ruelles* and the abstraction of the body. The dialectic of the unseen and the visible forge the topographical space of desire:

> [L]a ville s'arrange hiérarchie de nombrils: il y a le nombril corps public, ouvert à l'œil, d'accès légitime: mosquée par exemple; il y a le nombril corps caché, femme à vendre, cœur à cloîtrer. La rue exclut tout nombril, à désirer l'àcôté inaccessible mais qu'on sait à portée de main; le corps y est abstraction: reçu comme tel, on réincorpore en lui l'idée à ramener réalité par séquestration intime, par retour de patio, par passage obscur qui tranche la maison de la ville, vestibule où s'opère l'enchantement de la réincarnation, et d'abstrait le corps se redécouvre imminent désire (p. 64).

But it is this space of the city whose "parts", unlike those of the western urban center, cannot be named. One cannot "tell" another how to maneuver the streets and tiny paths of the *medina*, for one must see it, experience it. For example, in the Maghreb, the city "block" does not exist—space is negotiated by the body traversing walls and colors while passing through a place in which one's memories are anchored. The body is the abstraction of the city—the inside as private and sensual, the outside as visible and traversable. Identity is the morphological nature that the body shares with space and that language effects upon the body.[75]

---

[75] Traki Zannad's interesting study of spaces in Tunis, *Symboliques corporelles et espaces musulmans*, discusses this subject of the body's and the *medina's* morphology:"La comparaison morphologique entre l'espace de la médina et celui du *dar* nous révèle des caractéristiques communes qui pourraient nous permettre d'analyser la nature du rapport qui s'établit entre l'espace du dedans et d'analyser la nature du rapport qui s'établit entre l'espace du dedans et l'espace du dehors. La description morphologique de la Médina de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Talismano manifests somatic and urban space as those anatomical parts of memory that Meddeb attempts to reinscribe, translate, into language: "Être corps marchant, moulant les distances tout en étant parsemé par tous les chemins qui relient la maison à la lointaine école: à mesurer mon audace d'enfant" (p. 17). It is this translating of body and memory[76] into language that composes the narrative of *Talismano*—for both the somatic and memory become mixed up as narrative:

> L'écriture mélange les saisons, elle s'assume vrac de chaud et froid, été comme hiver: elle reflète le désordre du corps plus que la loi primordiale: elle est chaos qui précède le fiat, géantomachie à obstsruer le désir de s'inventer order des dieux: elle est en deçà, descente, souterrain, enfers, régression, totalité tâtonnante: elle est tribune qui coupe de part en part l'édifice, ambon cassant l'uniformité de l'espace narratif (p. 46).

Meddeb evokes narrative as a series of words that cannot possibly evoke and order the meaning of history, of memory. There is no order in writing—only the desire to destroy uniform spaces. Like the body in the *medina,* writing moves through the rigid constructs of narrative architectures, breaking order, inflecting new meanings with each turn of the corner. As Khatibi states, *Talismano* is the foreign language interiorized as "écriture effective, comme parole en acte".

Tunis présente une forme ovale dont le noyau central constitue un rectangle que représente la Grande Mosquée de la Zitouna. Ce noyau est entouré d'un quadrilatère qui constitue les souks de la Médina" (p. 28).

[76] Khatibi discusses this idea of translating memory in *Talismano:* "L'auteur rappelle son enfance. On y entre comme dans un rêve, un rêve fragmenté dans son dire initial, *un rêve écrit par une langue étrangère.* On ne peut que traduire une mémoire. Et ce dédoublement du rêve constitue l'imaginaire de cette forme d'écriture, séparée radicalement entre phonie et graphie, entre la diglossie et la langue française, entre l'altérité irréductible et l'impossible retour au Même. Aucun cercle ne se ferme sur l'identité déclarée par l'auteur. Il y a là une force d'amnésie en abîme, la substitution d'une mémoire à une autre, ou plutôt et plus exactement: un enchâssement sans cesse rompu, retrouvé, détaché de son unité, mouvement pris dans un oubli vertigineux, qui travaille à se fragmenter sans fin. La question théorique est la suivante: si l'on écrit en français alors que la langue première est demeurée orale, que devient le corps du rêveur quand il dort ou écrit?"" (p. 196).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Language in this narrative operates through juxtaposition of the tactile and the ephemeral, singular and the heterogeneous, the pre- and the post-colonial. Khatibi views this text as that which is not only translation, but views *Talismano* as a "récit qui parle en langues".[77]

Like Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*, this text nurtures the union between body and writing in the search for identity of language, culture and desire. It is the *bi-langue* of division (the alphabet that separates) that Meddeb evokes here:

> L'alphabet sépare l'écrit de l'image: au lieu d'admettre cette séparation et de percuter contre les parios tenaces qui protègent les régions étanches de l'expression, au lieu de s'exhiber amoindri, difficile musique, mot ou figure, autant rétablir l'investitutre orpheline pour continuer à rire de cette autorité alphabétique qui divise (p. 113).

For Meddeb evinces the physicality of language, the letters, that separate his memory from the written French words—translation is not always possible and the image is necessarily lost. Like the body moving through his childhood city of Tunis, Meddeb's narrative takes us through the seduction of language that trembles in its search of meaning:

> J'écris dansante calligraphie; et la main séduit puis tremble; j'écarte cette langue parcourue logique par des trous où ça respire, comme ça, allant, revenant, digressant, collant au corps, oubliant d'achever le père, voguant, empoisonnant, saillie des lances, nuit silencieuse scintillant, par-dessus armures d'argent, heaumes dépersonnalisant... (p. 114).

---

[77] Khatibi writes: "[L]a langue étrangère, dès lors qu'elle est intériorisée comme écriture effective, comme parole en acte, transforme la langue première, elle la structure et la déporte vers l'intraduisible. J'avancerai ceci: la langue dite étrangère ne vient pas s'ajouter à l'autre, ni opérer avec elle une pure juxtaposition: chacune *fait signe* à l'autre, l'appelle à se maintenir comme dehors. Dehors contre dehores, cette étrangeté: ce que désire une langue (si j'ose parler ainsi) c'est d'être singulière, irréductible, rigoureusement autre. Je pense (et je reviendrai sur ce point très important) que la traduction opère selon cette intraitabilité, cette distanciation sans cesse reculée et disruptive. Et en effet, toute cette littérature maghrébine dite d'expression française et un récit de traduction. Je ne dis pas qu'elle n'est que traduction, je précise qu'il s'agit d'un récit qui *parle en langues*" (1983, p. 186).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This erotization of language, similar to Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*, brings writing, like the body, into a state of trance through which the subject embodies that tongue of the colonized past (French) while accepting this tongue in an act of transgression. For Kilito marks the space of oppression and domination as the very same topography for linguistic subversion:

> Cette langue qui me prête un corps sur quoi j'appose la marque de l'appropriation, cette langue à symboliser métropole et attirance historique vers ce qui récemment participa à la domination du monde, langue que je ne saurai exécuter en simulant, sacristie du meurtre, les petites infamies de transgressions mineures (p. 126).

Taking the colonizing language and utilizing it to redouble desire is, for Meddeb, the only form of liberty. It is what Meddeb calls the "digression du je" through which language digresses, moving from the individual voice of autobiographical inscription of memory to the inscriber of a "je autre", the amnesiac who works to free his memory with language, the "infra-mémoire". For Kilito's theory of language and community, much akin to the discursivity of *'umma*, maintains meaning not in a central core or architectural space, but in the plurality of bodies, words and shapes spread out in the universe:

> Ici commence la digression du je, un je initiale du texte, à se mesurer d'envahissement méfiant, se permutant parfois tu, se neutralisant infinitif, un je, noyau affirmé ou caché, emphase de ce dire qui se déploie à la lisière du langage, de la mémoire, un je autre scripteur amnésique dans ses retombées de travail avec la langue, liberté d'infra-mémoire, à se confondre de proche poussière! (p. 55).

Meddeb attempts to undo amnesia by working through the colonial tongue, a painful process of working through the illogic memories, histories and even myths of colonialism. According to Khatibi, it is this writing of memory, this violence of the *other* language, which renders *Talismano* a sort of schism and *dédoublement*.[78]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While this process of the *bi-langue* in Khatibi seems rather seamless, painless, and fluid, for Medded, he evidences the difficulty of moving, of remembering. For Meddeb, the *bi-langue* is the *blessure*, the wound, which offers the body and language the possibility to heal: "Vient ensuite la blessure: par elle le corps manipule sa réalité, se défait de sa représentation factice, aiguise ses possibilités, se propose danse, cycle d'ivresse, perte de soi qui n'est pas réponse cicatrisante, mais couteau avec lequel on s'approfondit plaie, à ne pas fuir douleur, gravité à surpasser joie (p. 57). Yet, he does not even have access to his own name and struggles to reconstruct that which he cannot write:

> Mais la langue, de pureté rituelle, glisse par l'usage vers le désacralisant dialecte, réel généalogique: aussi Mu'addib change-t-il Middib; tel sort phonétique n'est pas anodin; il emporte le sens; et la tâche de l'ensegnement devient celle de l'instituteur: le middib est celui qui, par prétexte coranique, fait apprendre aux enfants à lire, à écrire (pp. 194-195).

Unlike Albert Memmi's recollection of the colonial tongue, however, Meddeb's text is constantly playing with readings of a colonial past and catapulting those readings of "oppression" and "disempowerment" into a space of subversion, transgression and empowerment.[79] *Talismano* seeks neither to forgive the colonial

---

[78] khatibi notes: "[L]amnésie: une histoire de palimpseste, de ce qui se travaille en quelque sorte sous la page blanche, l'effacement qui jaillit de sa trace...Une dialectique certes, mais en rupture, en déchaînement: la violence de s'affoler dans la langue de l'autre, de l'aimer en la dés-aimant: plaimpseste du dédoublement et de la schize (1983p. 200).

[79] Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is a text in which Memmi remembers his own youth growing up in Tunisia, and here he writes of the pain of the colonized tongue: "[T]he colonized's mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is the least valued. It has no stature in the country or in the concert of peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in the community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters. In the linguistic conflict within the colonized, his mother tongue is that which is crushed. He himself discards this infirm language, hiding it from the slight of strangers. In short, colonial bilingualism is neither a purely bilingual situation in which an indigenous tongue coexists with a purist's language (both

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

past, nor inoculate the subjects of this past as passive observers and receptacles of history and language. Meddeb takes the passive voice from postcolonial theory of the 1960's and 1970's and answers them in the active voice.

But this postcolonial view towards language and the body takes place through the feminine—a space in which desire is excessive and the body exists in a state of explosion through which meaning is destroyed and resituated:[80] It is not that the feminine is objectified in Meddeb's writing, but rather that the feminine is always present and serves as the reproductive energy for recreating identity:

> Le corps sur quoi il y a nom progress et travaille sourdement dans son propre vide: il n'est que chaos, désordre. L'hygiène certes en fonde la morale: amis la mort rôde. A respirer, à manger, à aimer, à dormir, à veiller, à dépenser, à rêver, à penser, à sentir, à voir le monde tête en bas, être à soi-même l'envers du monde, se garder de troubler l'endroit au cœur de ses représentations fragiles, telle brisure à colmater, ça travaille, à déplacer, à inspirer justesse à certaines parcelles égarées du corps, rebelle à sa permanence unitaire (p. 196).

As many Maghrebian texts analyze the space of the feminine and language, the loss of the mother tongue in order to maintain the symbolic father, we might see Meddeb's recuperation of the feminine as the very recuperation of national, linguistic and cultural identity, but in a much less romanticized fashion than say Memmi maintains. As Ann Pellegrini's *Performance Anxieties* lucidly states in her analysis of Fanon and Memmi: "The political drama of cultural bilingualism

---

belonging to the same world of feeling), nor a simple polyglot richness benefiting from an extra but a relatively neuter alphabet; it is a linguistic drama" (pp. 107-108).

[80] Meddeb writes: "En cette palme exhibée au moment de la mort féminine, on ne cherche pas seulement à denoncer un manque, ni à traduire la fin du corps par la réparation d'une tare: on célèbre plutôt l'alliance primordiale de l'intensité quotidienne et sérielle du désir, à la fois vigueur du corps et ravage localisable: l'épanouissement du corps s'impose total dès qu'on dépasse les maillures latérales et banales qui peuvent édenter une bouche ou enfler à jamais un pied, ou encore atrophier un mollet" (p. 21).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Memmi stages thus recapitulates the psychic drama of differentiation and subjectivism *all* subjects undergo, for that is part of what it means to become (a) subject" (p. 113). Indeed, the longing to "naturalize the mother" [tongue] is a constant paradox in post-colonial discourses—for language is always learned by the subject, *no matter what language it is.* In this way, much post-colonial discourse seeks to recuperate that which was "loss".[81] Memmi, however, does not fall into this dialectic of loss/recuperation, but demarcates memory and writing as the space of recuperating the body and language:

> Ibn ʾArabī parlant dans la mosquée de Damas de sa propre tombe: en ces jours vous vous trompez sur l'écrit! Écrire ce n'est ni vomir, ni plaisire, ni parturition: c'est mourir à soi-même; je l'ai rappelé, venu d'orient, lors synode atlasien, à mes collègues africains d'expression orale: éclairez-vou avant de changer le dit en écrit, de perpétuer ver col, à vue d'océan. Vous ajouterais-je qu'écriture s'implique multiple, étages et étapes, errance et séjour, départ et retour? (p. 215).

Weaving a text which is spiritually and culturally laden with significations, words locking up meaning for those who can access them, Meddeb's text advocates writing as "a dying to oneself" where leaving implicates returning, where singularity invokes the polyvalence of meaning and where the subject is perpetually caught "in between" meanings, like Jeanne Favret-Saada's invocation that words both tie and untie meaning.[82]

---

[81] Pellegrini writes: "Consequently, if Memmi may seem at times to romanticize and even naturalize the mother tongue, starkly contrasting it to the deprivations of "learned language", his longing identification with the repressed mother tongue recalls and phantasmatically recuperates another lost object: his mother's body. This fantasy is an ambivalent one, however. If "mother tongue" is metonymic for "mother,' she in turn stands in for the feminine—and feminizing—space of family" (p. 114). Also, there are many issues surrounding this romanticizing "original culture" and language quite common in Western African post-colonial discourses, most notably Wole Soyinka's notion of "return to the source".

[82] Favret-Saada writes: "Parler, en sorcellerie, ce n'est jamais pour informer. Ou si l'on informe, c'est pour que celui qui doit tuer (le désenvoûteur) sache où faire porter ses coups. Il est littéralement incroyable d'informer un ethnographe, c'est-à-dire quelqu'un

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ultimately, *Talismano* is a text whose title elides the dialectic specific to the French/Arabic *métissage*. According to Khatibi, the Italian title invokes an absence of the dialectic which sets the scene of absolute *jouissance* in that it is not contradictory.[83] Differently from Khatibi, however, I view Meddeb's choice of Italian as a form of putting the reader in the position of having to translate—for anyone understanding either French or Arabic would necessarily understand the Italian title. Thus, the act of reading this text becomes an act of having to translate meaning (for the non-Italian reader obviously). In this way, Meddeb creates a fabric of community whereby meaning is invoked from both sides—the writer and the reader—and where the text and body are the horizons upon which meaning passes, where identities are rewritten, and signs contradicted. Meddeb's writing essays to understand the creation of community and of nation as that which straddles memory and text:

> Le clan de villageois attaque par la porte verte, essayant de raviver la mémoire de l'Indépendance et de recruter de nouveau les masses pour célébrer la victoire, cortège imitant la spontanéité qui secoua la ville le jour du retour et de l'annonce de la liberté, inflation du signe, théâtralité éculée; personne n'acclame; alors foncent sur les maison rebelles les matraqueurs, aidés par des instructeurs étrangers, s'acharnant à arracher la mauvaise herbe qui prospéra ces temps derniers, quartiers heureux et sauvages de la ville. A lutter contre la barbarie, à soupeser les moyens d'action, reviendrait à se limiter à une réponse évasive (p. 237).

Meddeb demonstrates textual bilingualism as a contour in which meaning is

---

qui assure ne vouloir faire aucun usage de ces informations, qui demande naïvement à savoir pour savoir. Car c'est une parole (et seulement parole) qui noue et dénoue le sort, et quiconque se met en position de la dire est redoutable" (p. 26).

[83] Khatibi states: "[L]e titre du livre, *Talismano*, est italien, lequel mot provient de l'arabe *tilasm* et du grec *telesma*. Cette désignation n'est pas un hasard. En effet, le texte et parcouru, parsemé de mots italiens. L'italien ici: langue de la jouissance pure, langue paradisiaque et du jeu hédonique, loin de la violente contradiction du français et de l'arabe...L'italien ici: langue de la juoissance absolue, non contradictoire, utopique" (1983, pp. 188-189). Yet, this denomination of Italian as somehow uninvolved in colonization is simply elided by Khatibi since Italy has a long colonial history with Libya, for instance.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

caught in a *dédoublement* of language—for what we read are the translations of memory locked inside one language while translated into another. Yet, the text maintains a certain silence—the text as un-written—which is embodied as a sense of futility, for meaning cannot escape to reach the eye of the body and of the soul (*ʿayn*): "Dépôt du sens: la prison est surontée par l'institut qui soigne le trachome. A la gangrène qui sépare le corps de son énergie s'ajoute la peste qui ronge jusqu'au sang l'œil" (p. 18). For Meddeb, therefore, language and the somatic are *fitnic*—words inflect bodies that inflect language, and so forth. Words are imprisoned within a gangrenous limb, while the meaning of body is inflected by the "sick" words that attempt to express themselves. And it is memory that language essays to recuperate in Meddeb's narrative as memory is that *real* space of the past recreated in the narrative of the present, and memory is that is necessarily reconstituted within the individual consciousness and the scope of community.[84] Meddeb evidences identity as a process in which language and the body are intersubjective spaces upon which meaning passes while eluding the narratives of both colonial appropriation and post-colonial narratives of loss.

---

[84] Khatibi discusses this very question of memory and the connection between western and Arab cutlure: "La question aujourd'hui dégager des lignes de force, des paradigmes de déchiffrement, avec la plus grand clarté, avec le maximum d'efficacité. Cette efficacité est déterminée par la manière d'analyser et de s'auto-analyser dans toute question. La question des Arabes est ici posée entre celle de la post-modernité et la modernité. Je n'ai pas encore abordé ces deux notions. J'ai commencé par l'identité du nom parce qu'elle est l'identité minimum d'une personne, d'une nation et même d'une internation, par exemple l'internation arabe. Sans elle, celui qui se dit arabe risque de perdre ses repères généalogiques dans le temps et l'espace. Cette identité de base est la première phrase de sa mémoire. Or, là où est, dans le monde arabe ou ailleurs, il est confronté à ce problème et à sa solution: reconstituer la mémoire (individuelle et collective) dans la représentation de l'espace qui l'encadre. Cet encadrement est multiple, il va du dedans le plus intime et le plus secret d'une personne jusqu'à l'identité d'un territoire, d'une aire de civilisation, jusqu'aux limites planétaires et cosmiques qui conditionnent sa réalité, son imaginaire" (1993,p. 51).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Like Meddeb's construction of identity through the recreation of memory via language and the rendering of language via memory, Leïla Sebbar's *Le silence des rives* is a text in search of identity through the location of community as nomadic. Sebbar renders identity through the space of exile in this text creating a sense of community that exists not as a topography, but instead that exists as a space. Hence, Sebbar's narrative evokes both a sense of loss (exile) and of recuperation through the posturing of the nomadic identity as that which is *neither* here *nor* there. *Le silence des rives* is a novel which negotiates exile and memory in which movements, passages, bodies, traverse the pages, but nobody is really "named" aside from generic nominations of l'homme, l'enfant, la mère and les trois sœurs. Taking place in the south of France, this novel interrogates the possibilities of identity as much as it questions these linguistic and somatic spaces. In this novel, *fitna* occupies the terrain that brings together representation under the rubric of death and rebirth in order to contradict the binaries of naming/silence, birth/death, movement/stasis: "On dit aussi qu'elles sentent la mort à distance. Mais il y a la mer entre les deux rives, l'eau n'est pas un obstacle?" (p. 46). This novel takes place around the *rive* of a river in southern France which flows into the sea. It is at this juncture where the river meets the sea, where the characters of this novel are confronted, albeit symbolically, with the *métissage* of cultures: France, *là-bas*, and the Maghreb, *l'autre rive*. It is between *là-bas* and *l'autre rive* where the characters of this novel search for meaning in an indeterminate space of coming and going, of belonging and not belonging: "Sur l'autre rive, dans la chambre blanche,l'homme qui marchait le long du fleuve est à l'agonie" (p. 52). There is a similar *dédoublement* of the body and language in this text, as we found earlier with Khatibi and Meddeb;

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

however for Sebbar the *dédoublement* is never immediately evoked as an outburst of energy or a baroque corpus of simultaneous excess and poverty. Instead, the *dédoublement* in this text evolves slowly amidst the pages full of silences, white spaces, and pensive moments. Sebbar demonstrates the difficulty of locating identity as she manifests a story replete with characters who slowly begin to inhabit space instead of the earth. It is this interiorized space of consciousness, spirituality and corporeal relations to the spirit which become the loci of nomadic identity.[85]

In this novel, the interlocutors' identities are unknown—for Sebbar maintains a certain anonymity and androgyny to the narrators. Though at the beginning of each section of the novel, the narrator briefly changes and this voice speaks very little, narrating perhaps a line or two. The page is overwhelmingly blank and empty, the words are left in an abyss of whiteness. Then the narration changes to the previous omniscient narrator and the narrative continues as before. Like the movement between the presence and absence of writing on the page this text likewise manifests a similar struggle between presence and absence. For instance, there is a constant struggle between the identities of the characters that remain silent, unevoked, and the textual drive to name the language of the mother as that space of linguistic and cultural

---

[85] Traki Zannad writes of nomadism and space: "L'espace est un vécu intériorisé, il n'est pas une catégorie de conscience qu'on projette dans l'absolu. Le corps aussi est celui du déplacement, de l'émigration. Les nomades "habitent" l'espace et non le sol. Nous entendons par espace: le volume qui est pris est analysé ici en tant que support physique de pratiques sociales. Ceci a constitué une étape importante pour notre analyse sociomorphologique de l'habitat" (p. 43). Also, in Chapter One I discuss this issue of the "virtual body" as a locus of "potentiality" rather than a place or an imaginary. The nomodic identity is akin to the virtual body, but instead of having the potential for a somatic identity, it maintains the potential for a cultural one.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

identity itself:

> Qui me dira les mots de ma mère?
> Dans la chambre blanche où je suis seul, qui
> viendra murmurer la prière des morts? Et
> qui parlera la langue de ma terre à mon
> oreille, dans le silence de l'autre rive? (p. 53)

In Sebbar's narrative, she juxtaposes the geographical *rives* of difference to the metaphorical limits of language, the body and the community whereby the *rive* comes to stand for that which leads to the sea, the abyss that borders nations and likewise that which divides peoples. As these characters walk along the shores of that which looks out towards the Maghreb, Sebbar's narrative is a conscious negotiation of real and mythical spaces in which identity is inevitably negotiated, hidden, and sometimes "discovered".

At the beginning of the novel, it is clear that the characters have no sense of cultural heritage, no sense of community in their exile of southern France. For example, *l'homme* is a person who fundamentally does not care for his native culture or rites as he evidences in his disregard for what will happen to his body after his death:

> L'homme qui marche le long du fleuve a répété si souvent que sa mort, il n'y pense pas, que sa mort ne l'intéresse pas, et qu'on laisse son corps là où il sera sans vie...Ils disent qu'il restera toujours une petite place, après la réduction de corps du paternel ou du grand-père, que 'c'est les femmes qui s'occupent de ces histoires...Et lui qui dit que son corps sera jeté au désert, la fosse commune, c'est le désert, tout seul, sans famille ni rien, dans le désert, avec le sable qui bouge tout le temps, une tombe disparaît, le vent, les dunes qui se déplacent, on ne peut rien marquer dessus, à quoi servirait, qui lirait les lettres effacées, il faut mourir près des villes ou des villages, là où le sable est fixé par des touffes d'épineux, des arbres, des pierres tombales, des palmiers (pp. 55-56).

Sebbar's narrative focuses upon the body of death as a trope for the community in exile, marking this detachment from not only the rites of death, but from all ritual and spiritual tradition left behind in the *autre rive*. Nonetheless the "body

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of ritual" is also a *dédoublement* of signification for it maintains two opposed meanings at once: the body is a simultaneous presence and absence. Presence because memory inflects the body with the past which embodies the rites of passage, the rites of death and of a community that marks its tombs with stones. And absence because the body in exile is symbolic of that which can never be: the body of tradition outside the geographical location of tradition. The body is the *fitnic* reality of the Maghrebian in France, for the subject has all the memory of the place and rituals of a past community, but has no access to recreating them *là-bas*. The contradiction of the contiguous excesses and lacks of meaning is what Sebbar attempts to construct in her narrative, as each character is found to have very little regard for his or her cultural heritage, until the *trois sœurs* present the possibility of crossing the sea to the "grande maison".

Like the body lost between signifiers of presence and absence, language in this novel occupies a space of amnesia where characters depend upon one other to remember their mother tongue, to invoke their identity *for them*. Language maintains the power to represent; but since most characters have lost their mother (tongue), they are left to translate themselves in the language of the other.[86] There is one character, however, who remembers the mother tongue, *l'homme*. He keeps the community in touch with those "back home" since he is the only one capable of writing letters to the families of those who have long

---

[86] Khatibi notes that textual bilingualism is always double as it must stage the maternal language and translate it so as to make the new language both silent and effaced: "Le bilinguisme textuel serait le geste de ce palimpseste bien étrange, en perte sur lui-même, sur ses origines et généalogies. Je dirai même qu'un tel texte est double, parce que soutenu, silencieusement et à fond perdu, par la langue maternelle. Il devient traduisible sur l'autre versant, de telle façon que la langue-cible travaille à se taire et à s'effacer" (1983, p. 207).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

forgotten their native language:

> Ses compagnon ont perdu les mots, lui non. Il écrit les lettres des pères, maris, frèrers, cousins... Il écrit pour la Maison de chacun d'eux, le fils aîné qui va à l'école saura lire la lettre qu'il adresse à tous et à toutes. Les hommes attentifs le regardent écrire, il écrit vite sur le papier à lignes bleues. Il sont nombreux à lui confier des secrets, les mêmes de l'un à l'autre. Il est devenu l'écrivain public (p. 62).

Sebbar evidences language as paradox of sorts: language is that which is devoid of memory, dependent upon memory and yet evocative of one's memory. And language maintains a hold on the practices of a culture and the memory of a life, much of what is lost in the inability to put language together with memory *in the same body.* In this way, Sebbar evidences cultural and linguistic identity as well as memory as nomadic spaces that each character negotiates in attempting to find the words and the space of identity. Likewise, as the three sisters carry out rituals for the *l'Aid-Lekbir,* Sebbar's narrative elicits a community of people who go through the motions of a tradition almost forgotten—and these performances of culture may very well be the only sense of incorporating the movements of identity into the body. Indeed Sebbar's novel is about the link between soul and body—both in their contradictions outside of their homeland, in France, and in their union through ritual and passage: "S'il a une âme, on peut jeter son corps à la décharge publique, il a la promesse du patron que s'il meurt dans son café, il donnera son corps à la mer, il préfère, mais qui tient ses promesses?" (p. 101). The body can be saved from the schism of cultural identity by being left in the fluid waters of uncertainty—waters which bridge two cultures and which evidence the abyss of identity amidst a public body that is in search of itself. But in the indeterminacy of identity, this body inevitably drowns in the onslaught of meaning.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Indeed Sebbar's text asserts an obsession for the body of death in a gesture of understanding the relationship between the physical world of things and the world beyond, the domain of the spirits. In demonstrating the characters' growing concerns for the body and spirit of the dead, Sebbar's carefully weaves the space of nomadic identity: the domain where identity is no longer connected to the presence of the somatic, but where naming is conferred in the act of crossing boundaries. While the dead body is metonymic of a Maghrebian cultural identity in exile, stagnant and unable to move, it is also the body which catalyzes the possibility for "crossing over" physical and imaginary fields, stretching out onto the threshold of identity and space: "Et cet homme-là, doucement allongé au bord de la rivière, dont elles touchent le corps comme elles n'ont pas touché un corps d'homme, elles femmes et jeunes, prêtes à embrasser, amoureuses, l'homme qui les aurait aimées" (p. 108). *Le silence des rives* does not evoke nostalgia for the social nexus of a community in exile; instead this text demonstrates the individual body in search of a *social body*, a community, in a world where material presence is valued over the spiritual. As Michel Maffesoli notes, the physical and social bodies present a paradox: the crisis of the somatic transforms the physical body into its "opposite", the somatic form escapes into the social body.[87] In this way, the individual bodies experience crises and it is then when they seek the social corpus as symbolically located in the *grande*

---

[87] Michel Maffesoli in *La contemplation du monde*, discusses this paradox of the physical and the social body: "Car c'est bien du corps social qu'il s'agit. J'ai souvent insisté sur ce paradoxe: l'exacerbation du corps propre (corporéisme, mode, apparence) aboutit en son contraire, s'épuise en un corps collectif. Un tel phénomène doit nous inciter à regarder avec des yeux nouveaux tous les étranges rituels quotidiens qui ponctuent la vie en société, tous ces attroupements trivaux, ces diverses effervescences furtives et autres affolements urbains, où la bigarrure des formes joue un rôle primordial" (p. 209).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

maison. As dead bodies emerge throughout this story, Sebbar's narrative evidences that the "dead corpus" reveals the concrete, physical world as a most unsuitable and unstable reference for identity. Instead, *Le silence des rives* searches for a community that is not "earth bound", that does not depend upon physical presence (or absence). Community is the shifting of borders and the searching for identity across space, dislocating contemporary politics of identity that rigidly impose a strict adherence between language to the physical. As the bodies that circulate throughout this text remain anonymous, nameless, and unclaimed, the cultural nomadism of this group becomes part of a larger process of self-identity and a communal, dialogic search for a name that may never be found in a geography never revisited.[88] For Sebbar, community is always a nomadic, spiritual drive within a constantly shifting space of identity.

The space of *fitna* within *Le silence des rives* is evidenced, therefore, by the contradictions in meaning and space throughout this text, for the body is both real as a physical body and yet also imaginary as a social body. Likewise, language is also precarious in this text since its power to name both represents certain realities while eliding others. Identity, in Sebbar is conterminously fixed

---

[88] Woodhull writes of this idea of nomadism: "In their nomadic texts, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Leïla Sebbar, for example, directly address problems of cultural hybridity and the processes by which they are negotiated in various postcolonial situations both in France and in the Maghreb. In the case of Ben Jelloun and other Maghrebian writers such as Khatibi and Rachid Boudjedra, textual nomadism stands in relation to real changes in the writers' geographical location—their movement between France and the Maghreb. For theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault on the other hand, nomadism is a trope for nondialectical modes of thought and "wild" modes of social affiliation that do not necessarily have anything to do with minority groups' experiences of cultural hybridity and exploitation, even though they stem in part from Algeria's successful challenge to French political, intellectual, and cultural hegemony in colonial regimes as well as from the Gulag, from Auschwitz, and from Hiroshima—events that unsettled the first world's pretension to epitomize cultural achievement and enlightened thought" (pp. 89-90).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to and free of language and identity and it is this terrain which her novel negotiates. Sebbar establishes the terrain of identity which is both fixed upon and divorced from language and the body. Likewise, Sebbar manifests the sacred space of memory through which the characters are able to remember and idealize their homeland. The trope for the homeland here is the *grande maison*, a locus in this novel that is both real and fantastical, present and absent. For the characters in *Le silence des rives*, the *grande maison* becomes the space of being, of belonging, much like the pilgrimage to a marabout, to which they return if only to die.[89] Several characters evoke their desire to die in their homeland through the symbolic imagery of the *grande maison* as the locus of a specific cultural signification of "belonging":

> Il se rappelle un homme, rencontré un jour au bain public des hommes. un parleur pieux qui revenait des Lieux Saints. Pourquoi vivait-il en terre étrangère à un âge où le malheur pouvait le frapper à tout instant? Il ne dit pas. Il glorifiait ceux qui voulaient mourir en terre sainte et assurait que lui, malade, impotent, retournerait sur les Lieux Saints pour y mourir (p. 118).

As maraboutism is a quite common phenomenon in the Maghreb which is about the coming together of the community at a sacred saint's tomb through a "corporeal sensibility", we might see how this locus of dying in the "sacred place" would necessarily recast this tradition of marking the sacred from the profane, the belonging from the exile. This location of the *grande maison* manifests

---

[89] Traki Zannad writes of the cult of the marabout in the Maghreb: "La culte du marabout donne lieu à des manifestations publiques qui s'expriment très souvent à travers un déploiement collectif de la "sensibilité corporelle". Le marabout est un lieu sacré, il est posé comme l'altérité par rapport au monde profane. Il est délimité avec précaution. Il porte le signe de sa sacralisation: la coupole blanchie à la chaux surmontée du croissant et souvent un drapeau vert, symbole magico-religieux de la sainteté, constituent le signal de sa reconnaissance mais aussi de sa protection lorsqu'il est placé en dehors d'une agglomération" (1984, p. 72).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

identity as simultaneously fantastical and real, likewise rendering the body as a physical space which must be negated in order to attain any sort of belonging, in order to create the space of community. As such, community for Sebbar does not occur within the literal "walls" of place, but within the metaphorical limits of imagination through the recreation of language. This nomadic community of Maghrebian identity in France is composed of men and women who attempt to recreate this sacred space of ritual amongst themselves at the tomb, the *grande maison*, which is emblematic of ritual, culture, language, and memory.

Likewise, the body of identity is a domain which is difficult to assume or know within *Le silence des rives*—for even Sebbar herself denies her own identity as a "Maghrebian writer".[90] As such, identity can only be inferred and rendered through the subject's position to the world, through geography and language. But it is this very intractable quality of language and the body which Sebbar interrogates and reframes here. Sebbar evidences sex, gender, language and sexuality as fluid entities which move in and out of meaning, while also recognizing an external force, a socially-empowered subversion of fluidity which attempts to fix and name identity. Thus, within *Le silence des rives*, Sebbar maintains the linguistic and somatic spaces of identity, like the characters' names and bodies, as silent, poetic spaces of spirituality. Though these characters make choices—the

---

[90] Woodhull discusses this issue of identity in Sebbar: "The writers' refusal of any fixed sexual or national identity stems in part from the conviction that the writing process gives us access to psychic, somatic, and social territories that are, almost by definition, excluded by academic literary criticism and other French cultural institutions....Evident, too, in the refusal of sexual and national identities are vestiges of conviction, prevalent in France in the seventies, that first-world writing is produced in societies basically committed to egalitarian principles, societies in which feminists, Marxists, opponents of racism, and other leftis activists are preserving and expanding the spheres in which equality is ensured, so that the question for writers and intellectuals becomes how to go "beyond" liberal and socialist humanism (p. 105).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

return to the homeland, a life of despair, or the voyage to the *grande maison*—Sebbar's text confirms identity as that which negotiates the conflicting space of life and death, here and there, and presence and absence. Upon finding the body of a young woman who has just committed suicide, Sebbar writes: "On a retrouvé son corps, il a fallu le reconaître, elle portait la robe des soirs de fête, transparente et pailletée, ses cheveux étaient encore noués avec long ruban brodé de fils d'or que lui avait offert un client" (p. 131). The bodies emerge, disappear, and re-emerge in this text in such a way that death comes to seem more and more like a finding of space, rather than an escape of the present.

Sebbar's narrative manifests the discourse of death with a certain casualty such that the reader is numbed by the multitudinous corpses being abandoned and found, confused by the inability to inscribed identity, dizzied by the texts circularity between time and place. The stories being woven cross national territories, bodies and various forms of exile. There is a sense in Sebbar of an imminent loss—that perhaps the body will cease to exit and thus fade away, taking all traces of identity with it. For each chapter continually interrogates the "langue de sa mère" as each character seeks for an identity of place and belonging that is never found within language. Paradoxically, Sebbar leaves this question of language and identity completely open. Like Khatibi and Meddeb, she posits language, like physical body and world, as a central space of conflict and dialogue. Different from Khatibi, however, Sebbar's text makes room for the non-negotiations of identity—more than a contentious ground of cultural conflict, Sebbar also evokes the pensive silence that necessarily accompanies any voyage towards life, death, identity. For instance, after the *homme* finds out that his wife has left him to return to their homeland, he realizes that there will

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

be nobody to care for his body after death. Thus he writes his son to notify him of his impending death and he sets off for the *grande maison.* His desire to leave the earth reflects a haunting estrangement from a sense of place in exile, *là-bas,* and likewise represents a profound fear of losing the body in a country which was never home: "Dans la chambre blanche, sur l'autre rive, il n'est pas seul. Un homme, assis contre l'agonisant, murmure à son oreille la prière des morts, dans la langue de sa mère. Il la répète trois fois" (p. 147). Suicide is *Le silence des rives,* is the metaphor for leaving physical topographies of "belonging"—citizenship, language, culture—in order to recreate new sites of identity in the language of the mother "on the other shore".

