



SISYPHUS DREAMS
THE PREPOSITIONAL POETICS OF ERIN MOURÉ

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Abstract

Like many of Canada's contemporary poets, Erin Mouré is concerned with what she calls "both the trap and the way out: words/language" ("Changes" 43). What she seeks to resist is the seduction of the comfortable in language which perpetuates the status quo and enables "anaesthesia," the pull of the dominant order with its claims to truth and common sense.

While Mouré has received a great deal of critical attention, no intensive study of her work as a whole has been attempted. This thesis presents an analysis of her poetic practice as it is informed by her understanding of the relationship between language and our social and bodily existence. In both her theoretical and poetic work, Mouré challenges the binary nature of thought and language, proposing a relational system based on the preposition that eludes the emphasis on the primacy of the opposition of "I" and "Other." Michel Foucault's concept of the transgression and Gilles Deleuze's articulation of the "nuptial" provide important models for the discussion of Mouré's prepositional poetics, as does Judith Butler's critique of gender discourses based on the concept of an extra-discursive space.

This discussion begins with an analysis of Mouré's transgressive strategies that enable her to elude the moment of interpretation and the assignation of 'meaning' to her work. Chapter Two turns to the body/language binary with a critique of the oppositional stances created

for the body by discourses that seek to 'recuperate' the body as an emancipated female space. Instead, Mouré's poetic practice suggests a gestalt structure of 'being in the world' that does not depend on an opposition of discursive and bodily experience. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the civic context of the body, what Mouré calls "the Polis," and address the notion of the poet as responsible agent. Part of this responsibility involves a critique of the 'comfort' of accessibility, the individual and of authority. Each chapter includes a brief survey of the critical debate and a close reading of the poetry, focussing largely on the later texts, *Furious* and *Sheepish Beauty*, *Civilian Love*.

Table of Contents

Preface	vii
Chapter One The Text: Sisyphus Lifting Ellipses...	1
Chapter Two The Body: The Order of the Wound	34
Chapter Three The Polis: We're Not Angels Yet	62
Conclusion Getting Out of the Ending	83
Illustration	86
Works Cited	87

Illustration

"Drawing Hands." M.C. Escher

Preface

Erin Mouré startled me. In an undergraduate course on Canadian poets we studied a poem from her second collection, *Wanted Alive*, called "White Rabbit" which told us, "From the third storey window, you hung / your rabbit from a long chain." The white rabbit has continued to follow me through all seven of Mouré's collections, from her earliest, *Empire, York Street*, through *Furious*, for which she won the Governor General's Award in 1988, and into her most recent, *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*, where her tricks with language have startled me all over again.

Part of a community of contemporary writers that includes Susan Musgrave, Daphne Marlatt, Dionne Brand, Betsy Warland and many others, Mouré shares their concerns about language and its relationship with our social existence. Explicitly feminist, Mouré's poetics is based on the concept of the preposition, expressed as a shift in emphasis from the primacy of the noun/verb to the relational and provisional space of the 'between-from-to.' Such a shift enables a critique of binary systems which she associates with oppression, "anaesthesia" and the status quo. She explores the body/language binary in order to reconceptualize the body as both linguistic and civic space, and to trace the social order through the mechanisms of thought, memory and desire. For Mouré, poetry that disrupts our comfort is a political catalyst: "...let [my poems]

trouble the reader, 'cause maybe if we go away from reading poetry with the notion of being troubled...then we can bring that to looking at other things we have to deal with"("Resonate" 39).

While this desire to trouble the reader is palpable in her earliest work, it is in her most recent collections, *Furious* and *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*, that it is most powerfully demonstrated. For this reason, this thesis will focus on these texts. The works of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler will inform this discussion, which will bring together the concepts of the rhizome, the transgression, and the discourse of gender in a form that resembles what Deleuze calls "the nuptial," the end to binary machines.

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Sisyphus begins lifting ellipses.

Chapter One

The Text: Sisyphus Lifting Ellipses...

I. The Transgressive Text

"Meet the new boss, same as the old boss..."
The Who, "Won't Get Fooled Again"

But, of course, we *do* get fooled again. And again. Because this is what language is: it is a case for referentiality that we generally accept in order to signify. The conceit of absolute referentiality has long been known as such; Saussure revealed the gap between the signifier and the signified, Derrida unmasked the games of power and hierarchy that underwrite our binary cognition. With characteristic humour, Erin Mouré encapsulates the implications of the deconstructive moment, writing, "I am tired of the same old interrelated logic of the signs that we insist upon as if it were true. Ain't true. True blew" (*Furious* 86). Our understanding of the truth of language as a transparent representation of reality "blew" town in a cloud of Derridean wordplay and a seemingly endless destabilization of meaning, prompting Mouré to continue: "Referentiality distorts more than it conveys, it injects us with the comfortable" (*Furious* 89). It is the

seduction of the 'comfortable' that Erin Mouré resists in her theoretical approach to poetry. For Mouré, it is this comfort, and the desire for comfort and a sense of belonging, in language that enables a variety of oppressions, including patriarchy, heterosexism, racism and classism. Being comfortable in language is, in her formulation, a kind of anaesthesia that perpetuates the status quo, with all its entrenched claims to truth and common sense. Her poetry, then, is preoccupied with language's potential for both oppression and resistance.

There is a high degree of consensus among feminist philosophers and critics that, for a variety of reasons, women's relationship with language has been anything but comfortable. For those following the Lacanian vein to the lodestone of the phallic Law, this is because Woman must become radically Other in order to enter the symbolic realm; she must leave her femininity behind and become an object of desire, the fetishized phallus:

Hence Lacan's frequent assertion that women do not know what they are saying, whereas he does: women do not know what they are saying because they are saying what they are not -- the phallus; AND women do not know what they are saying because to say what they are is, impossibly, to speak outside the symbolic order....

(Neuman 396)

To speak outside the symbolic order is non-sense. Madness that way lies.

For Luce Irigaray, even this position as other is an illusory one. In the specular economy of the Same, the feminine as other is really a projection of the masculine through which 'man' defines a self.

Woman as Other is not the negative of the masculine, but a radical absence, that which cannot be signified within this economy in which the masculine circulates through the other in the guise of the feminine (Irigaray 53). Always elsewhere, woman can only masquerade in the symbolic order: "The masquerade for women, then, is a way of providing themselves with a protective skin in the absence of a language specific to their bodies and their own desires. They 'envelop' themselves in the 'needs/desires/fantasies/ of men'"(Whitford in Irigaray 77).

It would be no great revelation to say that the 'human' in 'Humanism' is male to the bone, that 'mankind' speaks for itself, but not for women. Models and theories proliferate in an attempt to explain women's discomfort with language, its inability to reflect women's experience, their desires, their sense of self. Metadiscourses seek to pull the mask off the feminine, fearing all the while that there may be no face behind it, or at least, as Irigaray warns us, no face that we can make sense of. This image, in itself, is discomfoting.

The illusion of referentiality is no less so for men, who are equally subject to the codification of the self in language. Patriarchy, in Mouré's terms, is the power to Name. And, while men are equally subject to constitution in and by discourse, they, themselves, are invested in that system, they can manipulate that power, and "do not have to put themselves at risk, which women have always had to do to exist, to speak, to have their existence affirmed by others"(Furious 91). Within patriarchal discourses, in other words, the masculine

partakes of the comfortable, while the feminine is something akin to a house guest, or, more accurately, an impostor.

Mouré's parable of the blind calf illustrates the relationship between language and patriarchy:

The blind calf with the membrane over its head, tottering in the darkness, the wall of the house near it, it feels the warmth of indoor heating....Its mother still labours, giving birth to its twin. Smaller, lighter, shrivelled. If the blind calf lives it is because it learned inside its mother to take that space from its own twin. Inside the womb. Where it was so dark, does it ever need its vision again?
(Furious 90)

Like the blind calf, patriarchal language defines itself against and at the expense of its twin. While patriarchal language is no more transparent for men than it is for women, language nevertheless reflects a centeredness of the masculine that relegates the feminine to silence or, at best, to a relative marginality, a smaller, shrivelled existence.

For women, linguistic absence is irrevocably linked to material powerlessness and the inability to define their own potential and selfhood. Mouré asserts: "Women know what language means, but it doesn't refer to them" ("Interview" 33). For women, positioned by discourses of sexuality as either the other of the masculine or outside of the economy altogether, theorizing subject-hood in language often represents a choice between the masquerade (the woman in man's

linguistic clothing)¹ or pathological nonsense (the hysteric, the woman behind the yellow wallpaper). Given these choices, the feminist theorist is placed in the difficult position of tailoring phallogentric language to a different form, or of seeking emancipation in a 'space' outside of language altogether. Both alternatives entail a form of exile.

For Mouré and many other feminist writers, there is the potential for resistance that neither escapes language, nor capitulates to its oppressive modalities, for the discomfort women experience in language places them in a unique critical position. Mary di Michele sees in this displacement from the comfortable the opportunity for a kind of "acute vision":

And whatever the political disadvantages which burden, ignore, and marginalize the writer identified as other, the creative advantages cannot be denied: the power not to rule, but to move, to disturb, and disrupt conventional linguistic surfaces. Such writers are outlaws of sorts....The law hasn't made it into unsettled territory, and so the outlaws neither know it nor ignore it; rather they take that law into their own hands.

(21)

In Di Michele's vision, the marginalized writer has a powerful generative function, working to overcome the inertia of language, its tendency to settle at a low point called 'meaning' or 'referentiality' and congeal there, solidifying definition and promoting the 'comfort' of

¹ Such as I am doing here, by referring to 'women' as 'they,' thereby removing myself from 'their' ranks to a position of so-called scholarly objectivity that is, in fact, the masculine in the guise of the universal.

unquestioned usage. The 'territory' di Michele invokes here is not outside of language, but at its edge. The generative gesture of poetry, with its metaphors, cadences and elliptical trajectories, pushes the limits of language and becomes a site of resistance to the patriarchal power of naming. Poets like Mouré, who seek to articulate that which has been elided in language, are motivated to reveal the constructedness of reference and to 'bend' language, to unstitch its binary oppositions and exploit its slippages in order to open up different ways of conceptualizing reality through language. Even the opposition of margin to centre deployed here by di Michele must face interrogation if the insistence on the primacy of centeredness is not to reassert itself in familiar oppressive patterns.

In her essay, "Corrections and Re/Visions: Mouré's *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*," Rhea Tregebov asserts that Erin Mouré's poetry represents a struggle for absolute referentiality in language. It is the "noble but doomed"(57) quest for what Oliver Sachs calls "a language of the heart, a language of perfect transparency and lucidity, a language that can say everything, without ever deceiving or entangling us..."(quoted in Tregebov 57). It is this paradigm that Tregebov identifies at the heart of Mouré's poetics: "For Mouré, language must partake of the divine. Words are intended to be not merely symbols of meaning, but meaning itself: 'not containers of meaning but / multipliers'"(56-7). However, these lines from "Corrections to the Saints"(*Sheepish Beauty* 10) invoke, not a desire for utter transparency,

but rather, the multiplicity in words that, while it inevitably contains the risk of duplicity, is also a source of infinite poetic and political potential. It is precisely the *lack* of referentiality, therefore, which is the generator of meaning in Mouré's work as a whole. Rather than seeking resolution, she creates texts that transgress the conventions of language and of "sense," attempting to maximize the anxiety of reference, exploit the gap between signifier and signified, words and space, in order to produce sites productive of multiple possibilities of meaning. Her work does not seek access to the comfort of language ("Meet the new boss, same as the old boss"); it resists the drive toward the "'closed sets'...in our ways of speech" (*Furious* 93), the twin overseers, stasis and dogma. Far from a dream of responsible words, Mouré's poetics is based on the notion of the responsible reader and the responsible writer occupying a position of ever-vigilant discomfort.

Like an antidote for the "truth serum" of unquestioned usage, this "new language" of discomfort challenges our very understanding of truth: "(the truth serum that does not uncover the truth but limits the way we see things, until we see only truthfulness" (Mouré, "Letter" 134). This project, this writing, then, must necessarily take place within language--as Foucault has told us, transgression is nothing without its rules--and the transgressions themselves invariably confirm their own limits, like lightning "which lights up the night from the inside from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity" (Foucault 35).

In "The Acts," the last section of *Furious*, Mouré articulates this position teetering on the limit of language in terms of gratitude that must be both acknowledged and resisted:

Because of physical solidity you can wear your sweater
without it falling thru you. Grateful for this. You want
to write only the gaps, between the eyelids of the letters.
Transcribing the view has become impossible.

(100)

Constituted in and by language, resistance must come from inside it, by actualizing alternate pathways of meaning, by forcing language to view the world and itself, not through eyes trained to register what is *there*, but through a different sense (in both meanings of the word) that acknowledges the spaces, the absences, the silences.

Within this enclosed linguistic space, transgression can never be adequately described as simple opposition. If, in feminist linguistic theory, language is identified as both masculine and oppressive, then the feminine is strategically mobilized along what appears to be a natural opposition between masculine rigidity and linearity and feminine fluidity, non-linearity and the diffuse. Thus, critics, such as Louise Dupré, can look to "the overflowing feminine"(38) for an emancipatory strategy. However, as Judith Butler has shown, the feminine established in such a position reveals the drive to resolution in binaries; there comes a point at which the opposition reveals itself/is revealed to be a part of the system, in fact, to be *generated by the system it opposes* (2). Thus, the very discourses of

opposition, appropriation, instrumentality and distancing that feminists strategically deploy are actually constituted within a discourse "that pits the 'I' against an 'Other' and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that 'Other'" (144).² In this formulation, there is no escape to some ideal feminine 'other' space, for this space makes/is made by the system itself. The rules that govern language, then, also generate their own transgressions and excesses, for every injunction to 'be X' necessarily contains the possibility of being 'anything but X,' what Butler calls the "necessary failures" that enable resistance (145).

For Mouré, the transgressive text, therefore, is not about articulating difference, since a claim to difference reinforces the norm:

Thought, unwatched, tends to resolve itself in a binary way, a natural leaning toward decreasing anxiety in the organism....What we call our 'difference' doesn't save us from this dynamic....And falling into difference as mere opposition. It's the same thing. And one reinforces the other. Perpetuates the civic order, the *Polis*.

("Polis" 202-3)

² Butler illustrates how even the terms of feminist opposition exist within the domain of discursive construction: "The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status of patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism's own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women's common subjugated experience" (3-4). The possibility of 'outside' discourse turns back on itself as an equally constructed space.

Women, then, must use language to inoculate themselves against its oppressive modalities. This requires a type of resistance that does not simply try to escape language, for the transgressive act is predicated on language; the gaps it exploits are made by the rules it (dis)obeys and the complicity of this act cannot be underestimated for either its constitutive or its excessive functions. As Stephen Scobie observes, while excess must exceed something, there can be no priority assigned: "Excess works within the field of language, though by definition it will always exceed its own location in that field"(80). The transgressive writer is a sort of Sisyphus lifting ellipses, not as penance or punishment, but because the lifting itself denies/defies/defines the top and the bottom of the hill.

As a process that works against the tendency for language to come to rest in binaries, the transgressive text stands in a complex relationship with the act of critical interpretation. The interpretative movement necessarily works to assimilate/neutralize the transgressive motion through a process of assigning meaning and a description of strategies and motivations. Paul Smith observes such a difficulty at the 'heart' of deconstructive critical strategies. For Derrida, he notes, the 'critique' is "the point where metaphysical operations of exclusion take effect, and where the concomitant institution of reason takes place"(44), involving Derrida in a paradox: "Insofar as it proposes and practices a dismantling of that kind of exclusive and exclusionary reason, Derrida's notion of critical interpretation is an attempt to remove from critical practice, broadly understood, exactly

its moment of critique" (44). A critical discussion must, for the sake of its own project, commit the violence of temporarily suspending the slippage of language in order to talk of that slippage. At the point at which 'meaning' is derived from the text, deconstructive in-determinacy falls in on itself.

With an awareness of this precarious relationship between text and critique, Mouré comments, "People who are making sense are just making me laugh, is all" and, "I want to write these things...that can't be torn apart by anybody, anywhere, or in the university. I want the overall sound to be one of making sense, but I don't want the inside of the poem to make sense of anything" (*Furious* 92). To this end, Mouré uses linguistic strategies that evade the drive toward closure and the congealing of 'interpretation': poem sequences, intertext, footnotes, prepositions, erasures, repetitions, syntactic rupture, all of which enable her to "get out of the ending..." (*Furious* 101).

Any interpretive act that seeks to follow Mouré's instructions and the ethos of the transgressive text must, therefore, approach the notions of meaning with full awareness of their potential for artificial closure of the poetic project itself. The interpretive act in such a context will identify the points at which the poetry eludes it, and will effect a shift in focus to the slippages and gaps of language that set the system into motion. These points are sites of production at which we can see, figuratively speaking, how energy is added to the system to counteract language's inertia and its drive toward

stasis/closure/interpretation.

II. "Act Act Act": Prepositional Poetics

Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns. Nuptials are always against nature. Nuptials are the opposite of a couple. There are no longer binary machines: question-answer, masculine-feminine, man-animal etc.

Gilles Deleuze

Deleuze, like the most diligent Sisyphus, is seemingly undone by language. In his statement describing the abolition of binary machines, he is forced to close with one, the "etc.," that mark of the most persistent of binaries: the said-unsaid, the explicit-implicit, the text-non-text etc. However, the capitulation is not complete, for the very nature of the etc. permits its internal binary to become permeable: it marks the place of insurgence of the unsaid, the implied, the non-text, a leak in the paragraph.

This leak is, paradoxically, the foundation of Mouré's prepositional poetics, "...a fissure through which we can leak out from the 'real' that is sewn into us, to utter what could not be uttered in the previous structure." This "previous structure" is "Dominant (in this case, patriarchal) speaking, which even we speak, even we

women" (*Furious* 95). In "The Acts," her poetic manifesto in the last section of *Furious*, Mouré works toward an end to binary machines and constructs a theoretical context for the 'nuptials' of the poems of her most recent collection, *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*.