Fitna is evidenced as the entwining of cultural and religious significations that each character encounters, but yet cannot fulfill. There is a synapse between that which the characters imagine of the *autre rive* and that which they really know or evidence in their *là-bas.* And it is the *grande maison,* this imaginary sphere outside of geography, which evokes this mystical space of community which is also not visible. However, the difference between the memory of one's own culture and the reality in which one lives in the other's culture is evidenced in this text as cultural schizophrenia: the characters find themselves lost within their exile, lost within the recuperation of their homeland through memory and thus they struggle to forge a language and space of identity. In attempting to create this *space* of identity they must negate the physical realities of geography and rely upon the space of memories present and absent and of bodies living and dying. Here, *fitna* is not evidenced as a baroque tissue of text and body such as in Khatibi's writing, but rather *fitna* is evidenced within the quiet, meditative recognition of the splitting of subjectivity, of language, of home, and of identity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When *l'homme* walks to the river and enters it, carrying his poetry in his hands, he begins to feel the turbulence of the river entering the sea:

> Qui pourrait reconstituer le mot le plus petit? Il tient les pages en miettes dans ses mains, s'avance à la croisée des eaux qui tourbillonnent, et les jette, avec les gestes amples et solennels des Anciens qui ont dû jeter les cendres d'êtres chers, sur les rivages de la mer fermée par des terres qui se sont fait si longtemps la guerre et ce n'est pas fini, mais la guerre c'est aussi la rencontre, le tourbillon des eaux où les papiers disparaissent, c'est l'échange turbulent du fleuve avec la mer (pp. 116-117)

It is this quiet yet violent tugging at identity which Sebbar reveals as the *fitnic* presence in her story. Here, cultural hybridity is a conflict—a virtual war of identities—struggling to find a space to embody. Sebbar evokes the body as caught up in this turbulence where the resolutions of identity are limited, the paradigms are intricate and the solutions are not readily nor immediately available. This narrative examines tradition in the context of exile as it collapses diachronic with synchronic time, silence with language, and presence with absence.

It is this collapsing of diametrically opposed moments that ushers forth the difficulty of finding meaning for each of the characters and for the reader as well. For instance, words are as much a part of the exploration of identity in this novel as is the silence evidenced on the occasionally blank pages of the text. As the reader is presented with numerous pages of written text that occasionally evidence the whiteness of silence, or where one sentence will make up an entire chapter, the reader must struggle to find a space for completing the narrative. Also, the characters are certainly dissatisfied with their lives in the *là-bas*, but none of them can reconcile returning to the *autre rive*. As such, identity remains caught between a mythic, choate vision of utopia as memory on the one hand, and on the other, the barren present of exile in a foreign land. Neither option seems viable or realistic, yet forging a new space of belonging seems equally

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

difficult project to undertake for these characters. As this novel straddles the superfluity and the poverty of signifiers, the subjects of this novel struggle to find a space for installing their identity. As they find out, identity is to be found neither in the economically deprived homeland, nor in the western economically-privileged country of exile. *Le silence des rives* evidences identity as a space that remains free of purely geographical constraints—identity here is nomadic. As nomadism emerges as neither a topography nor a temporality, the leaving of the earth through the metaphor of "suicide" locates the process of negating the physical, the body, and embracing the spiritual as a modality of identity. Nomadism is a space in which one lives, or as Traki Zannad situates, a "habitus", and it is through this symbolic recreation of identity that the characters reach the *autre rive*, which is neither France, nor the Maghreb, but a space of belonging.

Ultimately, Sebbar's *Le silence des rives* manifests the metaphoric space of exile that Maghrebians face abroad. The rhetorical positioning of the search for identity as a type of "suicide" makes this text quite complex. For the pursuit of identity in Sebbar is not geographical search, but a philosophical and somatic seeking of space through language and memory. In *Le silence des rives*, nomadism is evidenced as the inability to stay *là-bas* and the impossibility of ever *turning back* to the *autre rive*. This dynamic evidences identity as an impossible combination of tasks: on the one hand, the quest for identity is that which puts life, the body, in peril, and on the other hand, not seeking identity results in a spiritual death. Those who attempt to find the tradition they lost, die in the attempt to cross the sea, and those who remain indifferent to finding identity spiritually putrefy in the absence of meaning. The plethora of signifiers for both the characters who "succeed" and barrenness for those who do not, evidence

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nomadism as the *fitnic* space of in-between being and geography where space, and not geography, is the context for identity.

Post-colonial Moroccan identity can be best read in relation to *fitna*—identity is charged with simultaneous contradictions, conflicts, and restructurings. Discussing Moroccan identity today depends upon the ability of understanding divergent cultural realities, various national and colonial histories, and of course, many linguistic traditions. Obviously, this has been argued and widely achieved, but unfortunately, at the expense of the very culturally informed readings which writers like Khatibi have maintained through the use of *both* Islamic and North African theories *as well as* French thought. Ironically, Maghrebian cultural theory embraces the same discursive drive to understand these binaried structures of identity as does "western" post-structuralism. In fact, we could say that Khatibi vindicates himself in asserting that the west is still casting its own intellectual hegemony onto the rest of the world. For Khatibi's writing—despite the fact that he focuses on Middle Eastern and North African history, Islamic thought, and Moroccan cultural theory and literature—is still understood by western critics like Woodhull as an "appropriat[ion] of deconstruction for third world peoples...and cultural politics" (Woodhull, xi) rather than being recognized as a reworking of Islamic thought and North African identity through theoretical currents. Perhaps we should examine the discomfort presented by the critical reception of such discourses which locate a poetics and politics of liberation for women that does not coincide with "our" western ideals of such liberatory issue. More directly, we should re-evaluate what we so easily label "western" and attempt to investigate to what extent colonialism has necessarily influenced French thought and to what extent post-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

structuralism is as much a symptom of French culture as it is a product of France's long involvement with Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian cultures

Finally, maybe we ought to look back to Maghrebian cultural theory, most of which—contrary to Woodhull's assertion—does not offer extreme or subversive tactics or poetics as solutions for reshaping the social climate. Instead, we might find new ways of reading older texts, older bodies, in order to create newer spaces for newly born subjects. I think that North African women and men are all too conscious of the limitations involved with the various politics of "subversion" and, as a result, often attempt to locate their resistance within a more stayed, even a seemingly more tame, identity politics. The fact that Khatibi's poetics of resistance fails to ensure the ideals now fashionable in western cultural theory does not signify its failure as a project. It may, on the other hand, reflect the nature of our cultural proclivity of reading a politics of despair into any discourse which fails to resonate the same theoretical conclusions that have "succeeded" in the western academic scene or which have failed to reproduce similar social paradigms of oppressive and liberatory acts.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter Four

The Violence of Representation in Latin American Literature:

Realismo mágico and *Neobarroco* Bodies of Gender, Race, Sickness and Terror

> Cuando la carencia de energía asalta, o bien cuando progresiva y solapada va tomando posesión del cuerpo, cada día se pierde la capacidad de hacer algo, cesa o se degrada un don, se corrompe un recuerdo, un nombre propio se tergiversa. Nuesta escritura, por ejemplo, antes equilibrada y uniforme, en la que el pensamiento se encadenaba sin esfuerzo, legible como la partitura en el fraseo de un gran pianista, hoy se desvía de la línea, tiembla, exagera puntos, acentos, banderines y tildes. Todo es borrón, tachonazo, incongruente, sanguinaria ballesta. Las letras ameboides surgen solas, sin mano que pueda moderer su aceitosa expansión. Un pájaro de presa, ávido de nuestro propio desperdicio, se esconde en cada trazo...Lo dificil es eso: pensar en otra cosa. Pasar a algo distinto sin que la amenaza, la imagen agazapada—la de la muerte—vuelva.
>
> —Severo Sarduy, *Pajaros de la playa*

In 1949, Alejo Carpentier wrote "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso", in which he coined the phrase *"lo real maravilloso americano"* which together with Franz Roth's art criticism, *Realismo mágico* (1925), came to define what is today called "magical realism".[1] In this article, Carpentier explains the *real maravilloso*

---

[1] Carpentier specifies that Roth's definition of "magical realism" was really a descriptive of expressionist painting devoid of political content: "El término de realismo mágico, fue acuñado en los alrededores del año de 1924 o 1925 por un crítico de arte alemán llamado Franz Roth enun libro publicado por la *Revista de Occidente*, que se titula *El realismo mágico*. En realidad, lo que Franz roth llama realismo, es sencillamente una pintura expresionisa, pero escogiendo aquellas manifestaciones de la pintura expresionista ajenas a una intención política concreta... [L]o que él llamaba *realismo mágico* era sincillamente un apintura donde secombinan formas reales de una manera no conforme a la realidad cotidiana" (pp. 20-21). Later, Roth's term, *"realismo mágico"*, in art criticism was later replaced by "New Objectivity" and *realismo mágico* came to indicate the literary form manifested in the works of such writers as Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes and Isabella Allende.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in Latin America making a clear distinction between the spirit of the *real maravilloso* from European Surrealism with which Carpentier was involved while living in France from 1928 through 1939. Like many Latin American artists who tried to incorporate surrealism into their work by searching for the supernatural based on the subconscious and dreams, Carpentier realized that these very elements already existed in his own culture, thus he began to distance himself from surrealism.[2] Rather than arguing the marvellous real as a form of transcending reality by representing fantastic visions of the universe through abstract forms, Carpentier asserts that the *real maravilloso is* itself a direct representation of Latin American reality through juxtapositions and mixtures of the rich and diverse histories, languages, ethnicities, cultures and politics:

> En cuanto a lo real maravilloso, sólo tenemos que alargar las manos para alcanzarlo. Nuestra historia contemporánea nos presenta cada día insólitos acontecimientos. El solo hecho de que la primera revolución socialista del continente se produjera en el país peor situado para propiciarla—digo «peor situado» *geográficamente*—es ya de por sí un hecho insólito en la historia contemporánea, hecho insólito que se añade a muchos hechos insólitos que para gloria nuestra y con magníficos resultados se han producido en la historia de América desde la Conquista hasta ahora. Pero ante los futuros hechos insólitos de ese mundo de lo real maravilloso que nos esperan, no habremos de decir ya, como Hernán Cortés a su monarca: «Por no saber poner los nombres a las cosas no las expreso.» Hoy conocemos los nombres de las cosas, las formas de las cosas, la textura de las cosas nuestras; sabemos dónde están nuestros enemigos internos y externos; nos hemos forjado un lenguaje apto para expresar nuestras realidades, y el acontecimiento que nos venga al encuentro hallará en nosotros, novelistas de América Latina, los testigos, cronistas e intérpretes de nuestra gran realidad latinoamericana (p. 125).

Carpentier takes the force of language to represent that which is the reality of Latin America and invokes the writers of Latin America to take up the task of reporting and interpreting their sculture. In a sense, Carpentier regards the

---

[2] Carpentier criticized Salvador Dalí's painting "The Persistence of Memory" in 1931 asserting that Dalí consciously preverts reality thus lending to a completely superficial sense of the marvelous.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

artist as if she were a chronicler or even an ethnographer of the present reality, and thus entreats the artist to recount Latin America's culture and people in the narrative space between the first and third-person, as if the difference between "fact" and "fiction" were negligible.[3] Asserting that the language indigenous to Latin America embodies all the qualities for rendering the *real maravilloso,* Carpentier argues that the *real maravilloso* is a manner of interpreting reality that is as historically linked to the language of representation as it is to the particularities of history.

Lo real maravilloso americano materializes the present and history of Latin America by framing it within the context of visual culture and by distinguishing Latin American aesthetics from those of Europe. In making his argument for the *real maravilloso,* Carpentier positions Latin American identity not as a direct offspring of European culture, but instead as a necessary *mestizaje* of identities—a direct consequence of Europe's Conquest of the indigenous cultures in the Americas. Claiming that certain artistic periods, such as the

---

[3] Interestingly enough, Jean Favret-Saada discusses this very talk as the speaking subject, the "I" in ethnographic discourse as the third person subject: "Autrement dit, une convention implicite du discours ethnographique veut qu'un "il" jamais ne puisse être un "je" et que la place du sujet de l'énonciation première soit ainsi toujours laissée vacante: au mieux, un groupe social vient parfois s'y nommer. L'auteur ferait-il passer celui-ci pour une personne (ce qu'aucun groupe ne saurait être) ou même pour la fiction d'une personne, que la situation n'en serait pas plus plausible. Car ce sujet en troisième personne, tel qu'il parle dans le texte, ne semble pas s'adresser à quiconque, en tout cas pas au sujet qu'après tout l'ethnographe a bien pu être lorsque ces paroles furent jadis échangées: dans la littérature ethnographique, une faction indigène parle à la science universelle, une non-personne à un sujet indéfini. Ainsi, l'ethnographie semble s'élaborer entre un indigène qui serait une fois pour toutes cantonné dans la place du sujet de l'énoncé, et un savant qui se désignerait lui-même comme un sujet de l'énonciation, mais comme son sujet indéfini. L'indigène apparaît alors comme une monstruosité conceptuelle: assurément comme un sujet parlant puisque l'ethnographie est faite de ses dires; mais comme un *parlant non humain* puisqu'il est exclu qu'il occupe jamais la place du "je" dans quelque discours que ce soit. De son côté, l'ethnographe se donne pour un *être parlant* mais qui serait *dépourvu de nom propre* puisqu'il se désigne par un pronom indéfini. Etrange dialogue que celui qui paraît se tenir entre ces êtres fantastiques..." (pp. 56-57).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Romanesque and Gothic, never reached the Americas, Carpentier devotes much of this essay to the analysis of the baroque which not only made its way to the Americas, but thrived in Latin America as well.[4] The *barroco* is architecturally evidenced all over Latin America: the Santuario de Manquiri (Bolivia), San Francesco de Lima (Peru), La Compañia en Arequipa (Peru), and Estancia Jesuítica Santa Catalina (Argentina). But the strongest evidence of the *barroco* in Latin American architecture is to be found in Mexico where it is manifested as a highly stylized genre commonly referred to as the *barroco mexicano.* Manifesting all the traces of the European baroque—excessive imagery to the point of gaudiness, extravagance in ornament, great expressiveness, arabesques—the *barroco mexicano* goes beyond the European genre, exploding into thousands of colors, diverse materials and motifs that are inclusive of the indigenous body and the

---

[4] Carpentier describes the structures of the "New World baroque": "A América no llegaron ni el románico ni el gótico, es decir, dos *estilos históricos* que desempeñaron un papel capital en el desarrollo de la cultura plástica del viejo continente y que nosotros ignoramos completamente. No porque en alguna ciudad, en el año de 1920, se le ocurre a un arquitecto de mal gusto hacer una falso catedral gótica significa esto que el gótico haya llegado a nosotros. Ni el romántico ni el gótico entraron en América. Lo que sí entró fue el plateresco; el plateresco, que es una forma del barroco, acaso con más atmósfera, con más aire, diríamos, que el barroco de Churriguera. ¡Ah!, pero llega el plateresco español en las naves de la Conquista ¿y qué encuentra el alarife que conoce los secretos del espíritu barroco, añade el barroquismo de sus materiales, el barroquismo de su invención, el barroquismo, de los motivos zoológicos, de los motivos vegetales, de los motivos florales del nuevo mundo, al plateresco español y de esa manera se llega a lo apoteósico del barroco arquitectónico que es el barroco americano, cuyos ejemplos más prodigiosos son la iglesia de Tepozatlán en México (donde una cúpula central, piramídal,muy alta, nos muestra la acumulación más enorme de células proliferantes que pueda imaginarse, donde se juega también con la luz como en la Catedral de Toledo), la fachada de San Francisco de Ecatepec de Cholula, donde al barroco de las formas se añade el barroco de los materiales, de los colores, los azulejos, los mosaicos; la capilla famosa de Puebla, barroco en blanco y oro, donde aparece un concierto celestial en que los ángeles aparecen tocando la tiorba, tocando las arpas, los regales, todos los grandes instrumentos renacentistas; el *Árbol de la vida* de Santo Domingo de Oaxaca, que es una composición barroca monumental que cubre una bóveda, un gran árbol que se expande y con cuyas ramas se entremezclan figuras de ángeles, de santos, figuras humanas, figuras de mujeres, confundidas con la vegetación" (p. 18).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

flora and fauna of the Americas. For example, the church of San Francisco de Acatepec, Cholula, is one of the most extraordinary examples of the *barroco mexicano* as the multi-colored tiles cover the facade in a mosaic pattern that defies the European baroque through the incredible excess of form and the myriad of brightly colored tiles while the bell tower is composed of spiralling neoclassical columns painted gold. And several kilometers away, the church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla has an interior ceiling which is a celestial composition of white and gold covered with hundreds of gold-winged cherub reliefs springing out from the "heavens", each one bearing indigenous features. The *barroco mexicano* manifests the flora, fauna and human forms of the "New World" and the Christian motifs of the old, while producing images which are artistically as much a product of the European as the indigenous cultures.

The *barroco mexicano* manifests not only a highly stylized use of both indigenous and European aesthetics and forms, but also uses these aesthetics to reflect certain social and political thoughts of the period which, according to Carpentier, embodies the both a cultural and physical *mestizaje* (mixing). For the *barroco* is not only about artistic form and content being shaped in different topographies and societies, but Carpentier also views the *barroco* as a *mestizaje* of "race"—the baroque as the creolization of both body and culture

> ¿Y por qué es América Latina la tierra de elección del barroco? Porque toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra un barroquismo. El barroquismo americano se acrece con la criolledad, con el sentido del criollo, con la conciencia que cobra el hombre americano, sea hijo de blanco venido de Europa, sea hijo de negro africano, sea hijo de indio nacido en el continente—y eso lo había visto admirablemente Simón Rodríguez—la consciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis, de ser un criollo; y el espíritu criollo de por sí es un espíritu barroco. Y, al efecto, quiero recordar la gracia con que Simón Rodríguez, que veía genialmente esas realidades, en un fragmento de sus escritos, nos recuerda lo siguiente: que al lado de hombre que hablan el español sin ser ya españoles, puesto que son criollos—dicen Simón Rodríguez— «tenemos huasos, chinos y

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> bárbaros, gauchos, cholos y guachinangos, negros, prietos y gentiles, serranos, calentanos, indígenas, gentes de color y de ruana, morenos, mulatos y zambos, blancos porfiados y patas amarillas y un mundo de cruzados: tercerones, cuarterones, quinterones, y salta atrás». Con tales elementos en presencia aportándole cada cual su barroquismo, entroncamos directamente con lo que yo he llamado lo «real maravilloso» (p. 19).

Carpentier's notion of the baroque in Latin America embodies a cultural and physical *mestizaje* that is, all the while, based on a very *real* phenomenon of mixtures between bodies, continents, languages, and ultimately, of spirits. The passage that Carpentier cites from Simón Rodriguqez indicates the dissonance between words and their meanings in the newly colonized Latin America as every new "race" has a name that often does not accurately speak identity any more than the word "colored". Yet, the plethora of names, bodies and mixtures that Carpentier evidences here evidences the *real maravilloso* as a baroque space of democratic bodies, shapes, colors, and narratives.

In a rather controversial move, Carpentier maintains that the *real maravilloso* is as much a product of contemporary Latin American culture as it is a result of the Conquest of the Americas when writers wrote accounts of the Conquest that re-enacted tales of knighthood, based in Europe but *re-enacted in the Americas.* Carpentier gives the example of *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la nueva españa* claiming that Bernal Díaz textually re-enacts the adventures of Amadis of Gaul in the "New World".[5] Indeed, it would seem that all of the

---

[5] Carpentier delineates his argument here: "Lo real maravilloso, en cambio, que yo defiendo, y es lo real maravilloso nuestro, es el que encontramos al estado bruto, latente omnipresente en todo lo latinoamericano. Aquí lo insólito es cotidiano, siempre fue cotidiano. Los libros de caballería se escribieron en Europa, pero se vivieron en América, porque si bien se escribieron las aventuras de Amadís de Gaula en Europa, es Bernal Díaz del Castillos quien nos presenta con su *Historia de la conquista de la Nueva España* el primer libro de caballería auténtico. Y constantemente, no hay que olvidarlo, los conquistadores vieron muy claramente el aspecto real maravilloso en las cosas de América, y al efecto quiero recordar la frase de Bernal Díaz cuando contempla la ciudad de México por primera vez y exclama, en medio de una página que es de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

accounts of the Conquest narrate a "marvelously real world" in which bodies and matter overwhelm the reader with their heterogeneity of colors, shapes, and aesthetic forms, such that the European subject must rely on the power of language to describe the sights he beholds. From Bernal Díaz to Fray Bernardino Sahagún, accounts of the indigenous peoples are replete with descriptions that marvel at the aesthetics of and surrounding the indigenous—the colors of their bodies, the genre of clothing, the jewelry they wear, the feathers on their heads, and the food they prepare.

Carpentier's essay locates the *real maravilloso* as a way of representing the world, but also—and more importantly—as a way of seeing this world so as to describe it properly:

> Y si nuestro deber es el de revelar este mundo, debemos mostrar, interpretar las cosas nuestras. Y esas cosas se presentan como cosas nuevas a nuestros ojos. La descripción es ineludible, y la descripción de un mundo barroco ha de ser necesariamente barroca, es decir, el qué y el cómo en este caso se compaginan ante una realidad barroca. Ante un *Árbol de la vida*, de Oaxaca, yo no puedo hacer una descripción de tipo, llamaríamos, clásico o académico. Tengo que lograr con mis palabras un barroquismo paralelo al barroquismo del paisaje del trópico templado. Y nos encontramos con que eso conduce lógicamente a un barroquismo que se produce espontáneamente en nuestra literatura (p. 124).

Carpentier evidences the baroque as a vision through which the world is perceived by the witness of the topographies and corporealities of *mestizaje* in Latin America. In also envisaging the *real maravilloso* as a way of perceiving Latin American reality and not just as a modality of representation, Carpentier maintains a symbiotic relationship between the body of the representer and the bodies and terrains of the represented—each inflects the other with meaning. If the muralist

---

una prosa absolutamente barroca: «Todos nos quedamos asombrados y dijimos que esas tierras, templos y lagos se parecían a los encantamientos de que habla el Amadís.» He aquí el hombre de Europa en contacto con lo real maravilloso americano" (p. 22).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

paints an image of the *real maravilloso,* it is because the inspiration for this image, the *real,* was itself "imbued" with all the qualities of the *real maravilloso* and because the muralist perceived these qualities. Although Carpentier's mimetic vision of the *real maravilloso* might seem to codify and limit representation such that the baroque is the only style through which one might understand Latin American reality, it is important to understand that Carpentier is making a profoundly resounding statement about representing Latin American social and political reality—perhaps much more than he originally intended.

Certainly one cannot deny the brutal savagery of the Conquest and the colonization of the Americas any more than one could negate the violence that has been effected against the people of Latin America over the past five hundred years. Yet it seems to me that the *real maravilloso* is not merely about eliding this brutality in order to represent some "marvellous" otherness to eyes which are new to such a history and present. What strikes me most about Carpentier's essay is that he does not frame the Conquest in the brutal terms in which writers such as Todorov or Sahagún do—for him, the Conquest is an event which "marvelled" two worlds in different forms and which resulted in the *mestizaje* of race, religion, language and culture. The violence in Carpentier's interpretation of the Conquest is not so much dismissed as it is merely not an issue since he locates the *real maravilloso* as the interaction between these bodies and cultures that necessarily results in *mestizaje.* It seems to me that contrary to what Carpentier advocates—the vision and representation of the *barroco*—it is neither the "description" nor the "vision" of the *barroco* which creates the *real maravilloso,* but rather the multeity of visions and descriptions that create this fabric for seeing and locating culture. It is both the richness of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the images and the plurality of texts from which these images are evinced. For the literary genre of the *real maravilloso*, magical realism, is not merely a romantic vision of Latin America in which bodies mysteriously float, children are born with pig's tails, and dictator's stop by their mother's house to return her empty milk bottles to the store. Rather, magical realism is about the juxtaposition of these light, soothing and even humorous images with other visions that are entirely unromantic and, quite often, terrifying.

This is the story of Latin America: a place where the narratives of nation, community, and family are carefully maintained at the threshold where the romantic notions of happiness, community, innocence and love meet the terrifying realities of insurgency, death squads, torture, exile, disappearance and poverty. Ultimately, magical realism is much more profoundly complex than what Alejo Carpentier originally envisioned in 1949. As he maintains, the *real maravilloso* is a genre about seeing the excessive—the baroque in Latin American culture—but moreso, it is about seeing the baroque *in terms of its contradictions, ironies, destructions and rearticulations.* Magical realism is not just a literary or artistic genre—it is a cultural project through which identity is perpetually interrogated, confirmed and discredited. As a social project, magical realism is the mechanism of interpretation from which subjectivity is understood and it is the subjective mirror of representation upon which subjectivity is based. Ultimately, the possibility of understanding the very historically complex and contradictory realities of Latin America depends upon maintaining this space where numerous and incompatible baroque representations of history and culture coexist.

The baroque, however, is a common metaphor for understanding Latin American reality given that the *barroco* as an artistic and architectural form was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prevalent during the colonial period of Latin America and likewise had a literary revival in the twentieth century under its reincarnation called the *neobarroco.* Poets such as José Lezama Lima and novelists such as Severo Sarduy spent their careers formulating and working within this genre while producing some of the most important literature in Latin American history. Severo Sarduy, in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo,* maintains that the *barroco,* like Carpentier's *real maravilloso,* does not invent reality, but rather it represents the world *as it really is.* Analyzing the work of Góngora, Sarduy situates the baroque as not only an aesthetics of representation, but also as a knowledge (*saber*) based upon rigid conceptions of the symbolic:

> En los clásicos la distancia entre figura y sentido, entre significante y significado, es siempre reducida; el barroco agranda esa falla entre los dos polos del signo. En toda metáfora gongorina la categoría primera, el código de lectura, es lo simbólico: a partir de él se lee la realidad. La poesía es un proyecto de cultura, que se sustenta en la cultura, y todo lo que es exterior a ésta resistencia que, durante siglos, ha dado al adjetivo gongorino un sentido equívoco. El código de lectura, el espejo «aunque cóncavo, fiel», en que viene a reflejarse lo real, es una lengua compuesta por todos los elementos culturales del Renacimiento: referencias mitológicas, astronómicas, plásticas, literarias, etc. Ese *saber* ordena la naturaleza y la interpreta a partir de sus concepciones rígidas. Si hay nociones que deben ser eliminadas, otras deben ser tratadas según cánones retóricamente fijos. Para Góngora la poesía no se inventa, sino al contrario, pertenece a un mundo *ya* formado, de leyes fijas. Poesía que es, por naturaleza, *tropo,* que elude (*e-ludere*) todo mensaje. Los versos constituyen una serie de perífrasis: círculos que recorre la lectura y cuyo centro, aunque elíptico, está siempre presente (p. 1157).

Locating the "code of reading" as the mirror through which the text is interpreted—across cultural, mythological, and literal signifiers—Sarduy situates the Góngorian text as that which does not invent itself, but sees it as that which orders and interprets nature. Sarduy confirms that for Góngora, poetry is already formed, for nature is not only its message, but nature is in excess of its representation. Maintaining a poetics of reading in which the text "speaks for

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

itself", Sarduy argues that the baroque text is already fixed and needs no interpretation. However, in *Nueva inestabilidad,* Sarduy differentiates between the *barroco* and the *neobarroco* maintaining their relationship as a historical nexus of signifiers

> El regreso de un arte barroco, o el de alguna de sus espejeantes formas, no sólo se reconoce hoy, sino que hasta se reivindica. Se ve perfilar la máscara pinturera, por todas partes, incluso donde lo que asoma no es más que la pálida literalidad del rostro clásico. Sin embargo, cuando se trata de fundamentar esta nueva «carnivalización», de dar una explicación coherente de lo que la suscita, el discurso se empobrece bruscamente: todo se vuelve constatación, fácil apreciación de estilos, detección, a diestra y siniestra, de los «síntomas» del barroco; de modo que este neobarroco carece de una epistemología propia, y aún mas, de una lectura atenta al substrato, de un trabajo de signos. Si, con la perspectiva del tiempo, el primer barroco nos aparece hoy como algo inmediatemente descifrable y sus figuras se revelan inteligibles a tal punto que podemos situar entre ellas y las que las precedieron—por ejemplo entre la elipse y el círculo—las líneas divisorias, fracturas, todo un drama de las formas, el barroco de hoy no nos remite, en lo que de él se dice, más que a imágenes difusas, sin emisor aparente ni destinatorio: no sabemos de qué esas obras, con su carácter propio de residuo o de exceso opaco, son el emblema confuso, la *retombée,* ni si de algo lo son (p. 1370).

Where the *barroco,* according to Sarduy, is immediate, easily translatable, and open to interpretation, the *neobarroco* is opaque, lost in the excess of signification. The *neobarroco* neither maintains a sense of translatability, nor does it uphold a strict, linear communicability of meaning from transmitter to receiver. Instead, the *neobarroco* confuses the signs and orders of the *barroco* and it exists as "residue or opacity of excess". Sarduy's notion of the *neobarroco* can be regarded as the encounter between the "natural" world of transparent signifiers and the explosion of signifiers that take hold of the somatic or literary object and infect it with meanings that confuse, jar and escape any clear and neatly arranged meaning.

Today the *barroco* and the *neobarroco* occupy a symbiotic aesthetic dimension in Latin America: the transparency of the imagery and signification of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the *barroco* conflicts with the superfluity and privation of meaning of the *neobarroco*. Sarduy views this nexus as a most fitting dominion for representing reality in Latin America because it captures the eccentric and dialectical nature that composes Latin American history, cultures, bodies and language. Moreover, Sarduy views the interstices of literature and art as the dialectic space through which identity, ultimately, is created—the *neobarroco* of lost and obfuscated meanings along with the *barroco* of past significations that resonate, though somewhat distortedly, in the present. And it is through literature that Sarduy envisages the creation of identity that incorporates a necessary dialogic space of language and the somatic, where the visual meets the carnal and language traverses incessantly across the open terrain of excess and loss. As he comments on Maurice Roche's *Compact*, Sarduy notes that the creative, albeit violent, process of the baroque is manifested through the plasticity of the written sign which has its own particular nature:

> La literatura es, como el que practica nuestro coleccionista, un arte del tatuaje: inscribe, cifra en la masa amorfa del lenguaje informativo los verdaderos signos de la significación. Pero esta inscripción no es posible sin herida, sin pérdida. Para que la masa informativa se convierta en texto, para que la palabra comunique, el escritor tiene que tatuarla, que insertar en ella sus pictogramas. La escritura sería el arte de esos *grafos*, de lo pictural asumido por el discurso, pero también el arte de la proliferación. La plasticidad del signo escrito y su carácter barroco están presentes en toda literatura que no olvide su naturaleza de *inscripción*, eso que podía llamarse *escripturalidad* (1999, p. 1154).

Here Sarduy distinguishes between the *escripturalidad* of the natural sign and the violent process of its inscription which he likens to *tatuaje*. The art of *tatuaje* for Sarduy is necessarily a process of somatic terror and disruption whereby the "natural" body is necessarily interrupted and even cancelled by its conversion into becoming a "new" text, the freshly encoded space of meaning. It is the plasticity of writing which reinvents the form of the written graph or word,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

while also reinventing the body upon which this writing takes places. Finally, for Sarduy, writing is always an act of locating meaning between texts *(intertextualidad)* and between bodies *(intersexualidad)* and as such the *neobarroco* maintains a constant link to the historical referent of the past through the *barroco* while negotiating the present of excessive signifiers and a natural which is constantly shifting.

Carpentier's *realismo maravilloso* and Sarduy's *neobarroco* suggest that Latin American identity is never singular, but always plural, and these identities are to be found in the interruptions, contradictions and *mestizaje* of the culture, language and somatic spaces. Though Carpentier's exegesis omits the violent aspects of Latin American history—and hence cultural identity—he does specify a very concrete and corporeal notion of *mestizaje* which he likens to the aesthetics of seeing Latin America. Likewise, Sarduy's notion of cultural representation is a necessarily violent process which, like the body of *tatuaje* mentioned earlier, cannot exist without literary and somatic signs of scarring, blood, and pain. It is here where I would like to look at *realismo mágico* as the modality of not only representing Latin American reality, but also of interpreting it through the nexus of language and the body, the historical and the imaginary, and the belief and disbelief in reality. For *realismo mágico* is about the reflexive nature of the physical and spiritual worlds whereby language and the body reflect the contradictions, confusions, wonders, flavors, chaos, peace and violence that *are* Latin America.

It might sound as if this perspective which I am employing is an undertaking that refuses to make distinctions and to set limits and guidelines. Moreso, it might seem that I avoid stating "truths" of culture. Indeed, I am certainly the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

first to admit that this is exactly what I am doing. I maintain that the western philosophical tradition has offered much in the way of understanding the dialectic structure of thought; moreover, western thought has greatly influenced the attempts to break down such dualist thinking that is part of its tradition. However, if I might make one incredibly general critique about the western philosophical tradition, it is that in recent history theory has made great pretenses about breaking down spaces of indeterminacy whereby binaries are dislocated, narratives are no longer linear, identities are understood as heterogeneous and bodies are rendered visible. *But*, western theory ultimately has had great difficulty handling these temporarily destabilized identities and therefore typically caps disruptive spaces by naming them as a means of trying to "know" and control these valences. Since Puritanical notions of the body and Cartesian schemes of understanding history and the physical world are still strongly embedded within western traditions—and undoubtedly are not just going to dissipate into thin air—it is not surprising that western culture maintains such a firm hold on language as a solid, definite relationship to reality. Yet, as someone who has spent a great of time living outside of the west, it is disturbing to witness the intransigence of such theories which renders western subjects often incapable of dialoguing with other cultures. In understanding identity only as that which is homogeneous, intransigent, pure and rationale, one is necessarily left outside of any discourses of hybridity that are currently taking place across the globe and that have been going on for centuries. This stubborn distancing of contradictions and interruptions is an exteriorization of western rationalism which attempts to interpret meaning by freezing meaning, *as if meaning always were fixed.* But it is this process of ridding the scene of all that is "dirty" and "out of order" that, in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the end, renders much occidental interpretation of culture farcical at best and neocolonial as usual.

For instance, after the terrorist attacks on the United States (which already has become symbolically "our" Holocaust, 9/11), the government began a political campaign that strangely negated the center of the tragedy: the human body. In concert with the government, all images on television were neatly devoid of any human remains and "Ground Zero" was transformed into a hauntingly sterilized space of Terror for a worldwide audience that wanted to, yet never would, see American bodies. Instead, the world was given the repeatedly televised, Nintendoized visions of the charred skeleton of the lower floors of the World Trade Center, images of fire fighters and police that invoked the most nauseatingly naive recreations of Hollywood television from the 1950's (*Leave it to Beaver* comes to mind), and the hundreds of televised and web-cast sequences of the attacks that left all the spectators *believing* not only *that they there were there at the scene*, but also that they were the actual victims of the terrorism *by virtue of having witnessed it* from their television or computer. The strangest part of this event was the ensuing military campaign a month later which likewise negated the human body in the most eerie of fashions. The United States did not announce a war on people, the Afghanis, nor on a country, Afghanistan, but instead launched a war on an inanimate object: Terrorism. I point to this example of "The War on Terrorism" as symptomatic of the problems inherent in a cultural tradition that takes an incredibly large-scale form of violence and wipes away the spills, expeditiously cleans up the mess, and sterilizes the scene of the crime under a tactical and highly pragmatic language of anti-terrorism. The body no longer exists and "The War on Terrorism" is a war of language

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

where bodies are invisible, incidental and ultimately regarded as "collateral damage". What this paradigm manifests is a sterilization of contradictions, a cleansing of somatic references, and a fetishistic attachment to technology both as a means of receiving information and as an instrument for destroying the "bodiless" Enemy. Moreover, "The War on Terrorism" lends to a reading of history that is devoid of all contradiction—not because the contradictions do not exist, but because the discontinuities and negations are neatly tucked away, buried beneath the rubble and interpolated into the chaotic scene of disaster *as Disaster.*

Antithetical to this paradigm of sterilizing the scene of disaster, Latin American culture does not approach the "spills" of history and current affairs with metaphorical and syntactical brooms and mops. For *realismo mágico* embodies the contradictions of history to include the presence of the body—assiduously attaching significance to the body—as a means of representing the polysemous nature of identity in Latin America. It is not surprising that in Mexico, for instance, school children have grown up for decades reading stories of the Massacre at Cholula while some of their contemporaries in the United States—and not many—have only recently been introduced to the idea that some Indians might have been killed in the "expansion" of the then British colonies. Contrary to the popular perception of United State's heritage which evidences an egregious amnesia of violence, the cultural heritage of Latin America is represented as tragic, violent, and incredibly "surreal" at times. However, this violence of representation is refreshingly open to translation and accessible to inscription because *realismo mágico* is, as I mentioned above, not merely an aesthetic perception, but it is also a philosophical discourse which allows for the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contradictions and displacements of non-linear and "impure" narratives of identity to traverse the fields of representability. From Cortés' perception of the *maravilloso*, to Carpentier's *realismo maravilloso*, and Sarduy's *neobarroco*, there is a long held literary tradition in Latin America for reading bodies that are objects of simultaneous questioning, fascination, ordering, torture, embellishment, and even destruction. Ironically, this kind of representational spectrum is regarded as "fantastic" or "unreal" in countries such as the United States, perhaps because fictions of fantasy and melodrama—two genres that were highly employed by Hollywood during the Cold War—are often the rhetorical vehicles through which many cultures repress their greatest secrets and most profound contradictions.

I view *realismo mágico* as a trope for reading and representing the discontinuous and contradictory narratives of Latin American history and culture as manifested through representations of the body and language. As *mestizaje* is both a somatic materiality and a trope for representing cultural, linguistic, historical and racial hybridities, it is through the interstices of text and body that Latin America culture can be represented. For the "reality" of Latin America is not one, but is many. As such, *realismo mágico* is necessarily a space of polysemous realities where contested topographies, confused temporalities, violent conquests, unevoked races, and an array of other narratives (which contradict all the above) endlessly engage each other. The "magical" part of this "reality" lies in the polysemous nature of representation that incorporates language and the body within the cultural tropes of: romanticism and violence, discovery and murder, pure and impure, active and passive, life and death, and masculine and feminine. The literature of Latin America from the Conquest

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

through the present day evidences these contradictions in the polysemous constructions of body and language that invigorate identity as always fragmented, disrupted, complex and representative of the various discourses emanating from the *mestizaje* of cultures and bodies.