The binaries of our cognition, in Mouré's model, break down on a fundamental level, the level of what she calls PURE REASON: "Before reasoning. Before the word 'reasoning'" (*Furious* 88), where "our reasonableness (which may or may not be 'reasonable') is its flaw. A leak. An uncontrolled space at the edge" (*Furious* 87). PURE REASON is the source of "Intelligibility" and "Cause," and is itself not accessible to logic which is another organizing system, a manifestation of the flaw.

In this formulation, Mouré appears to be establishing an opposition between some unsignifiable, "pure reason," and the controlling signifying processes imposed from some point outside the system. Appearing to invert the hierarchy of 'reason' as control and PURE REASON as the uncontrollable unsignified, Mouré identifies 'reason' as an uncontrolled "flaw" or "leak." However, observed from the point of view of the limit and the transgression, Foucault's stroke of lightning, we can see that the hierarchy is not simply overturned, but dissolved: PURE REASON is only available to us through its flaws -- signification is its leak -- especially where referentiality is most incomplete, as in poetic language, where figures of speech open up into multiple potentialities and trajectories of meaning. PURE REASON is not

different from signification, or prior to it, it *is* signification, operative even when obscured by the conceit of referentiality. Stephen Scobie articulates the relationship in terms of the 'always already': "...Pure Reason belongs to the realm of the always already, that paradoxical dimension which precedes any origin, and supplements any completeness" (73-4). Thus, like lightning, PURE REASON makes and is made by the transgression that illuminates it.

The effect of this emphasis on the flashpoint of transgression is to situate PURE REASON within the system *with* language, rather than opposed to it. Such a model privileges interaction and contingency and forms the basis of a poetics that seeks to break the patriarchal hold of the noun/verb:

Because it is the force of language that maintains the power of its naming. In this way, the patriarchal structure (way-of-naming) of language, masculine language, is maintained by the noun/verb force. The same way certain stresses (which are 'motions') hold up buildings.

(*Furious* 95)

Mouré posits a shift to the preposition in order to move the emphasis from the terminal points of 'thing' and 'act' (the top and bottom of the Sisyphusian hill) to the relationship that defines the space in which they operate: "Without naming. Without erasing. Before & into. Without itself moving ever. Because it is part of & not separate" (*Furious* 97). Again, the stasis implied by the opposition Name-preposition is broken, set into motion by a recognition of their mutual constitution.

Such a recognition means seeing what we call an 'image,' as on a television screen, as it really is, a motion, a continual relationship that only our habits of seeing could reduce to a "thing": "The THING we are seeing is a MOTION. The Motion before the Name. The image/thing is not object, but act. Not act but act, act act -- a continual relation" (*Furious* 95). The movement from position to preposition is a movement "to what is always already there, as the force which moves towards. Not towards any thing, but just towards" (Scobie 74). A poetics of the preposition in the context of the limit and transgression demands that language be forced into non-habitual stances.

III. Nuptials In Motion

The 'story' of the book is not a narrative, is not the pearls-on-a-string of the short lyric collection, but a journey in ideation.

Beverly Daurio

As a "journey in ideation," *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love* "replaces traditional strategies with a symphonic or ideo-geographical structure" (Daurio 71) that requires an alteration in reading strategies in order to engage with Mouré's work. Balanced precariously on the limit and forcing (at least momentarily) the collapse of binaries into their mutual constitution, the poems attempt to evade the moment of choice. This is the moment at which language tumbles back into its

hierarchical structures, organized by the either/or of the interpretive act. It is the point at which the darkness reasserts itself, it is the bottom of the Sisyphusian hill. Mouré's "symphonic or ideogeographical" strategies create a momentary simultaneity through the use of the crossed sign (~~sign~~), a-parallel readings, intertext and unresolved contradictions, all of which work to (re)present the moment of transgression and increase the anxiety of reference. While by no means an exhaustive sample, three poem sequences from *Sheepish Beauty*, *Civilian Love*, "Visible Spectrum"(33-38), "Everything"(30-32) and "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*"(84-93), will serve to illustrate these strategies.

Of the three poem sequences, "Visible Spectrum" is, at first sight, most explicitly concerned with the interconnectivity outlined in Mouré's prepositional poetics. The sequence creates a network of interrelated images that form a kind of geography of language. In her descriptions of the grain in section five of the sequence, we can read the resistance to the comfort and stasis of referentiality. Here, the barley, "...once worshipped as a grain/successful," comes to represent the solidity and closure of habitual representations of 'object.' The grain, "having pulled the light out of the sky & made it solid"(5, 5-7), has stilled the beam of light and stopped the dynamic circulation of meaning. Especially significant here, is the *wilful* denial of possibility and the acceptance of stasis:

& refused thereafter to speak of it

having grown a seed over the eye
so as not to notice

a rosary, I say
hail mary
(5, 11-15)

Thus, as light is made into grain, so do the signifier and signified become, through the impulse of Naming, the sign that obscures the arbitrariness, the deferral inherent to language. The perception of objects and their entrance into language as images become a matter of rote, a kind of reflex like the liturgy of "hail mary" or the congealing of repetition on the television screen into a 'thing' which denies its own motion. The "hail mary" both comments on this ultimate closure and offers penance.

The syntactical rupture represented by the crossed sign (~~sign~~) exposes this operation of the sign and illustrates the inability of that sign to enclose the multiple potentialities of 'object.' The sky becomes a leak on the edge of signifying practice:

we won't talk about the ~~sky~~ here
we won't even say "sky"

we'll say "what you can't foresee"
or "critical envy" or
"vertiginous light"
(6, 8-12)

We are offered here instructions for reading that cannot be followed. Sky is under erasure, yet it must be read in order to be erased. If we follow the instructions (erase sky), the sentence does not make

syntactical sense. The syntax of language is ruptured. But more than simple rupture, there is to be found here the new syntax of simultaneity: in order to read the lines, we must both see and not see ~~sky~~ *at the same time*. Both must be held in the sentence simultaneously.

Even "sky" in quotation marks cannot go far enough to articulate the inadequacy of the signifier to enclose the object -- there is always a residual that slips free of the signifier's attempt to enclose it as reference. This escape is expressed in the erasure that cannot, by its own instructions, be erased. This residual is taken up in the metaphorical constructions of the second stanza, "'critical envy'" and "'vertiginous light,'" constructions that balance depth of approximation with the painful elsewhere-ness of the metaphor.

The last lines of the poem are also a site of rupture: "These things we remember / now / ~~wound~~ hold us"(12, 10-12). As in the instance of ~~sky~~, the erasure is a syntactic rupture, but, in this case, we are offered a substitution that re-establishes syntax. The possibility of substitution is a challenge to linear reading and the syntactical construction of meaning. Just as ~~sky~~ demands the acknowledgement of sky, so too does the substitution demand that the possibilities of multiple relationships be perceived simultaneously. The relationship between "wound" and "hold" suggests at once violence, protection and constraint, expressing what Mouré calls "both the trap and the way out: words and language"("Changes" 43). The drive toward closure at the end of the sequence is subverted by the erasure and

presence that keep the ending suspended in a perpetual circulation of substitution and reversal.

"Everything" and, especially its final section, "3) The Cortex," also avoids the 'ending' by putting syntax to unusual uses. The first two sections, "Everything" and "2) & Saw," are set up in columns like a newspaper and the 'narrative' of the poem follows up and down the columns as we would expect, actualizing habitual reading strategies. "3) The Cortex," however, begins to follow this pattern and then "switches gears" in the middle to read *across* the columns, effectively transgressing the spaces between the columns which act as a kind of barrier to our sight, carrying us along the column from top to bottom. This interruption creates a 'stutter' in the momentum of our reading as the syntax and even the provisional structure we expect of the poetic sentence begin to break down. Reading the columns down the page creates increasing anxiety as the poem begins to "fall apart." Mouré asserts: "But if you read it again and read it across, then it comes together at the end, instead of falling apart. On purpose"(Mouré, "Resonate" 45-46). This carefully orchestrated (dis)integration has several important consequences for our reading strategies.

First, it will be helpful to map out briefly some of the possible points at which the text "switches gears." Since these multiple possibilities will be important later on, I will reproduce the section here:

3) THE CORTEX

1. The physical resemblance of her arm to
the rest of my body,
where it has touched, trembling or
so sure of itself.

5. Herself.

Amid the grey hammers of a civil war.
The consequence of the touch is a
viscous fluid blooming pale white
in the centre,

10. subtly accused of lack of originality

the work switches gears easily.

They can't otherwise imagine, & don't
of chaos thru the mind.
laughing.

15. If the line works, life is beautiful,
having leaped over a great distance
in the present tense, but joy,
leaps up

fills

20 To think as such, fills
with laughter, these spaces.
The middle is all, curious, folded over
& slid into the envelope,
laughing.

25 I want to say "virile."

Even in middle age.
The dispersion of the languages until their
books exhibited such confusion they were
or verve. In spite of which,

30 Torn birds are out eating the grass, after all believe
in uncertainty, or the loops
But do you see it? What has the girl done, this
Always laughing.

she said, touching her arm

35 knowing happiness is unattainable
she said, which is everything
unbidden, its centre palace...