As such, the language of representation has never really been "transparent" in Latin America, for even the earliest accounts of the Conquest are replete with instances of mistaken identity and performances of "crossing" identity. Therefore, delineating homogeneous notions of racial, gender, or sexual identity becomes an impossible task since the multifarious texts and bodies evidence excess and confusion as the basis for what is a heterogeneous field of meanings, the *neobarroco*, of Latin America. For instance, there are many textual and somatic "crossings" in the many accounts of the Conquest of Mexico which have entered into the cultural mythology of Mexico. For example, Hernán Cortés' *Cartas de relación* gives the following description of Cortés' first encounter with Montezuma:

> [E]el dicho Mutezuma venía por medio de la calle con dos señores, el uno a la mano derecha y el otro a la izquierda, de los cuales el uno era aquel señor grande que dije que me había salido a hablar en las andas y el otro era su hermano del dicho Mutezuma, señor de aquella ciudad de Iztapalapa de donde yo aquel día había partido, todos tres vestidos de una manera, excepto el Mutezuma que iba calzado, y los otros dos señores descalzos; cada uno lo llevaba de su brazo, y como nos juntamos, yo me apeé y le fuí a abrazar solo, y aquellos dos señores que con él iban, me detuvieron con las manos para que no le tocase, y ellos y el hicieron asimismo ceremonia de besar la tierra, y hecha, mandó a quel su hermano que venía con él que se quedase conmigo y me llevase por el brazo, y él con el otro se iba adelante de mí poquito trecho. Y después de me haber él hablado, vinieron asimismo a me hablar todos los otros señores que iban en las dos procesiones, en orden uno en pos de otro, y luego se tornaban a su procesión; y al tiempo que yo llegué a hablar al dicho Mutezuma, quitéme un collar que llevaba de margaritas y diamantes de vidrio y se lo eché al cuello; y después de haber andado la calle adelante, vino un servidor suyo con dos collares de camarones envueltos en un paño, que eran hechos de huesos de caracoles colorados, que ellos tienen en mucho, y de cada collar colgaban ocho camarones de oro de mucha perfección, tan largos casi como un

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> geme, y como se los trajeron se volvió a mí y me los echó al cuello. Y tornó a seguir por la calle en la forma ya dicha hasta llegar a una muy grande y hermosa casa que él tenía para nos aposentar, bien aderezada. Y allí me tornó de la mano y me llevó a una gran sala que estaba frontera del patio por donde entramos, y allí me hizo sentar en un estrado muy rico que para él lo tenía mandado hacer, y me dijo que le esperase allí, y él se fué... Demás de esto, me dió el dicho Mutezuma mucha ropa de la suya, que era tal, que considerada ser toda de algodón y sin seda, en todo el mundo no se podía hacer ni tejer otra tal ni de tantas ni tan diversos y naturales colores ni labores; en que había ropas de hombres y de mujeres muy maravillosas, y había paramentos para camas, que hechos de seda no se podían comparar; y había otros paños como de tapicería que podían servir en salas y en iglesias; había colchas y cobertores de camas, así de pluma como de algodón, de diversos colores asimismo muy maravillosos, y otras muchas cosas que por ser tantas y tales no las sé significar a vuestra majestad (pp. 51-61).

And Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la nueva españa* give the following account of the same event:

> E como Cortés vio y entendió e le dijeron que venía el gran Montezuma, se apeó del caballo, y desque llegó cerca de Montezuma, a una se hicieron grandes acatos: el Montezuma le dio el bien venido, e nuestro Cortés le respondió con doña Marina que él fuese el muy bien estado. E paréce me que el Cortés con la lengua doña Marina, que iba junto a Cortés, le daba la mano derecha, y el Montezuma no la quiso e se la dio a Cortés; y entonces sacó Cortés un collar que traía muy a mano de unas piedras de vidrio, que ya he dicho que se dicen margajitas, que tienen dentro muchos colores e diversidad de labores, y venía ensartado en unos cordones de oro con almizcle porque diesen buen olor, y se le echó al cuello al gran Montezuma; y cuando se lo puso le iba a abrazar, y aquellos grandes señores que iban con el Montezuma detuvieron el brazo a Cortés que no le abrazase, porque lo tenían por menosprecio; y luego Cortés con la lengua doña Marina le dijo que holgaba ahora su corazón en haber visto un tan gran príncipe, y que le tenía en gran merced la venida de su persona a le recibir y las mercedes que le hace a la continua (p. 178).

Indeed, the fascinating and complex contradictions within Mexican culture today may very well have their origins in the many conflicting versions of Mexican history as demonstrated by these two texts. In Cortés' account of his meeting with Montezuma, we are given certain "facts": the ceremonious entry of Montezuma with his courtiers; their ritual kissing of the earth; Cortés' reception of Montezuma and his brother; Cortés' removal of his daisies and colored glass

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

necklace in order to put this around Montezuma's neck; the presentation of two shell and gold necklaces to Cortés by a courtier of Montezuma who then proceeded to put these necklaces on Cortés' neck; and Montezuma's presentation of his clothes to Cortés. However, in Bernal Díaz de Castillo's version of this story we are given a very different picture: Cortés approaches Montezuma; he responds to Montezuma through his interpreter, doña Marina (also known as La Malinche); Cortés extends his hand to Montezuma who refuses it and in turn extends his hand; Cortés pulls out a necklace made of colored stones called "margajitas" which he puts around the Montezuma's neck and then in going to embrace Montezuma he is stopped by Montezuma's courtiers; and finally, through the "tongue of" doña Marina, Cortés bids Montezuma farewell. Suffice it to say that the details, the characters involved, the sequence and actions of events, and the interlocutors of these two narratives vary greatly. In the version recounted by Cortés, for instance, he does even mention La Malinche's presence in this most important first meeting. This omission renders Cortés' account of the events problematic, to say the least, since he always speaks and acts through the first-person in his exchanges with Montezuma in this first meeting ("yo llegué a hablar al dicho Mutezuma"), despite the fact that in 1519 Cortés spoke no Nahuatl and was always accompanied by La Malinche, his translator and lover according to many other documents. However, in the second account, Díaz demonstrates a Montezuma who is much more resilient to the Conquistadores: he is portrayed as someone who proudly refuses the "kindness" of the Spaniards and who is guarded carefully by his loyal subjects. However, given the numerous other accounts of the Conquest in which Montezuma is essentially rendered a coward at best and many of his followers felt betrayed by Montezuma's cooperation

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with the Conquistadores, this account leaves many questions.

Obviously all the accounts of the Conquest of Mexico differ substantially and it is certainly not my intention to discuss here the verisimilitudes and fabrications of each account. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the contradictory constructions of history in texts such as these serve to locate *mestizaje* of Latin American identity through both what is written and what is omitted from the text. The historical chronicles of the Conquest of Mexico are replete with mistaken identities, gender "reversals", misnamed characters, absent bodies, fictional identities, and the conflation of mythical and real persons into one personage through the textual schizophrenia of identity. Ultimately, the textual inscriptions of the Conquest and Aztec cosmology are the paradigmatic basis for *realismo mágico* evidenced by the discursive positioning and naming of the body, gender and sexuality within the cultural inscriptions of identity prior to and just after the Conquest of Mexico. For example, in these above interpretations of the encounter between Cortés and Montezuma we can notice that who speaks to whom, and who approaches whom, is diametrically inverted in both accounts: in the version written by Cortés, Montezuma approaches him and in Díaz's narration Cortés approaches Montezuma. These might seem like very minor differences, but they symbolically frame the way that both Cortés and Montezuma are viewed as historical subjects. Rereading these textual and oral traditions verify that no historical consensus is really possible and that the myriad interpretations of Cortés, Quetzalcóatl, Montezuma, and La Malinche demonstrate the body and narrative as the interdependent loci of a Mexican national identity that will forever remain fragmentary, interrupted, contrariant, and somehow always quite *unreal*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Let us first examine Hernando Cortés whose arrival in Mexico in 1519 was subject to a myriad of theories, myths and negations. As Tzvetan Todorov notes in his well-known study of this subject, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, the myth of Quetzalcoatl's return to Mexico[6] is not a simple question of Cortés being "in the right place at the right time", but rather is about how his presence in Mexico effected the differing versions and reinscriptions of this myth. Todorov differentiates between the older myths of Quetzalcóatl's role as "secondary and his role uncertain" and those which frame his return as certain and primary, such as this account by Fray Bernardino Sahagún, which confirm that Quetzalcóatl was to return to regain his kingdom after having left Mexico disappearing into the East many years before:

> Como hubo oído Moctezuma[7] las nuevas de los que vinieron de la mar, mandó luego llamar al más principal de ellos, que llamaba Cuextécatl, y los demás que habían venido con la mensajería. Y mandólos que pusiesen guardas y atalayas en todas las estancias de la ribera de la mar: la una se llamaba Naulitlantoztlan, otra, Mictlancuactla, para que mirasen cuando volviesen aquellos navíos, para que luego diesen relación. Con esto se partieron los *calpixques* o capitanes, y mandaron luego poner atalayas en dichas estancias. Y Moctezuma juntó luego sus principales, los más privados, y les comunicó las nuevas que habían llegado, y mostróles las cuentas de vidrio que habían traído los mensajeros, y dijoles: "Paréceme que son piedras preciosas. Guárdense mucho en la recámara; no se pierda ninguna. Y, si alguna se perdiere, pagarla han los que tienen cargo de guardar la recámara.' Desde ahí a un año, en el año de trece conejos, vieron en la mar navíos los que estaban en las atalayas, y luego vinieron a dar noticia a

---

[6] Todorov states: "The story of Quetzalcoatl's return to Mexico is more complex, and its consequences more important. Here, in a few words, are the facts. According to Indian accounts from before the conquest, Quetzalcoatl is a figure at once historical (a leader) and legendary (a divinity). At a given moment, he is forced to leave his kingdom and flee to the east (toward the Atlantic); he vanishes but, according to certain versions of the myth, he promises (or threatens) to return some day to reclaim his own...The Indian accounts of the conquest, especially those collected by Sahagún and Durán, tell us that Montezuma identified Cortés as Quetzalcoatl returning to recover his kingdom; this indentification is given as one of the chief reasons for Montezuma's failure to resist the Spanish advance" (p. 117).

[7] Moctezuma is also spelled Montezuma, depending on the text and transliteration. There are also several other variations not used here.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Moctezuma con gran prisa. Como oyó la nueva Moctezuma, despachó a gente para el recibimiento de Quetzalcóatl, porque pensó que era él quien venía, porque cada día le estaban esperando. Y, como tenía relación que Quetzalcóatl había ido por la mar hacia el oriente y los navíos venían de hacia el oriente, por esto pensaron que era él. Envió cinco principales que le recibiesen y le presentasen un gran presente que le envió (*Códice florentino*, Book xii, Chapter iii, p. 230).

Sahagún's account clearly evidences the "anticipation" of Quetzalcóatl's return, although Todorov's study makes this assumption paradoxical by positing Cortés, his physical being, as the force that " effects a synthesis of varying data".[8] As such, Cortés' body is the literal corpus upon which myth, fantasy and fiction are projected in the textual and cultural interpretations of the Conquest. Yet, Todorov later in his study maintains that Cortés no longer took on the identity of the other (Montezuma) somatically, but did so metaphorically. Todorov's separation between the metaphorical and the "real", however, problematically negates the connections between the metaphoric and the physical in Latin America that are important factors the cosmology and cultural beliefs.[9] Not only does Todorov

---

[8] Todorov dellineates the contradictory accounts of Quetzalcóatl's return, epitomizing this "myth" upon the physical presence, the body, of Cortés: "The Indian accounts of the conquest, especially those collected by Sahagún and Durán, tell us that Montezuma identified Cortés as Quetzalcoatl returning to recover his kingdom; this identification is given as one of the chief reasons for Montezuma's failure to resist the Spanish advance. We cannot question the authenticity of accounts which report what the priests' informants believed. The notion of an identity between Quetzalcoatl and Cortés certainly existed in the years immediately following the conquest, as is also attested by the sudden recrudescence of cult objects linked to Quetzalcoatl. But there is an obvious hiatus between these two states of the myth: the old version, in which Quetzalcoatl's role is secondary and his return uncertain; and the new one, in which Quetzalcoatl is dominant and his return absolutely certain. Some force must have interved to hasten this transformation. This force has a name: Cortés, who effects a synthesis of varying data. The radical difference between Spaniards and Indians, and the relative ignorance of other civilizations on the part of the Aztecs led, as we have seen, to the notion that the Spaniards were Gods. But which gods? Here Cortés must have provided the missing link, converting the rather marginal myth into a myth of Quetzalcoatl's return—perfectly adapted to the language of the Other" (p. 117).

[9] Todorov states: "Cortés slips into the other's kin, but in a metaphoric and no longer a literal fashion: the difference is considerable. Thereby he ensures himself an understanding of the other's language and a knowledge of the other's political organization (whence his interest in the Aztecs' internal dissension), and he even

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fail to understand the degree to which metaphor and corporeality are completed interrelated—inseparable even—, but he negates that the creation of the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return might very much be part of an *en*gendering of Conquest that occurs throughout these accounts.

For instance, while Todorov discusses the way in which Montezuma was effeminized in a famous encounter in which Cuauhtémoc calls Montezuma a "woman of the Spaniards":

> The worst insult, then, that can be addressed to a man is to treat him as a woman; on one occasion, the enemy warriors are forced to don women's clothes, for they have not accepted the challenge and fought...Tovar reports a revealing scene, from the period of the conquest, when Cuauhtemoc, the incarnation of warrior values, attacks Montezuma, whose passivity identifies him with the woman. Montezuma speaks to his people from the terrace of the palace, where he is kept prisoner by the Spaniards. He had no sooner finished than a brave captain, eighteen years of age, named Cuauhtemoc, whom they already wished to choose for their king, shouted out: "What matters what that coward Montezuma says, that woman of the Spaniards, for, such we can call him, since he has surrendered himself like a woman, out of fear , and given us over to them bound hand and foot, and thus drawn all the evils upon us" (pp. 91-92).

Given his astute critique of the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return early on in his study, I wonder why Todorov fails later to analyze the specific metaphor of Conquest presented by Tovar: the "effemininate", "passive" object of Conquest, Montezuma. Aside from Tovar's text, many narratives of the Conquest evidence the active/passive matrix inherent within this specific encounter, framing the Conquest through tropes of gender and sexuality in an surprisingly conspicuous fashion. Curiously, however, Todorov limits his analysis to questions such as the proliferation of the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return and whether or not this myth

---

masters the emission of messages in an appropriate code: hence he manages to pass himself off as Quetzalcoatl returned to earth. But in so doing he has never abandoned his feeling of superiority; it is even his very capacity to understand the other that confirms him in that feeling" (p. 248).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was "really" believed by the Aztecs. As the story of the Conquest is just as much about the written narratives as it is about the myths, stories and other "untruths" told throughout time, it is curious that the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return to earth would somehow provide more of a "logic" for Montezuma's actions than, the various inscriptions of his person as being "womanly". Indeed, to position the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return as the "reason" behind the Spanish defeat of the Aztecs is to resist the personification of Montezuma as a passive leader, as a figure who let the Spanish "dominate him", just as eliding this myth has resulted in interpretations that read Montezuma "like a woman" or passive. Certainly, the belief of the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return as "true" would lend to the reading that Montezuma was not a passive leader who surrendered his empire to Cortés and would instead render Montezuma a leader who was faithful to tradition and cultural myth. Yet, Todorov conveniently fails to consider that the fluctuations in the representations of Montezuma lead to various interpretations of his person—for those who offer the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return, Montezuma is not depicted as "passive" and in those texts where this myth is not mentioned, he is depicted as a rather weak and "womanly" leader. It is important to note that the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return was not only a belief held by Montezuma, but was, according to many records of the Conquest, held by many, to include the very first *calpizque* who saw the Spanish.[10] Hence, utilizing this myth in

---

[10] Sahagún writes of this first encounter in the *Códice florentino*, Book, xii, Chapter ii: "La primera señal fue que aparecieron navíos en la costa de esta Nueva España. Los capitanes de Moctezuma, que se llamaban *caplixques*, que estaban cerca de la costa, fueron a ver qué era aquello que venía, pues nunca habían visto navíos; uno de ellos fue el *calpixque* de Cuextecatl que se llamaba Pinotl. Llevaba consigo a otros *calpixque* de Cuextecatl que se llamaba Pinotl. Llevaba consigo a otros *calpixques*: uno que se llamaba Yaotzin, que residía en el pueblo de Mictlanquauhtla; y otro que se llamaba Teozinzocatl, que residía en el pueblo de Teociniocan; y otro que se llamaba Cuitlalpitoc: éste no era *calpixque*, sino criado de uno de estos *calpixques* y

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

order to understand Montezuma's person would be quite simplistic since, according to many of the texts of the Conquest, these were cultural constructions which were believed by the people and not only ordained by the leadership. Finally and more importantly perhaps, Todorov's analysis completely elides any questioning as to *why* these texts might attempt to portray Montezuma as a passive leader. It seems that there is certainly a sexual unconscious in these texts which represent the domination of the other and there seems to be an almost conscious effort to make Montezuma the sexually passive object.

As I spiral out these various readings of this history inscribed by Cortés, Sahagún, Díaz, and Tovar which are replete with references to Montezuma's "femininity", imbuing further readings laden with implicit readings of passive sexual roles, I begin to question these representations of gender and sexual metaphors as having anything to do with Aztec notions of power and disempowerment. While these metaphors are certainly present in the texts I have cited, we must remember that these texts were written by western informants (though Sahagún was to have worked with the indigenous in writing his account) who were making culturally specific conclusions to the Conquest itself. For what we know of Aztec cosmology, unlike European beliefs at the time, is that identity is quite often doubled, and this is especially true with the understanding of Quetzalcóatl, the deity Cortés was allegedly mistaken to be.

---

principalejo; y otro principalejo que se llamaba Tentlil. Estos cinco fueron a ver qué cosa era aquello, y llevaban algunas cosas para venderlas, so color de ver qué cosa era aquélla. Llevárонlos algunas mantas ricas que sólo Moctezuma las usaba; ningún otro tenía licencia para usarlas. Entraron en unas canoas y fueron a los navíos. Dijeron entre sí: "Estamos aquí en guarda de esta costa, conviene que sepamos de cierto qué es esto para que llevemos la nueva cierta a Moctezuma. Entraron luego en las canoas y comenzaron a remar hacia los navíos. Y, como llegaron junto a los navíos y vieron a los españoles, besaron todos las proas de las canoas en señal de adoración. Pensaron que era el dio Quetzalcóatl que volvía, al cual estaban y están esperando, según parece en la historia de este dios" (pp. 228-229).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In her study of Tenochtitlan, the center of the Aztec empire that fell to Cortés in 1521, Inga Clendinnen's study, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, opens up this argument of gender completely as she demonstrates that Aztec cosmology embraces androgynous and hermaphrodite deities, such as Tlacatecutli, the Earth Lord who could be either male or female. Clendinnen points to a "doubleness" of identity which "obscured not only sexual roles, but sexual difference" and where western notions of "opposition" or binaries "waver and melt into one another".[11] Clendinnen also recounts story of creation in which Quetzalcoatl accidently mixes the sexes, produces a universe of magical confusions, where the sexes, though separate, inevitably share the same bodily matter, and even then, the same body:

> The "creation of humankind" story best known among the Mexica gives little indication of male priority. Four worlds and their peoples had been destroyed before the making of this our "Fifth World," created through Tezcatlipoca's and Quetzalcoatl's manhandling of the androgynous Earth Montster. Then Quetzalcoatl ventured into the domans of the Lord of the Dead to gather up the human bones of an earlier creation. Initially the bones were kept separate, "the bones of the man...together on one

---

[11] Clendinnen specifies the roles of the deities and their genders: "Earth and water-related deities were androgynous, or, more precisely, could be invoked in either gender identity, as with "Tlacatecutli", which we translate as "Earth Lord", but who was apostrophized sometimes as male, sometimes as female. The Earth Monstre, typically invoked as female, could also be regarded as male. Others were represented as gender-twinned: Xochiquetzal and Xochipilli, Chalchihuitlicue and Tlaloc. The maize, whose life parabola was so closely identified with humans, changed sex in mid-course, with Xilonen, goddess of the young maize when the cob was slender, the kernals milky and the corn-tassel long and silky, becoming Centeotl, Young Lord Maize Cob, as the cob swelled and hardened. Nonetheless Centeotl, apparently so unquivically male, was on occasions addressed as female. The aggressively virile Huaxtec attendants of Toci in the festival of Ochpaniztli carried not only their erect penises before them, but also cottom blossoms and spindles with unspun cotton: female identifiers par excellence. Female deitities could be accoutred as *warriors*, with shields, eagle feathers and hero-feather sprays juxtaposed with their insignia as women. This doubleness obscured not only sexual roles, but sexual difference. In a world so comprehended, our notions of "opposition", or even of "duality" waver and melt one into another. Relationships were revealed not thorugh differentiation, but through permutations and transformations, and spoke more clearly of connection than opposition" (p. 168).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> side, and the bones of the woman...together on the one side". But in his flight from the Death Lord's anger Quetzalcoatl stumbled and dropped the bones, which shattered. He snatched up the fragments (so presumably mingling them) and took them to Cihuacoatl, "Woman Snake", representing Earth Lady and all her vegetable abundance, who ground them into a fine mean on her maize-grinding stone. Then it was the turn of the male gods, led by Quetzalcoatl, to make their contribution, drawing blood from their penises to moisten the ground bones. A man and a woman took form from the dough (p. 173).

The imagery of bodies who bones are spilled and shattered, inextricably mixed for eternity which are then fragmented once again as if corn only to return to the earth by virtue of male god's "menstrual blood" bringing to life the form of man and woman renders vivid a world in which gender is constantly traversed, interchanged, destroyed, and contradicted. Indeed, gender and sex are seemingly mystical spaces of destruction through which the somatic is a residue of a long and complex process that involves not only other bodies, but the entire cosmos of imagined and real elements through which the body—both real and metaphorical—is constructed.

Given this contradictory and fragmentary nature of gender in Aztec belief, I find these narratives of the Conquest which position gender and sexual metaphors of domination/submission and active/passive highly suspect as intercultural and intersomatic representations of the events following 1519. If anything, it is due to the fact that Aztec cosmology is so complex and beautifully contradictory in and of its own rich structure—even prior to the Conquest—that the tales of the Conquest such as those above survived within the cultural economy of symbols, language, memory and history. These tales of Conquest, when set alongside the Aztec religion and mythology, make up another body of mythology that takes its place among the many already existent stories of the Aztec empire. In essence, the heterogeneity of stories and forms of narrativizing identity prior to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Conquest, already encompassed possible other narratives of destruction and death. For even before the Spaniards conquered Mexico, there were already many stories of death and even suicide among the Aztec deities in which the body is the site of it own destruction, creation and revealing.

There are two significant stories that demonstrate the way in which the body in Aztec culture is simultaneously a rhetorical and figurative space which is likewise the site for contradictory readings of identity. The first is the legend of the fifth sun wherein Xólotl,[12] the "deformed" twin of Quetzalcóatl (god of wind), must die in order to save the god Nanhuatzin and Tecuciztécatl who had allegedly thrown themselves onto a fire in Teotihuacán, a sacred Aztec city. Thus the air kills the other gods, but when it comes to kill Xólotl, he refuses death, crying for his life. So he fled and hid in cornfields where he transformed himself into a twin-staled corn plant, which is also called *xólotli.* Later he fled and transformed himself into a twin-bodied *maguey,* also called *mexólotl.* Then he escaped to the water where he made himself into an *axólotl,* a fish, from where he was taken and killed. Yet, there is another ending to this story which Roger Bartra in *The Cage of Melancholy* tells:

> There is another version of this myth, which some historians consider older, in which Xólotl superintended the sacrifice of the gods, cleaving their breasts with a knife before killing himself. The two versions of the

---

[12] Emanuela Monaco writes of the transformative powers fo Xólotl: "Nel *Codice Borgia* Quetzalcoatl si trasforma in Xolotl-Nanahuatzin; di fatto è generalmente riconosciuta la possibilità di una identificazione tra queste entità (Xolotl, rappresentando l'aspetto vespertino di Venere, era ritenuto gemello di Quetzalcoatl), sicché potremmo considerarli, secondo l'uso, "doppi" di Quetzalcoatl e risolvere in immediato il quesito aperto precedentemente. Come Tonacatecutli e Tonacacihuatl innescarono il processo di formazione del reale attraverso la generazione del reale attraverso la generazione delle quattro divinità, e dunque con il passaggio dal due al quattro, così il Tonacatepetl può essere "sgranato" per l'umanità allorché l'azione di Quetzal-coatl è prolungata in quella del suo "doppio" (dunque, anche qui, con il passaggio dal due al quattro)" (p. 216).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> legend appear to be incompatible. Recall, however, that Xólotl is an incarnation or double of Quetzalcóatl, god of wind, and, in the first version, it is precisely the air (Ehécatl) which kills the gods (and gives life to the sun), while in the second version it is Xólotl himself, twin of Quetzalcóatl, who sacrifices the gods (pp. 69-70).

So, not only are there two versions that contradict each other, they also, in an irony of naming, confirms that Xólotl, metaphorically kills himself in the first story and literally does so in the second. Moreso, these stories render the body of Xólotl contiguous metaphorical and somatic constructions, for Xólotl, in refusing death, is affirming his somatic life while negating the spiritual while in finally dying is accessing the spiritual while negating the physical. Yet, in every one of his evasions from death, Xólotl reincarnates himself in life—the *xólotli*, the *mexólotl*, and the *axóltl*, which are not only the incarnations of his body but are also Xólotl's embodiment within language as his name is contained within these words. We can see how the circularity of meaning from body to re-embodiment as flora and fauna, to yet another re-embodiment as language, reflects itself both as metaphor and the many intersecting, multicorporeal and intertextual *reals* within this narrative.

And in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, we have a complex story following the death of Quetzalcóatl in 2 actl, where Tezcatlipoca, Ihuimecatl and Toltecatl decide to conspire against Quetzalcóatl for not having made enough human sacrifices. So, after preparing pulque (*maguey* wine), these gods get Quetzalcóatl drunk and then Tezcatlipoca decides to show Quetzalcóatl his body by presenting him with a mirror. Upon seeing himself in the mirror—warts on his eyelids, bags under his eyes, and the face all swollen—Quetzalcóatl is shocked and calls upon Ihuimecatl who soon sends a craftsman of feathers, Coyotlinahual. Making first the set of feathers and a green mask, Coyotlinahual then painted

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Quetzalcóatl's lips vermilion and his face yellow with additional feathers. Then they showed Quetzalcóatl his face and he was quite content with the results. This story evidences yet another interesting *dédoublement* of identity and *engaño:* for Quetzalcóatl is allegedly disembodied in this story, yet as we find out later, he is actually not deprived of his body, but merely is deprived of a beautiful body. And then when the other gods attempt to trick Quetzalcóatl in order to punish him for his lack of sacrifices, they offer him *his body,* which is to say, the mirror. And it is through the God's showing him the mirror that Quetzalcóatl understands himself to have a body. In other words, Quetzalcóatl is endowed his body by virtue of the "offer" language, which is confirmed with the visual reproduction of himself in this mirror. Then the *engaño* multiplies in its effects and defects, for as the initial stage of the god's plan functioned—for Quetzalcóatl was truly dismayed by seeing his body—, the second part of the plan boomeranged. In trying to destroy his body by making it ridiculous and obscene, the revenge of Tezcatlipoca, Ihuimecatl and Toltecatl has the very opposite effect. The body these gods "give" Quetzalcóatl ends up becoming a transformative body of excess and beauty, resulting in Quetzalcóatl's pleasure. Here the body is both ugly and baroque, invisible and visible, dead and alive, and ultimately, the body of Quetzalcóatl is a transgressive body of gender that moves between the ugliness that is often associated with masculinity and the feminine beauty of his transvestite, *neobarroco* metamorphosis.

Like the previous two characters, Montezuma presents many complexities in the many layers of representations that have traversed the literary corpus of interpretations and rereadings of Montezuma's place in history. As discussed earlier, the portrayal of Montezuma has been of great contention in Mexican

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

history for the cultural mythology of Montezuma demonstrates him as a cowardly leader who does not have the capacity to communicate with the *conquistadores* and who, in essence, hand Mexico over to Cortés. Certainly, in Mexican popular culture it is not Montezuma who is considered the hero of the Conquista but Cuauhtémoc, the Aztec leader who fought the Spaniards rather than negotiate with them.[13] The perceived "cowardice" of Montezuma can been seen by his reticence to meet directly with Cortés as demonstrated by the many accounts which demonstrate him refusing the mere mentioning of the Spaniards. In fact, the idea of meeting Cortés in the early days of the Conquest was not considered at all by Montezuma as there as most narratives depict Montezuma as silencing his subjects who would suggest that he meet these strangers. In fact, Montezuma held the first witness under guard after having reported to Montezuma the Spaniards' arrival. To avoid contact with Cortés, Montezuma initially sent envoys bearing treasures so as to send the visitors on their way or encourage them to hasten their departure.[14] Indeed, Sahagún notes in the *Códice florentino*

---

[13] As Todorov theorizes the reasons behind Cuauhtemoc's capture as related to the codes and emblems surrounding his person, it would seem quite a paradox that Cuauhtemoc is viewed as any better a communicator than Montezuma given that the way in which he is captured is due to his inability to understand the very signs with which he indicates his "royal" presence to the *conquistadores:* "Montezuma himself surrenders precious information to his jailers, and if Cuauhtemoc is captured, it is because he tries to escape in a boat richly decorated with royal emblems. We know that this is no accident. An entire chapter of the Florentine Codex is devoted to the "ornaments used by the kings in warfare", and the least we can say is that these decorations are not particularly discreet: "They wore the costly red spoonbill headdress, set off with gold, having very many quetzal feathers flaring from it, and with it, borne upon his back, the skin drum, upon a carrying frame and decorated with gold. And they dressed him in a red shirt, made of red spoonbill feathers, decorated with flint knives fashioned with gold; and his skirt of sapote leaves was set all about with quetzal feathers. The shield was ringed with thin gold, and its pendants were made of precious feathers.' We are also told, in the book devoted to the conquest, of the exploits of the warrior Tzilacatzin; the latter disguised himself in a thousand ways in order to deceive the Spaniards;

[14] Sahagún writes of one such incident: "Comenzaron a subir al navío por las escaleras, y llevaban el presente que Moctezuma les mandó llevar. Como estuvieron delante de

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that the Conquistadores were far more interested in gaining material possessions than in "exchanging" gifts or information. But, as Todorov notes, these gifts had the opposite effect and only enticed the Spaniards to stay and, in most every account of the Conquest, Montezuma is certainly viewed as the major figure who might have unknowingly encouraged the Spaniards to stay.

Yet Todorov demonstrates Montezuma is a leader who is made effeminate in accounts such as Tovar's. Likewise, Montezuma is the object of many possible threats and acts of violence during the first year of the Conquista. For instance, in Díaz' account of the conquest Montezuma is the object of treason by the Cholutecas and in Cortés' account, Cholula is attacked by the Conquistadores assisted by Tlaxcaltecas, grave enemies of the Cholutecas, who were easily befriended by Cortés.[15] Even upon hearing the news of the Massacre of Cholula,

---

don Hernando Cortés, besaron todos la tierra en su presencia y hablaron de esta manera: "Sepa el dios a quien venimos a adorar en persona de su siervo Moctezuma, el cual rige y gobierna la ciudad de México, y dice: Ha llegado con trabajo el dios.' Y luego sacaron los ornamentos que llevaban y se los pusieron al capitán don Hernando Cortés, ataviándole con ellos. Pusieron primeramente la corona y máscara que arriba se dijo, y todo lo demás Echáronle al cuello los collares de piedras con los joyeles de oro. Pusiéronle en el brazo izquierdo la rodela que se dijo arriba, y todas las demás cosas las pusieron ante él ordenadas, como suelen poner sus presentes. El capitán dijo: '¿Hay otra cosa más que esto?' Dijéronle: "Señor nuestro, no hemos traído más cosas que éstas que aquí están.' El capitán mandóles luego atar y mandó soltar tiros de artillería, y los mensajeros que estaban atados de pies y manos, como oyeron los estruenos de las bombardas, cayeron al suelo como muertos, y los españoles levantáronlos del suelo y diéronles de beber vino con que los esforzaron y tornaron en sí" (pp. 233-234).

[15] Díaz tells of what happened in Cholula with Montezuma's embassadors: "Y que con los embajadores de Montezuma disimulásemos, y les dijésemos que los malos de *los* cholutecas han querido hacer una traición y echar la culpa della a su señor Montezuma, e a ellos mismos como sus embajadores; lo cual no creíamos que tal mandase hacer, y que les rogábamos que se estuvieran en el aposento *de nuestro capitán*, e no tuviesen más platica con los de aquella ciudad, porque no nos den que pensar que andan juntamente con ellos en las traiciones, y que se vayan con nosotros a México por guías; y respondieron que ellos ni su señor Montezuma no saben cosa ninguna de lo que les dicen; y aunque no quisieron, les pusimos guardas porque no se fuesen sin licencia y porque no supiese Montezuma no saben cosa ninguna de lo que les dicen; y aunque no quisieron, les pusimos guardas porque no se fuesen sin licencia y porque no supiese Montezuma que nosotros sabíamos que él era quien lo había mandado hacer; e aquella noche estuvimos muy apercibidos y armados, y los caballos ensillados y

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

according to Díaz' account, Montezuma does not react with the violence one might expect from an Aztec leader, but instead placates the matter using words rather than action:

> Y como Montezuma oyó esta embajada, y entendió que por lo de Cholula no le poníamos culpa, oímos decir que tornó a entrar con sus papas en ayunos en sacrificios que hicieron a sus ídolos, para que se tornase a ratificar que si no dejaría entrar en su ciudad o no, y si se lo tornaba a mandar, como le había dicho otra vez. Y la repuesta que les tornó a dar fue como la primera, y que de hecho nos deje entrar, y que dentro nos mataría a su voluntad (p. 168).

Indeed, many of the accounts of Montezuma meeting Cortés demonstrate his fear of the *conquistadores* and his reticence to meet directly with them. For Montezuma was known, in the initial months of the Conquest, to cover his ears when the Spaniards were mentioned. And in many accounts, Montezuma avoids confronting the Spaniards by sending emissaries who speak for him. In the

---

enfrenados, con grandes velas y rondas, que esto siempre lo teníamos de costumbre, porque tuvimos por cierto que todas las capitanías, así de mexicanos como de cholultecas, que aquella noche habían de dar sobre nosotros; y una india vieja, mujer de un cacique, como sabía el concierto y trama que tenían ordenado, vino secretamente a doña Marina, nuestra lengua, y como la vio moza y de buen parecer y rica le dijo y aconsejó que se fuese con ella a su casa si quería escapar con vida, porque ciertamente aquella noche o otro día nos habían de matar a todos, porque ya estaba así entre los de aquella ciudad y los mexicanos se juntasen, y no quedase ninguno de nosotros a vida, o nos llevasen atados a México..." (pp. 161-162). And here, Cortés notes how the Tlaxcaltecas, "los amigos nuestros", helped in the Massacre of Cholula: "Los capitanes y la gente que con ellos se halló, eleaban tan bien y esforzadamente, que no les podían entrar el aposento, puesto que eran pocos; porque, demás de pelear ellos como valientes hombres, el posento era muy fuerte; y como yo llegué luego entramos, y entró tanta gente de los naturales de la ciudad, que en ninguna manera los podíamos socorrer, que muy brevemente no fuesen muertos...Y así cayeron muchos de ellos muertos y ahogados de la calor, sin herida ninguna, y dos caballos se ancaron y el uno murió. Y de esta manera hicimos mucho daño, porque ocurrieron muchos indios de los amigos nuestros, y como iban descansados, y los contrarios casi muertos, mataron muchos. Por manera que en poco rato estaba el campo vacío de los vivos, aunque de los muertos algo ocupado; y llegamos a los aposentos y albergues que tenían hechos en el campo nuevamente, que en tres partes que estaban, parecían cada una de ella una razonable villa, porque, demás de la gente de guerra, tenían mucho aparato de servidores y fornecimiento para su real, porque, según después supe, en ellos había personas principales; lo cual fué todo despojado y quemado por los indios nuestros amigos, y certifico a vuestra sacra majestad que había ya juntos de los dichos nuestros amigos más de cien mil hombres" (pp. 91-92).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

following account, Sahagún tells of a "false" Montezuma who is sent to meet the Spaniards:

> Y, como vieron al principal Tzioacpupuca, preguntaron a los que con ellos venían, tlaxcaltecas y zempoaltecas, secretamente, si era aquél Moctezuma. Y dijéronles que no era él, que era un principal suyo, que se llamaba Tzioacpupuca. Y después preguntaron al mismo principal si era él Moctezuma, y dijo que sí, que él era Moctezuma, y dijéronle: "Vete de ahí, que mientes, que no eres Moctezuma. ¿Piensas engañarnos? ¿Piensas que somos unos necios? No podrás engañarnos, ni Moctezuma se nos podrá esconder or mucho que haga; aunque sea ave, y aunque se meta debajo la tierra, no se nos podrá esconder. De verle hemos y de oír hemos lo que nos dirá (*Códice florentino*, Book xii, Chapter xii, pp. 240-241).