"we," touches us

The first possible switch follows the column down the page, beginning with "The consequence of the touch..." (7) and going on through to: "subtly accused of lack of originality / the work switches gears easily"(7-11).³ The second begins in the right-hand column: "...until their / books exhibited such confusion they were / subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily"(27-11). Another reading begins, like the first, in the left hand column with "The consequence of touch..."(7)

³ I am breaking with conventional citation here. Having quoted the section in full, I have chosen not to offset quotations longer than four lines in my discussion of this particular poem in order to simplify the readings of the various combinations of lines. Offsetting the lines presents similar problems as the ones outlined below.

moving across the column at line 10 to line 29: "subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily"(7-11).

Several things will be apparent from this short inventory of possible readings, all of which follow our expectations of syntax and sentence structure. First is the difficulty of explaining the various trajectories using words and scholarly citation: readings one and three have cited the same line numbers, though they in fact follow different paths; reading two shows us that we are moving backward from line 27 to line 11, where this is not actually the case. I have tried several methods of assigning intelligible line numbers to the poem, and short of providing a new system for every reading, I've found none that will escape this apparent confusion. This situation leads me to admit that, either conventional linear citation (our habits of assigning position) simply do not work, or they work very well and describe exactly the convoluted, non-linear trajectories of the poem, trajectories that resist our attempts to extract segments from the whole for scholarly dissection. In describing the various movements of the sentences across the column, I have attempted to map in words what I would rather point out with an index finger, following the movement of the eyes, tracing a path from line 27 to line 11 that goes forward, despite what the numbers appear to say. Thus, the physicality of the text continues to assert itself, and so doing, reveals a gap between the scholarly discourse of interpretation (citation, extraction, quotation) and the matter and movement of the poem as a whole. Asserting itself as a complete entity,

the poem will not submit to dissection of a conventional kind.

A second important consequence of this switching of gears in the middle of our complacency is that the strategy allows the poem to "get out of the ending..."(*Furious* 101), if not avoiding closure altogether, at least placing it where we least expect to find it. If we follow the syntactic instructions of the poem and choose one of the possible routes to the switching point and then continue to read to the bottom of the page, the upper section of the right hand column is left out, unless we go back and read it later. Thus, if we do go back, the poem appears to end at "Even in middle age"(26), in the *middle* of the column.

The grammatical instructions we are given cause us to circumnavigate this section, which is held in reserve like the answer to a riddle. Like a joke. Only this space gives no answer but its own excess, its laughter:

To think as such, fills
with laughter, these spaces.
The middle is all, curious, folded over
& slid into the envelope,
laughing.

(20-26)

The lines are slid into the poem which continues to fold back and into itself. Even if we do not read the lines they continue to disrupt by being something that the poem leads us away from, by being a spatial echo of excess and supplementarity. The only way to read these lines, not as an afterthought by going back from where we have been led, is to misread the poem, to read the columns from top to bottom, despite the

fact that the sentence structure "falls apart." Either way, these lines break the rules. Either way, the joke is on us.

The third consequence of the multiple switching points of the poem is that they create contradictory readings that do not resolve themselves. In the first reading, we are told that "subtly accused of lack of originality / the work switches gears easily"(10-11), which describes a kind of capitulation or retreat in the face of critique, an attempt to find a new path that would avoid such criticism. In the second reading, beginning in the right hand column, switching to line ten and back to line 29, we get: "their / books exhibited such confusion they were / subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily"(27-11). This reading works against the first by asserting a kind of defiance, stating that the work will do as it likes in spite of critique or convention. Despite their apparent divergence, the two readings do converge at the point of self-reflexivity. As my attempt to assign line numbers illustrates, the poem will assert its wholeness in spite of any attempt to force it into another discursive frame (reading two). It will also do the unexpected, innovation in format avoiding the critique of "lack of originality" (reading one). Thus, the 'avoidance' is really an acceptance of the critical challenge, "in spite of which" the work continues to fulfill its own trajectory.

These not-quite-parallel readings mark the site of (con)divergence, multiple trajectories of meaning which, by their

apparent *divergence*, enable a *convergence* on another level. But, as in Deleuze's 'nuptials,' the (con)divergence takes place *between* the two or more parts that comprise it, and also elsewhere, it "is that which creates not something mutual, but an asymmetrical block, an a-parallel evolution, nuptials, always 'outside' and 'between'"(7). This is not a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, with a synthesis forming a newly completed ground for further dialectic, but a co-constitutive relation, a "line of flight"(10), the rhizomal structure:

In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is 'between', the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other. Every multiplicity grows from the middle, like the blade of grass or the rhizome....A line does not go from one point to another, but passes between the points ceaselessly bifurcating and diverging....
(viii)

"Everything 3) The Cortex" follows just such a rhisomal structure. In the bottom half of the poem segment, we can read the columns either up and down or across, providing us with multiple readings. We may read, "If the line works, life is beautiful, / having leaped over a great distance / in the present tense..."(15-17).. Or, we can leap across the columns to read: "If the line works life is beautiful / she said, touching her arm / having leaped over a great distance / knowing happiness is unattainable / in the present tense..."(15-[34,35]-17). The first reading speaks of language, the way in which written words balance tenses: these lines speak of a future, signalled by the word "if," thus leaping a distance in time while

remaining firmly established in the present tenses of the verbs. The second reading maps a relation of the body, the touch of an arm. The "great distance" covered is an interpersonal space that cannot be closed, we are told, "in the present tense." A-parallel readings, one of language, one of the body, they are suspended simultaneously within the poem. Between them, however, is a rhizomal structure; the line passing there is that of desire.

In speaking of the poem "Three Signs" (*Furious* 52), Mouré describes a strategy similar to this rhizomal structure:

& if the three parts of the poem are 'disconnected' only because of the way we read. Their interconnection being neither logical nor purely associative, but involving instead a giant leap out of the 'event' that makes the surface of the poem. I want those kind of transitions wherein there's a kind of leap that's *parallel* to the rest of the poem. Where the parts are seemingly unrelated but can't exist without each other.

(*Furious* 93)

The third poem I would like to consider, "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*," exhibits these "giant leaps." For Deleuze, the rhizome grows from elements involved in a nuptial. In this poem, the elements of the photon and the scanner are related in the sense that the scanner must read the photon: "'Recognizable speaking' in the photon *here* / & the mute dependency of the right cortex / a stuttered scanner that decodifies or scans / the fifth madness, *over there*" ("Blister Split [photon] 10-13). The "here" and "over there" refer to the two sides of the poem, the "photon" being the left hand page and the "scanner" being

the right, and also to the two hemispheres of the brain and their specialized functions: "The voice (stutter) speech is reconstructed in the split across / two hemispheres" ("Blister Split [photon] 8-9).

The photon and the scanner are co-constitutive in language as the scanner creates a trajectory of meaning for the photon, incorporating it into a network of questions, interpretations, blindnesses that 'create' the photon as a 'knowable something.' For its part, the photon 'creates' the scanner by being both its question and its answer. In the same way, the two sides of the poem are implicated in one another, interrupting, becoming, creating, denying, defining; the poem as a whole traces a line of flight between them. As in "Everything 3) The Cortex," we can come to this mutual implication by identifying the points where the poem transgresses its limits, at generative sites where language leaks. One such place is the asterisk which appears several times both within the text of the poem sequence and as a supplement or footnote to it. These multiple positions of the asterisk create intertextual relationships between the sections of the poem.

The asterisk first appears in "Harsh Metallic (photon)" as "ribcage*" (20) and then in "Bank Hill (photon)" as "unreadable*" (19) and again in "Inner Mutiny (photon)" as "*immortal" (20). Of the three only the last appears to refer to anything: at the bottom of "Inner Mutiny (photon)" we find "*breathing." In this case the asterisk does not explain, but substitutes "breathing" for "immortal." The substitution alters the trajectory of the line, creating an interaction between "breathing" (physical survival, material existence, the body) and

"immortal" (a kind of transcendence of the body, the destruction of Time). But this is not the only axis of alteration; the asterisk refers us back to the other sections of the poem where the expected substitution was not made. "*Breathing" flows in to fill the vacuum of the earlier asterisks, adding "ribcage*" and "unreadable*" to the changing form of the rhizomal structure of associations. "*Breathing" also fills the vacuum left by the unfinished sentence of "Bank Hill (scanner)," completing, "The traverse of love, we (scarcely)"(13) "*breathing."

Nature, we are told, loathes a vacuum, and this substitution seems to decrease the anxiety present in the poem by fulfilling our expectations, especially in the case of the unfinished sentence, permitting an 'ending.' However, the completion is only to be found *outside* the boundaries of the section, "in spite of" the borders established by the subtitles and section numbers which make a claim to each section's self-sufficiency. The asterisk forms a kind of thread, weaving a complex intertext between the sections of the sequence. Like the convoluted line numbers of "Everything 3) The Cortex," such an intertextile resists extraction or abstraction; the 'meaning' is not in the words, but in their complex interaction.

In the fourth poem of the sequence "Unicorn Ear (photon)," "*breathe" reappears, this time within the poem itself (21). Again, no substitution or explanation is given at the bottom of the page. We must look, then, back to "immortal" or "ribcage" or "unreadable" or, perhaps

forward to "Blister Split" for "tremour"("photon" 25) or "blue spruce."
 "track thru these trees"("scanner" 14) or "*benzene lamp." None of
 these possible substitutions make syntactical sense, nor can they easily
 replace one another. The referral occurs outside of the poems
 themselves, or between them in the rhizomal structure, permitting an
 accumulation of associations/possibilities/trajectories to 'fill' the
 space left/indicated by the asterisk, no one substitution (ful)filling
 the (w)hole, but all in(ter)jecting potential energy. The poem remains
 "'full of holes.' As if the leaks, that absorb matter, are the places
 where the real poem is. We create the representation in language not to
 mirror reality but as a physical relation by which the leaks are
 visible"(Mouré, *Sheepish Beauty* 17).

The back-and-forth play of the asterisk in the poem mimics the
 processes of the mind and of memory, the sediment of past experiences
 disturbed and reformulated by new experience, all of it a constant
 rewriting of our sense-memory. The two halves of the poem are like the
 two halves of the brain stuttering over the gap between hemispheres to
 bring their processes together in thought. In order to perceive this
 interaction, we must read in spite of the margins, allowing the two
 halves of the poem to interrupt one another. This interruption may be
 as simple as the completion of a sentence. In "Harsh Metallic," the
 "photon" line begins, "This, & the quail in the hands, felt
 suddenly:"(9), and "scanner" interjects "empty"(6), before the momentum
 of the poem carries us back along the photon to "the warm river, a

trickle, bird wings audible"(10). The sequences are replete with connections that suggest themselves and fade away as our attention is drawn elsewhere, or the syntactical momentum carries the poem on along a different current.

The sequence is a narrative, not so much of an event, as of thought, or the coming into being of a thought. Repeated again and again in the "scanner" portion of the text is the shooting of a woman, the startled rising of the onlookers. But what we hear is not the gunshot, but the slamming of a car door, over and over: "The cortical circuit unable to identify the noise"("Blister Split [scanner]" 7), "The cortical scan repeats the brittle slam of cars / Repeats the known noise, not any explosive power" ("Inner Mutiny [scanner]" 9-10). The repetition is the poem's representation of how we decode the information of our senses by circulating it through our experience of the probable, coming at last to a realization of what we could not believe.

Leaking across the page, the two sides of the poem resonate within each other, forcing our reading across the gap of hemispheres in order to experience the confusion and the abrupt interconnections of the thought process:

What is in excess of the body pissed out or
cut by the pages here, whose binding you must
 efface
o reader engage
the hemispheres' simultaneous noise this
 consciousness
where thought & body Are one

From the oaken dress, the roses tumble

Her lungs seeping where the metal whispered

"The wound now pisses joy"

("Blister Split [photon] 17-21)

("Blister Split [scanner] 11-13)

The car door continues to slam while the evidence of the senses accumulates, culminating in the final sequence in the realization of the wound.

Coming to this "line of flight" requires a transgression similar to those committed in both "Visible Spectrum" and "Everything 3) The Cortex." Each of these transgressions involves reading the poems "in spite of" both our conventional strategies and the instructions that the poems offer in order to find alternative pathways, witnessing the nuptials that open up into wider and wilder spaces. Forcing language into non-habitual stances resists the comfort of the "truth serum" that makes us ultimately "see only truthfulness," instead, increasing anxiety with an addition of linguistic energy that counters the tendency for language to run downhill to comfortable binaries.

Granting this, however, it is important to recognize that the nature of the media (the writing and our brains) will not allow the transgressive moment to persist. Writing is a linear process which proceeds along the paths of its syntax, and we read along that path. The simultaneous readings, the points of convergence and divergence, the lines of flight that exist in the poem can only be interpreted in language one at a time. The structure of my discussion illustrates this as I progress from one reading to the next, all the while speaking of

their simultaneity. Critical discussion inevitably enacts the moment of *interpretive choice* -- no matter how many balls I choose to juggle, I must have at least one in my hand at any given time. Transgression must, therefore, "return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable"(Foucault 34).

Both Mouré's project and my own balance on the precarious edge of failure. This is disturbing only if we imagine it as an attempt to transgress a border between somewhere and somewhere else. But, if we allow ourselves to conceptualize something like PURE REASON as that which denies the possibility of somewhere else, the project becomes something else altogether. Watching the juggler, we can choose to keep our eyes on the balls in the air, rather than on the one in the hand.

Throughout this discussion, I have demonstrated some of the ways in which Mouré attempts to in(ter)ject energy into linguistic systems, using syntactic rupture, unresolved contradictions and simultaneous readings to evade the interpretive moment. Such disruptions indicate, like the unexplaining asterisk and Deleuze's "etc.," sites of production, the miasmatic energy of PURE REASON. Mouré does not position her PURE REASON in a pre-discursive space such as a Kristevan semiotic, but rather in the order of the limit. Though she uses words such as "before" to describe it ("Before reasoning, before the word 'reasoning' "[*Furious* 88]), this does not indicate a relationship of priority but is, instead, a manifestation of the 'flaw' of the intelligible: 'reason' is the flaw or leak of PURE REASON. In order to

conceptualize the relationship between PURE REASON and its flaw or leak, we must entertain the notion that there is no outside of PURE REASON. It is not a semiotic, pre-discursive space, an origin or a cause. There is *no difference* between 'leak' the noun and 'leak' the verb. Signification is not *a leak*; PURE REASON is not *leaking* or *that-which-leaks*. Such distinctions are not relevant. PURE REASON *is* its flaw. The flaw does not come from somewhere else; it is not inflicted on some surface by something else. There is no somewhere else; there is no surface.

Just as the limit and its transgression have a flashpoint existence within themselves "where they totally exchange their beings..."(Foucault 34), PURE REASON and its flaw make/are made by one another, which is not the same as a relationship between two autonomous things. Mouré's poetic practice attempts to wrest language from its insistence on that separation of flaw and flawed, to approximate this 'space' where such a separation is not only inadequate, but irrelevant. *It is to attempt the impossible. This cannot be done.*

Language speaks of language and discourse confronts its own discursiveness in a painful circularity that cannot sustain its vision of itself. As Foucault observes:

Our efforts are undoubtedly better spent in trying to speak of this experience and in making it speak from the depths where its language fails, from precisely the place where words escape it, where the subject who speaks has just vanished, where the spectacle topples over before an upturned eye....

(40)

The eye that Foucault invokes here is Bataille's "small white globe that encloses its darkness, traces a limiting circle that only sight can cross," an organ that both lights up the world and collects light through the blackness of the iris "where it is transformed into the bright night of an image....It is the figure of being in the act of transgressing its own limit"(Foucault 45). The impossibility of Mouré's project is best represented by the "exorbitated eye," the eye that, to be seen in its entirety, must be pulled from its seat in the cranium; it must be denied sight, but as the organ of sight, it is denied its own spectacle. The cranium is left dark and cannot see the eye *without* the eye (Foucault 45). This is the position occupied by Foucault's philosopher of transgression, committed to this exorbitated state where absolute vision is also an absolute blindness, "'...with no other end than exhaustion, no way of stopping short of fainting. It is such excruciating bliss'"(Bataille as quoted in Foucault 43). My critical discussion and, inevitably, the poetry itself, enact this textual exhaustion, a reconstruction of the toppled spectacle, where language faints into the moment of decision, the critique; where flaw and flawed collapse into their discrete signifying existences. This is not the same as failure: the juggler does not defy the laws of physics, she can only gesture toward them in her movement to escape them. Sisyphus begins lifting ellipses again.

Chapter Two

The Body: The Order of the Wound

I. Haunted Houses or, The Skeleton in the Cranial Closet

"oh, the body"
Erin Mouré, "Visible Spectrum"

We are passengers in complex machines. We live in our bodies in small fortified camps, garrisons of consciousness, listening to the strange sounds from the darkness where organs carry out mysterious tasks, where energies are shunted along neurons and mechanisms operate according to some program we did not write. It is like living alone in a haunted house. And yet, it is our body. We live it, not just in it.

A central concern in Mouré's poetics, the body is more than a linguistic or material battle ground. For Mouré, the body as alienated creature is not something to be repatriated, nor is it an emancipated free space to which women must flee from the oppressive structures of phallo(go)centrism. It is instead the medium of language, part of what I will call the 'gestalt structure' of 'being in the world' that enables our understandable existence. The body, "our semaphoric splendour, this

surface, skin / border of signs" ("Visible Spectrum" 10, 12-13) is another site of meaning production in Mouré's work, and also, another moment of textual exhaustion, where language and the body collapse into discreet existences. In discourse the "border of signs" marks the Cartesian divide between the physical matter of being and the abstractness of thought, the carnal and the soul. As a poetics of the limit, Mouré's work destabilizes this fundamental binary, attempting to erase the division between its terms by insisting on the material nature of thought and the physicality of language. In "The Acts," she articulates this notion of the gestalt: "Image of the whole physical body must always be there. Not truncated, not synecdoche, but the physical image speaking directly the entire body at once" (*Furious* 85). Language and body occupy the same space; this is the space of PURE REASON where the division is not relevant.