Montezuma, in the body of Tzioacpupuca, is realized symbolically but transformed into farce, demythologized as power, when the Spaniards recognize that they are not facing the Aztec ruler, but a "counterfeit". During the Conquest, however, bodies are constantly rendered false and then true again—dissimulation of identity is a quite common tactic in dealing with the uncertain and in making one familiar with the other. For as Clendinnen demonstrates, Montezuma was like invested in bringing the Spaniards under both political and cognitive control—I would certainly stress the latter. Just as he was interested in learning more about these strangers before meeting them, Montezuma even sent painters to the coast to paint the Spaniards only to find that a Mexica lord resembled Cortés. It is because of this painting that Montezuma sends Quintalbor to the coast to test this verisimilitude upon the Spaniards.[16] Thus, Montezuma's body is both

---

[16] Clendinnen writes of Montezuma's attempt to understand who the Spaniards are by having their appearances painted: "Acting on his conviction of the revelatory power of appearances, he had sent skilled painters to the Spanish encampment on the beach to record what they saw: "the face and countenance and body and features of Cortéz and all the captains and soldiers, also the ships, sails, and horses, and Doña Marina and Aguilar, and even the two greyhounds, the cannon and cannon-balls, and the whole of our amry", as Díaz remembered. it was recognized from the paintings that a Mexica lord, "Quintalbor" in the Spanish rendering of it, bore an uncanny resemblance to Cortés: he was sent with the ambassadors on their return to the coast to test the resemblance and to probe its meaning. A Spaniard wore a helmet shaped

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

doubled by virtue of Tzioacpupuca and then made symbolically "Spanish" by virtue of Quintalbor's trans-national, trans-ethnic performance with the Spanish.

However, the most phenomenal paradox of Montezuma is how that first encounter between he and Cortés is framed within the Mexican imaginary. For many Mexicans believe that Montezuma and Cortés exchanged clothes—that they both "cross-dressed". And after searching for textual "evidence" of this, I have only been able to find references such as the citations I listed above from Cortés and Díaz which indicate that a sort of cross-dressing did indeed take place. For if we go back to Cortés' narration of events, we can see that Cortés did take off a colored-glass necklace and put this around Montezuma's neck and Montezuma did not only put the two gold and shell necklaces around the neck of Cortés, but that he gave Cortés *his own clothes* (see Cortés, pp. 51-52). Hence, these various narratives of giving and receiving of clothes, jewelry and other gifts has have great resonance in Mexican popular culture whereby today "transvestitism"—albeit of a cross-cultural nature—serves as the metaphor of the meeting between Cortés and Montezuma. Given such placements and displacements of identity, as well as transvestite acts of bridging nation and race, it becomes quite necessary to view *realismo mágico* as necessarily an integral part of Mexican cultural identity and certainly a necessary consideration when approaching Montezuma's identity. The richness of Mexican history evidences Montezuma as a complex historical figure whose identity is not one, but many—his identities are composed within the multifarious narratives, readings, and disjunctures that, in time, have become reinterpolated within the cultural field

---

like the headdress of Huitzilopochtli: the ambassadors begged it to send to their ruler" (p. 268).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of understanding and negotiating his identity. Whether or not he really believed in the myth of Quetzalcóatl's return or whether or not he was a passive agent in the Conquest, we shall never really know. But we do have the textual evidence of mostly Spanish written accounts which have clearly projected the Spaniard's sexual and gendered metaphors of "conquest" every bit as much as these texts have elided Aztec notions of gender and sexuality.

Though Cortés, Quetzalcóatl and Montezuma were certainly important figures of the Conquest, these three characters were brought together, literally and metaphorically, by La Malinche, for the encounter between Cortés and Montezuma, is a meeting mediated by La Malinche, without whom no such exchange would have been possible. Todorov's study of the Conquest evidences the central role La Malinche had in the Conquest and paradoxically affirms that she is not only the person who is "responsible for what occurred" by virtue of her linguistic skills of translation, but that she is the person who represents what is modern day Mexican identity: that of cultural *mestizaje*.[17] Indeed, La

---

[17] Todorov eloquently describes La Malinche's place in history: "The Indians, too, regard [La Malinche] as much more than an interpreter; all accounts mention her frequently, and she is present in every image. The *Florentine Codex* illustration of the first encounter between Cortés and Montezuma is quite characteristic in this regard: the two military leaders occupy the margins of the image, dominated by the central figure of La Malinche...The Mexicans, since their independence, have generally despised La Malinche as an incarnation of the betrayal of indigenous values, of servile submission to European culture and power. It is true that the conquest of Mexico would have been impossible without her (or someone else playing the same role), so that she is responsible for what occurred. I myself see her in quite a different light—as the first example, and thereby the symbol, of the cross-breeding of cultures; she thereby heralds the modern state of Mexico and beyond that, the present state of us all, since if we are not invariably bilingual, we are inevitably bi-or tri-cultural. La Malinche glorifies mixture to the detriment of purity—Aztec or Spanish—and the role of the intermediary. She does not simply submit to the other (a case unfortunately much more common: we think of all the young Indian women, "offered" or not, taken by the Spaniards); she adopts the other's ideology and serves it in order to understand her own culture better, as is evidenced by the effectiveness of her conduct (even if "understanding" here means "destroying")" (p. 101).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Malinche is symbolic of cultural *mestizaje*, but Todorov again stops short of that which La Malinche really represents to many Mexicans today: she is the person who betrayed Mexican identity, and yet who, paradoxically, embodies it. Moreover, La Malinche's identity has become so complex because of the various namings of her person through language and the way her body has come to literally and symbolically engender an entire nation of *mestizo*. As Roger Bartra writes :

> The Malinche is, in Mexican legend, the Grand Whore of paganism; as the mistress of Hernán Cortés, she has become the symbol of female treachery. Malintzin was the daughter of the *caciques* of Painala; when she was a child, her father died and her mother married another *cacique*, with whom she had a son. Here begins the history of female treachery. Malintzin's mother, in order to get rid of her and thereby ensure inheritance of the chieftainship for her new son, gave her away to some Indians from Xicalango and then announced her death. Later the Indians from Xicalango gave her to those of Tabasco, and these in turn gave her to Cortés. And so the barely adolescent Malintzin became, as the poet Rafael López put it, "fragile and fragrant cinnamon stick in the conqueror's chocolate"(p. 155).

La Malinche is the person who betrayed her people by translating for the Spanish, and by helping the Spanish out by giving them the means to conquering the Indians "cognitively". But most of all, La Malinche is the person who is responsible for the "mixture" of blood by virtue of her relationship with Cortés and later with one of his soldiers with whom she had children. For many scholars, La Malinche who also represents the passage of Christianity to Latin America through the body of the *mestizo*.[18]

However, La Malinche's identity is often misread in that she is often understood as having a "secondary role" in the Conquest, as Todorov maintains.

---

[18] Bartra writes of this parallel between the Virgin and La Malinche in Mexican identity: " "The Malinche betrayed her people just as the Virgin did, since both surrendered, and their purity was stained. The first began the lineage of the *mestizos*; the second was reborn as the dark-skinned Indian Virgin" (p. 149).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However, these texts evidence some very confusing representations of not only "doña Marina", as she is often called, but of the naming of La Malinche such that many times the indigenous refer not only to her, but to Cortés by that very same name. According to William H. Prescott's book, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Cortés gave doña Marina the name, "La Malinche" (which means captain "captain"). In this way, the names of La Malinche and doña Marina become quite confusing since these texts evidence a myriad of names and meanings for each one—the name she is given by Cortés, the name she is called by the indigenous which at times also refers to Cortés, and then the very confusing ways in which she is named textually from one writer to the next. Here, for example, Bernal Díaz demarcates the various metamorphoses of "La Malinche" as a name which was given by the indigenous of Mexico to refer to Cortés (as the "captain" of doña Marina), to refer to Juan Pérez (because of his association with doña Marina) and then to textually refer to Cortés as within Díaz's narrative:

> Antes que más pase adelante quiero decir cómo en todos los pueblos por donde pasamos, o en otros donde tenían noticia de nosotros, llamaban a Cortés Malinche; y así, le nombraré de aquí adelante Malinche en todas las pláticas que tuviéremos con cualesquier indios, así desta provincia como de la ciudad de México, y no le nombraré Cortés sino en parte que convenga; y la causa de haberle puesto a queste nombre es que como doña Marina, nuestra lengua, estaba siempre en su compañía, especialmente cuando venían embajadores o pláticas de caciques, y ella lo declaraba en lengua mexicana, por esta causa le llamaban a Cortés el capitán de Marina, y para más breve le llamaron Malinche; y también se le quedó este nombre a un Juan Pérez de Arteaga, vecino de la Puebla, por causa que siempre andaba con doña Marina y con Jerónimo de Aguilar deprendiendo la lengua, y a esta causa le llamaban Juan Pérez Malinche, que renombre de Arteaga de obra de dos años a esta parte lo sabemos. He querido traer esto a la memoria, aunque no había para qué, porque se entienda el nombre de Cortés de aquí adelante, que se dice Malinche..." (p. 143).

Thus we see how La Malinche's name refers to doña Marina, her lover, Cortés, and to Juan Pérez de Arteaga, by virtue of his proximity to La Malinche. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Cortés does not mention La Malinche's presence

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

at his first meeting with Montezuma in the "Segunda carta-relación"? Or, perhaps this was a conscious elision since Cortés gave doña Marina the name "La Malinche", to ironize the fact that she is called "captain" while by virtue of her absence in his *carta-relación*, underlines the fact she is not a leader nor even a significant participant in the Conquest. Yet here above, in Díaz's account, the indigenous reverse this play on words by calling Cortés "La Malinche" possibly as a means of underlining the name's very opposite meaning as Cortés employs with doña Marina—that Cortés is the "symbolic" leader and doña Marina, the "real captain". In this way, the body and the naming of La Malinche are always double and language maintains an unreal trajectory to the somatic: "La Malinche" originates in Nahuatl, it is given to doña Marina by a Spaniard to signify that which she is not, it refers to Cortés by the indigenous by virtue of his proximity to the "original" Malinche and because he is regarded as "her captain", and then the use of "La Malinche" is erased in Díaz's description of doña Marina (except by the necessary referential naming of Juan Pérez). La Malinche's erasure is indeed as significant as her naming in other texts, since it evidences a desire to destabilize both what authority she might have in these texts and her "real" power to signify the men around her.[19]

---

[19] Margo Glantz writes of Díaz's use of erasure as a way of mediating meaning in *Borrones y borradores:* "Bernal escribe pues con toda su corporeidad; es, subraya, testigo de vista. [López de] Gómara escribe sólo de oídas, por las relaciones que otros le han trasmitido. Esta distinción es esencial: involucra en el acto de escribir no sólo su mano, sino su cuerpo entero. Con ese acto subraya un procedimiento legal, explícito en un documento que, exigido a los soldados cuando reclamaban mercedes a cambio de sus acciones guerreras—la Probanza de Méritos y Servicios—, constituye la prueba irrefutable de que se ha peleado y de que los servicios se han cumplido y merecen una recompensa, porque están inscritos en el cuerpo. Manejado así, el *borrón* es una marca que separa Bernal del ilustrado Gómara; la verdad es imborrable, ha dejado señales indelebles—tatuajes—; se convierte entonces en un texto singular, el de las inscripciones corporales. Gómara malea las acciones de los conquistadores que fueron testigos de vista, sobre todo las de aquellos que "sacaron señal" al conquistar y poblar;

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ultimately, there is a constant destabilizing, reconstruction and cross-gendering of the name, "La Malinche", and its meanings—the name is imposed by Cortés and the indigenous as it takes on an infectious character nominating those near the "original" Malinche while at times disregarding her own body. "La Malinche" both as linguistic signifier and person dislocates even the binaried constructions of identity, since her identity goes far beyond signifying only in terms of active/passive or captain/dominated, but rather evokes a sense of indeterminacy that neither destabilizes these binaries nor reaffirms them. La Malinche remains forever in definition and indeterminacy—she both signifies too many identities and is rendered invisible by the absence of representations. The fluidity of La Malinche as language and body within the narratives of the Conquest foment her identity as not only as the Mother of Mexico, but she is the body and language upon which the magically real identity of Mexico lies. La Malinche is the essence of baroque excess of meaning and discontinuous narratives of identity which in their collisions, deflections and contentions with each other, usher forth unstable meanings and evocations of temporality. It is neither surprising then that the name "La Malinche" adheres to other men associated with her, nor that her name is absent in certain historic moments whereby such events could never have taken place without her presence. The *barroco* of La Malinche is the contradictory space between her prevalence within history and

---

por el simple hecho de hacerlo, los coloca en una jerarquía distinta de la que les corresponde por derecho, los inserta en una categoría ambigua que los acerca peligrosamente a los indios, utilizados como bestias de carga, marcados, troquelados, semejantes a las cabezas de ganado para hacer producir los campos y las minas. En cierta medida, con su escritura exige un reconocimiento, e implica el deseo de que no se le convierta en un colonizado *avant la lettre*, colonizado porque los *borrones* de la escritura de Gómara, producidos en la Metrópoli, lo *desfiguran* a él y a los demás soldados que expusieron sus vidas por conquistar las Indias y al *borronear* sus hazañas, las oscurecen, las confunden, las hacen desaparecer" (pp. 20-21).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

her absence within language, evidenced by her conterminous disappearance and overabundant use *of her name but not her person* in these texts. Though Cortés, Quetzalcóatl and Montezuma all occupy interesting historic and mythic spaces of understanding the *real mágico* of Mexican identity through the *dédoublement* of the body and language, it is La Malinche, in her dis-embodiment, textual silence, and mis-named embodiments, that ironically displaces any homogeneous reading of her person, her name and by default, of Mexican identity.

For that which La Malinche also represents, is the *chingada*, the "whore", as Octavio Paz so sententiously states in *El laberinto de la soledad:*

> ¿Quién es la Chingada? Ante todo, es la Madre. No una Madre de carne y hueso, sino una figura mítica. La Chingada es una de las representaciones mexicanas de la Maternidad como la Llorona o la "sufrida madre mexicana" que festejamos el diez de mayo. La Chingada es la madre que ha sufrido, metafórica o realmente, la acción corrosiva e infamante implícita en el verbo que le da nombre...La voz está teñida de sexualidad, pero no es sinónima del acto sexual; se puede chingar a una mujer sin poseerla. Y cuando se alude al acto sexual, la violación o el engaño le prestan un matiz particular. El que chinga jamás lo hace con el consentimiento de la chingada. En suma, chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro. Es un verbo masculino, activo, cruel: pica, hiere, desgarra, mancha. Y provoca una amarga, resentida satisfacción en el que lo ejecuta. Lo chingado es lo pasivo, lo inerte y abierto, por oposición a lo que chinga, que es activo, agresivo y cerrado. El chingón es el macho, el que abre. La chingada, la hembra, la pasividad pura, inerme ante el exterior. La relación entre ambos es violenta, determinada por el poder cínico del primero y la impotencia de la otra. La idea de violación rige oscuramente todos los significados (pp. 68-70).

Paz asserts the *Chingada* as the woman who is one of the many figures of representation of maternity, as the "suffered Mexican mother", who is the object of violence, of hurting, of staining. While the male form, the *chingado* is passive, invoking thoughts of Montezuma's representation in the narratives of the Conquest, the *chingado* is the female, "pure passivity". Early on in *El laberinto de la soledad*, Paz analyzes this very matrix of active/passive in terms of Mexican identity, interestingly enough, as he investigates the notion of the *mala mujer*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the *pasivo.* His reading evokes a sense of the passive as being "abject", degraded, used, while on the other hand, the *mala* is hard, independent, akin to *macho.* Using metaphors of active and passive homosexuality, Paz manifests identity a space in which meaning negotiates being "closed" or "open", where meaning traverses these oppositions and more often than not each identity implicates its "opposite", *as long as* the opposites are maintained separate. It is in this way that the "loser" is viewed as "passive", according to Paz: "el perdidoso es poseído, violado, por el otro".[20] For Paz delineates that which is taken, dominated, and open, from that which is immobile, intransigent and tough. It is the *rajado* which, according to Paz, renders women symbolically weaker *because they are open,* while the *mala* is closed and impenetrable.[21]

Both meanings of *Chingada,* therefore, necessarily inflect a sense of violence:

---

[20] Paz writes: "Es curioso advertir que la imagen de la "mala mujer" casi siempre se presenta acompañada de la idea de actividad. A la inversa de la "abnegada madre", de la "novia que espera" y del ídolo hermético, seres estáticos, la "mala" va y viene, busca a los hombres, los abandona. Por un mecanismo análogo al descrito más arriba, su extreme movilidad la vuelve invulnerable. Actividad e impudicia se alían en ella y acaban por petrificar su alma. La "mala" es dura, impía en ella y acaban por petrificar su alma. La "mala" es dura, impía, independiente, como el "macho". Por caminos distintos, ella también trasciende su fisiología y se cierra al mundo. Es significativo, por otra parte, que el homosexualismo masculino sea considerado, con cierta indulgencia, por lo que toca al agente activo. El pasivo, al contrario, es un ser degradado y abyecto. El juego de los "albures"—esto es, el combate verbal hecho de alusiones obscenas y de doble sentido, que tanto se practica en la ciudad de México—transparenta esta ambigua concepción. Cada uno de los interlocutores, a través de trampas verbales y de ingeniosas combinaciones lingüísticas, procura anonadar a su adversario; el vencido es el que no puede contestar, el que se traga las palabras de su enemigo. Y esas palabras están teñidas de alusiones sexualmente agresivas; el perdidoso es poseído, violado, por el otro. Sobre él caen las burlas y escarnios de los espectadores. Así pues, el homosexualismo masculino es tolerado, a condición de que se trate de una violación del agente pasivo. Como en el caso de las relaciones heterosexuales, lo importante es "no abrirse" y, simultáneamente, rajar, herir al contrario" (p. 35).

[21] Paz writes of the *rajada*: "El 'rajado' es de poco fiar, un traidor o un hombre de dudosa fidelidad, que cuenta los secretos y es incapaz de afrontar los peligros como se debe. Las mujeres son seres inferiores porque, al entregarse, se abren. Su inferioridad es constitucional y radica en su sexo, en su "rajada", herida que jamás cicatriza" (p. 27).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the *chingado* maintains a "poder cínico" as is mediated by Tovar's reading of Montezuma, and the *chingada* is the "violated Mother" while also, according to Paz, La Malinche *is* the *chingada:*

> Si la Chingada es una representación de la Madre violada, no me parece forzado asociarla a la Conquista, que fue también una violación, no solamente en el sentido histórico, sino en la carne misma de las indias. El símbolo de la entrega es doña Malinche, la amante de Cortés. Es verdad que ella se da voluntariamente al Conquistador, pero éste, apenas deja de serle útil, la olvida. Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche. Ella encarna lo abierto, lo chingado, frente a nuestros indios, estoicos, impasibles y cerrados. Cuauhtémoc y doña Marina son así dos símbolos antagónicos y complementarios...De ahí el éxito del adjetivo despectivo "malinchista", recientemente puesto en circulación por los periódicos para denunciar a todos los contagiados por tendencias extranjerizantes. Los malinchistas son los partidarios de que México se abra al exterior: los verdaderos hijos de la Malinche, que es la Chingada en persona (pp. 77-78).

Although La Malinche, as Paz points out here, was voluntarily the lover of Cortés, as soon as he was "finished" with her, Cortés left La Malinche. Paz makes La Malinche into a object of violation, desecration and abuse, rather than as the subject in her own empowerment (as was Cortés ultimately). Moreover, he sees a similarity between Cuauhtémoc and La Malinche inasmuch as each one represents a polar position in the horizon of representability: Cuauhtémoc is the one who was not *chingado,* who did not get "taken", while La Malinche was *chingada.* Thus, Paz transcends his own definition of the word "chingada" since he takes it outside of its limitations of sexual activity and passivity and extends it mean a sense of treason, of betrayal of a people and, more specifically, the betrayal of the indigenous of Mexico. La Malinche verifies that all Mexicans are "hijos de la [Chingada]", and the *Malinchistas* of today are those who wish to "open up" Mexico to its exteriors, to betray that which Paz designates as its

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

internal fixity, its hardness.

Inasmuch as I agree with much of Paz's representation of Mexican identity through this trope of the *chingada*, I have troubles with his reading of La Malinche as the *Chingada*, since in Paz there is a sense of casting La Malinche as "victim" rather than as agent, as Todorov's reading of her asserts, or more interestingly, as an open field for reading Mexican identity that defies both the "victim" and *conquistador* identities. Moreover, it is this opposition of penetrator/penetrated and empowered/defeated that Paz utilizes in what is quite a rigid reading of Mexican identity—there is no moving in between these spaces, only a clear affirmation of *either/or*. That there is a "core" to be betrayed, a purity to be defiled, is a discourse which implicates dichotomies of identity in which one is inevitably "stronger", and the other the "weaker". It is through his construction of the binary, the *dualidad* as he calls it, that Paz negotiates identity as either reaffirming these binaries by an insistence upon their relationship of strength/weakness, or as destroying these binaries by accepting neither duality. Yet, in his delineation of La Malinche, he abandons any *dédoublement* in the *Chingada*. Hence in discussing the Mother of Mexico, he remains intractably fixed to her condemnation and there is no possibility of reading La Malinche as anything other than the *Chingada*, the passive, the wounded, and no open space upon which to understand a heterogeneity of possible readings. There is only a clear repudiation of her identity, an understanding of her as the abject space of Mexican identity, and a very harsh abstraction of her as "traitor" while a strange adoration for Cuauhtémoc.[22]

---

[22] Paz discusses the use of binaries in identity politics: "El dualismo inherente a toda sociedad, y que toda sociedad aspira a resolver transformándose en comunidad, se expresa en nuestro tiempo de muchas maneras: lo bueno y lo malo, lo permetido y lo

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For Paz language is not the limit of representation and he places at the center of this politics of identity the body. It is the somatic in Paz's *Laberinto* which confronts the political and social realities—the body of death and destruction at the hands of the *Conquistadores*, the body of violation, and the body of *mestizaje*. Interestingly, Paz delineates the body as a terrain upon which identity is always multiple; it is the site of suffering and pleasure, of shame and pride, and the site of the *Chingada* where identity and language are made incarnate:

> Si en la política y el arte el mexicano aspira a crear mundos cerrados, en la esfera de las relaciones cotidianas procura que imperen el pudor, el recato y la reserva ceremoniosa. El pudor, que nace de la vergüenza ante la desnudez propia o ajena, es un reflejo casi físico entre nosotros. Nada más alejado de esta actitud que el miedo al cuerpo, característico de la vida norte-americana. No nos da miedo ni vergüenza nuestro cuerpo; lo afrontamos con naturalidad y lo vivimos con cierta plenitud—a la inversa de lo que ocurre con los puritanos. Para nosotros el cuerpo existe; da gravedad y límites a nuestro ser. Lo sufrimos y gozamos; no es un traje que estamos acostumbrados a habitar, ni algo ajeno a nosotros: somos nuestro cuerpo (p. 31).

As the language for describing the *Chingada* is a space for always evoking the violation of the Mother, the betrayal of the "Father"-land, rendering Mexico a "bastard" child whose father is completely unclear and for whom the paternity remains consciously unclear. For who can possibly name the "father" of Mexican identity when interpretations of the Conquest from Tovar to Paz are obsessively creating homosexual overtones where the Conquest is a taking of Montezuma to where he is made effeminate, where the being dominated by an *other* is akin

---

prohibido; lo ideal y lo real, lo racional y lo irracional; lo bello y lo fea; el sueño y la vigilia, los pobres y los ricos, los burgueses y los proletarios; la inocencia y la conciencia, la imaginación y el pensamiento. Por un movimiento irresistible de su propio ser, la sociedad tiende a superar este dualismo y a transformar el conjunto de solitarias enemistades que la componen en un orden armonioso. Pero la sociedad moderna pretende resolver su dualismo mediante la supresión de esa dialéctica de la sociedad que hace posible el amor" (p. 181).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to being penetrated in a homosexual act of domination, and where La Malinche has no subjectivity and, despite her central role in the Conquest, is made abject, passive, and violated. It is not surprising, therefore, that the paternity of Mexico is left up in the air, perpetually in question, and certainly, never to be answered.[23]

As such, Paz effectively negotiates his reading of Mexican identity where identity is double and occurs in the space between the rupture with the world and the attempt to create another in the creation of new bodies, a new race.[24] However, his reading of La Malinche remains intractably outside any such interpretation, for Paz rashly demarcates her as passive and does not examine her active role in the Conquest. Perhaps this is because Paz himself negotiates this very same dialectic that La Malinche represents, that which she successfully negotiated in her encounter with the other: identity. Paz maintains that the Mexican is caught in a bind as he cannot come to any resolution regarding his identity. But this struggle is not only about race, but it is about a more profound sense of belonging and of not getting pushed outside into the possible space where one gets *chingado*—it is a question of being or not being passive.[25] But

---

[23] In her study of Mexican cinema, Joanne Hershfield questions this very paradox of the uncertain paternity of Mexico: "In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz, has theorized that if the mother is *la chingada*, the whore, then Mexicans are by definition *hijos de la chingada*, sons of the violated Mother. If La Malinche is the mother of Mexico, who is the father—the Spanish conqueror, Cortés, or the conquered Indian, Montezuma? Either way, according to Paz, the Mexican people are the product of violation, abduction or deceit." He writes that this conflicted question of origins is the central secret of our anxiety and anguish" (p. 21).

[24] Paz discusses the *dédoublement* of identity here: "El doble significado de la sociedad—ruptura con un mundo y tentativa por crear otro—se manifiesta en nuestra concepción de héroes, santos y redentores. El mito, la biografía, la historia y el poema registran un período de soledad y de retiro, situado casi siempre en la primera juventud, que precede a la vuelta al mundo y a la acción entre los hombres. Años de preparación y de estudio, pero sobre todo años de sacrificio y penitencia, de examen, *de expiación y de purificación. La soledad es ruptura con un mundo caduco y preparación* para el regreso y la lucha final" (p. 184).

[25] Richard Dyer in his study of whiteness writes of this connection between race and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

what Paz's analysis fails to examine—perhaps because he stubbornly refuses La Malinche as an active agent in the Conquest—is how this notion of betrayal is negotiated. For Paz gives the parallel of the passive homosexual and likens this to La Malinche, confirming that homosexuality is tolerated, as long as the person "violated" *is passive*. This is where Paz's theory becomes incoherent. Since he makes clear that not only a woman can be *chingada*, but also a man, why does Paz interpret La Malinche as the one who *is chingada?* By his definition of what *she did to Mexico*, it seems that she is the active agent in this act of "violation", making the Mexican people the passive recipients of her "betrayal". If we are to understand La Malinche as passive then, it is because Paz does not concede women the active role in either sexual or social politics. Paz does not view women as the ones who *chingar* the other, but they are necessarily always *chingadas*. La Malinche, therefore, would "naturally" passive because of her sex, despite the fact that her actions in the Conquest are certainly not those "traditionally" of an *hembra*. It seems that Paz, in trying to theorize *mestizaje* in Mexico as a space of contradiction and negation, he has unwittingly demonstrated his views on women, gender and sexuality so as to revive the "father" image of Mexico (Cuauhtémoc) while defiling the Mother.

---

sexuality: "Concepts of race are concepts of different kinds of bodies. What makes whites different, and at times uneasily locatable in terms of race, is their embodiment, their closeness to the pure spirit that was made flesh in Jesus, their spirit of mastery over their and other bodies, in short their potential to transcend their raced bodies. There is, however, before we turn to embodiment in relation to imperialism, a further dimension to whiteness and race, one implicit in the concepts of race just discussed and in the oddness of whites in relation to them. This is heterosexuality. If race is always about bodies, it is also always about the reproduciton of those bodies through heterosexuality...Inter-racial heterosexuality threatens the power of whiteness because it breaks the legitimation of whiteness with reference to the white body. For all the appeal to spirit, still, if white bodies are no longer indubitably white bodies, if they can no longer guarantee their own reproduction as white, then the "natural" basis of their dominion is not longer credible" (p. 25).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is unfortunate that Paz foments his theory in a very mundane dialectic of the *passive woman* and the *active man* such that women can be nothing other than whores or mothers and men are left to being either heroes or passive homosexuals. Though *El laberinto de la soledad* raises the necessary questions about national identity in Mexico and the political and cultural implications of a country whose symbolic mother is a violated woman, Paz fails to consider that possibly La Malinche is the one agent in the Conquest who was both active *and* passive, both Mother and Father. La Malinche could be viewed as the single mother who was abandoned by the male figure, yet also the woman who was strong enough to raise a nation despite the betrayals of the men around her. She is a figure who would did not allow herself to become victimized but always sought her own empowerment through her action and reaction to the events of history. She was empowered to such a degree in her dealings with the Aztecs and Cortés that her involvement in the Conquest was not just paramount, as described in many of the accounts, but La Malinche likely made the Conquest happen. After all, she was the one making "passive" Mexico as she and Cortés moved throughout the country until reaching Mexico City whereby she was instrumental in the entire destruction of the Aztec empire. As Paz demonstrates that La Malinche was "betrayed" by Cortés as he took on another lover later during the Conquest, but he omits the fact that La Malinche also took another lover with whom she later had children. I think naming La Malinche's passivity and victimization at the hands of the Spanish is a thinly veiled attempt at trying to what Cortés in his narrative does at certain crucial moments—erasing La Malinche from her active role in history.

La Malinche's name and body has become the historical field upon which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

identity politics in Mexico are played out. Her body is the progenitor of *barroco mexicano* as she was not only the ambassador between two "worlds", the mother of *realismo mágico* who brought two people, two languages and two cultures together, but La Malinche is the progenitor of the *mestizo,* a new body upon which these cultures, language, and worlds collide in their splendor of contradictions, excess and mythological constructions of a history that will never be verifiable. La Malinche represents that which is *neither*—neither active nor passive, neither indigenous nor Spanish, nor, according to Paz, "anything":

> El mexicano no quiere ser ni indio, ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos. Los niega. Y no se afirma en tanto que mestizo, sino como abstracción: es un hombre. Se vuelve hijo de la nada. Él empieza en sí mismo...El mexicano y la mexicanidad se definen como ruptura y negación. Y, asimismo, como búsqueda, como voluntad por trascender ese estado de exilio (pp. 78-80).

But, perhaps this is the paradox of Mexican—if not all Latin American—identity: that language and bodies are not fixed agents, each of which can be traced to a static meaning or an absolute truth. Instead, La Malinche offers a vision of Latin America where identity moves across time and space and where it maintains absolutely no pretense to an absolute *real.* In Latin America, the *real* is often inaccessible since any pretense of the *real* is inevitably covered by narratives that contest the voices and bodies of history.[26] As La Malinche evidences, the *real* is

---

[26] In Bernal Díaz's account of the Conquest, he even notes the indigenous disclaiming the accounts of Bartolomé de las Casas of the Massacre of Cholula: "Y creo que estarán hartos los curiosos lectores de oír esta relación de Cholula, e ya quisiera haberla acabado de escribir. Y no puedo dejar de traer aquí a la memoria las redes de maderos gruesos que en ella hallamos; las cuales tenían llenas de indios y muchachos a cebo, para sacrificar y comer sus carnes; las cuales redes quebramos, y los indios que en ellas estaban presos les mandó Cortés que se fuesen adonde eran naturales, y con amenazas mandó a los capitanes y papas de aquella ciudad que no tuviesen más indios de aquella manera ni comiesen carne humana, y así lo prometieron. Mas ¿qué aprovechan aquellos prometimientos que no lo cumplían? Pasemos ya adelante, y digamos que aquéstas fueron las grandes crueldades que escribe y nunca acaba de decir el señor obispo de Chiapa, don fray Bartolomé de las Casas; porque afirma *y dice*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

often conflated with the imaginary to the point that neither can be teased apart and identity, therefore, is the residue of all the traversings of facts, fictions and cultural myths.

Despite these historical texts which evidence the embellishments, contradictions, and fantastically baroque inscriptions of identity, contemporary literature in Latin America is likewise engaged in reviewing these very historical representations. Many Latin American writers have utilized these texts of the Conquest and of the colonization of Latin America as the paradigmatic basis upon which history can be rewritten and reviewed. As the *mestizaje* of Latin American racial identity has set the groundwork for understanding other types of crossings in Latin America, the body has become a primary figure in the scheme of contemporary identity politics as manifested in literature, film and art. Likewise, we notice intersections of metaphorical and real bodies in which the identity has come to stand for that which is not fixed—the body is that which is traversed, violated, abducted, tortured, disappeared, racialized, engendered, sexualized and diseased. The somatic as both real and metaphorical has become a recuperative identity for Latin America in that meaning is always being conceived and destroyed, delineated and erased, as well as revealed and made mythic. Like Sarduy's notions of *tatuaje* and *escripturalidad,* the body and language in Latin American literature are the modalities through which meanings are inscribed. It is through the somatic and language that the "natural" is constantly effaced in favor of a culturally-imagined narrative, a plastic sign that converts any perceived *real* into an artifice of construction and desire whereby

---

que sin causa ninguna, hizo aquel castigo; y aun dícelo de arte en su libro a quien no lo vio ni lo sabe, que les hará creer que es así aquello e otras crueldades que escribe siendo todo al revés, y no pasó como lo escribe" (p. 166).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

history is never true or false, but a magically real space of the impossible.

Carmen Boullosa's *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* is an example of such of a novel which takes up the task of reinterpreting history as a means of recuperating lost identities while questioning the historically inscribed heroes and antiheroes of the Conquest through an examination of the bodies and language of history. Boullosa, a Mexican writer, uses the body of Montezuma as a trope for cultural loss and plenitude, as the lost corpus of identity that is inevitably reconstructed by three women who encounter Moctezuma where the Great Tenochtitlan once was: in the Parque Hundido in Mexico City. This narrative weaves the stories of three temporalities: these three women from 1989; Moctezuma taken out of his time, 1519; and the author's own narrative time as she inserts, throughout the story her own narrative self-conscious, reflecting her own processes of writing history, of interpreting identity. Boullosa's novel directs the body as the epicenter for creation and recreation, as Montezuma, formed "sin madre" awakens and discovers that he is enclosed in his body, that he is alive:

> "Cerró los ojos, se encerró en su cuerpo. Se diría que el cuerpo incómodo le está ardiendo, que respirar por primera vez, despertar después de siglos, era estar en aceite hirviendo y soportar adentro de la piel frita un enorme cuerpo enfermo. Sale él de ahí, sale y vuelve a salir, pegajoso, sale, o empieza a salir arrancado por una estampida de imágenes:" (p. 14).

Montezuma breaks through the physical barrier of death and pain to revive his body, bringing language to the physical body and the immersing the body in language and meaning.[27] Boullosa mixes history with fantasy, dream with reality,

---

[27] When Moctezuma awakens, he feels pain all over his body, "me arde la piel" and "todo el cuerpo me duele, me duele", he repeats (p. 48): "Es fácil imaginarlo: despertar después de muerto, despertar en otro sitio, en otro tiempo, entre tres rostros extraños, extranheros del todo, y encima de lo ya dicho un barniz de violencia, dolor del cuerpo, dolor de parto en un cuerpo de adulto, acabado de pasar por el canal de la sangre, los apretujones, los crujidos de huesos. Un segundo nacimiento. Miedo, angustia, congoja; es fácil imaginar..." (p. 49).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

past with present. She does not order the narrative chronologically, but consciously distorts and flips time; hence the reader receives the text as one long interpolation of a history that is never coded as "true", but which is wrested upon the thresholds of history, fiction, fantasy and reality, with no true understanding of each individual moment.

Taking historical texts and renarrating them (the codexes are clearly woven within her narrative), Boullosa weaves together fantasy and popular consciousness of Montezuma and brings him "to life", once more. Here Moctezuma has "*el sueño*" and then "*un sueño, uno hacía mucho tiempo*" whereby he confuses his body in time, for he cannot confirm what reality he is living, nor what past he once lived. Awakening in the same space of his death, Parque Hundido, in a physical form that is living, yet dead, Montezuma does not recognize his body. Like Quetzalcóatl in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, Montezuma is "given" his body, only he does not know what to do with it:

> ¿Qué soñó? Que la ciudad, caída nueve veces cincuenta y dos años antes de la fecha de esta aparición (la insólita de Motecuzohma en el Parque Hundido) despertaba a su propio callado bullicio...Un homre enorme rubio, enorma, casi brillante. Conforme se acerca a él, su tamaño disminuye. Se vuelve opaco, desteñido. Su piel, un poco rojiza, parece como inflamada, como desagradablemente abotagada. Las líneas en la piel no parecen hundidas, sino bordadas, sobrepuestas. Parecería enfermo, pero conforme más se acerca más se parece su piel a la de un puerco de monte. Huele mal (pp. 20-21).

Boullosa reincarnates Montezuma's body as a means of inspecting the roots of Mexican history and of the myth of the *chingado*, the man who let the Spanish "take him". Boullosa mixes history with dream, as Montezuma is a character who innocently approaches the world, as if he were a child. He remembers his death, though it seems much more like a dream than a reality to him—he is sacrificed on the pyramid and his body, like his memory, desecrated.[28] And in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the present of Boullosa's narrative, Montezuma finds himself split between past and present, straddling life and death, and ultimately unable to decide if he is human or god:

> "Puedo estar vivo. Pero no en mi cuerpo. Puedo ser piedra, colibrí, pluma, oro... Podría (por qué no) estar sobre la superficie de la tierra contemplando. Vería que en la vida nunca habrá fin, que la vida no terminará nunca. Podría, siendo piedra, tener ojos por el recuerdo; podría ser colibrí o pluma y pensar y sentir, por el recuero de lo que algún día fui, eso lo acepto, así como confirmar que el cielo está y que el cielo guarda en su presencia mi memoria, y me hace sentir presente cuando ha tiempo que he muerto. Pero no puedo tener el cuerpo que tenía en Tenochtitlan. Esto querría decir que el desorden y la vacilación han llegado a la tierra, querría decir que la vida podrá terminar porque las piedras han dejado de serlo, y el cielo ya no lo es, ni las plumas ni los colibríes aleteando... Ni el viento. Ni el sol: el final sobrevendría sobre la tierra si yo regresara con un cuerpo que he perdido, anunciando que el final llegará, que el final está a punto de llegar aquí..." (p. 29).