This dream of the gestalt has important implications for women who have traditionally been exiled in philosophical discourse to a disparaged bodily existence. Shackled to the carnal, women's social existence is characterized by alienation, from their own bodies and from the language that cannot adequately articulate their experience. Recuperation of 'the body,' a common theme in feminist discourse, often also recuperates the Cartesian dualism. It is this deployment of the binary that Mouré's poetics seeks to avoid.

In her article, "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture," Susan Bordo identifies the "dualist axis"

of analysis that articulates the binary model of the body/mind. In this Cartesian dualism, the body is an alien 'not-self,' the "brute natural envelope for the inner essential self," the limitation from which the soul must escape, the source of obscurity and confusion whose disruptions and appetites must be controlled by the will: "That is: to achieve intellectual independence from the lure of its illusions, to become impervious to its distractions, and most importantly, to kill off its desires and hungers"(93). This articulation of the body/mind complex is one that has driven much of the debate in feminist theory, where the body is both trap and a site of radical resistance in an emancipatory project.

Such a mind/body split is at the foundation of Simone de Beauvoir's articulation of gender, where the mind becomes the domain of the masculine and the feminine is synonymous with a disparaged embodiment. As Judith Butler observes in her critique of de Beauvoir's theory:

This association of the body with the female works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to the body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom.

(Butler 11-12)

In her study of wordplay and the childbirth metaphor, Susan Stanford Friedman illustrates how this ideological splitting is realized in language, where masculine intellectual *creation* is opposed to feminine *procreation*:

Confinement of man suggests imprisonment - indignities to, not fulfillment of manhood. *Delivery* from confinement suggests restoration of man's autonomy, not its death. *Confinement* of women, in contrast, alludes to the final stages of pregnancy before *delivery* into the bonds of maternity, the very joy of which has suppressed their individuality in patriarchy.

(75-6)

Here, as in de Beauvoir's model, the mind/body split within the 'individual' becomes encoded by gender: whereas the body was once the 'container' of the intellect, the female body becomes an empty cache, signalling the flight of a free masculine abstracted subjectivity. The disparagement of embodiment manifests itself in innumerable metaphorical guises, such as in Frank Kermode's discussion of interpretive reading: "Once free of the constraints of the simple primary sense, we begin to seize on those more interesting -- let us say spiritual -- senses that failed to manifest themselves in the course of a, let us say, carnal reading" (9). The carnal here is not only 'trivial' or 'surface,' but is a 'constraint' that must be escaped into the freedom of sophisticated 'spiritual' reading.

Trapped in an economy of carnality, the feminine bodily experience, as it is expressed in patriarchal discourses, is one of alienation. This bodily experience is a discursive one, in that being *read* through a discourse will necessarily alter the way we read the 'real' or 'material' corporeality of our bodily experience. Bordo's example of the anorexic is a powerful illustration of this phenomenon, where societal discourses of appearance and sexuality become mapped onto

the body in a radical way. when, for example, the discourse of 'dieting' casts the body's need for food as a "dangerous eruption"(91):

Since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project. Anorexia nervosa, which has now assumed epidemic proportions, is to women of the late twentieth century what hysteria was to women of an earlier day: the crystallization in a pathological mode of a widespread cultural obsession.

(65)

Here is the old Cartesian dualism realized in bodies on a trajectory of disavowal that leads to death.

The example of the anorexic illustrates how "communal discourses and practices determine how the body is called together as a unified or coherent material reality with specific identity contents"(Sidonie Smith 128). Thus, the phenomenology of lived bodily experience is also a discursive reality, as Iris Marion Young demonstrates in her analysis of female body language in "Throwing Like A Girl." In the domain of spatiality, for example, the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty describes space as a function of the body. Rather than a set of pre-existing coordinates into which the body is placed, space is created and organized by one's sense of bodily presence, where "here" is always where the body is and "yonder" is always relative to the organizing force of the "here"(152).

However, as Young explains, the force of the "here" is not the only organizing principle of women's space, precisely because women are in fact *positioned* in space as objects, and their motions are

experienced as though they issue from "an alien intention": "In its immanence and inhibition, feminine spatial existence is *positioned* by a system of co-ordinates that does not have its origin in her own intentional capacities"(152). Sandra Lee Bartky identifies such positioning as a function of the panoptical masculine gaze:

In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.

(72)

Bartky's positioning of the male connoisseur *within* women's consciousness reveals the degree to which this objectification is internalized, such that woman occupies the space of the male gazer, transferring her sense of "here" to a "yonder" position, thereby leaving herself essentially homeless.

Like Bartky and Young, Sidonie Smith has observed this homelessness which "derives from the relationship of specific bodies to the cultural meanings assigned bodies in the body politic"(128), where fragmentation becomes the organizing principle of bodily unity. and through that unity, of bodily-based identity. The concentration on genital difference, for example, is a function of a pre-existing discursive lens that establishes the genital fragment of bodily experience as a meaningful site on which to base a normative model: "The fragmented materiality of bodies helps sustain the illusion of indisputable continuity between biology and culturally constructed

identities such as those of gender and race, the illusion of stable categories"(129). So-called 'unified' identity, as a 'woman', for instance, is predicated upon a synecdochic relationship that substitutes the fragment for the whole, projecting this discursive construction back onto a biological, in this case genital, base.

Faced with a radical alienation from bodily experience, living perpetually in the gap between "here" and "yonder," it is easy to see why much of feminist theory has turned on the necessity of recuperating the female body from its exile in patriarchal discourses of sexuality. Locating the force of oppression in a discourse identified as masculine, theorists such as Luce Irigaray turn to the body as a pre-discursive or extra-linguistic space, where "Everything takes place before speech intervenes"(Irigaray 110). For Irigaray, the feminine is un-speakable, for it "thwarts [women's] reduction to any proper name, any specific meaning, any concept. Women's sexuality cannot be inscribed *as such* in any theory, unless it is standardized to male parameters"(59-60). This return to the body shifts the emphasis from the organizing principle of the gaze to that of touch, "the substratum of all the senses, [which] acts before any clear-cut positioning of subject and object"(108). Irigaray's 'body' is a space where women can be free of the confinement of phallogocentric definitions that rest on the primacy of a masculine subject and the absence of the feminine.

This concept of a female space, a recuperated and finally liberated body that is fully self-representative, is a seductive one,

but leaves unanswered the nagging question of the Cartesian split. Sharon Thesen expresses a certain discomfort with this 'return' to the body: "...we must ask ourselves if directing everything back to women's bodies...simply intensifies the problem of image and images in relation to women and their art"(381). In other words, does the return to the body simply make the best of Cartesian exile? Does it answer the questions posed by the emaciated body of the anorexic who attempts to escape what is a discursively constructed carnality for an equally constructed vision of an emancipated intellect?

On the one hand, it does, for the return to the body posits an existence outside of such discourse, where the body would no longer be the enemy. But, on the other hand, the examples of Iris Young's phenomenology and Sidonie Smith's lens of bodily fragmentation show how the body's very materiality is discursive. Of the question of a pre-discursive bodily space, Judith Butler advises: "...any theory that asserts that signification is predicated upon the denial or repression of a female principle ought to consider whether that femaleness is really external to the cultural norms by which it is repressed"(9). This point taken, we must then ask, "Is 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex?"(129).⁴

⁴ We need not look so far as foot-binding or corsets for evidence of the physiological shaped by the political; ubiquitous television advertisements for diet plans and moisturizers, and the emaciated forms of gymnasts denied their own puberty give evidence of social forces changing our bodily existence. In *Female Desires: How*

Denise Riley answers this question by asserting that the experience of being a "sexed body" is not a return to "a founding sexed condition," but is, rather, a negotiation or venture "among descriptions"(98). Paul Smith approaches a similar conclusion in terms of ideology, suggesting that to imagine an extra-ideological space of resistance is to posit "some kind of innate human capacity that could over-ride or transcend the very conditions of understanding and calculation -- indeed of social existence"(25). The body, then, is neither some kind of inert surface that is inscribed from without -- as we have bodies, our discourses are themselves embodied -- nor is it a space beyond inscription. It is both mode and medium of inscription, an Escher drawing of two hands drawing one another (see Illustration). In the picture, the hands are at once the medium, the agents and the subject of the drawing ("drawing" being at once the noun and the verb).

Mark Johnson has mapped the bodily relation of cognitive structures in *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Challenging the Cartesian emphasis on the purely intellectual processes of cognition, Johnson demonstrates how the metaphorical structures that govern understanding are constituted by social, discursive and bodily experience: "In short, our understanding is our mode of 'being in the world.' It is the way we are meaningfully

They Are Sought, Bought and Packaged, Rosalind Coward illustrates how even good health is ideologically structured, since it is "invariably tangled up with the narcissistic construction of women as objects for 'the look' which may itself be a factor in causing women's depression"(25).

situated in our world through our bodily interactions, our cultural institutions, our linguistic tradition, and our historical context"(102). Abstraction of any one of these elements of understanding would deprive us of our "being in the world."