Here Montezuma questions his physical being, wondering if he is stone, hummingbird, feather, or gold—each embodiment which would give him a different insight into seeing history, or a sense of feeling and remembering. In imagining his body in these reincarnations of gold and feathers, however, he also wonders if might have become a god or even a representation of a god. As he confesses that he can never have his body of Tenochtitlan, his current

---

[28] Montezuma remembers his death in Boullosa's text: "Brinco sobresaltado y sobresaltado el que empuja la daga retrocede y yo brinco pero no puedo brincar, los grillos me lo impiden y entre dos me sostienen retirando sus rostros del mío para que yo no pueda reconocerlos, me sostienen volcándome boca abajo, lastiman más mis muñecas heridas y digo o quiero decir ¡qué pasa! cuando siento el dolor en mis carnes huecas, siento la daga destrozándome y oigo un vocerío que me impide sentir el dolor y oigo las voces de todos ellos, las que he llegado a conocer tan bien y para mi desgracia, embarrándose las unas con las otras, sucias, las que me han mentido y no terminan de matarme y oigo que dicen: dejen su cuerpo entero, no lo lastimen, déjenlo entero y alguien contesta es que no se ha muerto y le dice el que habló mueve la daga, clávala más hondo, rómpele las carnes, destrózalo pero déjalo entero porque tenemos que mostrarlo, déjalo entero, ahí déjalo, que se desangre, por qué vinieron estas bestias aquí, a estar entre nosotros, qué buscan, están enfermos sus corazones y jalonean algo entre ellos y oigo una voz que dice no debimos hacerlo, él siempre fue noble y generoso con nosotros y luego otro le dijo no vinimos a tener conmiseraciones, tiene que ser nuestra ya la ciudad antes de que..." (p. 27).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

embodiment confirms that which he once lost while conterminously announcing the "end", that history is about to finish *aquí*. Boullosa's novel is one of a Montezuma who has come back from the dead to reclaim a history that was never his, to rectify that which was never understood or even recorded. Montezuma's putrefying body becomes the rhetorical instrument for understanding identity of the history never written.

Working from historical accounts of the Conquest, *Llanto* questions the limits of historical authority while taking the body of Montezuma and posturing it as that which was never real, but always configured from outside.[29] This outside space is a multiple space incorporating the Spanish who imprisoned and, according to some accounts, killed Montezuma; the indigenous who felt betrayed by Montezuma and who, according to other accounts, killed him; and the outside is most distinctively the narrative process through which language isolates through naming, eliding, and contorting realities. Likewise the structure of the novel addresses, through the division of chapters, the spaces of memory, history,

---

[29] In one scene, Boullosa notes how the cadaver of Montezuma was used by the Spanish to "fool" the people: "Cuando sacaron al cadáver para engañarlos con que iban a oír las palabras de su emperador, olvidaron poner la música que antecede su aparición, los tambores, la invocación, porque aunque fuere su prójimo en cuanto al ser de hombre, en cuanto al oficio era como un dios. Todo era falso, y el cuerpo que alguien detenía para que no cayera (pues si era un muerto) se repetía a sí mismo las palabras que le habían sido dichas el día de su coronación: '¿Qué hará si en su tempo se destruye su reino, o nuestro señor enviase sobre usted su ira, enviando pestilencia? ¿Qué hará si en su tiempo se destruye su reino, o nuestro señor enviase sobre usted su ira, enviando pestilencia? ¿Qué hará si en su tiempo se destruye ell reino y su resplandor se volviese en tiniebla?' Pero dejó el orden de sus recuerdos cuando sintió sobre su carne muerta, en la frente, una piedra lanzada desde allá abajo y se dijo: 'No es para mí, es para Hernando Cortés, porque quién no se dará cuenta de que me han matado, pero me ha atinado a mí, en la frente' y cuando terminó de decirse esta frase, cambió el curso de su pensamiento y dejó que sus venas de sangre ya inmóvil y un poco descompuesta babearan sangre en el lugar en que habían aventado la piedra, en su frente, y cambió el curso de sus recuerdos: 'Muchos tienen envidia a los señores y reyes por tener lo que tienen y comer lo que comen pan de dolor. Señor, no piense que el estado real y el trono y dignidad es deleitoso y placentero, que no es sino de gran trabajo, y de grade aflicción y de gran penitencia'" (p. 32).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and fantasy of Moctezuma. For instance, the chapter entitled, "Se enojaron los dioses..." (primer fragmento de novela), wherein the narrative of authorship, of writing history and of fiction come together in a dialogical network of voices contesting and reaffirming one another, writing—literally and metaphorically—the body, as Boullosa likens the written text of history to the scripted corporeality of *the creation*:

> "Si exagerara, faltando literalmente a la verdad, se comprendería mejor que aquel polvo acabó siendo en un caso lo que a continuación aparece; si exagerara diría que el polvo, la ceniza, la arenilla se tranformó en tinta, en tinta solamente. Pero mi exageración, puesto que lo es, no sería información precisa, porque el polvo se transformó también en la manera que el escritor tuvo de entender lo que el polvo le dice, también en su negativa para escribir lo que el polvo le pide, y en su deseo de escribir una novela en la que sabe no podrá avanzar, una novela que sabe no podrá escribir y cuyo deseo de ser llevada a cabo él trata de ahogar separándose de ella y que lo llevó a anotar palabras de la siguiente manera:" (p. 36).

Boullosa's narrative weaves together the polysemous texts within the synapses that cultural identity embodies. *Llanto* takes the *neobarroco* of historical identities gone "mad", and reincorporates them into a story that calmly searches for those fragments that were lost, while resuscitating a dialogue over time that works with the interrupted spaces of narrative and the violent renderings of body. Ultimately, Boullosa's text confirms that memory is that which must be created since there is no memory in Mexico of this specific period, only fantasy and incongruities that do not nurture identity, but rather kill it: "El que no tiene memoria es un asesino y puede matar, y mata..." (p. 66). For this very reason Boullosa focuses on the body as a means of accessing memory—the body as meat for the novel and memory is the violence:

> "El recuerdo es carne de la novela. El olvido es armonía. El recuerdo es violencia. El olvido es serenidad. Incluso estas enormes e indescifrables piedras no son nada en el olvido, ni guijarros tirados al lado del camino. Estarían enterradas. El recuerdo desentierra. Saca los muertos al sol. Nos hace carne de muerte: carne para novela...Así que no debo dudar en

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> continuar escribiendo mi versión de la vida de Moctezuma II. No tengo de qué dudar, siempre he trabajado con piedras, siempre he tratado de indagar (en la sabiduría ajena y en la fantasía) cómo eran esas piedras de las que escribo cuando estaban coloreadas, recubiertas de plumas, piedras preciosas, piedras pulidas, vivas, útiles, sonriendo o llorando entre los hombres" (p. 60-61).

Text is therefore an antithetical space where memory *desentierra*—memory takes the bodies out of the ground and *reincorporates* them within the text. The writer, like the stone worker of Montezuma's time, has the task of representing the world, smiling and crying, in the labor of representation. Boullosa does not idealize the act of writing, for she admits that it is linked to the fantastical; nor does she idealize Montezuma. But in recreating the scene of Montezuma's reincarnation, she allows us to reread his person from the inside out, whereby the rotting body becomes the locus of truth rather than the glorified hand of Spanish Conquistadores. Emphasizing that there were never any direct inscriptions of his thought, that all understanding of Montezuma was imposed from the outside, Boullosa's novel narrates Montezuma's understanding of the Conquista taking the interstitial incongruences from the official narratives—of which there are many—and weaving them together with the mythology of Montezuma embedded within Mexican folklore:[30]

> "Sabios quienes al contar nuestra historia olvidan disertar acerca de las razones de su raro comportamiento, como los que lo adjudican a que en la llegada de los españoles él vio el retorno de Quetzalcóatl y lleno de culpa y

---

[30] Boullosa's narrator problematizes the absence of Montezuma's voice in historical narratives: "Sabios quienes al contar nuestra historia olvidan disertar acerca de las razones de su raro comportamiento, como los que lo adjudican a que en la llegada de los españoles él vio el retorno de Quetzalcóatl y lleno de culpa y temor dejó que tomaran lo que lespertenecía y de inmediato pasan a disertar durante cientos de cuartillas acerca de lo que representó para occidente el encuentro con este mundo. Son sabios, porque sólo del mundo que arrasó hay suficientes indicios. Tenemos con qué saber qué sintió, pensó, opinó Felipe II o Carlos V, pero en cambio de Moctezuma no quedaron indicios. Ni huesos, ni se señas de cómo era su pensamiento, ni nada de nada" (p. 75).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> temor dejó que tomaran lo que lespertenecía y de inmediato pasan a disertar durante cientos de cuartillas acerca de lo que representó para occidente el encuentro con este mundo. Son sabios, porque sólo del mundo que arrasó hay suficientes indicios. Tenemos con qué saber qué sintió, pensó, opinó Felipe II o Carlos V, pero en cambio de Moctezuma no quedaron indicios. Ni huesos, ni se señas de cómo era su pensamiento, ni nada de nada" (p. 75).

The body is the focal point for rewriting history and thus the text is the space for giving Montezuma a voice. As such Boullosa renders the text the metaphor for the somatic and the sexually charged arena of confronting the past: "La angustia está en el cuerpo, y el alivio natural que consiguen los cuerpos cuando se besan o acarician o penetran es un alivio doloroso. Pero es, al fin, alivio" (p. 104). While the pain of confronting the truth disrupts the peace of silence and forgetting, it also releases the pain, freeing that which could never be heard before.

Discussing the basis for writing this novel, the narrator as "author" argues against historical interpretations which contend that Montezuma was killed by his people, stoned to death by the Mexicas. Instead, the narrator discusses her motivation for rewriting history since as she believes, the body of the Tlatoani, Montezuma, was consistently utilized to shape accounts of the Conquest that reflected positively upon the Spaniards. Indeed *Llanto* questions Montezuma's cowardice, positing this representation as a contrivance of the west that ultimately serves to legitimate the Conquest and weaken the image of the indigenous:

> "Deserté del primer Moctezuma que vi, el hombre que recibió anuncios o presagios de lo que iba a ocurrir (algunos hermosísimos, otros divertidos o asombrosos, en todos los casos 'antojo', golosina para el narrador); deserté del hombre que murió de una pedrada en la frente; deserté del supersticioso; deserté del que me convocó a escribir *Llanto.* buscando una verdad en la cual fundar a mi personaje, perdí mi novela...Deserté del hombre que murió de una pedrada porque no creo que el pueblo mexica se haya atrevido a alzar la mano contra su Tlatoani sino contra el cadáver con él cual pretendían engañarlo, al escribir sus crónicas, en mostrar la mejor imagen del ellos mismos, y asesinar a un hombre en cautiverio para

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> una maniobra que no fue oportuna no era algo que debiera dar a conocer; deserté de la idea del hombre atribulado, indeciso, aterrorizado y vacilante porque creo que se ve a Moctezuma vacilar o actuar como un cobarde desde la idea de Occidente de lo que es un cobarde y un hombre que vacila ante una guerra que él no tenía por qué entender...(Me pregunto, ¿por qué me preocupa no será que aquello de lo que yo he desertado es de la novela? ¿Ahora qué soy, si ya no soy novelista?)" (pp. 96-97).

Demystifying Montezuma's cowardice and asserting it as a construction of the occident, Boullosa attempts to reread Montezuma by deconstructing her own position as chronicler/novelist. By demonstrating that the difference between the chronicler of history and the writer of fantasy is an illusion, Boullosa opens up her novel through an interesting *mestizaje* of historical and fictional narratives. In short, she blurs their differences through the juxtaposition of their images, truths and fantasies.[31] Often, the reader is left wondering if the fantasy might not be truer than the historical narrative.

Deconstructing the body of gendered identity, Boullosa confirms that the identities of Montezuma and La Malinche are completely undermined in many of the "official" accounts of the Conquest. As discussed earlier, La Malinche was very well perceived as the leader of the Conquest in many of the historical accounts. Likewise, Boullosa positions La Malinche as the true leader, the "real" *capitán*, by refuting her identity as a passive victim of the Spaniards while delineating her as a very active agent in the Conquista.[32] Montezuma, conversely,

---

[31] Boullosa writes of the novelist: "El novelista se entrega a dos viajes radicalmente distintos cuando escrdibe. En uno, su conciencia y su imaginación lo obligan a alejarse, a irse más allá, donde ni el sentido del sinsentido es posible...En el otro camino, el escritor entra a la vena del Hombre y él mismo es sangre placentera corriendo con gusto en los pasajes de la historia. Al trabajar con la lengua, con las palabras, el escritor escucha hablar al hombre y sabe que no está solo, que él no es nada solo: se coloca en el territorio donde la novela es imposible" (pp. 110-111).

[32] Boullosa evidences La Malinche as the captain of the Conqeust: "...[C]uando llevamos al Capitán Malinche, a Hernando Cortés, a visitar el jardín donde conviven todos los animales, él y sus hombres no comportían nuestro asombro. Estaban asustados, me preguntaban que parra qué había yo puesto a todas estas bestias aquí y yo no

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is not reinscribed as the *macho* defender of the Aztecs in *Llanto*, but is effeminized in Boullosa's story as a way of representing this leader as human, as part of a larger cosmology of the universe. Though she does not ascribe qualities of cowardice to Montezuma, Boullosa reconfigures his presence in history as a leader who is confronted with his end in history as he refuses this inscription: "Creemos ver venir nuestro fin; somos nosotros quienes lo hemos trazado. Algo le ha dado guerra a la humanidad; algo somos nosotros. Alguien nos propone una manera distinta de entender espacio, tiempo, cuerpo, idea, representación, imagen, ese alguien somos nosotros" (p. 98). Montezuma struggles with his loss of voice within history since throughout this narrative, his putrefying body is evidenced as the last enigmatic fragment of in a complex history. Montezuma's identity has long been interred beneath the narratives that had previously justified the Conquistadores and it is up to the women of this novel to recuperate his lost identity.

And this is where the novel begins and ends, in the midst of the Aztec empire where today lies a huge public park under which, presumably, Montezuma's body remains. And it is in this most unlikely space that Laura, Luisa and Margarita, drunk after a party, stop in the Parque Hundido to talk only to discover Montezuma. It is this place where Aztec civilization meets the modern day Mexican woman *in narrative*, where Boullosa's story brings together the *mestizaje* of diverse times, bodies and gendered performances. For it is Laura who finds Montezuma, picks him up, and carries him in her arms, passing houses, parked cars, electricity poles as he begins to weep—Laura tells him: "Ya,

---

hallaba cómo explicar que en este jardín se guardan todos los animales que hay en mi imperio y más allá, hasta donde mis embajadores han hollado y han podido cazar" (p. 29).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

no llores, ahora te llevo conmigo, ya todo pasó..." (p. 53). Demonstrating an incredible sense of compassion for this Aztec ruler, Boullosa confirms that identity is not a composite of public opinion, but rather that which lies—literally and figuratively—under the surface:

> "Como me toca ser franca, porque a fin de cuentas esto solamente lo escribo para mí, decir que imagino muy bien el trecho final de la novela, pero que en cambio me parrece imposible todo el cuerpo, el primer cuerpo, el de la amistad. Porque qué demonios de literatura puede ser ésa, esa en la que los personajes escuchan y comprenden entre sí las palabras y no hay distancia, o por lo menos hay la ilusión de que entre ellas no hay distancia y de que en dicha ilusión va la mirada del escritor clavada, como la espada en el toro, clavada, y no provoca sangre o derramamiento" (pp. 45-46).

As such Boullosa invokes the body of Montezuma as a necessarily contradictory and interrupted space where one narrative cancels out another, and where all identities are in a perpetual trajectory of disagreement, dismantling and restructuring. Hence, Boullosa offers literature as the surface upon which the demons of history might reinscribe and dismantle one another in a continual process of negotiation and affirmation. As she compares the use of language to the saber in the bull that does not provoke damages, Boullosa views literature as that arena which "pins down meaning", but does not *bleed.* Ultimately, Boullosa views Montezuma as that figure of the Conquest whose powers were most underestimated and under-represented: "Moctezuma es entonce capaz de cualquier cosa. Bautizado, danzante, cantante, travestista o loco. Lo que fuera hubiera sido posible" (p. 107). Dancer across history, cross-dresser of the Spaniards—Montezuma is the historic figure who moves beyond the boundaries of the conceivable, who escapes representation, and who remains forever a marginal character of history because his voice, for so long, was silenced.[33]

---

[33] Boullosa writes of Montezuma's lack of voice: "De haber sido mudo, como es

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Boullosa's narrative ties together the contested voices that have escaped historic speculation and, more importantly, *Llanto* addresses the popular myth of Montezuma whose voice was taken away by virtue of its textual absence. Making the novel the vehicle for Montezuma's reincarnation, Boullosa achieves the unthinkable: she reinvigorates the dead body while reconciling his spirit with the gods and the modern day Mexican. All this through the written word, representation—what Boullosa ascribes as the rectification and "reconciliation" of identity on paper:

> "La voz que a mí me interesa escuchar en la novela, la voz que es verdad y carne, ésa no aparecería. Porque el mexica no ha roto con el mundo, las cosas (lo que él fabrica) no son vehículo de separación sino ingrediente de reconciliación con los dioses (voces del Mundo) y directamente con el mundo. El mexica no hiere los caminos con la risa helada de la rueda ni tampoco traiciona al Mundo de los dioses, a las cosas, con la palabra escrita. Reconcilia sobre el papel, representa. Reconcilia sobre el papel, representa. No violenta sobre el amate, armoniza. Su representación escrita es puente y señalamiento" (p. 113).

Inscription of meaning on blank spaces, the interment of meaning and the resurrection of another—this is the task of the writer. Boullosa incorporates identity as a contentious, yet harmonious, space where meanings collide and reverberate, when meaning at times has no resonance, and where history remains in a perpetual state of dismantling and reconstruction. Ultimately, *Llantos* evidences the body and language as the nexus in which national, racial and historical identities are necessarily disassembled and demythified. It is this *raíz,*

---

siempre mudo el viento, a nadie le habría importado... De haber sido mudo... Pero la garganta del viento insignificante era una garganta feroz, una garganta sangrienta, anónima y voraz, sin cuerpo y deseosa de otros cuerpos. Va cobrando cuerpo, la garganta del viento, y al pasar por los pies de los que van pasando o de aquellos que consigue en su tropiezo los va infectando, como si en lugar de ser viento fuera el turbulento paso de un infeccioso, contagioso que al plagar no perdonara a nadie ni a nada... De haber sido mudo no sería meas que un estúpido viento incapaz de remontar altura, nada más que un viento imbécil, fardoso, vergonzoso, un viento a medias, un viento burocrático, bostezón, medio a medias, entredormido y entrevivo, un viento de nada" (p. 65).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

this essence, that Boullosa destroys—the essence of body, of language, of race and of any monolithic identity that might compel one to "possess" another. For *mestizaje* is the somatic nomination for the mixings of blood in Latin America, but likewise it is a metaphor upon which identity is based. This *mestizaje imposible*, like the body and language, is that which, according to Boullosa, maintains Mexican identity as a "negated certitude", as that which will always be irreconcilable.[34]

Identity as "knowable" is an incredibly contentious issue in Latin America, not to mention many regions of the world which have suffered ruthless political regimes and brutal histories. Reinaldo Arenas' *El mundo alucinante*, for instance, is a fantastic story which negotiation of cultural myths and historical texts. This novel addresses Fray Servando Teres de Mier Oriega y Guerra, a Catholic priest who spent much of his life escaping prison because of a famous sermon he made on 12 December, 1794, Mexico City, in which claimed that the Indies had been

---

[34] Boullosa writes of the *mestizaje* of Mexico and the *raíz rota:* "Cuando el vientecillo dijo 'Fernando' ¿quién hubiera podido oír que designaba al Conquistador, al Capitán Malinche, a Don Hernando?... Fernando fue el primero de todos los mexicanos, como se usa hoy la palabra mexicanos, castellanizando el mexica y arrebatándolo a sus antiguos poseedores. Fue el primer habitante de la nueva nación, el primero de todos nosotros, el fundador de una historia que entre sus raíces tiene una rota que nunca dejaremos de lamentar y de comprender seducidos por ella, una raíz que intentaremos arrasar, seducidos por ella, y alternadamente negaremos y vocearemos, y abandonaremos, sabiendo que ella nunca nos dejará, que siempre tendremos esa raíz rota, porque no es una elección, es una memoria india imborrable e imposible de evitar, irrecuperable e inalcanzable, el recuerdo de un dominio del mundo que hoy no puede tener imitación, un dominio que ya no está, que ya no se puede practicar, un dominio, un dominio de otra manera, basado en otro ejercicio del poder del hombre sobre el mundo y en otro hombre, otros dioses, otros afectos, otro lenguaje, y mientras una multitud india la conserva, como fue, idéntica y afuera de su propio tiempo, pervertida y purísima en el marco de una era que no le pertenece, la raíz se torna veneno puro y vitalidad exuberante en todo mexicano, certeza negada y habitada, de esencia irreconciliable, de mestizaje imposible, raíz propia y ajena, propia cuando afuera del territorio de su patria el poseedor la siente estrellarse adentro de las paredes de sus venas buscando desesperadamente la tierra, y ajena en su propio territorio, ajena adentro de al patria que le es propia, como algo invencible...'" (pp. 117-118).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

converted by St. Thomas long before the Spanish arrived. Moreover, Fray Servando maintained that the venerated image of the Virgin of Guadalupe did not date from the 1531 in which the indigenous Juan Diego had allegedly "seen" the virgin, but instead was impressed upon the cape of St. Thomas whom the Indians later called Quetzalcoatl. This theory provoked much scandal since the *criollos* (Europeans born in the colonies) were invested in revising Mexican history and identity in a period in which Mexican's independence from Spain was quickly becoming a national fight. This new interpretation clearly made clear that the Spanish manipulated the Virgin of Guadalupe to legitimate the colonization of the Americas. This sermon caused Fray Servando to be arrested by the Inquisition, to be sent back to Spain, and sentenced to ten years in a monastic prison. However, he escaped and was to spend the rest of his life travelling in Europe as a French Priest getting arrested many times though always managing to escape. *El mundo alucinante* locates the identity of resistance through transnationalism, transcorporality and transglobalism in such a way that the narrator identifies with Fray Servando, in much the same way that Arenas manifested in his political exile from Cuba. The narrator states at the beginning: "Lo más útil fue descubrir que tú y yo somos la misma persona" (p. 9). Ultimately, *El mundo alucinante* is a text which, like Boullosa's *Llanto*, manifests the body as a baroque terrain upon which identities are deconstructed and through which desire is negotiated.

But the body in Latin America is not only the domain upon which identity is arrested from a past inscription and rewritten in the present-tense. Nor is the body the space for merely subverting former notions of language, place and belonging. In Latin American literature, the body is often the sphere of resistance in which the somatic ceases to exist—the body as tortured, the body as violated,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the body as sick, the body as disappeared. These metaphors for identity are certainly not new to Latin American Literature with texts such as Manuel Puig's *Beso de la mujer araña* which evidences the body as the terrain upon which identities are played out, through which fantasies are projected, and *in which* secrets are *tortured out*. Likewise, recent Argentine cinema such as Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo* (2000), evidences the body of the political as the double domain of the body's resistance to torture or of the body's absence, its disappearance. This is the part of *realismo mágico* that Alejo Carpentier's theory fails to take into account—the *barroco* as cruel, inhuman and as representative of the excessive brutality that humankind inflicts upon others. Yet the body of political repression is also a source of images, language and emotions where the *barroco* is strongly evidenced through the excessive meanings, colliding signs and the multifarious recreations of truth because, quite simply, the "truth" has been destroyed, murdered, and tortured. More often than not, the "truth" lies in the Atlantic Ocean where thousands of Argentines' drugged bodies were ejected from airplanes during the repressive regime of the 1970's.

The body of torture is often the locus of destabilization of meaning, whereby identity and knowledge are everything to the life of that body—belonging or not belonging to a specific group, knowing or not knowing certain information. The tortured body is a somatic surface upon which power is directly inscribed and policed—the body is motivated to produce certain information, and correspondingly punished if it does not. As Renato Martínez states:

> Torture, no doubt, is directly related to this particular form of communication. Torture uses the body as morphological pieces which the syntax of repression puts in its most horrible discursive reality...Torture is also a secondary modeling system, a particular form of social intercourse

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that is consistent with the ideologically motivated symbolic universe. Through torture a privileged message is produced: "Do not mess with authority, for if you do your body will be terribly punished and your very existence will be made to disappear." In such a system, the body of the disappeared represents, in the thought of Roland Barthes, a modern poetry in *Writing Degree Zero*, in the language of the body nature does not become a fragmented space. What one observes in torture is the recovering of nature as an epistemic opposition to pluralistic culture, to writing, and to social texts in general (p. 86).

As such, the bodies of the disappeared in Chile, as Martínez discusses here, or those in Argentina, are the physical textures which are disposed of in an effort to efface history, to recover a lost "truth" or to "recover nature as an epistemic opposition". At the heart of torture, this recovery of the *real*—the kernel of "truth"—is the motivation for the violence imposed upon the body. But where the body of torture lies—marked by the scarring of the electric prod, traversed by the various significations attached to it, violated by an unimaginable violence—also lies the *body of resistance*. The body as the object of torture represents a larger social body for whom the somatic doubles as the space of torture of the "social body". The body of torture is robbed of its privacy and stripped of all autonomy and is thus made to represent symbolically the space of "public" punishment, where one must answer for the masses.[35] This body is a somatic sphere upon which identity is literally enforced and where the somatic

---

[35] Jean Franco, in her article, "From Public Space to the Fortified Enclave: Neoliberalism's Effect on the Latin American City": "Torture, a commonplace of old dictatorial regimes, was modernized by the use of the electric prod. The application of electric shock had, in the 1940s and 1950s, been widely used in attempts to cure or modify behavior of mental patients. In the southern cone and Central America, the electric prod became the torture instrumen of choice, used both to change rebels into submissive citizens and as a painful threshold to death. Only in a few cases were the military able to convert former militants into informers. But this was perhpas less important to them than the dissemination of fear, which led most people to withdraw into the privacy of their homes and appartments. Torture and disappearance became effective deterrents to public action and created a form of social amnesia that has persisted in the era redemocratization" (p. 60).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fights language, struggles not to give information, and battles memory. The body of torture problematizes heterogeneous identities, since it is exactly this embodiment of plurality which results in torture—the body must make singular knowledge and the subject must surrender itself to a homogeneity of language and thought. Like the body of the aristocratic female in Renaissance theatre, the state literally imposes order upon the body of the individual in order to assert the state's order and logic, while also communicating to others the state's power.[36]

Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School* is one of many *testimonios* in Latin America which deals with the body political repression. Specifically, this *testimonio* analyzes torture and disappearance by putting into writing—making visible—the approximately 30,000 disappeared during Argentina's "dirty war" from 1976 through 1983. Many *testimonios* have spoken out against political oppressions of various sorts—from Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* of the murder of the indigenous in the Quiché, Guatemala, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, to Elena Poniatowska's work within the genre of *testimonio* such as *La noche de Tlatelolco*, a weaving together of voices dozens of participants

---

[36] Leonard Tennenhouse in his article, "Violence done to Women on the Renaiisance Stage", discusses violence in Renaissance theatre: "The body of an aristocratic female was the centerpiece of the spectacles of violence on stage had everything, in the Elizabethan period, to do with the Queen herself. She constantly encouraged an equation to be made between the health of her body, its wellbeing and integrity, and that of the state. During her reign, this iconic identification between the queen's body and the land was such that the violence done to one was the same as violence to the other. Thus the theater regularly staged scenes of violence and disorder in order to materialize an opposition to the monarch over which monarchy asserted its order. On the Jacobean stage, however, the aristocratic female having acquired this usage had to be both different from the king's body and yet essential to the purity of the aristocratic community. Once again, she was the site on which to stage an assault on the monarch. As a source of pollution, she empowered the monarch by subjugating her in a ritual that purified the community" (p. 79).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and witnesses to a major protest in Mexico City during October, 1968 which resulted in the tortures and deaths of dozens of people. Like these *testimonios,* Partnoy's story is particularly evocative given that her narrative uses language to evoke the bodies of those disappeared—bodies that even the government and certain sectors of the public to this day refuse to acknowledge—while also using language as an aid to help her understand reality from fantasy. In Partnoy's text, language is incorporated as presence and as embodiment, while it also serves to delineate the absence, the literal non-existence, of thousands of people whose identities were wiped away from all traces of life, whose bodies were disposed in such a fashion that nobody seems to know where they are. Evidencing language as a presence which stands in for the non-presence of the *desaparecidos,* Partnoy's text *is* a metaphorical body as much as it is a literary work which weaves the space of the *neobarroco* as a terrain of simultaneous visibility of the excessive signs of torture and the invisibility of the *desaparecidos.*

The Little School treats the *desaparecidos* of Argentina from the viewpoint of the narrators, Partnoy and other prisoners, who while living in Bahía Blanca, were arrested and sent to *la Escuelita* for three and a half months. The *Little School* deals with the first months of disappearance where Partnoy recounts her experiences of captivity, exile, isolation, torture, and fear living in a cell with others, all of whom remained blindfolded and physically deprived of movement during their imprisonment:

> I left my house for some days, just as a precaution. I named myself Rosa. Sometimes the whole affair of the alias seemed ridiculous. Giving it some thought I decided the aliases were probably okay in a little town, where everybody knows everybody else, where there is just one Bumersindo, one Pascual...but how do you find an Alicia in a city of hundreds of Alicias, a Carlos among thousands? We learned slowly. Each pebble of information helped create the avalanche that would crush the rest of our friends: the color of the hair, the inflection of the voice, the texture of the hands, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> name, the nickname...details. By the time of my own avalanche, I was Rosa. When they came to arrest me, I didn't know whether they were coming for Rosa or Alicia, but it was for me that they came (p. 42).

Partnoy evidences how the body becomes the topographical locus for finding information, from which the state squeezes even the most minute traces of information which might advance the cause. As Partnoy uses an alias at the time of her arrest, identity in this space of secrecy and information becomes quite convoluted and virtually unintelligible—except, of course, for those who specialize in identifying bodies, the police. Partnoy's use of language to "protect" her body fails as even the alias "Rosa" cannot protect her true identity. It would seem that as language works to mask identity, it also backfires and serves as a trace that uncovers subversive markings that, like crumbs in the forest, leads straight to the object of inquiry.

The Little School is written with no regard for linear time—it is often recorded narratively backwards, with action beginning at the outset of each chapter and then returning to events by stepping back into time as if to make "reappear" the bodies that have been disappeared. At moments the narrative is circular where one torture reckons a past event and then the same torture is used—time is fragmented, the reader is dizzied within a vortex of memory, torture and a virtual fragmentation of the body. This text evidences a strong element of fantasy, of wanting to escape the present, the body, the pain—Partnoy's words evoke a desire to remember the past and realize the future. But the subject is "stuck" in the present, consumed with the quotidian experiences of a very uncertain future—for the narrative maintains a certain concern for the quotidian as a means of possibly deflecting the unpleasant thoughts of what might very well happen *if*...[37] Moving seamlessly between scenes of torture and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scenes of the quotidian concern for meals and latrine visits, Partnoy weaves a narrative that hauntingly presents the reader with a textual reality of terror—of not knowing from one moment to the next what, exactly, will happy. This *testimonio* evidences the surreal juxtaposition of Partnoy's memories of her plastic sandals in which she is arrested, to her memories of her daughter about whom she knows nothing, to her concern for her husband when he is being tortured. Piecing together fragmentary memories of torture along with the scant memories of the past and the hopes of the future, Partnoy terrorizes the reader by establishing a nexus into which the body is already absent and words attempt, in vain, to materialize those names.

Incidents such as the following begin with an action that seems to "go away" in the first lines of the narrative. But Partnoy has crafted her text such as to terrorize the reader with the narrative of exactly how terror seems to go away, or lessen—the subject seems to engage in dialogue and calm the agent of violence. And just as one thinks the violence is "over", it comes back to haunt, to regain control and to mark the body with its pervasiveness, letting the subject know that she should, in fact, always "be scared":

> Five days ago Vaca, a fat, humongous individual (not GatoVaca, I could never see that one), brought a can of insecticide and sprayed us. After a while he entered our room again and put a gun in my mouth. "It's

---

[37] Partnoy writes of her daily habits: "Lunch was at 1:00 P.M. and dinner at 7:00 P.M.; we went without food for eighteen consecutive hours daily. We were constantly hungry. I lost 20 pounds, going down to 95 pounds (I am 5 ft. 5 in.). Added to the meager food, the lack of sugar or fuits, was the constant state of stress that made our bodies consume calories rapidly. We ate our meals blindfolded, sitting on the bed, plate in lap. When we had soup or watery stew, the blows were constant because the guards insisted that we keep our plates straight. When we were thirsty, we asked for water, receiving only threats or blows in response. For talking we were punished with blows from a billy jack, punches, or removal of our mattresses. The atmosphere of violence was constant. The guards put guns to our heads or mouths and pretended to pull the trigger" (p. 15).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> loaded," he said. "You're sacared aren't you?" I didn't move. Maybe this is why the whole business of toothbrushes seemed so absurd. The fact was that a few minutes later he appeared again and gave us each a toothbrush and toothpaste. "From now on,' he solemnly announced, "you'll brush your teeth once a day." ...Today, at noon, he took away the brushes. A while ago, Vaca entered our room and pointed a gun at my temple. I felt the cold of the metal. "It's loaded," he said. "Are you scared?" (pp. 81-82).

Scenes such as this, indicate a certain repetitiveness in Partnoy's narrative, whereby each torture doubles itself, comes back to itself, all in order to haunt the subject. In fact, it is this quality of repetition mixed with a constant silence, the subject awaiting the future—torture, death, release—that renders this text as a virtual embodiment of torture. Partnoy consciously does not "tell all" in this *testimonio* as a means of evoking the sensation of torture: a space where knowledge is unidirectional and the prisoners, like the reader, are rarely given any useful information. Much of the text is concerned with the most trivial information—the only information available to the prisoners who struggle against the constant fear of violence, of death. It is this focus upon the small details of the quotidian that gives this narrative the ability to render "live" abstract concepts and small material items.

Throughout her *testimonio* language is used to materialize the bodies of the disappeared as language also conjures up the memory of those bodies one simply has difficulty in remembering:

> For a while now I've been trying to recall how Ruth's face looks. I can remember her big eyes, her almost non-existent little nose, the shape of her mouth. I recall the texture of her hair, the warmth of her skin. When I try to pull it all together, something goes wrong. I just can't remember my daughter's face. It has been two months since I've seen her. I want to believe that she's safe. "Vasca! Do you remember my daughter's face?" I whisper. "What?" "I said, do you remember my daughter's face? I can't..." "Of course I do, she's so pretty" (p. 77).

Partnoy struggles between a desire to forget the present and to remember the past even by engaging other prisoners in the act of remembering. Yet when

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vasca is later taken away, Partnoy keeps her jacket and remembers Vasca via the cold metal of the buttons, material objects replace those humans whose bodies are neither living nor dead: "While touching the thick fabric and the cold metal buttons, I recalled the times when I peeked under the blindfold to see Vasca. Then I cried again. That was the night before yesterday, after they'd taken her away. To kill her, someone had told me" (p. 110). At times there is a sense of matter-of-factness to this *testimonio* which undercuts any sentimentality while plainly relating the chilling realities of the narrators' existence in *La escuelita*.[38] It is the coldness of the writing, the stultified nature of the memories, and the occasional fluidity between past and present moments that render Partnoy's *testimonio* a body of language that circumscribes corporeality between the lines and which depends upon language to remember the many bodies—living, dead, and disappeared:

> This small box of matches is my only belonging. Sometimes I own a piece of bread, and once I even had an apple. But this box is my only non-edible belonging. Now I keep my box under the pillow. Every so often I touch it to make sure it is still there, just because inside that little box is a piece of myself: my tooth. When I hit my tooth against the iron gate it didn't hurt very much; it only made my lips bleed. When the dentist had originally fixed my tooth six years ago he told me, 'This is going to last twenty years.' To tell the truth, the tooth that broke the other day wasn't mine. The tooth, made of acrylic, with a metal point, was permanently attached to the root canal. It fell out when I was coming back from the latrine and the guards pushed me against the iron grate. My mother locked herself

---

[38] Scenes such as this evoke the coldmess of the facts withotu falling into sentimentality while also carefully negotiating the stark realities of each characters situation: "She took off the rest of her clothes. She felt as if the guards did not exist, as if they were just repulsive worms that she could erase from her mind by thinking of pelasant things...like rain falling inside the cans, her conversation with María Elena. She thought the conversation had been worth it, despite the beatings that could come, despite humiliation. They tied her hands behind her back...Those two killers and been glancing through the pages of an encyclopedia. On the Chinese history page, they had seen a drawing of the Chinese torture method 'the drop of water'; puzzled to see that there still existed tortures that they had not used, they wanted totry this one to see how it worked" (pp. 71-72).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> in the bathroom to cry when my real tooth broke. It happened at an amusement park when I was twelve. I did not have it repaired until I turned fifteen...It was in that age of perfect teeth that I started to feel it was okay to flirt, to want to be pretty. Now the acrylic wonder sleeps inside this Ranchera brand match box and I'm convinced that, with my eyes blindfolded, I deserve at least a mouthful of teeth. Do I want to look pretty for the guard, the torturers? I hope that what really matters to me is to be whole...meanwhile, I'm being destroyed. To be whole is to keep my tooth, either in my mouth or inside the matchbox, my sole belonging...Pato screams: 'Sit down!' While he unties our hands for lunch, I put the tooth in the box. The little match box will bring me trouble. Sooner or later a guard is going to decide that the box is a dangerous object in my hands. Right now it's my only possession (pp. 87-90).