The task, then, is neither to retreat into a pre-discursive utopia of bodily existence nor to resign ourselves to alienation, but to approach the point at which the anorexic chooses *between* body and mind and attempt an integration, to shift the emphasis from difference to relationship and mutual constitution of the bodily, mental and social experiences. Such a shift is a resistance that destabilizes what Mouré calls 'the Law': "*binary thinking, hierarchical thinking. Thinking to the end. The tyranny of the a priori category. The way the mind knows itself*"("Polis" 202). But resistance is a *transgression*, not an escape, and such transgression demands vigilance:

Because the way we remember, have remembered, structure memory, *is mediated by language*, by the conceptual frameworks buried in language: and, if we're not careful, the structure of our work reinforces heterosexism, classism, racism, as well as sexism. Reinforces the *Polis*. The Law in which poetry, too, participates.
("Polis" 202)

An understanding of the body/mind/discourse as gestalt permits Mouré to transgress the Law's insistence on binaries, freeing carnality from its disparagement and bringing the abstracted subject home. This disruption permits the articulation of other experiences, such as that of lesbian desire, which are displaced by the preoccupation with male/female,

masculine/feminine difference. Not so much another language, and not outside of language, such an articulation of alternative bodily relations is a kind of 'accent,' indicating the insurgence of the 'etc.' into the 'normal.'

II. Pure Reason and the Bodily Flaw

"The wound now pisses joy"

Erin Mouré, "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*"

Gestalts...are not unanalyzable givens or atomistic structures. They can be 'analyzed' since they have parts and dimensions. But, any such attempted reduction will destroy the *unity* (the meaningful organization) that made the structure significant in the first place.

Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*

Mark Johnson's description of a gestalt structure and the difficulties involved in its analysis is closely related to what I describe in chapter one as the 'impossibility' of the interpretive and poetic tasks in the domain of the transgressive text. As soon as the analyzing eye turns its gaze to the gestalt structure, the gestalt itself becomes impossible to view, its significant unity refracted into analyzable "parts and dimensions." In the same way, the interpretive gaze refracts Mouré's "Everything 3) The Cortex" into a series of elucidations that can gesture toward, but not re-present its complex

simultaneity and multivalence. The exorbitated eye gazes sightlessly back at the dark cavern of the skull.

A similar problem exists for any theoretical formulation of the body, where the gestalt structure of what Johnson calls "understanding" or "being in the world" is subject to a refraction that situates the body in a variety of oppositional stances. Susan Bordo's discussion of anorexia nervosa illustrates the Cartesian trajectory that marks the increasing separation between the mind and the body of the anorexic. The 'return to the body' formulations posit an extra-discursive body, as does the notion of the body as inert matter completely inscribed from without.

All of these constructions, I would argue, are produced in "exhaustion," when we collapse into the space of interpretation, where the gestalt escapes our view. It is this same exhaustion that allows us to see Mouré's PURE REASON as a source or origin, permitting the collapse of 'flaw' and 'flawed' into their discrete existences. The impossible transgression of Bataille's exorbitated eye is not an attempt to escape language into some bodily space, but to approach the point at which such a concept as 'escape-from-into' is irrelevant. In this case, there can be no 'return' to the body, for the body is, quite literally, a point of no return.

What I mean by this statement is not that the body marks a state from which we can no longer think of going back to some originary point of either dis-embodiment or total embodiment, just as discourse is not a

marker of some pre-discursive space.⁵ I am talking about a specific conception of the body here, as illustrated by the various oppositional stances described in Part One of this chapter: the body as an 'originary' space that can be escaped, inscribed or returned to.

To help illustrate the relationship between these oppositional stances and Mouré's PURE REASON, I would like to turn to yet another bodily metaphor, which I will call the order of the wound. This metaphor is all about the discursive construction of 'origin,' and demands first that we understand the body-as-organism as a sort of gestalt structure. I will use the example of the blood to help illustrate this structure and its collapse into the concept of 'origin.'

When your blood is inside you, fulfilling its tasks, carrying nutrients, oxygen and waste gasses, it is, for all intents and purposes, your body. It is a *part* of your body, but, in that you could not survive as an organism without it, it cannot be abstracted from its bodily context. We do not typically look at ourselves in the mirror and think, "My blood is looking well today."⁶ Blood in the context of a human being as a functioning organism is one of the "parts and dimensions" of a gestalt structure. However, when blood is *outside* the

⁵ Rather, the 'pre-discursive' is a function of discourse, since its very status as "preceding" discourse is dependent upon the always already existence of discourse itself. See below, the example of the order of the wound for further discussion.

⁶ Unless we are suffering from some disease of the blood that demands our conscious attention -- but this is discourse, to which I will return below.

body, when it *leaks* through, say, a wound, it becomes something else altogether. It becomes Other, abstracted from the being-as-organism in the context of trauma, or, in the case of giving blood, of medical intervention. In any case, it is no longer 'you.' It becomes 'your blood,' something that you produced, or that issued *from* you through the wound.

We can begin to see now how the body as 'origin' comes into being. This is a matter of common sense. If the blood came *from* your body, then your body is necessarily its origin. But look again. This common sense deduction can only occur *after* the blood has escaped you. In order for your body to be the 'origin' of the blood, the blood must *already* be outside you, must *already* be Other. Thus, the body-as-origin is a retrospective construction, or a projection from the state of Otherness of *its own origin*. We could say, therefore, that the blood is the origin of the body.

All of this is, of course, wordplay of the Derridean tradition, this turning of 'origin' on its head. The oppositional stances of the body-as-origin, the constructions of the body as that which is to be escaped, inscribed or returned to, are exactly this: wordplay. They exist in the order of the wound, always already constructed from an always already position of Otherness. You cannot put the blood 'back in,' except, perhaps, through a transfusion. But transfusion is medical intervention in the context of a discourse of disease, injury and cure. Transfusion is just the wound in disguise. Otherness and origin are

phantasms in the order of the wound. Blood *is* the body in the order of the wound.

Mouré's PURE REASON is analogous to this order. I have described signification as a leak of PURE REASON, not something inflicted from outside, not a gap in some surface. These notions of surface and exteriority function to construct PURE REASON as origin the same way the oppositional stances constructed for the body situate it across some border, abstracted from the gestalt structure of "being in the world." The transgressive text, therefore, is an attempt to see the gestalt, and Mouré's poetic project is like a transfusion, an attempt to put the blood into its gestalt structure, but with full awareness that such an act is constituted by woundedness.

III. Signals Across Boundaries

Because the past tense exists IN us speaking, or is not anywhere. We can speak of it separately because our language permits it. The future tense too. They do not exist outside our bodies! But in us as memory, & desire. Those relations.

Erin Mouré, *Furious*

In determining shape, it is signals across the boundaries of structures that count.

Israel Rosenfield, quoted in "Speed or Absolute Structure"

In a letter to her younger self, Erin Mouré writes: "Through the utterance we organize our perceptions of the world" ("Letter" 134), tying language, body and the social together in a manner that seeks to evade the force of Cartesian duality. Mouré's poetics seeks to unite the body and language as a creative space and a site productive of meaning. Daphne Marlatt has studied this space in her investigation of the materiality of language, its "link with the body's physicality" in our vocabulary of communication. She lists several examples of this convergence: matter (subject matter); language (tongue); sense (the five senses); intimate (intimate), and so on (54). For Marlatt, this attention to the "living body of language...means putting the world together, the world we live in: an act of composition, an act of birthing, is uttered and outered there in it"(56).

As this process of integration takes place within language, the structure of "being in the world" must be signalled by the wound, in the same way that PURE REASON manifests itself in its flaw. Thus, the question of difference is important to a discussion of Mouré's poetic negotiation of this structure. As the above quotation from *Furious* suggests, it is language that permits the expression of bodily memory and desire in the form of the past and future tenses, and it is utterance that organizes the world and our being in it. Language is a structure of difference and boundaries. The prepositional poetics of "The Acts," however, suggest that, though there is no escaping language, its momentum can be changed, and the interpretive eye can isolate, not

divisions, but relationships. These are the "signals across the boundaries" that make the universe an intelligible place and enable understanding. Prepositional poetics requires a shift in emphasis from the "boundaries" to the "signals," such that the slash in any binary opposition ceases to be merely a fulcrum for Derridean reversal and becomes a seam that marks simultaneity as the signature of the gestalt.

Once again, I will turn to a representative, though hardly exhaustive, sample of Mouré's poetry to illustrate this negotiation. The poems of the earlier works exhibit the kind of alienation and homelessness I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The later poems, exemplified here by three poem sequences from *Sheepish Beauty*, *Civilian Love*, exemplify this gesture of integration of body, mind and language. I will return to "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" to discuss memory as a bodily experience and the ways in which the body both contains and is contained by the 'outside' environment. I will then turn to "*Speed, or Absolute Structure*" to discuss bodily identity as language. Finally, I will trace the shift in emphasis from boundaries in "*Speed, or Absolute Structure*" to the signals of the prepositional light beam in "*Visible Spectrum.*" It is in this final sequence that we can see how the shift in emphasis from "boundaries" to "signals" enables an articulation of lesbian desire that attempts to elude oppositional binaries.