Partnoy's tooth becomes the physical locus for memory, a confirmation of life through materiality and her resistance against death. This narrative spirals the tedious experiences of the everyday, taking the reader in a backward trajectory from the tooth which is carefully hidden in the matchbox, to the moment when Partnoy lost her tooth after being pushed by the guard, to the first time she lost this tooth when she was twelve years of age. The memory of the tooth evidences Partnoy's sense of her self-consciousness regarding her body since what this tooth—or rather its loss—represents is a conterminous loss of attractiveness, femininity, sociability and sexuality. This memory also parallels her current condition of imprisonment where she experiences these same losses due to, instead of her tooth's loss, her entire body's disappearance. She displaces her own disappearance, however, by adapting to this nightmarish world of torture where she inserts her identity in a child-like world of small objects: she keeps dried bread rolled up into balls which serve as a mental diversion as does her tooth carefully hidden away in her matchbox which is symbolic of the only component in her life directly under her control. As her tooth is a "piece" of herself, the tooth becomes her own objectification of her identity such that she actually "owns" herself by virtue of holding on to the tooth she so carefully

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

guards.

What is most interesting about *The Little School House* is how Partnoy manifests the body of the tortured through the language of memory and poetry while also invoking the emptiness and the silence of *non-being* of the *desaparecidos*. Partnoy clearly distinguishes between the body of the tortured and the body of the disappeared—the first body is clearly visible and bears the "marks" of the "verbal objectification" for having failed to "properly" answer questions, while the disappeared is simply a body, absent and which bears no language, no physical demarcations, and which is entirely without place.[39] This *testimonio* uses language to conjure the body while it is tortured and in turn this body resists torture by utilizing language to deflect the pain, to transport the tortured into a space which is neither past, nor present. Here, Partnoy's husband is being tortured as he attempts to escape the pain through language and the imaginary:

> Daughter, dear, my tongue hurts and I can't say *rib-bit rib-ribit*; even if I could, you wouldn't hear me. This little poem soothed you when you cried; you went to sleep listening to it...I've repeated it for a whole day but I still can't sleep. *Rib-bit rib-bit he sings on the roof*...I won't see you again...The electric prods on my genitals...Trapped, like the little frog...*but we hear him all the time.* I told the torturers if they took me to the meeting place I would point to him; then, when I saw him I didn't do what I'd promised. Afterward, the electric prod again, and the

---

[39] Elaine Scarry writes of this dynamic of language and the body: "But the very consistency of these oppositions between body and voice means that the two also mirrror one another. Assigned identical positions, they reflect and amplify one another. Just as the pain is a physical measure of the colossal discrepency between the person tortured and the torturer (for whatever their spatial proximity, there are no two experiences farther apart than suffering and inflicting pain), so the interrogation is the verbal objectification of that colossal discrepancy. In his desperate insistence that his questions be answered, the tortures luxuriates in the privilege or absurdity of having a world that the other has ceased to have. Nowhere does language come so close to being the concrete agent of physical pain as here where it not only occurs in such close proximity to the raising of the rod or the turning on of the electricity, but also parallels and thereby doubles the display of distance" (p. 46).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> blows...harder: 'Where is he?' But my child...*Rib-bit rib-bit*...Where are you, my little girl?...Don't make me believe I'm an animal. But that's not my scream; that's an animal's scream. Leave my body in peace..I'm a froggy so my child can play with me...*Rib-bit rib-bit little girl on the roof...Nobody, nobody*...I'm thirsty—Sir...sir...water please (p. 93).[40]

Here the body of the tortured is trapped in a state of being over which it has no control and relies upon the imaginary, the children's poem, as its "intentional object". This poem, like Partnoy's rolled up bread pieces and her tooth, are the objects which refract the body of the present, the body of pain, the body whose only control is that of the mind: the imaginary.[41]

Yet, how to represent the *desaparecidos*—those who are not present, whose voices cannot be invoked and whoses bodies are simply gone *as if they never were living?* In an interesting extra-narrative effort, Partnoy creates a map of *La escuelita* two appendices to her *testimonio* wherein she inscribes each member of *La escuelita*—from the prisoners to the guards—carefully naming each one. Linking the living survivors to the living interrogators, Partnoy creates a nexus through language in which these bodies are ineradicably connected through the text. Likewise, she textually evidences those disappeared whose bodies are neither living nor dead, but which are simply "gone". The *desaparecidos* exist as traces of the past tense, of "having been", marked upon the pages of this *testimonio* through language. Yet, their bodies are also narratively pulled into

---

[40] *El Sapito Glo-glo-glo* is an Argentinian children's poem.

[41] Scarry discusses the relationship between pain and the imaginary: "Physical pain, then, is an intentional state without an intentional object; imagining is an intentional object without an experienceable intentional state. Thus, it may be that in some peculiar way it is appropriate to think of pain as the imagination's intentional state, and to identify the imagination as pain's intentional object. Of course, it is probably inaccurate to identify an essentially objectless state as an "intentional state without an object" since only by having an object does it exist as an intentional state: in isolation, pain "intends" nothing; it is wholly passive; it is "suffered" rather than willed or directed" (p. 164).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the present as homage is paid to the memories of their spirits through this textual remembering. It could be easily argued that this text serves two contradictory functions: it embodies the funeral rites denied to so many bodies which were never put to rest while it also serves not to remind the living of the *desaparecidos*, that this was indeed a brutal fact of Argentina's history and not, as some state, an fabrication of the Left.[42]

The most haunting body manifested in Partnoy's narrative is that of the son to whom Graciela, one of the *desaparecidos*, gave birth while in prison. After Graciela was disappeared, her son was given to one of the interrogators, as was a quite common practice. This element of the story embodies the truly cruel aspect of the *neobarroco*—the loss of the body, the mother, the family. And yet, this fact demonstrates the *mestizaje* of bodies and political ideologies from which there is no clear escape. The irony of Graciela's child is that he, like many other children of the *desaparecidos* born during the mother's incarceration, live in a nation which struggles to recognize its past and which, more often than not, has forgotten who the "guards" really were. This public amnesia, which is also quite common in Chile for instance, refuses that which it cannot see. In effect, the strategy of the military *junta* was a success because it feeds the twisted logics of those who say "What disappeared? Where?" Yet, many of the *hijos de los desaparecidos* are beginning to ask questions in a country

---

[42] Michael Taussig writes of *Las madres de la Plaza de mayo:* "What the Mothers of the Disappeared do is to collectively harness this magical power of the lost souls of purgatory and relocate memory in the contested public sphere, away from the fear-numbing and crazy-making fastness of the individual mind where paramilitary death squads and the State machinery of concealment would fix it. In so courageously naming the names and holding the photographic image of the dead and disappeared, the mothers create the specific image necessary to reverse public and State memory. As women, giving birth to life, they collectively hold the political and ritual lifeline to death and memory as well" (p. 27).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which often denies them answers. Interestingly enough, some of those infants who were given to the interrogators are beginning to find out who their "real parents" were, and who their actual parents *really* are. This is certainly a chilling reality and a surreal embodiment of ancestry that Argentina must confront. This *mestizaje* of identity is a mixing that is not a racial combination of bodies from across the globe, but instead is an absolutely cruel mixture of identities based upon the theft of certain persons—taking them from the earth, swallowing up their identities as if they never were while their children are raised within the space of a fictionalized "family photo" that in every frame bears the absence of the *desaparecida*, the mother. The *realismo mágico* of Argentina is just this: the numbing excess of *absence* and the conflicting public narratives that either invoke the bodies of the *desaparecidos* through language or that *doubly disappear* the *desaparecidos* by denying the political events in Argentina from 1976 through 1983.

The *barroco* is the space in which identity is never stable, never what it seems through historical inscription and it is, at times, completely unevocable as the scene of both representation and life often renders identity as disappeared, as absent. The *barroco* negotiates these very contradictions engendered by nation, race, gender and sexuality such that identity is not only unstable, but identity is often "kidnapped" from the very scene of its creation. Perhaps we might begin to see how the spiraling dislocations and rereadings of history render identity in Latin America a necessarily *magically real* undertaking: the terrains upon which identity is fought, dialogued, tortured and disappeared are those of language and the body which are constantly being rewritten and which engender conterminous belief and disbelief. *Realismo mágico* invokes the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

discontinuity of narratives that are both peaceful and violent, real and imaginary, through bodies and texts that invoke, constantly and always, these contradictory readings. But identity in Latin America is not only a crossing between the binaries of masculine/feminine or real/imaginary, but identity is also located in the space where body and language traverse all these possible valences, breaking down, once and for all, the rigid definitions of not only gender, but the barrier that gender shares with sex or language, for instance.

Severo Sarduy's *Cobra* (1972) is a novel which makes heterogeneous sexual, gender and sexed identity, while also dissolving national and ethnic identity. *Cobra* recounts the tale of a transvestite, star of the Teatro lírico de Muñecas (Lyrical Theater of the Dolls), whose obsession is to transform his/her body. Cobra is accompanied in her metamorphosis by the Madam and Pup, Cobra's dwarfish double. They too change shape, through the violent ceremonies of a motorcycle gang, into a sect of Tibetan lamas seeking to revive Tantric Buddhism. This is a novel of simulation that hyper-teleologically impels the somatic and language towards a baroque aesthetic of "makeovers," performances, inversions, deaths, and resurrections. This novel pushes forth Sarduy's notion of the *doublure* of the body and language through an evocation of the signs that consistently recreate their references and hence, reciprocally reinscribe their own value, destroying any notion of continuity of identity, of the self, of sex, of sexuality, of reality, or of any static meaning or signification. The imaginary within this novel serves as Sarduy's arena of the *dédoublement* of identity— the imaginary coalesces the formation of national and sexual identities polemicizing both the grand narratives of History (i.e. Colon and Cortés) and the master narratives Sexuality (i.e. *machismo* and heterosexuality) in Latin America. *Cobra* reveals a plurality

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of national and sexual identities that draw nature (the body) into a symbolic sphere of reinscribing the "lost" or "forgotten" histories and the elided sexualities. The baroque of language and of the somatic throughout this novel attempts to undo nature (*deshacer la naturaleza*) in evoking a realm of the imaginary and the hallucinatory that transforms the historical and cultural paradigms of power into a *pastiche* of the perversion of these very paradigms.

Cobra, a transvestite night-club singer, performs in the *Teatro lírico de Muñecas* where the club's headmistress, *la Señora*, and Cobra's midget double, Pup, involve Cobra in a world of theater, men, art, and drugs where the body and language come together to recreate Cobra's sex, gender and ethnic identity.[43] Cobra's signification of woman, however, is not complete as long as the referents of the "true woman," *la Señora*, and the "imitation," Pup, surround her. She leaves for India and Nepal, making a counter-pilgrimage to the East, signifying her—and Cuba's—links to this part of the world.[44] After returning, Cobra exercises her penultimate act of simulation in a scene recreated from Von Sternberg's 1933 film, *Morocco*, in which Cobra attempts to realize the *hiper-mujer*, as she imitates Marlene Dietrich's character who is, in the film, cross-dressed as a man. This play of the manifold possibilities of space (theater, film, literature, reality, Morocco, Eastern Asia, and Cuba) and of the body (Cobra as woman, Cobra as Amy Jolly, Marlene Dietrich as woman, and Dietrich as transvestite) establishes

---

[43] Sarduy writes of this theatre as a showplace where the body is never real, but always mechanical: "¿dios mío—en el tocadiscos,como es natural, Sonny Rollins—¿por qué me hiciste nacer si no era para ser absolutamente divina?—gemía desnuda, sobre una piel de alpaca,entre ventiladores y móviles de Calder—. ¿De qué me sirve ser reina del Teatro Lírico de Muñecas, y tener la mejor colección de juguetes mecánicos, si a la vista de mis pies huyen los hombres y vienen a treparse los gatos?" (p. 427).

[44] Many of Sarduy's references to the characters directly reflects back to Cuban national and ehtnic identity, such as in this instance where Sarduy notes Cuba's ethnicity as a *mestizaje* of Africa, China and the indigenous of Cuba.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cobra's identity within the complex network of symbolic codes—a network within which Cobra must ultimately efface through her sex-change operation and her escape from the theater.

As she sings in mise-en-scène recreated from the film, Cobra meets Dr. Ktazob,[45] the doctor of her transsexual operation. It is through him that through Cobra reinvigorates meaning in her body, while also negating her body as "natural" and it is through the operation that Cobra's body becomes the interstitial space of the crossings of sex and gender and becomes the canvas for writing the body:

> La escritura es el arte de la digresión. Hablemos pues de un olor a hachís y a curry, de un basic english tropezante y de una musiquilla de baratijas. Esa ficha señalética es la del indio costumista, que tres horas antes de que se descorrieran los telones del show llegaba con su cajita de pinceles, sus minuciosos fracasos de tinta y «la sabiduría—decía el propio enturbantado, de perfil, mostrando su único arte—de toda una vida pintando la misma flor, dedicándola al mismo dios» (pp. 431-432).

Sarudy manifests the body as that which houses the art of writing, the restructuring of the body and the costuming of ethnicity. The body of Cobra is that body which crosses national and ethnic boundaries every bit as much as it crosses sexual and gendered divisions through a language which both destroys and creates, as does the knife of Dr. Katzob. The body of transsexual surgery *is* the textual body upon which the *barroco* is impressed upon the body and meaning is again transformed from the inside out:

> Cobra aparece al fondo del coche, de pie contra la pared de lata, pájaro clavado contra un espejo. *Está maquillada con violencia, la boca de ramajes pintada. Las órbitas son negras y plateadas sde alúmina, estrechas entre las cejas y luego prolongadas por otras volutas, pintura y metal pulverizados, hasta las sienes, hasta la base de la nariz, en anchas orlas y arabescos como de ojos de cisne, pero de colores más ricos y matizados; del borde de los párpados penden no cejas sino franjas de ínfimas piedras preciosas. Desde*

---

[45] In Moroccan dialectical arabic *kta*ᶜ (or *qta*ᶜ) means "to cut" and *zob* mean "penis; hence "Katzob" literally means "Cut-penis"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> *los pies hasta el cuello es mujer; arriba su cuerpo se transforma en una especie de animal heráldico de hocico barroco.* Detrás, la curva del tabique multiplica sus follajes de cerámica, repetición de crisantemos pálidos (p. 497).

Language is the vehicle for the somatic subversion of Cobra as it is that which marks the text and the body; yet language is also informed by the body is marked by plurality of identities that are recreated by the subversion of the "natural" body.[46] The body is marked by the graphic, the pen, the paint and the knife which either temporarily or permanently renders a change—a change which is the "elipses" of identity, just as writing also is: "La escritura es el arte de la elipsis: en vano señalaríamos que de todas las agendas era la de Cobra la más frondosa" (p. 430).

Sarduy's *Cobra* is a creature who becomes the catharsis of crossing genders, ethnicities and religion, for she is not only a woman in this text, but in every way a godlike figure that crosses sex and life forms. It is through the rewriting of the corporeal that Cobra *embodies* the literal and figurative restructuring of identity such that the body is writing and writing is the body upon which disorder, chaos, interrupted meanings traverse as order is constantly imposed and overthrown:

> La escritura es el arte de descomponer un orden y componer un desorden. La Señora había descubierto al indio entre los vapores de un baño turco, en los suburbios de Marsella. Quedó tan estupefacta cuando, a pesar del vaho reinane, distinguió las proporciones con que Vishnú lo había agraciado que, sin saber por qué—con estos jeroglíficos, y sin revelarnos que lo son, nos asombra el destino—pensó en Ganecha, el dios elefante (p. 435).

Here Cobra is not only the performative embodiment of woman, but she is the

---

[46] The narrator states: "La escritura es el arte de recrear la realidad. Respetémoslo. No ha llegado el artífice himalayo, como se dijo, alhajadito y pestiferante, sino con un recién planchado y viril traje cruzado color crema—en la corbata de seda una torre Eiffel y una mujer desnuda acostada sobre el letrero Folies Chéries...No. La escritura es el arte de restituir la Historia" (p. 432).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

god-like reincarnation of a Hindu god—both male and female, animal and human, and both bound to earth and eternally drawn to the heavens. It is Cobra's desire to become other which finally brings her to India and then to the table of Dr. Katzob where she undergoes the transformation that begins her voyage into the ultimate dismantling of somatic, racial and gender meanings.

Cobra's body is made into an artifact of the baroque through which gang members she later encounters eventually come to worship, to tattoo, to torture, to name, to terrorize, and finally, to kill. The body, once again, is the topography of the graphic, of language and of violence through which each gang member attempts to transcend reality. It is through a "group sex" encounter that each gang member masturbates, Cobra narrates, milk spills, the bodies join in exchanging identity.[47] In aiding the gang to achieve a form of inner sense, *aprender a respirar*, Cobra dies and it is here, once again, that her body takes on yet another somatic reincarnation, yet another identity.[48] But the gang members want to keep alive her image and her body, unable to distinguish the somatic from the iconographic—Cobra remains intractably bound to both. Hence, they

---

[47] In *Le temps des tribus*, Michel Maffesoli contends that the exchange of words and sex are the indications of a society opening up to the other: "Tous les grands moments d'effervescence sociale qui sont liés au rythme du temps ont tous, d'une manière affirmée ou à leur corps défendant, un aspect initiatique. Lors du carnaval par exemple, la circulation de biens (dons, vols, déprédations...), la circulation du sexe (échangisme, inversion, orgies...) ou la circulation de la parole (expression libre multiple et variées...), tout cela entend apprendre à la jeunesse, et par là-même redire pour soi-même, que toute société repose sur l'échange, sur l'ouverture à l'altérité, et que c'est la réaffirmation ponctuelle de ces aspects qui, au-delà de la pensateur naturelle, constitue le moteur de la perdurance" (p. 172).

[48] —¡Qué vida la mía—suspiró—: debo encontrarme al este para el equinoccio de primavera, al sur para el solsticio de verano, en pleno oeste cuando rompe el otoño y en el norte extremo en lo más crudo del invierno! Me voy pues —y se abre, otra vez sola, la puerta cuarteada. Antes de franquearla se torna por úlima vez el Único hacia la muchedumbre distraída y sentencia:

ACONSEJO LA INGESTIÓN DE PÉTALOS (p. 544).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dress her up in men's clothing and re-embody her once again, as if they were trying to cancel her physical incarnation as woman, as the post-operative Cobra without a *zib:*

> Con una silla y su ropa, empezó a armar la imagen del muerto. Le puso pantalones a las patas delanteras y un par de botas, vistió el espaldar con un suéter rojo, le abrochó un jacket de antílope, raído y sucio: en el dorso aún podía adivinarse un arco vertical abierto en la piel, chorreado, embebido en la felpa, retorcido como una serpiente macheteada; luego, como antaño, trazado de un solo gesto por un calígrafo de estilo anguloso, el círculo de la adivinación, torcido sobre sí mismo y sin bordes el aro perfecto; estampado por un cuño de piedra, junto al círculo un sello cuadro: BR; lacerado junto al hombro una A (p. 549).

By tattooing her body, the gang members inscribe meaning—her name—upon her body whereby the body and language are one and identity occupies the space where the physical and language reflect each other in their meanings. In the case of Cobra, however, language and the body suffocate each other with excess, or as Totem states: "Cobra: para que envenene. Para que ahogue. Para que se enrosque alrededor de sus víctimas y las asfixie. Para que hipnotice con el aliento y sus ojos brillen en la noche, enormes, de oro" (p. 522).

Cobra evidences language and the somatic as the terrains which inflect and redefine one another through the violence of rendering identity—be it through the paintbrush, pen, performance or knife. Sarduy's text is the apotheosis of the *neobarroco* which contains all the bodies of history, gender, sex and torture and projects this rich his terrain of intersecting discourses and inscriptions upon the body. In *Cobra* there is no "effeminized victim" nor is there the struggle to render active the passive voice. Sarduy's narrative demonstrates *realismo mágico* as a consciousness that pervades the act of writing and perceiving the world—for Sarduy brings identity into the afterlife where, like the unknown of history, identity will continue to be constructed and where it will necessarily

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

take on a variety of shapes as if a Hindu god. Sarduy manifests identity as both *intertextualidad* and *intersexualidad* where language and the body are forever bound up in each other and simultaneously never cease signification.[49] It is this constant reshaping and reformatting that Sarduy locates as the nexus of Cuban identity: a racial, sexual, linguistic and cultural *mestizaje* that has no finite ending. For once dead, Cobra's memory, like Cuba's history, remains to be re-named and re-inscribed and the novel paradoxically ends at the beginning ("*Al alba empezaremos de nuevo...*" (p. 262) with a reincarnation of Cobra's memory and body. The *doublure* of the body within this novel is a part of Sarduy's *hiper-telico* that resists any confirmation or homogenization of identity through the exercise of the marginal sexual practices (i.e. sado-masochism and homosexuality), the use of various somatic inscriptions (i.e. cross-dressing, *tatouage*, and make-up), and the translation of national and cultural identities which form Cuba (i.e. the conversion to Buddhism and the East/West dialectic persistently evoked within the novel). For Sarduy, the quiescence of identity through the *imitation* of nature or the sanctification of history results in the

---

[49] Sarduy writes: "El travestismo, tal y como lo practica la novela de Donoso, sería la metáfora mejor de lo que es la escritura: lo que Manuela nos hace ver no es una mujer *bajo la apariencia* de la cual se escondería un hombre, una máscara cosmética que al caer dejara al descubierto una barba, un rostsro ajado y duro, sino *el hecho mismo del travestismo.* Nadie ignora, y sería imposible ingorarlo dada la evidencia del disfraz, la nitidez del artificio, que Manuela es un ajetreado bailarín, un hombre disimulado, un *capricho.* Lo que Manuela muestra es la coexistencia, en un solo cuerpo, de significantes masculinos y femeninos: la tensión, la repulsión, el antagonismo que entre ellos se crea. A través de un lenguagje simbólico lo que este personaje significa es el pintarrajeo, la ocultación, el encubrimiento. Cejas pintadas y barba: esa máscara enmascara que es una máscara: esa es la «realidad» (sin límites, puesto que todo es contaminado por ella) que el héroe de Donoso *enuncia.* Esos planos de intersexualidad son análogos a los planos de intertextualidad que constituyen el objeto literario. Planos que dialogan en un mismo exterior, que se responden y completan, que se exaltan y definen uno al otro: esa interacción de texturas lingüísticas, de discursos, esa danza, esa parodia es la escritura" (p. 1151).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

necessary death of creation, the death of the body, and the reinscription of writing.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter Five

Hybrid Bodies and Border Crossings: Nationalism and Modernity in Morocco and Mexico

Modernity and Tradition

In his book entitled *All That is Solid Melts into Air,* Berman characterizes modernity through four central conditions, two of which I would like to examine specifically. First, Berman contends that modernity is a uniquely European phenomenon. Secondly, Berman states that modernity is part of a historical process dating from the Renaissance which recognized a break between the polarities of the "real" and "illusory" world such that modern man might view the world through both history and a very physical, real present: "Now the false world is seen as a historical past, a world we have lost (or are in the process of losing), while the true world is in the physical and social world that exists for us here and now (or in the process of coming into being)" (p. 106). Berman's definition of modernity, aside from consolidating an ethos of consciousness, serves to posit modernity as a concept of "progress", thereby implying a moral judgement upon those societies which are not modern—namely non-Western cultures. This break characterized by Berman as man's ability to view the world

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"as it is" versus an "objectivized", historical reframing of the past is certainly not unique to European culture and needs to be more closely examined and refashioned so as not to unnecessarily exclude social models which are either constituent or critical of modernity.

I turn here to a historian who theorized modernity in Islam during the 1950's and 1960's, Marshall Hodgson. In *Rethinking World History*, Hodgson redefines modernity in terms of a global context of experiences *between* cultures—specifically those of European and Islamic societies. Refuting the idea that non-Western cultures entered into the "mainstream" of European culture, Hodgson chronicles how the Afro-Eurasian medieval world was engaged in mechanical, biological, political, and social experimentation in the context of increasingly complex trading patterns, and he gives a plethora of examples to show how Islamic cultures actually contributed to European modernization through the introduction of Chinese and Indian sciences and technologies as well as Chinese and Iranian political systems. Arguing against Eurocentric notions of modernity, Hodgson analyzes the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe as historically having been conceptualized as "progress" which he refutes on the grounds that progress, in this context, is homologous to "better". Critiquing Max Weber's distinction between "rational" and "traditional" societies, Hodgson concludes that Weber's concept of modernity depends upon a break from the "traditional" to "rational" which elides contributions made by other cultures and locates Europe as the sole agent of modernity. Demonstrating that rationality and tradition are not at all antithetical concepts, but instead are integral, interdependent moments which work to reinvent and rearticulate cultural traditions, Hodgson confers that modernity depends upon the "effectiveness of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

traditions" which serve to channel individual rationality. In questioning the allocation of non-Western cultures as "pre-modern" and Western cultures as "modern", Hodgson forces us to rethink the West's predilection towards bifurcating modernity and tradition as two separate or antithetical modes which are indigenous to specific cultures. Ultimately, Hodgson, lays the groundwork for understanding modernity as integral to tradition.

In engaging this argument of modernity and tradition, it seems to me that to destroy the binary could easily lend to a recrafting of their polarities, or worse, it could impose a superficial annex to history adding onto the ruins of language another vector of "truth". But, as a friend reminded me recently,[1] one cannot treat history as if it were a house by merely adding on "another wing" to correct an imbalance or amend a spatial inconsistency. So how might we approach the contradictory nature of this discussion of tradition and modernity through a restructuring of sorts that does not pervade the historical consciousness of language or that does not pay homage to what Nietzsche calls the "wirkliche Historie"? As Foucault saliently argues, the traditional devices of history must be "systematically dismantled", he advocates "effective" history as the force that will unearth traditional history and disrupt its "pretended continuity" by breaking down simplistic configurations of events and finalities and by getting caught amidst the complexities and contradictions of events—in essence, by getting lost: "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a

---

[1] I thank Willard Uncapher for this most beautiful way of problematizing discourses of moderntiy and history.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

point of reference" (pp. 154-155). Here Foucault's concept of tradition engages both the structure and process of making knowledge as a historically immutable event and, I would argue, lays the groundwork for understanding modernity as the perpetual dismantling and reestablishment of traditions through the creation of syncretic forums based on past and current enunciations and through the disarticulation of identity based on heterogeneous bodies which pervade any static representation of the subject of knowledge.

Thus we are left to confront modernity head on as a dialogic space of maneuvering inside/outside, past/present, and local/global as informed primarily through the past fifteen years of social science theory which has opened up venues for discussing culture not as a structure, but as a process. I take my distinction of modernity, modernization, and modernism from Hisham Sharabi who locates *modernity* as a "comprehensive structure" that forms a cultural whole, *modernization* as the process of technological transformation, and *modernism* as a consciousness of being different from cultures which are not. I use this distinction drawn by Sharabi carefully since I ultimately object to the cultural relativism his reading lends to modernity as, once again, an originally European moment. However, the distinctions Sharabi draws between the structure, process, and consciousness of modernity provides a practical basis for analyzing the paradigm of modernity as both an intercultural and a local space of recognition and dialogue which shifts between an understanding of modernity as a structure informed by *modernization* as an "infection" of materials, technologies, and practices from outside, and *modernism* as a self-conscious tactic for reinscribing or restructuring traditions from "inside". It is this negotiation of inside/outside and center/periphery which provides a rich terrain for examining

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernity as a process of persistent "infection", or rather dialogue of oneself to another, through stories of our families, our neighbors, and then, on a global level, of our cultures and nations. Each story conveys a meaning that situates history and identity as constituent within an ongoing dialogue of culture, of establishing the borders of inside from outside, and of concurrently breaking down previous distinctions and boundaries within the scope of the present tense. Viewed in this way, modernity is the process of reassessing and reframing traditions through the language of power and the power of language, reflecting both how we frame other cultures and how we are likewise framed.

Modernity as dialogue abandons puerile notions of cultural isolation and embraces contiguous definitions of tradition and transformation as integral to both internal reflections and external transmissions of what we perceive to be our utopias and our particular modernities. Perhaps one of the most meticulous critics of this process of cultural dialogue is Ashis Nandy, whose *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* establishes dialogue as integral to cultural understandings of tradition:

> A dialogue of cultures—or of utopias, visions and faiths—is a dialogue within each participating culture among its different levels or parts. This second dialogue could be articulate, well-defined, or central to the culture; it could be inarticulate, ill-defined or marginal. Some cultures hide their most profound experiences at their peripheries but all cultures have the capacity to use creatively the intersecting demands of such outer and inner dialogues (p. 17).

Just how we negotiate these dialogues as interpreters of culture depends upon our approach to reading culture, for Nandy verifies how traditional technologies have always existed in both Western and non-Western cultures, but has recently been "rediscovered" by the intellectual as part of an exegesis of modernity. For instance, in pointing to Western medicine which is regarded as "modern", Nandy

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contends that Western medicine can likewise be referred to as part of the traditional practices of North America and Western Europe reminding us that "the choice is not between traditional and modern technologies; it is between different traditions of technology, some dominant and some recessive, some endogenous and some exogenous" (pp. 77-94).

At this juncture of modernity—modernization's traditional technologies and modernism's consciousness of "progression"—I now attempt to consolidate a reading which I hope will recast modernity not as a radical break between past and present, but as an embrace of the past within the present and of the transnational within the local, creating what Arjun Appadurai labels as "vernacular globalization" (p. 10). Appadurai shrewdly demonstrates that although modernity has been part of the intellectual geography for many scholars and elites during the 1950's and 1960's, modernity is relatively new for the poor and working class in countries such as Morocco and Mexico. Although we must keep in mind Appadurai's claim that modernity is "decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced," we must also acknowledge that modernity in its formal applications, such as what I am constructing here, is necessarily as uneven as the phenomena which are utilized in any heuristic approach to understanding (pp. 3-13). What can be gained through analyses of modernity, I believe, is to understand specific cultural articulations within very real paradigms of representation, self-definition, and transference of cultural artifacts and imaginings between persons, communities, towns, ethnicities, religions, and nations. In this way, difference can no longer be viewed as intractable, but becomes, instead, a very real and negotiable forum for understanding culture as a polyvalent scene of heterogeneity and contradiction. Likewise, redefining

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernity becomes a challenge for academe as many scholars attempt to uproot the discourses of homogeneity which seek to reaffirm and encapsulate identity within distinguishable and marked units so that we can transcend—or even subvert—former occidental delineations of modernity previously understood as organic to the West. Indeed, modernity is a moment that is not necessarily "at large", lost within a nebulous global context, for modernity as such is conspicuously missing from current local practices of non-western cultural traditions. Instead, modernity is to be found within the vernacular of these cultures which engage identity as a necessarily disrupted space. As such, modernity can no longer be opposed to tradition (or non-western culture) but rather can be understood as a the endless disruptions and rearticulations of traditions taking place in both local and intercultural dialogues.

Portraits and Power of Morocco's Hassan II

On 20 August 1953, Moroccan sultan Mohammed V was deposed and exiled by the French. During his absence of over two years, Mohammed's image remained in Morocco through the many photographs which men kept in their wallets; thus his image, like that of Egypt's Nasser, continued to maintain a legitimating space of political and spiritual power despite the Protectorate's ban on such photographs.[2] In his absence, the monarch's claim to power was also evoked verbally through the references to his role as political and spiritual leader, as Moroccans would refer to Mohammed V as "Commander of the Faithful"

---

[2] For a more detailed discussion of this, see Susan Ossman's *Picturing Casablanca*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(*Amir el mou'minin*). However, it was not until after his return to Morocco on 18 November 1955, that Mohammed's features became familiar to the people since, following independence, his face appeared on coins, bills, and then on official portraiture which was designated as mandatory to hang in public spaces, to include private businesses, cafés, bookstores, hotels, meeting rooms, and classrooms (Ossman, pp. 136-137). Though long in existence before the French Protectorate, portraits of Alawite sultans, have since Moroccan independence come to represent both the reinstatement—and reminder thereof—of Moroccan sovereignty as well as the conterminous articulation of the power of the sultan and the autonomy of Morocco as a nation.

What is most striking about these official portraits is how these images maintain an iconic space for referring to the King outside of language which simultaneously excludes and includes the Moroccan viewer: she is obviously not "in" the landscape of the picture, yet as a Moroccan, as one of the "Faithful", she is included within the iconic legitimacy of power and hence, empowerment. Thus, like the images themselves, the viewer is frozen, trapped, within the referential scope of authority/authorized, sultan/follower, and then leader/citizen. Although the king's portraits serve to insinuate Morocco's presence as a monarchy and major Islamic state power, these photos simultaneously reinforce the polyvalence of national identity in Morocco today which embraces two primary streams of empowerment often understood as contradictory: the dissolution of colonial ties to the West in terms of renegotiating and reinvigorating an Islamic traditionalist state as well as the articulation of interest in European and American cultural politics and practices. Yet, these photos, while engaging the interstitial gesticulations of modernity and tradition, serve to interrogate these

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

valences and their assumed corollaries: the coupling of the modern as a European importation or contagion within Morocco, and the traditional as the autochthonous, original Moroccan core of identity. Inasmuch as these portraits might seem to reaffirm the bifurcation of tradition and modernity within an occidental scope of theorizing the modern moment, I maintain that they subvert Western assumptions of identity by asserting modernity and tradition as inseparable, tractably interdependent, and integral to Moroccan national identity today.

In examining the official portraits of the Moroccan sultans as the nexus between traditional and modern Moroccan identities, we might begin to understand how the structures of modern/traditional, colonial/postcolonial, and outside/inside function on the level of both the "popular" and the "official" in the formation of postcolonial Moroccan national identity today. In order to discuss national identity in Morocco, we must first understand the importance of the visual as a primary discursive basis for insinuating any narrative of nationalism within the country since any singular verbal and written communication inevitably excludes a rather large portion of the population. For instance, there are five major languages spoken in Morocco—three dialects of Berber, *derija* (dialectical Arabic), and French—and the literacy rates for Arabic and French demonstrate that 37% of the population is literate with women over the age of fifteen occupying a 26% literacy rate (UNESCO, 1990 & British Geological Survey, 1995). Moreover, when late King Hassan II gave a public discourse on the television or radio, it was not uncommon that he spoke in none of the languages spoken in Morocco, but instead offered his speech in Classical Arabic eliding the uneducated sector of his audience. Thus, the visual image, the official portrait of the king,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

has become the central signifying figure in Moroccan society, along with the national flag, for representing Moroccan nationalism, given that these portraits speak to most all Moroccans regardless of language or literacy.

Although portraits of the sultans have been used for centuries to represent their authority as spiritual and political leaders, such as this painting of Mohammed III from 1788, the French Protectorate of Morocco aggressively used the technology of photography to consolidate its presence both physically and symbolically within Morocco *(fig. 1)*. In many respects, the photographs of the French Protectorate served as a much more pervasive and dominant exertion of power than had the portraits of Moroccan kings prior to colonization *(figs. 2-3)*. Images of French presence in Morocco were not uncommon as a way of affirming French authority and of simulating an "amicable" relationship between the Protectorate and the then King Mohammed V and young Prince Hassan *(figs. 4-8)*. During this period, images of King Mohammed V and Prince Hassan are rare, and when they are found within photographs they are normally posed with the "friendly" French administration and army, in military uniform (although their was no Moroccan military during the Protectorate), or performing a Muslim ritual *(figs. 9-13)*. There is this one portrait taken of Sultan Mohammed V and his son in 1944 immediately after the Liberation of France *(fig. 14)*. It is not surprising, however, that this photo is taken at sea as the king and his son sailed to France to meet De Gaulle. The emphasis of the king being "without" land, as it were, is clear from the open hatch and the anchor imprinted on the carpet beneath his feet.

It is not until the return of the royal family from exile in 1955, that we begin to see images of the king that not only reinstate his physical presence

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

within the country, but which also attempt to reconstruct Moroccan national identity and legacy of the throne *(figs. 15-17)*. Since the independence of Morocco in 1956, these photos have become mandatory in public spaces, including private businesses *(figs. 19-20)*. Over a lifetime of seeing Hassan's portraits, Moroccans have witnessed his early years in college in France, his return from exile in Madagascar with his father, his stylish long sideburns and cigarettes of the 1970's, through today with his grown sons, his aging body, and his ever-present gaze toward the people. These photos are central to understanding the power of political imagery in Morocco as well as the way in which the post-colonial condition of Morocco has necessitated a careful balance between invigorating the present with Arabization and nationalism and carefully negotiating the past of the French presence and the traces of this history as manifested by the French language, the architecture of the *ville nouvelle* (new city), legal codes, and other cultural remnants which still remain long after the dissolution of the Protectorate. For the purpose of this presentation, I will focus the core of my discussion on the photographic images of King Hassan II, who ruled Morocco from March 3, 1961 until his death July 23, 1999. This analysis seeks to uncover the very dialogic relationship between modernity and tradition within the representations of the sultan as these portraits are tools of nationalism which reimagine and reframe Moroccan history within a contemporary interplay of conterminous inside/outside, Western/Islamic, secular/religious, and global/vernacular. These portraits attempt to secure a unifying discourse of the past within the present, rather than bringing about a complete rupture of the present from the French colonial history. But do these photographs actually function univocally, as images that are meant to include the Moroccan viewer

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and offer a "modern" image of identity? Or, might these images actually mimic the representations of modernity and tradition which are specific to what Rabinow calls the "French Modern"?[3] Ultimately, there is a framing within Moroccan culture which seeks to separate—and quite consciously so—the "modern" from the "traditional" and the colonial past from the Arabized present; but this is nonetheless quite problematic. Inasmuch as Moroccan "traditionalism" and "modernity" could be considered integral and interdependent nodes which create a renewed Moroccan nationalism, we need to speculate these polyvalent sources which establish modernity and tradition as integral and autochthonous constituents in Moroccan society today and which attempt to conterminously erase the "glory" of colonialism while simultaneously emulating its designs.

Through analyzing the official portraiture, I undertake an examination of the nexus of tradition and modern through which Hassan II attempts to represent himself—and a greater ideal of "Moroccan identity"—in terms of upholding ties to the Islamic, Arab, and Berber history of Morocco while also engaging in the fashion, sports, and cultural activities of the West. These photos, found virtually everywhere in Morocco, serve to consolidate the visual as the focal point for disseminating national identity, authority, and belonging as these photos necessarily spring into being dialogues and discussions of the king in the vernacular tongues of Morocco. Susan Ossman, in her book *Picturing Casablanca*, writes:

> The entanglement of word and image opens new vistas for the illustration of personal traits. When we see a picture of the king throughout the city, his name is echoed and reechoed through their repetition. These visual refractions appear more varied in expression than in naming. Photos show the monarch conducting all of the mundane actions of life: drinking

---

[3] See Paul Rabinow's *French Modern* for an analysis of the making and planning of the "colonial image".

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> tea, purchasing bread, praying. But he also meets important heads of state, appears on royal steeds, smiles beside his newlywed daughter. *He* implies multiplicity; *he* is not pinned to a single name. Images bear witness to important events: he meets Margaret Thatcher, dined with some other head of state. Like biographies, photographs themselves observe, projecting the manifest traits of face or manner. Their determinacy and regularity—the way in which they pose all their subjects in a uniform space and time—seem to diminish the mystery and awe inspired by *him* (p. 139).

Clearly, Moroccans viewing these pictures are under no grand illusion that the king goes to the local *hanut* to buy his bread; however, as Ossman points out, these pictures consolidate a dual narrative which frames Moroccan identity as singular and quotidian and yet heteroglossic in their naming and their reenactment through dialogue and storytelling. Moreover, it is the very pervasive geography of these photos coupled with their official and daily scenes which present the king as simultaneously a religious, political, local figure with whom Moroccans can identify and respect and a figure who is untouchable and beyond scrutiny. Upon closer look, however, Mohammed

The photos of Mohammed V and Hassan II taken prior to 1961, still found in many rural sections of Morocco, show Mohammed V in *jelaba* and *belġa*, while Hassan is often in Western attire, playing sports in shorts and sneakers or wearing Western suits and casual oxford shirts *(fig. 21)*. The early years of education of the then Prince Hassan II rarely show him in Moroccan clothing, despite the fact that his father is almost always in *jelaba*. Young Hassan is often pictured sporting a *deux-pièce* or a military uniform with the occasional photo of him in engaged in military duty *(fig. 22)*. Clearly, these early photos, prior to 1961, bifurcate and mark the stereotypical modern spaces of education, military, and I would argue youthful "freedom" for Prince Hassan II from the scope of tradition as authority, age, and patriarchy for King Mohammed V.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is not until the death of Mohammed V on 26 February 1961 that we can easily find the new King Hassan II in Moroccan dress; yet he does not abandon Western clothing as he prays for his dead father in a suit and tie that very same day *(figs. 23-24)*. From the moment that Hassan II is enthroned we can begin to see contexts for reading a collapse of the traditional Moroccan identity with the Western pretenses of modernity wherein the artifices of this marked Western modernity are interpreted within a specifically Moroccan context of tradition and reintegrated into a dialogic sphere of a new Morocco, or rather a new Moroccan tradition *(figs. 25-28)*. The blurring of Western influences from a Morocco, now independent, consolidates a reading of nationalism as a moment of change, innovation, and of course allegiance to these traditions of both the old and the new *(fig. 29)*.

Many of represenations, however, recycle the same dichotomies that the images of the French colonizers manifested decades earlier. For if we look at how De Gaulle is framed, always surrounded by the people (*fig. 2*), overlooking the "land" (*fig. 4*), with or with the villagers (*fig. 6*), Hassan II, during his rule, is likewise framed in this very same way. For example, we see Hassan facing the camera for a moment, greeting the people of Morocco, and meeting with world leaders, sporting fashions from various regions of Morocco and the world *(figs. 30-32)*. These photos function in two distinct modes: they serve to nuance the traditional by honoring it and posturing it while also they conterminously echo the colonial "grandeur" of Morocco by "staging" the modern state. Likewise, there is a drive to demonstrate the people, the *shaʿabi*, surrounding Hassan II while in many other official portraits there is an almost grotesque display of wealth that most Moroccans could only possibly see through these photographs,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as if wealth (the modern) immediately excludes most every single Moroccan. It is in this way that the photos perversely juxtapose what often seems to be a "staged" presence of Moroccans surrounding Hassan II while others demonstrate their removal, their silence and ultimately their insigificance. Just as the many colonial photographs of De Gaulle years earlier show him surrounded by Moroccans in procession and on the streets with the "people" and other images portray him alone overlooking the city, the legitimazation of power in the photographs of Hassan II can be understood as "real" as much as "performed".

And certainly the styles Hassan II fanfares distinctly play the dichotomies of tradition and modernity, for these images of combat gear, sunglasses, tuxedos, *jalaba*, and long sideburns are all signifying elements that individually might serve to uphold any reading of a strict allegiance to form and function; but here these signs are intertwined, juxtaposed, and combined so as to lose any particular, reduced meaning *(figs. 33-37)*. Yet, there is a constant underpinning of their being dichotomies as Hassan II is clearly "cross-dressing" for his Moroccan subjects. The ostensible modernity of technology, warfare, and Western fashion are undermined by the "mixing" of other professed signs of tradition—the *jalaba*, the fez of the Ottoman empire, and the turban of the *Saharouia*, the people of the disputed southwestern territories who, like the Polisario, are often viewed as marginal in Moroccan society *(figs. 38-39)*. Many of these signs of "tradition" are themselves historically part of cultures which were not always integrated within Morocco and which were later incorporated within Moroccan culture as part of a new syncretism, as part of a continuum of modernity and nationalism. In pursuing the contested territories of the south, King Hassan II instigated *La Marche verte* in November of 1975, bringing with him tens of thousands of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moroccans who joined in this peaceful claim to land *(fig. 40)*. Here, Hassan intermittently wears clothes of the *Saharouia* and of the military in asserting the authority of the people and the state *(fig. 41)*. There is no clear rupture between the people, as traditional, and the state, as modern—they coexist, each redefining the other as interdependent constituents that simply cannot be separated *(fig. 42)*. Moreover, *La Marche verte* came amidst a period when Hassan II had not only sent political dissenters to prison while exiling others, but there Hassan II had used the military to murder many of the Polisario in the disputed territories in southwest Morocco as well as use violence against people in civil unrest.[4] Reading these photos of *La Marche verte* for anyone slightly familiar with recent Moroccan history, therefore, becomes an act of seeing the Emperor with his "clothes on". These images could as easily read as propaganda campaigns designed to mediate the image of community, democracy, nation and modernity to those who take in these images.

Yet, so many of the later photos of Hassan II project an image of the loving, diplomatic and "the people's" king, that the political repression and violent elimination of dissent in earlier years is simply elided by the choreographies of fashion, international relations, and the "modernization" of Morocco by virtue of the king's ability to cross over. The valences of modernities and traditions become confused with each additional photograph, each open to the critical gaze, deflecting questions such as: Is a smoking jacket and combat gear modern or traditional *(figs. 43-44)* ? Is education traditional or modern *(fig. 45)*? Such

---

[4] The writers Khaire Eddine and Abdelatif Laâbi were two of a very long list of writers send to prison. Laâbi was finally released and exiled to France and later returned to Morocco in 1995 after Hassan II allowed his return to Morocco.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

questions, like many of the theories of modernity and tradition coming out of Europe and the United States in recent years, exclude the possibility that the modern and the traditional moment might actually be more dialogically bound and integral to cultural frameworks such as Morocco than they are in France or the United States, for instance. Indeed, these images beg the question if the notion of the "traditional" is nothing more than a very modern and recent concept.

Showing King Hassan II in traditional Moroccan clothing at his daughter's wedding, with his two sons in the mosque, or solemnly sipping mint tea, these photos are incorporated into the architecture of Moroccan beauty salons, telephone boutiques, corner stores, and cafés from the old *medina* to the *ville nouvelle* to the *blad* (countryside) *(figs. 46-47).* King Hassan II easily negotiates the role of political leader as he is often pictured with world leaders from the Queen of England to the Pope *(figs. 48-50).* Likewise, he handles the religious aspects of his title with as much charisma and maneuvering of the old and the new *(figs. 51-52).* Not surprisingly, the multifarious representations of King Hassan II in jeans and button-up oxford, in full fishing gear, or clad in gold bracelets and rings conveys an inclusive identity of Morocco within the post-colonial spaces of independence *without* posing a threat to the religious images of Hassan going to sacrifice a sheep on the *Aid El-Kebir* or performing his ablutions *(figs. 53-54).* In fact, the photos which show a more religious side of Hassan are inflected with the new, the modern, fomenting a reinvigorated reading of tradition, since the gold ornaments and silk *jelaba* worn by the king are strictly prohibited for use by men according to the Qur'an *(fig. 55).* And certainly these postures are not unique to the king as many Moroccan men wear gold

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

jewelry, silk shirts, and Western clothing. It shocks no Moroccan to see a man wearing the Nike logo on a t-shirt any more than to see him later wearing a *fuqia* (long robe with short sleeves) and *belġa* (the Moroccan slippers with the pointed toes). Simply put, the interspersing of Western and Moroccan clothing in the city or amid the rural sectors does not operate on the level of cultural "schizophrenia", but rather acts as a sort of cultural remapping, restylization, and recreation in which each individual can partake of the gestures with which he or she feels comfortable. Certainly, there are many Moroccans who rarely—if ever—wear Western clothing and there are few Moroccans who wear Western clothing daily who do not have a *jelaba* stashed away in their wardrobe. However, is this system of recognition and mutual identification between the modern and the traditional enough to deconstruct their binaried oppositions, or might this "play" lay the foundation for deconstructing one's subordination of the other?

In his writing on ethnicity, Appadurai argues strongly against primordialist theories which he claims are products of theories and implementations of Western modernity:

> Modernization theory, especially as it was applied to the new, postcolonial nations by American political scientists, was largely responsible for defining this antimodern symptom of primordialism. In recent efforts to explain ethnic violence, the two explanatory targets of primordialist theory have become subtly fused, so that the primordialism of resistance to modernization and the primordialism of ethnic violence have become loosely identified (p. 140).

Furthering this logic, Appadurai asserts that models of Western modernity infused within postcolonial settings, instead of distancing the primordial, actually exacerbate the primordialisms of group identification. Although I agree with Appadurai's thesis of the abuses of primordialist theory, I object to his subjugation of the primordial as always anti-modern, rather than as a theory which insinuates

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

itself upon postcoloniality *as* anti-modern. Moroccan identity is a complex network of languages, ethnicities, and to a lesser extent today religion, which cannot simply be cut up into the primordial and the modern, nor easily divided into the "us" and the "them". For much like Mexican immigration to the United States whereby close to two thirds of Mexicans have a relative living in the United States, Moroccans are a people who are found living on Moroccan soil as well as in large numbers in Spain, Italy, France, and Canada. To speak of modernity as an element that can be easily isolated or aggregated into a facile system of academic "speak" or bourgeois access, as Appadurai maintains, denies the transmissibility of modernity within everyday language, material, and symbols as created and syncretically adapted from within and from outside Moroccan soil in far reaching corners of the *blad* to the *medina* to the Miami pool in Casablanca. Moreover, to speak of modernity as a device which can or ought to do away with group identification, or what Appadurai calls "intimate collectives", seems to negate the driving force crucial to any modernity—that of its integration within a traditional body of the present which necessarily posits this hybrid identity within a collective which either succeeds or fails in negotiating change and strengthening communities (pp. 139-157). Instead of labeling the failure of the modern as a return to the primordial, we ought to begin to understand the modern as its potential success as well as its potential failure. Given that various paradigms of modernity's success or failure bring with them vernacular embodiments of difference, we might begin to instigate investigations of failed modernities as loci of newer, vernacular articulations of a modernity that our current readings deny.

As many theorists maintain that culture is a system of simultaneous

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inclusion and exclusion, these portraits of Hassan serve as iconic references which both include and exclude various identities—as does any representation. Yet, it is through this *seemingly* contradictory gesture of inclusion/exclusion of modernity and tradition which evidences Moroccan nationalism as a viable and ever-changing narrative of belonging, exile, return, repatriation, and inclusion *(fig. 56)*. The power of Arabization in the media and the schools in the 1960's and 1970's forced a greater marginalization of speakers of Berber from the fore, the mid 1990's evidenced a change in public policy: the Moroccan government mandated obligatory study of one of the three Berber dialects in secondary education in an attempt to include these languages within the topography of Moroccan identity. Similarly, the government of Hassan II changed radically throughout its thirty-eight years as it went from being a rather harsh structure of political assimilation in the 1960's and 1970's—imprisonment and execution for those who refused—to being a much more open and, dare I say, a more "democratic" forum for expression and dissent in the 1990's. For instance, Abdelatif Laâbi, once the *enfant terrible* of the literary scene and political prisoner for many years, returned to Rabat in 1995 from his long exile France and has now begun a new journal in which he addresses the very same literary, cultural and political issues for which, previously, he was punished. That Hassan II flagrantly violated human and civil rights is hardly a matter of dispute, as are his military activities and years spent on human rights groups' blacklists. Yet, he clearly attempted to amend some—not all—of his actions in the last years of his rule. Although a utopic inclusion of all groups within the scope of Moroccan nationalism seems unlikely at this point in time, it is evident that Moroccans are entangled within a complex network of contradiction, change, and assimilation of newer

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

traditions—or modernities—within older traditions, recasting centers of power, redefining peripheries, and continuing dialogues between individuals, communities, and nations.

To venture in and out of shops in Morocco is truly a remarkable journey for the eye and the mind as seemingly antipodal narratives converge into moments of commerce, eating, and dialogue. An old woman who sells me *henna* rummages through a pile of used plastic bags looking for the one that will just accommodate the portion I have bought. Above her is a headshot of the king looking outward, smiling *(fig. 57)*. I go to the telecommunications building to buy some stamps and there is Hassan, dressed in a suit, leaning back in a leather office chair speaking into a creme-colored telephone *(fig. 58)*. And in the cafés Hassan is usually drinking *atay bi naᶜnaᶜ* (mint tea) clad in a light colored cotton *jalaba*. Everywhere I go in Morocco I consciously seek out King Hassan's photo to observe what pose is offered, what clothes are presented. Indeed, I am struck by the changing postures and attire for they articulate an expression of individuality and exclusion as much as they demand a reading of national belonging and inclusion. These photographs also need to be read in terms of themselves as artifacts, as images of power which reenact the past within the present *(figs. 59-60)*. The *métissage* of the traditional and the modern are clearly active within the collective composition of these portraits, insinuating style as much a moment for reading Moroccan identities as fragmentary as it is a forum for executing individuality *(fig. 61)*. During his 1995 visit to the United States, when asked to comment on his impression of Bill Clinton in comparison to the other seven U.S. presidents he had met in his lifetime, King Hassan responded to press by saying: "First, let me say that no two men are alike. As a wise man once said,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

style is what defines the man." Truly, King Hassan's words echo what I am attempting to demonstrate here. Rather than speak of modernity as a monolithic structure of seamless occidental origin, we ought to turn to readings of modernity in various histories and cultures which are informed, inflected, and vectored by various traditions and which, in turn, have become syncretic, vernacular nodes for forming newer traditions and different styles.

Frida Kahlo's Self-Portraiture as *mestizaje*

In *The Cage of Melancholy*, Roger Bartra discusses modernity in Mexico in terms of the *pelado*, a notion he borrows from Octavio Paz. The *pelado* represents the figure of solitude and melancholy who inhabits the city because he has lost the "rural paradise" for which he was once searching.[5] Bartra examines the *pelado* as paradigmatic of Mexican identity and, more importantly, as representative of a *modern* Mexican identity. The *pelado* both demythifies the utopic vision of the Indian, displacing all homogeneous notions of history, race and body and defies :

---

[5] Bartra writes: "But in melancholy the will, too, is oriented toward martyrology: the conscience is confronted with barbaric ancestors, those unbelievers of the soul, and is obliged to hate them, but to vaunt them nevertheless as terrible scars and deformities. Perhaps for this reason the mythical character that has been set up in Mexico as the symbol of the whole nation is the *pelado*, a kind of urban peasant (if I may employ such a paradox), half-asphyxiated by the city, who has lost the rural paradise and has not found the promised land. In the *pelado* is restored the horrendous image of the *lépero*, form the Porfirian era and New Spain. That mob, the *leperaje*, which was seen by the scientists of the nineteenth century as a bottomless well of vice, bestiality, and cruel atavisms, reemerges in the eyes of the postrevolutionary intelligentsia in the person of the *pelado*, who is clearly dominated by a feeling of inferiority (according to Ramos and Paz) but in whom abides, hidden, the complex tragedy of human solitude" (p. 33).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The modern Mexican seems an even more nebulous and mysterious figure than the Indian; nevertheless, his formulation was indispensable for laying the foundations of, and then consolidating, the nationalism of the new Mexican Revolutionary State. The myth of the Indian, with its inevitable flood of rural griefs, is not enough; the modern Mexican must also contain the tragedy of the *mestizo* in an urban context. The *pelado*, says Yáñez, "is the Mexican in his natural state, and moreover, the representative type of our *mestizo* character"...The result is that the *pelado* is distrustful, realist, skeptical, pessimistic, undisciplined, disorderly, and stubborn, manifesting a "double ancestral cruelty" (both indigenous and Spanish) (pp. 92).

Bartra makes paradoxical this figure of the *pelado* as someone who does not belong to anything in particular *because* he takes part in so many discontinuous spaces that no particular identity is *his*. Identity for the *pelado* is not smooth and devoid of dissonance—to the contrary, the *pelado* is a conflictive identity which, according to Bartra, serves the basis to understanding discourses of nationalism in Mexico. As Bartra's reading of the *pelado* could be viewed as the postmodern response to romantic narratives of the Indian, he posits the *pelado* as the cultural and somatic figure of *mestizaje*. Evidencing that the urban center serves to diffuse the awkwardness that the *pelado* feels, he never quite adapts to any homogeneous construction of identity and inevitably is a figure who distrusts history as much as he refuses naming. Bartra's analysis of the *pelado* lays claim to a very legitimate argument regarding what constitutes the modern Mexican subject in regards to nationalism, insinuating uniformity as the basis of Mexican nationalism which is both a form of erasing differences so as to serve political ends and a usurpation of the structures of power such that corruption and incompetence are, according to Bartra, rampant:

> Mexican nationalism has arrived at a critical moment. It is not only the odious, legitimating source of a dominant, exploitative system, which seeks to justify deep inequality and injustice through the imposition of uniformity on political culture: this is shared by all varieties of nationalism. Mexican nationalism (and this is the root of the crisis), is also the source of a succession of transfigurations and transpositions that have resulted

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> in a political culture which no longer corresponds to the needs for expansion within the system of exploitation itself. Even the advance of resolute imperialist capitalism clashes openly with the trail of rural sorrows, barbarisms domesticated by the *caciques*, workers' movements ringer with Cantinflas's puns, and inefficiency and corruption in the name of a cohort of *pelados* (pp. 175-176).

The *pelado* is a figure who does not correspond to current systems of naming because, quite simply, Mexican identity has been evidenced as conflictual and rarely, if ever, logical. For Bartra, the *pelado* represents the modern Mexican state of confusion, corruption and even chaos while he also engenders the double bind of identity from which the Mexican is linked and from which he cannot escape. In a sense, Bartra establishes the *pelado* as a synchronous dialectic of the modern and the traditional which configures Mexico's history—from its violent and "magically real" beginnings through the present. A historical figure who never seems to fit into unambiguous schematics of nation, race, history or sexuality, the *pelado* catalyzes discourses of traditionalism and modernity in terms of the polyvalences of identity which he simultaneously embraces and defies. Therefore, the *pelado* is doubly misunderstood: he is forever marginal to the internal cultural logics of Mexico and he is elided within external studies of national identity which attempt to tease out and name destroying all interstices of temporality and ambiguity. As such the *pelado* manifests Mexican identity as multiple and fractured and likewise bridges discourses of modernity and traditionalism such that these two valences become confused and interwoven moments of the same phrase.

As *mestizaje* and nationalism are discourses which constantly redefine one another by negotiating the displacement and rupture of somatic inscriptions of identity, it is not surprising that the body in Latin America has become the locus for understanding identity as disrupted, uneven, contradictory and quite

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

often destructive. Indeed identity is never homogeneous even within certain classes, social sectors, geographies or "races"—for the nomenclature of identity is insufficient to represent myself to you or you to me. Words which once maintained their specificity in a distinctively cultural reading no longer resonate to many participants of cultures worldwide and the very notion of community seems to be as much a fiction of good will as it is a modality of hope, of *recovering something once lost. Instead, the various discourses of exile and* nomadism are having an increasingly powerful social currency in many countries around the world while notions such as class, nation, race and gender are constantly pushed outward, subverted, corroded and usurped. Developing nations which lose thousands of citizens each year due to emigration to western countries are the first to understand what migrant culture is all about and what it means for understanding "community" as fractured and discontinuous. In Ashis Nandy's *Plural Worlds, Multiple Selves,* he discuses this very notion of exile, both globally and specifically within the United States:

> This is, however, an age of exile in more than one sense. Not only have many communities that looked settled till recently experienced colossal dislocation through migration, war, unbridled urbanisation, and mega-development, a large part of the world is now inhabited by people who have experienced or carry within them memories of uprooting. Even when we nowadays talk of a global order dominated by one super power, that power represents, among other things, the power of the immigrants, the refugees, the displaced, the decultured and/or recultured. It is this culture, and the public values that can survive in a society of uprooted, which dominates the global cultural order. Few will disagree that America *is* primarily a culture of the uprooted, but fewer will admit that it is a culture of the uprooted that must deny that it is atypical; that it prefers to see itself as a model for the rest of the world, a haven where the poor, the powerless and the discarded of other lands have come and remade their lives voluntarily and produced a culture that now makes transcultural sense. This preference is continuously endorsed by the élites of other countries, especially those of the third world, constantly talking of catching up with the United States in the distant future (p. 114).

Nandy's maintains that transcultural mixings are indeed not only about

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

restructuring community, but that these spaces are about reviewing they dynamics of these transglobal orders and how they are framed within a larger inter-cultural dialogue. For instance, a country such as Mexico which has a voluminous emigration annually—mostly to the United States—manifests identity as somatically, historically and culturally part of a *mestizaje* which knows no limits to borders, which has no specific topography. Indeed, *mestizaje* as a nomadic identity is understood as a movement between identities, but it is unclear what exactly these identities are. For identity in Latin America is paradigmatic in this way: it is both without terrain and yet somehow always about crossing borders. In this way then, exile can be felt not only outside the borders of nation-state, but often within these very border which heretofore were the sites of belonging.[6]

---

[6] Nandy writes cogently on this space of exile and displacement: "For some, the twentieth century has been a century of refugees. Others like Hannah Arendt have identified refugees as virtually a new species of human beings who have come to symbolise the violence of our times. Refugees as contemporary symbols, however, proclaim something more than the pathologies of the global nation-state system. They also represent a state of mind, a form of psychosocial displacement that has become endemic to modernising societies. Defined thus, most refugees do not have to cross national frontiers to become refugees and many, when they do so, are more "pulled" by the seductive appeals of self-induced displacement than the "push" of an oppressive or silent system. It is this changed status of territoriality inhuman life that explains why, in immigrant societies like the United States, the metaphor of exile now looks jaded. There are some who have already begun to argue that human beings need not have a "home" as it has been traditionally understood in large parts of the world, that the idea itself is a red herring. Given the cultural hierarchy in the world, many, it seems, have become reconciled to living with a labile sense of self. Displacement and the psychology of exile are in; cultural continuities and settled communities are out; they have a touch of *ennui* associated with them. However, in societies such as China and India, which their citizens and outsiders were both accustomed to view as relatively stable and unchanging, adjustment to the pace-setting role now given to the culture of exile is disorienting and unnerving. In India, where the metaphor of eternal India continues as an important ingredient of public lexicon, the spread of the culture of uprootedness has produced new cultural dislocations, anxieties and social tensions. Yet, many aspects of uprooting that take place in South Asia remain invisible. We have not yet noticed, for instance, that the psychology of displacement is becoming a serious presence in the South Asian landscape and many elements of South Asian public life are readjusting to the culture of the uprooted" (p. 112).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mestizaje is a cultural and somatic discourse of mixings, violences, coherences, and disruptions which occur in no particular order and which are understood in no particular singularity. The contemporary Mexican subject is always split in his history, language, body and nation and his identity forever traverses the various textual and social fields of meanings which attempt to relegate him to a specific place within the terrain of identity politics. The *pelado* is the figure of cultural and racial *mestizaje* who fights against singularity by passing across determinate concepts as a means of not comprising anything in particular. As Giorgio Agamben states, singular identity can only maintain itself *in relationship to* an other, in respect to a border:

> Whatever is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Through this relation, as Kant said, singularity borders all possibility and thus receives its *omnimoda determinatio* not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property (being red, Italian, Communist), but *only by means of this bordering*. It belongs to a whole, but without this belonging's being able to be represented by a real condition: Belonging, being-*such*, is here only the relation to an empty and indeterminate totality (p. 67).

Therefore, identity is about a paradoxical belonging and not-belonging which conterminously cancels out any strategies for reading monolithic constructions of identity. Moreover, it is the subject of modernity in Mexico who embodies this very movement—both by her physical structure of "mixed blood" and her physical traversings of borders which displace the topographical space of nation, culture and community. The Mexican subject remains tied to a certain concept of identity while simultaneously traversing this very modality in order to reconstruct a community which is all but real and every bit virtual, imaginary and part of a magically real space in which modernity and traditionalism are no

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

longer polar opposites but instead are discontinuous moments.

Agamben's work on community is most useful when discussing identity in Latin America, for it is the body as commodity, historical figure, or paradigmatic symbol which maintains the social body, which nurtures the very idea of community:

> The commodification of the human body, while subjecting it to the iron laws of massification and exchange value, seemed at the same time to redeem the body from the stigma of ineffability that had marked it for millennia. Breaking away from the double chains of biological destiny and individual biography, it took its leave of both the inarticulate cry of the tragic body and the dumb silence of the comic body, and thus appeared for the first time perfectly communicable, entirely illuminated. The epochal process of the emancipation of the human body from its theological foundations was thus accomplished in the dances of the "girls," in the advertising images, and in the gait of fashion models. This process had already been imposed at an industrial level when, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the invention of lithography and photography encouraged the inexpensive distribution of pornographic images: Neither generic nor individual, neither an image of the divinity nor an animal form, the body now became something truly *whatever* (pp. 47-48).

In this way the body is more paradigmatic than ever—it is both commodity and real, both exchangeable and valueless. What Agamben posits as the "emancipation of the human body" from its theological foundations can also be viewed as a liberation of the body from purely social or biological foundations. For the body of the *mestizo* can be viewed as both legitimating discourses such as race, as much as it verifies the transparency of such language to any "real" meaning. For the *mestizo* as a historical and linguistic concept bears no weight when pulled from the veneer of history and into the quotidian space of the *pelado*. As such, *mestizaje* could be viewed as a cultural fiction for understanding the historical tropes of identity in Latin America which serves as the discursive model for

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reading both community and body as *whatever.*[7]

It is this in-between space, this *whatever,* which I wish to examine in the problematic terrain of identity politics in Latin America today. As Appadurai warns of the "modern moment" as a temporal truncation prevalent in western theory, we can begin to understand that what constitutes contemporary identity is often guided by a discursive drive to separate past from present:

> One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science (Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Toennies, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim) is that it has steadily reinforced the sense of some single moment—call it the modern moment—that by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present. Reincarnated as the break between tradition and modernity and typologized as the difference between ostensibly traditional and modern societies, this view has been shown repeatedly to distort the meanings of change and the politics of pastness (p. 3).

It is this break between the then and the now that is persistently maintained in western readings of identity and which has fomented a sense of cultural schizophrenia when reading the *pelado.* As this break is part of a western tradition of reading culture, I believe that such interpretations must be re-evaluated in order to take into account the polysemous histories and bodies that are simply not evocable. It is through the body of the *mestizo* that identity maintains a constant flowing between temporalities in which the past and present in Latin America are never really separated, but are integral moments of a larger topography for reading identity as fragmentary, plural and discontinuous. The

---

[7] Agamben writes: "The coming being is whatever being. In the Scholastic enumeration of transcendentals (*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum seu perfectum*—whatever entity is one, true, good or perfect), the term that, remaining unthought in each, conditions the meaning of all the others is the adjective *quodlibet.* The common translation of this term as "whatever" in the sense of "it does not matter which, indifferently" is certainly correct, but in its form the Latin says exactly the opposite: *Quodlibet ens* is not "being, it does not matter which,' but rather "being such that it always matters.' The Latin always already contains, that is, a reference to the will (*libet*). Whatever being has an original relation to desire" (p. 1).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mestizo is this movement between the traditional and modern moments which renders interpretation a dizzying task and which maintains identity as constantly beyond representation.

As *mestizaje* in Mexico is evidenced through the persistent negotiations of modern and traditional spaces, the paintings of Frida Kahlo negotiate Mexican national identity as a constant movement between the body and culture of *mestizaje*. Kahlo has been studied ad nauseam through autobiographical approaches to her work and it is indeed not my intention here to reinvigorate such discussions. Rather, I would like to examine Kahlo's paintings as artifacts that manifest Mexican identity as a space of fragmentation and reinscription in which the body is the sphere upon which various single identities are traversed, ruptured and embedded. Instead of giving weight to very valid autobiographical interpretations of her work, I would like to focus upon the ways in which the subject of the body in Kahlo's work is utilized to represent Mexican identity which is—coincidental to many autobiographical readings—fragmented, divided, conflictive and plural. Frida Kahlo's paintings demonstrate a *mestizaje* of magically real proportions in which the body is a polyvalent field of conflicting meanings: modern and traditional; *mestizo* and European; healthy and sick; masculine and feminine; past and present; and wealthy and poor. Kahlo's work demonstrates that Mexican identity is not only about plurality and constant renegotiations of history, but her paintings evidence the body as a space upon which identity is inscribed through the combination of the body destroyed, dissected, doubled and plural. It is the body which incarnates the traces of these historical and discursive maneuverings and it is the broken, scarred and marked body common in Kahlo's work that represents the most unrestrained, cogent and ultimately

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

realistic forum for understanding the complex nature of Mexican identity.

In "La columna rota" (*fig. 61*), Kahlo's representation of her own body demonstrates how the somatic becomes a contiguous sphere for destroying and constructing identity. Inasmuch as the autobiographical readings of this self-portrait in particular are numerous, they are certainly not antagonistic to a reading which understands her body as both a space of her own pathology and also a terrain upon which identity is never singular or pure, but necessarily broken, in repair and neither completely organic nor completely mechanical. Kahlo represents her body as a cyborg and it is through her cybernetic embrace that we witness her own personal "marking" of identity as she opens up her body for us to witness it. Concurrently Kahlo uses her body to evidence Mexican identity as that which is necessarily built upon a synthesis of a western structure (the ionic column) and the organic matter (the "natural" body). Each is flawed, for not only is the column broken in this image, but that which is unnamed—the body—is also ruptured as we witness the superfice of her body covered in nails which continue down to her clothing. As Kahlo's "La columna rota" makes no distinction between the organic and the artificial, Kahlo does not separate the broken vertebrae from the strangely dissected body which is likewise incapable of covering the broken spine. Strangely, through its title this self-portrait indicates the internal body fractured while depending upon that which is unnamed to demonstrate the external body as broken and buttressed by a harness which bypasses her open thorax. Here the body is both organic and artifice, both broken by virtue of the column and then healed by virtue of the technology of the body. In the distance, we see the arid land void of vegetation while tears pour from here eyes. Indeed Kahlo offers this cyborg body as a contentious

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

space where the dryness of nature meets the emotivity of technological bodies and where the white sheet of the hospital is abandoned for the land empty of cures.

Kahlo's "Lo que me dio el agua" (*fig. 62*), is a fetishistic painting of her body where the only part we see are her calves and feet and a strange reflection of her feet in what would be a mirror-like reflection despite the awkward angle. Within the bathtub we see elements common in many of her other works: her dresses, the naked bodies of an indigenous woman with a light-skinned woman, and then icons such as the Empire State Building in New York. This painting again has a plethora of personal readings as well as interpretations through surrealist theory, but what strikes me most about this piece is how Kahlo takes personal elements of her life and weaves them into a fabric for understanding cultural *mestizaje*. For as Kahlo was spending time between the United States (New York mostly) and Mexico City, we notice how Kahlo brings these two worlds together through a physical displacement of the Empire State Building into one of Mexico's many volcanos—perhaps Popocatepetl. It is here where Kahlo turns the paradigms of creation around and views Mexican culture as that which gives birth to other cultures, to include this New York architectural symbol. We also see another image of the indigenous women who is holding a European woman—an image recurrent throughout many of her paintings. This bathtub quickly becomes the locus of diverse bodies, races and forms of seeing the world—her world—such that identity might be understood as floating, as always emerging at the surface. Perhaps it is not surprising that Kahlo shows us the end of her body in this painting as it is one of the few pieces she produced in which her identity is implicated but never clearly represented and in which her

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

body is obfuscated by the multifarious objects in her world which cloud any clear rendering of identity. In a sense, we might understand "Lo que me dio el agua" as a literally fluid space where identity passes, floats and never completely settles.

"Las dos Fridas" (*fig. 63*) is a painting which has captured much attention for the duality of her person and the impossibility of Kahlo seeing herself as a singular subject.[8] However, I think this painting very much manifests Kahlo not as a subject of her own pathological condition, but rather shows Kahlo as representative of Mexican identity. For one Frida is clearly European and the other indigenous—yet their blood and hands are joined. This painting evidences the body as the space for somatic and cultural encounters—the body shares the blood running between these two figures, just as the hands joining in union becomes a trope for understanding the joining of cultures which necessarily are geographically linked. The bodies of these doubled Fridas indicate the myriad identities within Mexico despite their seeming similarities. Clearly Kahlo's piece is not invested in naming identity but is interested in juxtaposing identities such

---

[8] In *Plotting Women*, Jean Franco writes of this particular piece in terms of the private self: "Kahlo's paintings also reveal a deep split in her personality, explicitly acknowledged in *The Two Fridas,* in which her dual selves, dressed as if they belong to different generations, are joined by an artery that leads from the open breast of one into that of the other. This split made it impossible for Frida to recognize herself as a unitary subject. Is there a private self so different from the displayed self? Is there a "private" self at all? Are men never split in this way? In some of her self-portraits, she is adorned in beautiful and exotic clothes, "dressed up" as a Tehuana and therefore visibly different from any bourgeois Western beauty. But in other paintings there is a naked, mutilated, and helpless Frida whose inert body appears to be controlled by science. The unclothed body is not a "self" but a socialized body, a body that is opened by instruments, technologized, wounded, its organs displayed to the outside world. The "inner" Frida is controlled by modern society far more than the clothed Frida, who often marks her deviation from a norm by defiantly returning the gaze of the viewer. The naked Frida does not give the viewers what they want—the titillation of female nakedness—but a revelation of what the examining eye does to the female body" (p. 107).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that the borders of each become evidenced while simultaneously the terrain within the borders becomes most difficult to render or interpret. For what Kahlo's piece shows us here is not the singularity of the European or indigenous bodies and constructions, but rather the multiplicity of Mexican identity by virtue of the literal *mestizaje* of blood, language, culture and history through which modernity and traditions are embraced within the bodies that persistently negotiate these dialectical spaces by simply existing between them.

Though much of Kahlo's work represents *mestizaje* through the juxtaposition of the light and dark bodies of the European and indigenous woman respectively, many critics have interpreted these paintings as autobiographically linked to Kahlo's ethnic heritage. However, looking at works such as "Dos desnudas en un bosque", it becomes quite absurd to react to such a piece in a strictly autobiographical context given that Kahlo was hardly an anomaly in a nation which is as culturally and ethnically heterogeneous as is Mexico. In addition, the concept of racial and cultural *mestizaje* has always formed part of national identity in Mexico given that *mestizaje* was one of the many consequences of the Conquest. Yet, Kahlo was invested in representing both what she lived and what she interpreted of Mexican identity in her work such that "Dos desnudas en un bosque" (*fig. 64*) has come to represent this *mestizaje* of bodies, as well as a kind of paradise for two women who are free of the constraints of the social and of the urban center. Although this painting has received particularly uninteresting readings of homosexual desire, I must confess that I do not see these figures as sexual in the least—neither to the viewer, nor between themselves. Instead, I see this piece functioning in much the same way that Kahlo manifests her own sick body of surgical interventions and non-organic materials—as devoid

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of sentimentality, yet full of hyperreal images. Though the body is organic, it is highly embellished by the larger-than life vegetation and the surreal nature of the skies which ultimately draws the body into this field of not understanding if the vegetation is huge or the bodies just very small. As the spectator loses sense of size, perspective is also corrupted as the terrain upon which the women are positioned is seemingly both inserted into the earth while also uprooted. These women's bodies are likewise juxtaposed in this manner so as to evidence a constant sensation of belonging and not belonging, of being part of the earth and yet being rejected. "Dos desnudas en un bosque" catalyzes identity at the roots of uncertainty and disavowal of these very roots.

"Autorretrato con pelo cortado" (*fig. 65*) is a quite ironic piece which posits a certain autobiographical reading of Frida Kahlo (who is dressed in Diego Rivera's suit) while also offering a reading of gender which stigmatizes desire at the site of the body while also refusing desire by virtue of the body's "misuse" of gender. Above Frida's transvestite body lies an inscription which reads: "If I loved you, it was for your hair,/ now that you are bald, I don't love you." Kahlo's hair lies dramatically strewn across the canvas while her body inside Rivera's suit is dwarfed as she glances to her right, scissors in hand. This is a painting which simultaneously deals with the subject, Frida Kahlo, who is both the object of desire and the agent of destroying desire as she is the culprit responsible for rendering the body as archetypically unfeminine, asexual and then not beautiful. This painting represents desire as necessarily emerging from certain social paradigms which, due to Kahlo's position as both artist and subject of the painting, is quite complex. On the one hand she represents herself as the murderer of desire—the murderer of herself even—while on the other hand, Kahlo

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

represents herself as "deformed" in an unusual way. For this time her body is intact, but her womanliness is not. She is both brought to life through the representation of her body and simultaneously deadened as woman, as her body is rendered absent, non-desirable and clearly masculine as the bearer of Rivera's suit and, more poignantly, as the bearer of the murder weapon. Making paradigmatic the language of desire, "Autorretrato con pelo cortado" evidences identity as that which is simultaneously the agent of subversion, destruction and recreation whereby the body is always caught between identity without becoming burdened in the weight of cultural clichés and tropes of gender.

"Memoria o el corazón" (*fig. 66*) is a piece which deals both with Kahlo's own personal devastation of her body in a tram accident when she was young and which represents with the Conquest of the America as a parallel tragedy. Kahlo stands on the east coast of land (Mexico) while clothes float near her—one is a traditional indigenous dress and the other a very western one. Yet, Kahlo's own body in the center of this piece is itself disembodied for she has no hands and as we look more closely we notice that her arms are attached to the other dresses. Near her on the beach is a giant, bleeding heart whose blood flows into the water. And through her body is a pole which leaves her impaled and literally disembodied despite all the pretenses to dress herself. "Memoria o el corazón" is a fascinating piece because Kahlo is able to take, once again, her personal story of physical disfigurement and turn it into a double metaphor for life—her own and that of Mexico. For it is no coincidence that she stands with her body extending out to sea—one foot on land, one foot on the water—as she remains divided between two very distinct renderings of Mexico. On the one hand is the sea which brought the Conquistadores over to Mexico and on the other is the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

land which gave birth to the indigenous. On the very border of these two spheres we witness the *mestizo* who maintains a position of neither here nor there, neither one nor the other. It is not that Kahlo's piece represents indeterminacy or ambivalence, but instead this piece offers a language for understanding the fluidity *between identities* while neither destroying either option nor forcing one to enter into identity. The fact that Kahlo gives the spectator the choice—memory or the heart—indicates that the choice presupposes the very impossibility of choosing. Indeed, identity is a fluid process of remaining transfixed by the encircling narratives of history, language and culture where memory and the heart are but two somatic functions that have, at their most poetic interpretations, meanings that go far beyond the body. Here the heart is a hyperbolic representation as it is many times larger than life as it bleeds into the land and sea while conversely, memory is written onto the body as Kahlo's own body is marked by the devastation of her accident, just as the body of the *mestizo* is likewise marked. It is most telling, however, that the figure of Kahlo stares out of her disembodied body straight ahead into the future.

"El abrazo de Amor del Universo, la Tierra [México], Diego, yo y el Señor Xólotl" (*fig. 67*) is a quite paradoxical piece which attempts to demonstrate Mexican identity as that which is both maternal and sexless and as a space which is both somatic and disembodied. While this painting manifests identity as part of a larger continuum of physicality and spirituality, it also breaks down identity such that identity can be understood through both the material and magical worlds in which narratives reinscribe and reinvent history, race and gender. Here the embrace is multiple as the center of this piece is a naked Diego Rivera

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

who is the enlightened individual embodying a third eye while he holds a fire in his hand. He is embraced by Frida whose hair is dripping blood who is in turn embraced by "Mother Earth". It is mother earth's body which, like Kahlo's, is both disfigured and scarred while it is also life-giving as it drips with milk in order to nurture the earth's inhabitants. Embracing the earth is Amor del Universo who is both dark and light skinned and who is a sexless protector of Mother Nature such that the universe neither maintains gender nor history, but which instead offers a reading of identity that takes place amidst the discontinuities of representation. All this takes place while the sun and moon coexist and Xólotl, Quetzalcoátl's twin, sleeps. This piece makes paradoxical all identity as the body is manifested as a contentious space of the grotesque and of incredible beauty. Here the body is caught up in a struggle through which identity emerges for as we can see Amor del Universo is pulling the earth from a core in which it was ingrained. The roots are left bare, the hemispheres are covered by the spatial elements of light and dark and Kahlo manifests Mexican identity as that which is tenacious enough to survive the various uprootings of the body.

"El Marxismo dará salud a los enfermos" (*fig. 68*) is a curious piece in which Kahlo once again positions her body as simultaneously plastic and real. All the human figures of this piece are painted as if cardboard cutouts just waiting to be excised from the canvas, each one hovering near an other while hands appear from the skies giving her a "new"—albeit constructed and painted—body, her crutches fall to the side. Using metaphors of Marxism and peace to manifest that which heals the somatic—both her own and those politically sick bodies—this painting imports a concurrent physical and ideological wellness that makes the body and nation inseparable. Yet, it is quite curious to witness

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the series of images which render visible the ideological choices: the United States, represented as a turkey, and Communism represented by the bodiless head of Karl Marx. Kahlo offers two distinct choices of wealth and capital or equality and peace and she positions her body clearly on the side of Communism as the red of the earth, blood and her Communist "bible" come together to form a unity whereby all identity might seem magically implicated in a greater scheme of nature and culture. The body of political discourse is disembodied, re-embodied and destroyed and as such no body is recognizable except at the limits of its disorientation and plasticity. For even the clothes of Kahlo are imposed from "above" as one of the hands reaching from the sky—her bodice which holds her injured torso and the bottom half of the garment which disindividualizes her as *mestizo*. Identity here is a constant negotiation of space, time and narrative and Kahlo uses her own self as the simultaneous object and subject of such constructiveness which defies any clear, homogeneous notion of one pure identity. Here not only Kahlo implicates the spectator into this scheme of somatic belonging and reconstruction, but also the eye embedded in the left hand remains open, extended outward as if to invite the viewer into this magically real space of ideological and political difference.

There is, however, a painting which represents Mexican identity in its relationship to the United States such that Kahlo distinguishes between a nation built upon industry and artifice and a nation whose heritage is culture and tradition. Indeed, this painting has as much resonance today as when Kahlo painted this in 1932 since discourses such as national identity are still at the fore of discussions of culture and nation today. Kahlo's "Autorretrato en la frontera entre México y los Estados Unidos" (*fig. 69*) deals with the *mestizaje* of cultural,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

economic and historic identities that take on a surreal quality when the borders of these two cultures meet. Kahlo, dressed in western clothes, is positioned at the border, her body dividing the most divergent visions of cultural difference while simultaneously embodying them. On the right, the American flag billows above the smog exiting the factory towers, while beneath this scene of industry and cement lies a garden of electric equipment implanted into the ground as if these mechanical objects were flowers. The American landscape is almost cartoonish as all the building remain nondescriptly grey and brown while the only "organic" object is the artificial garden. Kahlo represents the United States as a country completely devoid of culture and replete with money and industry denying any sort of organic or natural qualities intrinsic to the United States. Distinct from this scene of artifice, coolness and machinated passions, on the left side of this painting lies a Mexico of history, nature and culture. We see the sacred city of Teotihuacán whose Aztec temple lies beneath the sun and the moon which are represented side by side. This world of Mexico is a complete image of culture as beneath the pyramid are rocks and a skull from Mexico's past—a culture of ruin, destruction and death which harbors, at its very core, great beauties and violences, contradictory narratives that forever encapsulate Mexican identity. On the ground, instead of the technological garden of wires, lightbulbs and motors, are flowers and cacti planted with absolutely no pretense to the modern mechanical world of the Americans to the north. This painting is quite controversial because it assumes identity as something that is intrinsic to the nation-state while also demonstrating the subject as necessarily split between both identities. The figure of Kahlo is Mexican as evidenced by the flag she holds in her hand yet in the other hand she holds the industry of tobacco. It is clear

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that Kahlo embodies both the natural, authochthonous nature of Mexico as well as the very artifices which brought her to the United States constantly throughout her life for operations upon her body. While arguing for an understanding of one country as purely cultural and an another as entirely industrial, Kahlo demonstrates the inevitability of having to stand upon the border neither in affirmation nor denial of both spaces. Her body traverse these spaces of linguistic, cultural and technological difference while her eyes stare fixedly upon the viewer, implicating her within this construct of negotiating multiple worlds, multiple cultures and inevitably multiple selves.

And yet, Kahlo returns constantly to this recurrent theme of crossing borders given that she spends much of her adult life travelling between them for both professional and health reasons. Yet, Kahlo maintains quite ideological critiques of the United States and capitalism as demonstrated in "Mi vistido está colgado allí" (*fig. 70*) whereby amidst a quite vituperative critique of the plasticity and superficiality of American culture, she remains implicated. Despite all resistance to this other, Kahlo is inescapably part of this space which she decries and mocks. Interestingly enough, Kahlo is absent from the scene of a New York which is geographically reformulated to show all the artificial constructions of capital while also indicating the people fighting for justice beneath this awesome collage. Clearly Kahlo views the people as part of the United States, but she sees them as circumstantial and necessary components in the machinery of industry and capital which flatten and oppresses them beneath the burning masses of cement and the grandiose structures of national identity prevalent in the United States. The people are small and faceless while the stars, such as Mae West who is painted larger than life, retain their iconicity as they are positioned side by

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

side with the tall skyscrapers of the metropolitan center. Kahlo's dress, a traditional costume of Mexico, remains strung between a toilet and a trophy and as such Kahlo's body is present by virtue of its absence. As Kahlo implicates her simultaneous presence and absence in this piece, we see that identity is not only negotiated by traversing or occupying space, but that identity is hinged upon narratives that foment belonging and community. For above this quite mechanical center of industry, money and a cultural self-adulation, we see a strangely combined Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island strangely devoid of human life. The myth of the United States as being a land if immigrants is destroyed here as Kahlo manifests an image of nationhood in which people are as formless and unimportant. Their bodies retain the individuality of ants in a colony and ultimately the spectator receives no confirmation of a great, "free" United States. To the contrary, amidst this spectacular panorama of wealth, fame and industry we are left to face the empty Mexican dress which both implicates the painter's conterminous embodiment and disembodiment of identity, but also negotiates this very lonely space of exile into which the Mexican is certainly mired. For the subject is both modern and traditional, present and absent, immigrant and exiled, and part of a cultural make-up of identity as much as she is incidental to it. There is a sense that *mestizaje* is not only part of a Mexican national identity, but that *mestizaje* is necessarily about an immigrant identity which seeks a space of insertion and ends up being commodified along with the rest of the cultural artifacts of a culture.

Indeed, bodies and cultural spheres of *mestizaje*, like many diasporic cultural spaces, is about an impossibility of being inserted into an identity politics which maintains at its very core quite homogeneous views of culture and nation. As

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

such it would seem that Kahlo's vision of nationalism is one of a *postnational* experience whereby pure narratives of belonging are impossible to envision much less embrace and whereby the body of the *mestizo* is already a product of certain intercultural and intersomatic assimilations. As Appadurai so eloquently states the postnational state is based upon heterogeneity of discourse and bodies into which the *mestizo* has already been launched.[9] Indeed, I believe that Kahlo's paintings not only implicate the body of the Mexican into a complex space of gendered, national, racial and temporal *mestizaje*, but her work evidences that Mexican identity is and always has been about negotiating contradictory and uneven spaces of belonging and not belonging by virtue of being always multiple. By virtue of a cultural and somatic heritage that has positioned the Mexican as the recipient of hundreds of years of Conquest, colonization, violence, creation and border crossings, there is a firm cultural understanding of identity as that which is not neat, framed and beautifully devoid of massacres and bloodshed. Instead, Mexican identity as Kahlo paints it is about the very surreal interstices of incongruity and discord that erupt between the borders of nation, race, sex and modernities that are constantly in definition and forever informing the Mexican subject. Kahlo evidences that Mexico is not really a topography, but

---

[9] Appadurai writes: "Diasporic public spheres, diverse among themselves, are the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movement of refugees, activists, and students, and laborers. It may well be that the emergent postnational order proves not to be a system of homogeneous units (as with the current system of nation-states) but a system based on relations between heterogeneous units (some social movements, some interest groups, some professional bodies, some nongovernmental organizations, some armed constabularies, some judicial bodies). The challenge for this emergent order will be whether such heterogeneity is consistent with some minimal conventions of norm and value, which do not require a strict adherence to the liberal social contract of the modern West. This fateful question will be answered not by academic fiat but by the negotiations (both civil and violent) between the worlds imagined by these different interests and movements" (pp.22-23).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

instead is a narrative which harbors a constant redefinition of identity by virtue of the body which negotiates its own borders of intelligibility. It is by both belonging and not belonging to a larger community—this very contradiction of the *pelado* that both Paz and Bartra discuss— which Kahlo's work evidences as central to understanding Mexican identity. For identity is never streamlined or unambiguous, but instead it is a built upon the somatic and cultural disruptions of meaning that embrace the culturally illogical narratives of time and memory which Mexican history embodies rather than purges. As such the *mestizo* is a figure who forever struggles within the nexus of moving inside and outside culture, geography and body. The *mestizo* is in exile from himself as much as from the confines of geographical, national, and racial boundaries and it is this careful negotiation of borders and multiple selves which has come to embody Mexican identity today. Indeed, Mexican identity can be thought of as an imaginary space which interpolates the violence of the past within a present which negates the very divisions that nationalism imposes.[10] Perhaps it is this contradictory space of belonging and not belonging that the subject in the United States has yet to understand in the many dialogues outside its neatly maintained borders and the multifarious history books which maintain a quite sterile and peaceful rendering of its own history and fantastical notions of nationhood?

---

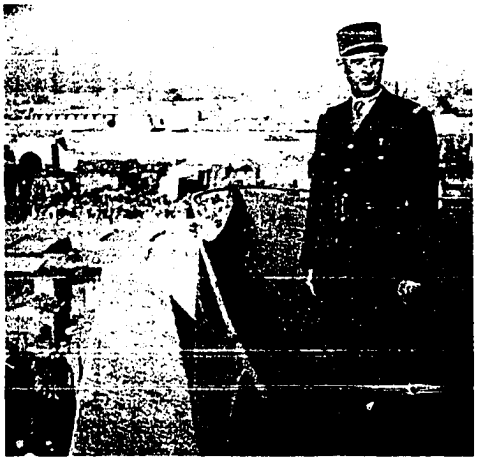
[10] Appadurain writes: "We need to think ourselves beyond the nation. This is not to suggest that thought alone will carry us beyond the nation or that the nation is largely a thought or an imagined thing. Rather, it is to suggest that the role of intellectual practices is to identify the current crisis of the nation and in identifying it to provide part of the apparatus of recognition for postnational social forms" (pp. 158).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1. Sultan Mohammed III, portrait, 1788

2. De Gaulle in Fes,1943

3. Young Hassan II, Mohammed V and de Gaulle in Rabat,1943



4. De Gaulle in Marrakech,1944

5. De Gaulle arriving at Azrou, 1943

6. De Gaulle in Ain Leuh, 1943

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

7. Hassan II and French army, late 1930's

8. Hassan II and Mohammed V with French colonizers, late 1930's

9. Hassan II (far left) with a French general, early 1940's

10. Hassan II as a child, early 1930's

11. Hassan II and Mohammed V greeted by French military, early 1940's

12. Hassan II, in military outfit and fez, mid 1940's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

13. Hassan II & Mohammed V, El-Aid I Kebir, early 1940's

14. Hassan II and Mohammed V at sea, 1944

15. Hassan II & Mohammed V returning from exile, 1955

16. Hassan II and Mohammed V, giving speech after return from exile, 1955

17. King Mohammed V, headshot

18. Hassan II & Mohammed V greeting his father, mid 1950's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

19. Pictures of Hassan II and sons hanging in a conference

20. Pictures of the Hassan II at an Infocom Conference

21. Hassan II paying tennis, mid 1950's

22. Hassan II in airplane, late 1950's

23. Hassan II, day of Mohammed V's death, 26 February, 1961

24. Hassan II praying, day of Mohammed V's death, 26 February, 1961

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

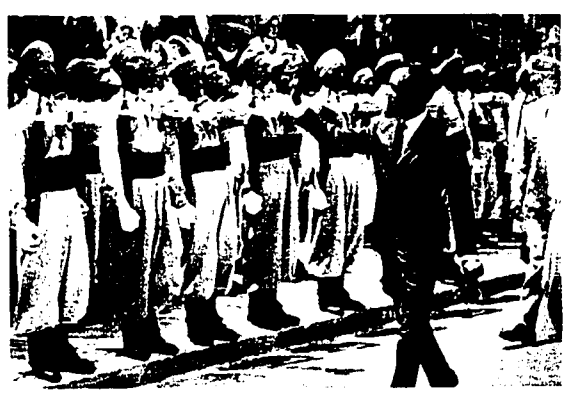
25. Hassan II, day of enthronement, 3 March, 1961

26. Hassan II in Winter jelaba, mid 1960's

27. Hassan II at prayer, early 1960's

28. Hassan II in jelaba and sunglasses, late 1960's

29. Hassan II in overalls, 1960



30. Hassan II visits Tangier, 1961

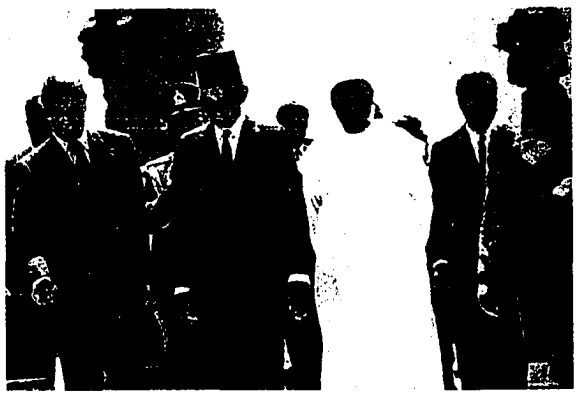
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

31. Hassan II with de Gaulle, early 1960's

32. Hassan II and John F. Kennedy, 1960

33. Hassan II riding his Horse, early 1960's

34. Hassan II with his soldiers, early 1960's



35. Hassan II & the Shah of Iran, sunglasses and fez, early 1970's

36. Hassan II and the Shah, early 1970's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

37. Hassan II, fez, jelaba, & sunglasses, mid 1970's

38. Hassan II, with sideburns and suit, early 1970's

39. Hassan II with turban in the Sahara, 1974

40. Hassan II, La Marche verte, November 1975

41. Hassan II, at Oued Ed-Dahab (Dakhla), 1975

42. Hassan II with Saharaouia, mid 1980's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

43. Hassan II, at Young Olympics, 1986

44. Hassan II in battle uniform, early 1980's

45. Hassan II, at École Coranique, mid 1980's

46. Hassan II and sons, in jelaba, late 1980's

47. Hassan II and the British Royal Family, early 1990's

48. Hassan II and Aralat, early 1990's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

49. Hassan II and King Juan Carlos, early 1990's

50. Hassan II and the Pope, early 1990's

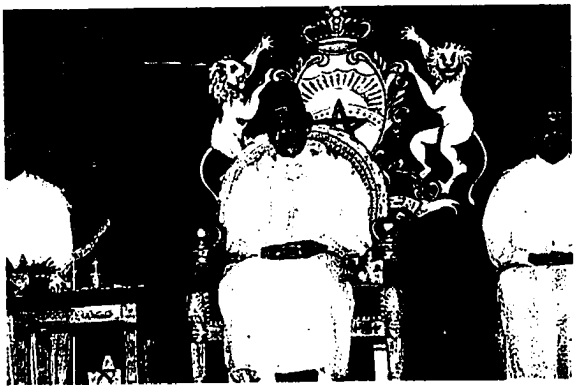
51. Hassan II and his sons in a mosque, early 1990's

52. Hassan II praying, 1993

53. Hassan II fishing,1993

54. Hassan II during El-Aid, mid 1980's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

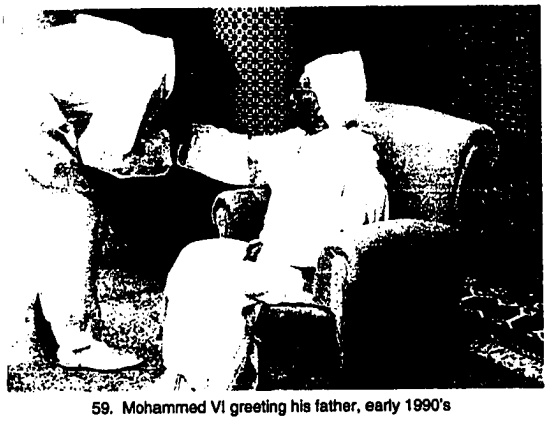


55. Hassan II and his sons in jelaba, early 1990's

56. Hassan II and his army in full dress uniform, early 1990's

57. Hassan II, headshot, 1993

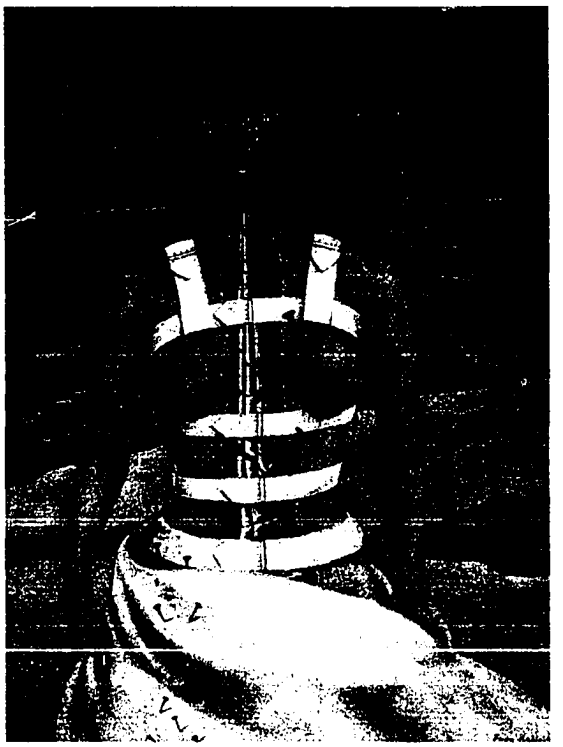
58. Hassan II seated in suit, early 1990's



59. Mohammed VI greeting his father, early 1990's

60. Hassan II with sons in deux-pièce, 1993

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



61. "La columna rota", (1944)

62. "Lo que me dio el agua", (1939)

63. "Las dos Fridas", (1939)

64. "Dos desnudas en un bosque", (1939)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

65. "Autorretrato con pelo cortado", (1940)

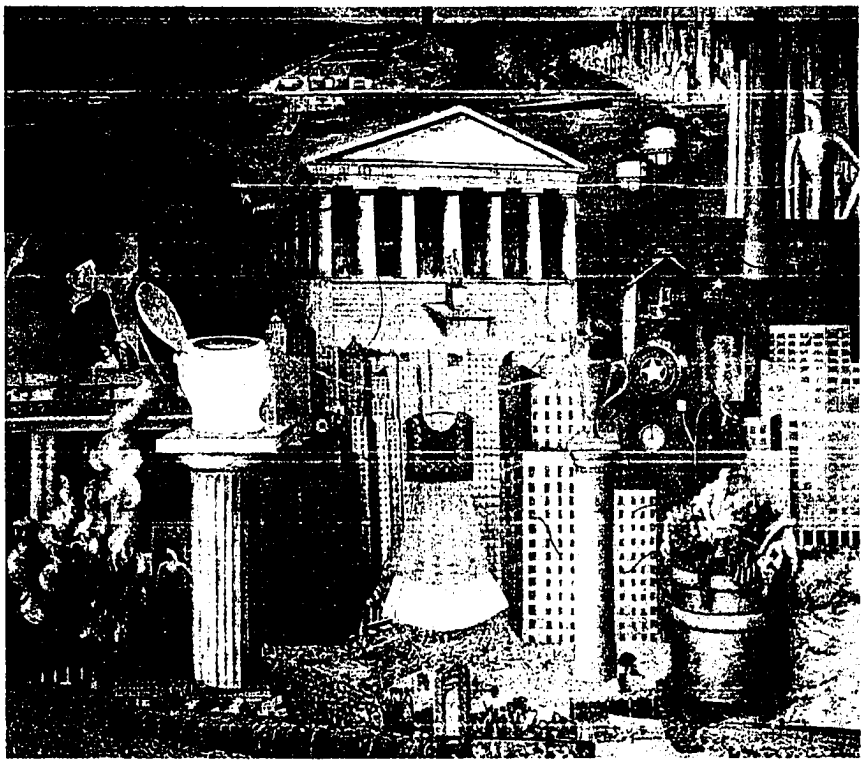
66. "Memoria o el corazón", (1937)

67. "El abrazo de Amor del Universo, la Tierra [México], Diego, yo y el Señor Xólotl", (1949)

68. "El Marxismo dará salud a los enfermos", (1954)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

69. "Autorretrato en la frontera entre México y los Estados Unidos", (1932)



70. "Mi vistido está colgado allí", (1938)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Works Cited

Agacinski, Sylviane. "Incorporation." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson. Cambridge: The MIT Press,1997.

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community.* Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Agrest, Diana. "The Return of the Repressed: Nature." *The Sex of Architecture.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Ahmed, Leila. "Discourse of the Veil. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

al-Ġazālī. *Scritti Scelti.* Ed. and Trans. Laura Veccia Vaglieri and Roberto Rubinacci. Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editore Torinese, 1970.

Alloula, Malek. *The Colonial Harem.* Trad. Myrna Godzich e Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986

Amin, Qacim. *La Libération de la femme. Sou'al.* (Republished in No. 4, 1983). Original publication date: 1899.

Amselle, Jean-Loup. *Logiques métisses: Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs.* Paris: Payot, 1990.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Arenas, Reinaldo. *El mundo alucinante.* Barcelona: Montesinos, 1981.

Artaud, Anonin. *Le théâtre et son double.* Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Barker, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection.* Ann

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Barthes, Roland. "Le monde-objet." *Essais critiques.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *The Rustle of Language.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Barthes, Roland. *Incidents.* Trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Barthes, Roland. *L'obvie et l'obtus: Essais Critiques III.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970.

Barthes, Roland. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes.* Paris: Seuil, 1975.

Bartra, Roger. *The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations.* Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Beaune, J.C. The Classical Age of Automata." *Fragments for a History of the Human Body.* Ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. New York: Zone Books, 1989.

Bendheim, Hossain. *Personalité maghrébine et foncton paternelle au Maghreb* ou *Oedipe maghrébine.* Paris: Le pensée universelle, 1984.

Benjamin, Walter. "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings.* Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 1978.

Bennani, Jalil. *Le corps suspect: Le migrant, son corps et les institutions*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

soignantes. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1980.

Berman, Marshall. *All That is Solid Melts into Air.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

Betsky, Aaron. *Building Sex: Men, women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1995.

Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration.* London: Routledge, 1990.

Boudjedra, Rachid. *La répudiation.* Paris: Denoël, 1969.

Boudjedra, Rachid. *Letters Algériennes.* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1995.

Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. *Sexuality in Islam.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. "Le Hamman Contribution à une psychoanalyse de l'Islam." *Revue Tunisienne de Sciences Sociales.* No. 1, Sept. 1964.

Boullosa, Carmen. *Llanto: Novelas imposibles.* Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1992.

Buci-Glucksmann, Christine. "Fitna ou la différence intraitable de l'amour." *Imaginaires de l'autre.* Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1987.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* New York: Zone Books, 1992.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. The Female Body and Religious Practice." *Fragments for a History of the Human Body.* Ed. Michel Feher with Ramona

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. New York: Zone Books, 1989.

Canguilhem, Georges. "Machine and Organism." *Incorporations.* Eds. Johnathan Crary and Standford Kwinter.New York: Zone, 1992.

Carpentier, Alejo. "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso." *Ensayos.* Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1984.

Certeau, Michel de. *La fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe Siècle.* Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1982.

Chebel, Malek. *Le corps dans la tradition au maghreb.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984.

Clendinnen, Inga. *Aztecs: An Interpretation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Colomina, Beatriz. "The Medical Body in Modern Architecture." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997.

Cortés, Hernán. "Segunda carta-relación—30 de octubre de 1520." *Cartas de relación.* Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1988.

Cowan, J. Milton, ed. *Hans Wehr:A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.* Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1961.

Crapanzano, Vincent. *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Crapanzano, Vincent. *Tuhami: A Portrait of a Moroccan.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Cremaster I. (1993) Dir. Matthew Barney. *Barbara Gladstone Gallery.*

Crowe, Norman. "The Idea of a Man-Made World." *Nature and the Idea of a Man-Made World: An Investigation into the Evolutionary Roots of Form and Order in the Built Environment.* Cambridge: The MIT Press,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1995.

Dawood, N. J., trans. *The Koran.* New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex.* Trans. and ed. H. M. Parhsley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Ear of the Other.*

Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la nueva españa.* Ed. Carmelo Saenz de Santa Maria. Madrid: Instituto Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, C.S.I.C., 1982.

Diouri, Abdelhaï. *Trans, Écriture.* Thèse pour le Doctorat de 3e cycle, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales: Dir. par Roland Barthes, 1979.

Djebar, Assia. *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement.* Paris: des femmes, 1980.

Dyer, Richard. *White.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne. *Le mots, la mort, les sorts.* Paris: Gallimard, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice.* Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume* I: An Introduction. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Franco, Jean. "From Public Space to the Fortified Enclave: Neoliberalism's Effect on the Latin American City." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cambridge: The MIT Press,1997.

Franco, Jean. *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Glantz, Margo. *Borrones y borradores: Reflexiones sobre el ejercicio de la escritura (Ensayos de literatura colonial, de Bernal Díaz del Castillos a Sor Juana).* Mexico City: Ediciones del Equilibrista, 1992.

Glissant, Edouard. *Le discours antillai.* Paris: Seuil, 1981.

Gouga, Moncet. "Les Communautés Ibadites au Maghreb: Reflexions sur leurs raports au pouvoir, à la sexualité et à la mort." *Peuples Méditerranées.* No. 34 Jan-Mar 1986, pp. 49-64.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Cyberspace, Virtuality, and the Real: Some Architectural Reflections." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson. Cambridge: The MIT Press,1997.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

Hadj-Moussa, Ratiba. *Le corps, l'histoire, le territoire: Les rapports de genre dans le cinéma algérien.* Paris: Publisud, 1994.

Hammoudi, Abdellah. *La Victime et ses masques: Essai sur le sacrifice et la mascarade au Maghreb.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988.

Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Herculine Barbin dite Alexina B. Ed. Michel Foucault. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1978.

Hershfield, Joanne. *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940-1950.* Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1996.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hirt, Jean-Michel. *Le miroir du Prophète: Psychanalyse et Islam.* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993.

Hodgson, Marshall. *Rethinking World History.* Ed. Edmund Burke, III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Ibn ʿArabī. *Traité de l'amour.* Trad. Maurice Gloton. Paris: Albin Michel, 1986.

Ibn Khaldûn. *Al-Muqaddima.* Beirout: Commission Internationale pour la traduction des chefs-d'œuvre (Collection UNESCO d'œuvres représentatives, 1967.

Ibn Khaldûn. *Al-Muqaddima.* Beirout: Commission Internationale pour la traduction des chefs-d'œuvre (Collection UNESCO d'œuvres représentatives, 1967.

Ibn Sīnā. *Remarks and Admonitions Part One: Logic.* Trans. Shams Constantine Inati. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984.

Ibn Tufail, Abu Bakr Muhammad. *The Journey of the Soul.* Trans. Riad Kocache. London: The Octagon Press, 1982.

Interview with Avital Ronell. *Angry Women.* Ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale. San Francisco: Re/Search Pubications, 1991.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Jardine, Alice A. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Khatibi, Abdelhebir. *Amour bilingue.* Casablanca: Editions EDDIF, 1992.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Khatibi, Abdelkebir. *L'arte callagraphique arabe.* Paris: Chêne, 1980.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. *La mémoire tatouée.* Paris: Denoël, 1971.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. *Maghreb pluriel.* Paris: Denoël, 1983.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. "La rhétorique du coït." *La blessure du nom propre.* Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1974.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. *Le Livre du Sang.* Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1979.

Khatibi, Abdelkebir. *Penser le Maghreb.* Rabat: Société Marocaine des Editeurs Réunis, 1993.

Khatibi, Abledkebir. *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française.* Paris: Denoël, 1987.

Kilito, Abdelfattah. *L'auteur et ses doubles: Essai sur la culture arabe classique.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

L'Évangile de Thomas. Ed. and trans. A. Guillaumont. Paris: Logion, 1959.

La passion d'al-Hosayn ibn Mansour Al-Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922. 2 vols. Paris, 1922.

Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Le Corbusier. *The Radiant City.* New York: Orion, Press, 1967.

Leiris, Michel. *La possessione e i suoi aspetti teatrali tra gli etiopi di Gondar.* Trad. Mirella Schino. Milano: Ubulibri, 1988.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.* Trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Lombroso, Cesaire. "Civilization, Barbarism, Etc." & "Influence of Race." *Crime:*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Its Causes and Remedies. Trans. Henry P. Horton. Boston: LIttle, Brown, and Company, 1918.

Maffesoli, Michel. *La contemplation du monde: Figures du style communautaire.* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993.

Maffesoli, Michel. *Le temps des tribus: le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés de masse.* Paris: Meridiens Klincksiek, 1988.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa-Malti. *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Martínez, Renato. On the Semiotics of Torture: The Case of the Disappeared in Chile." *Reading the Social Body.* Ed. Catherine B. borroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.

Meddeb, Abdelwahab. *Talismano.* Paris: Sinbad, 1987.

Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized.* Trans. Howard Greenfeld. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society.* Cambridge: Schenkman, 1975.

Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite.* Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Weslely Publishing Company, 1991.

Miller, D.A. *Bringing out Roland Barthes.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Monaco, Emanuela. *Quetzalcoatl: Saggi sulla religione azteca.* Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1997.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nafzâwi, Sidi Mohammed. *Ar Rawd Al Atir Fi Nuzhati Al Khatir. (La Prairie parfumée)*. Trans. René Khawam. Paris: Éditions Phébus, 1976.

Nalbantoπlu, Gülsüm Baydar. "Limits of (in)Tolerance: The Carved Dwelling in the Architectural and Urban Discourse of Modern Turkey." *Postcolonial Space(s)*. Eds. Gülsüm B. Nalbantoğlu and C.T.Wong. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997.

Nandy, Ashis. *Plural Worlds, Multiple Selves: Ashis Nandy and the Post-Columbian Future.* (Special Issue) *Emergences.* 7-8 (1995-1996): 105-125.

Nandy, Ashis. *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays on the Politics of Awareness.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Oliver, Kelly. *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the Feminine.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

Ossman, Susan. *Picturing Casablanca: Portraits of Power in a Modern City.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Ouitis, Aïssa. *Possession, magie, et prophétie en Algérie.* Paris: Éditions de Arcantère, 1984.

Pandolfo, Stefania. *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Partnoy, Alicia. *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina.* Trans. Alicia Partnoy with Lois Athey and Sandra Braunstein. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1986.

Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad.* Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959.

Pellegrini, Ann. *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pérez Oyarzun, Fernando. The Mirror and the Cloak: Adjustment and Maladjustment in the Architectural Body." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson. Cambridge: The MIT Press,1997.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Prescott, William H. *History of the Conquest of Mexico.* Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.

Rose, Jacqueline. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision.* London: Verso, 1986.

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality.* Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Pandora, 1989.

Sabbah, Fatna Aït. *La femme dans l'inconscient musulman.* Paris: Éditions Albin Michel S.A., 1986.

Sahagún, Fray Bernardino de y los informantes aztecas. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (Códice florentino).* Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1985.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Sarduy, Severo. "La emigración de los tatuajes." (in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo II).* Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Sarduy, Severo. *Barocco.* Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1974.

Sarduy, Severo. *Cobra.* (in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo I).* Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Sarduy, Severo. *Escrito sobre un cuerpo.* (in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo II).* Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Sarduy, Severo. *La doublure.* Paris: Flammarion, 1981.

Sarduy, Severo. *La simulación.* Caracas: Monte avila Editored, C.A., 1982.

Sarduy, Severo. *Nueva inestabilidad.* (in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo II*). Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Sarduy, Severo. *Pajaros de la playa.* Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1993.

Sarduy, Severo. "El barroco y el neobarroco." in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo II.* Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Sarduy, Severo. "El barroco y el neobarroco." in *Obra Completa/Severo Sarduy: edición critica. Tomo II.* Ed. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Sebbar, Leïla. *Le silence des rives.* Paris: Stock, 1993.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Smithson, Robert. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings.* Ed. Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Solà-Morales, Ignasi de. "Absent Bodies." *Anybody.* Ed. Cynthia C. Davidson. Cambridge: The MIT Press,1997.

Stétié, Salah. *Archer aveugle.* Cognac: Fata Morgana, 1985.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stone, Rosanne Alluquère. "In the Language of Vampire Speak." *The Eight Technologies of Otherness.* Ed. Sue Golding. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Stone, Roseanne Alluquère. "Virtual Systems." *Incorporations.* Eds. Johnathan Crary and Standford Kwinter.New York: Zone, 1992.

Stone, Sandy. The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity.* Ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Taussig, Michael. *The Nervous System.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Tennenhouse, Leonard. "Violence done to Women on the Renaissance Stage." *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence.* Ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: HarperPerennial, 1984.

Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance.* New York: PAJ Publications, 1987.

Vergès, Françoise. "Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom." *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation.* Ed. Alan Read. Seattle: Bay Press, 1996.

Wahbi, Hassan. "Le souci de soi: A propos de *La Mémoire Tatouée* de A. Khatibi." *Identité Culturelle au Maghreb.* Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1991.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Westermarck, Edward. *Ritual and Belief in Morocco.* (Vol. 1). New York: University Books, 1968.

Woodhull, Winifred. *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Zannad Bouchrara, Traki. *Les lieux du corps en Islam.* Paris: Éditions Publisud, 1994.

Zannad, Traki. *Symboliques corporelles et espaces musulmans.* Tunis: Cérès Productions, 1984.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.