Many of the more lyric poems of Mouré's earlier collections are characterized by the sense of homelessness of the objectified and

alienated body. In *Wanted Alive* especially, the image of the skin recurs again and again, always as a separate entity. In "If You Find It"(19), the skin "sings around your head like a dome / barren of frescoes"(7-8), like a space that envelopes and echoes, a structure in a declining or abandoned neighbourhood where "even the hallelujahs got sick of it / & moved"(14-15) and "...citizens / don't vote in elections"(22-23). The skin in "Snowbound" is a "Stubborn coat" that "...stinks & pouts & works me over / like a snowbound fool"(18-20). Again there is this strange interiority within a structure that faces the world, but seems to offer little comfort or protection. Though the speaker asserts that "The coat I am // keeps out the cold easily"(28-29), she adds, "I don't know if it keeps me safe, or warm"(30). The tone of these poems is one of vulnerability, a tired skin containing, but not really sheltering, an interior self who lives inside its echoing chambers.

Perhaps the most powerful and disturbing image of alienation in the collections occurs in "Tonight My Body"(75):

Tonight my body
 won't come home to me, it won't
 hug me at all
 It huddles naked three blocks away,
 on the roof of the stone Chinese church
 by a belltower
 How its lungs howl out its anger,
 its heart fizzes in the dark
 rain! (1-9)

The body has been severed from a self "stupefied & cold"(14) by some

sexual act. We are told "My insides are smeared with warm sperm," and this statement is coupled with "don't talk to me!"(15-16), severing as well the self from a language drowned by the inarticulate howling of the exiled and angry body.

This anger is gender-coded and invested with history since the speaker is also "my cousin & my aunt / sitting on the shoulders of my body three blocks away. / both of them howling"(11-13). The speaker's gesture of recuperation demands that her body be extracted from its painful community; in order to comfort it, she must "...coax it out / from under its relatives, to come nearer / to home"(27-29). This recuperative gesture reveals a further isolation of the woman suffering an individual pain, who sees a personal oppression divested of its context within the greater genealogy of women's collective, and possibly empowering, anger. "Tonight My Body" presents an almost apocalyptic vision of the body exiled and inarticulate, and this alienation is also that of a self from the community of women who share a common pain.

In a later collection, *Domestic Fuel*, we find the body in a slightly different context, one that begins to move toward the integration enacted in *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*. In "Including Myself"(61-62), the body becomes a tenuous and temporary coincidence of molecules: "In ten years there is no molecule in the body / that is the same"(7-8). Identity, then, involves a kind of rejoicing, where molecules of, for example, "Everybody who has lived in Vancouver, ever"(1) are part of a communal coalescence of self, where interpersonal

relationships become necessary and urgent. Bodily existence becomes a question of social interaction:

We should walk into the street or onto the screaming-
 porches
 before we are too
 different or too changed,
 & call out, offering each other
 our future absence, our private & immoderate discourse,
 the place where we are hoarding
 memory, & the small snow
 (46-52)

Memory has its bodily existence, and identity, "our private & immoderate discourse," is constituted by language, as we "call out," offering a bodily memory up in the form of words.

It is just this relationship that takes form in the three poem sequences of *Sheepish Beauty*, *Civilian Love*. Here, body, mind, so-called 'objective' reality, and language come together in the gestalt structure of "being in the world." In "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*," we saw the way in which memory was constructed across the two hemispheres of the brain, represented by the division of the poem itself across the pages as "photon" and "scanner" sequences. In an interview, Mouré explains how memory can actually encode or create the 'event' in 'objective' reality, for what we call an 'event' is inevitably plural, multiplied by the number of people who experience it: "When we remember, the event is altered by our remembering. Who knows what really happened? Nothing happened. What anybody remembers is what happened" ("Interview" 29-30). Thus, the physical processes of memory

establishes the body of water as both identical with and a product of (spit) a physical body. The boundaries between an interior body and external world are further confounded in "Harsh Metallic (photon)." Here, the image of a bird "(inside the ribcage* / or in memory, beneath the needled tree"(20-21) presents memory as an interior space that opens up into an outer environment, memory folding back into physical space through the image in the mind.

The processes of memory project both inner and outer reality, "The physical beauty of a remembered touch"("Bank Hill [scanner] 10), dissolving the oppositional stance of the body relative to the mind and to 'objective' reality. As memory is a bodily process, and as memory can write the 'event,' the body becomes constitutive of reality.

While this process/status creates a kind of relationship of mutuality where the "parts and dimensions" of the gestalt structure cannot be delineated in a way that maintains the significance of that structure, we cannot forget the importance of difference in the construction of identity. "Including Myself" demonstrates how the bodily experience of memory becomes identity through language as communication. "Speed, or Absolute Structure"(40-45) explores this relationship as well in the limit case of the Franklin expedition, where, after three years trapped in the Arctic ice, the remaining sailors left their ship pulling small boats filled with a strange collection of combs, slippers, writing desks and very little food. One popular explanation for this irrational act is that the sailors contracted lead poisoning from the canned provisions which ultimately

impaired their judgement. For Mouré, the Franklin expedition illustrates not only the relationship of a poisoned body to the mind, but the crisis of identity when the body is confronted with its own absolute structure.

Merleau-Ponty has demonstrated, through the use of the "here-yonder" paradigm, the way in which the body constructs spatial relationships. Thus, the ordering of the physical universe is an extension of the body -- "yonder" is always relative to the organizing principle of the bodily "here." In the case of the Franklin expedition, we are confronted with this paradigm at its limit, where, on the ice field, the human identity becomes the only reference or point of scale: "'beset for three years' in ice / now heading across the ice away from *terror* / toward 'home'"(1, 16-18). Mouré constructs an image here in which "away from" and "toward" have no objective spatial meaning, but are instead, co-ordinates of the mind, vectors of fear and hope, memory and desire, terror and home. This is an image of an identity constructing itself in the absence of context.

It is this absence of context that Mouré posits as an explanation for the strange cargo the sailors carried during their escape. By placing the emphasis on context, Mouré is able to recuperate the body from its oppositional stance as something "...inherently extreme & / beyond all element always"(5, 1-4). The objects of the cargo come to be constitutive of identity as projections of the body, sites of difference through which the sailors create the boundaries

necessary for the construction of context.

In a footnote, Mouré quotes Israel Rosenfield's *The Invention of Memory* on the subject of difference: "How we perceive stimuli depends on how they are categorized, how they are organized in terms of other stimuli, not on their absolute structure"(5). Alone on the ice field, Franklin's men are confronted with their own absolute structure: "The dissolution of physical boundaries / creating unstable ground / by which we cannot 'recognize' the figure"(7, 1-3). Such a radical absence of context prevents the organization of stimuli and leads to a desperate attempt to preserve a dissolving identity.

"[O]n unending ice where the body had exploded already / into its parts / combs etc"(5, 24-27), the apparent nonsense of the cargo becomes the context for identity. "inner meaning jettisoned outside the body"(5, 18), where an Other is created that defines the boundaries of the self. This is the order of the wound, allowing the body to be constructed as origin retrospectively from the position of its "jettisoned" blood (in this case, combs, toothbrushes and slippers). Identity, like language, is a product of the "signals across the boundaries." The flight of Franklin's men is that of the body fleeing its absolute structure. In this formulation, absolute structure, such as an essential, or self-identical pre-discursive bodily experience, is a site unproductive of meaning, a null space. As Paul Smith has said of ideology, a disavowal of the order of the wound is a denial of the very terms of understanding.

The images of "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" illustrate the body as a site productive of meaning in the context of a reciprocal relationship between the physical, the mental and the 'objective' worlds. "Speed, or Absolute Structure" demonstrates that language as a system of differences is not to be discounted as a fallen state of some essential uncorrupted utopia of absolute referentiality, but is, rather, that which enables the gestalt structure of "being in the world." "Visible Spectrum" continues this erosion of Cartesian duality by positing a shift in emphasis from difference to the relational aspect of language, represented by the "trinity" of the perceiving organ of the eye, the perceived object and the beam of light.

"Visible Spectrum" begins with the eye, open to absorb light, "or to enact this light, / to be then what this light is made of"(1, 4-5). With this image, Mouré establishes the eye as both source and receiver of light, much like the memory of "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" which both takes in information and orders 'objective' reality. The image recalls the Beaudrillardian eye, absorbing light in the iris and also pouring forth "into the world like a fountain which sees, that is, which lights up the world..."(Foucault 45). At the heart of the image is the light as the necessary condition of knowing: "...The visible / spectrum. In which we saw for the first time / the light of the other..."(2, 1-3).

By definition motion, the light beam is the preposition that can traverse the distance between subject and object, creating time as it

moves, making memory and perception possible: "(& by this thing I am visible to her, / responsive)"(9, 14-15). Through the aegis of light, the subject and object are involved in a continual process of mutual determination. Thus, we have a shift in this section from "responsive"(9, 15) to "responsible"(9, 17), a word that connotes a reaction to, but also mutuality and obligation, a response that includes the other. The act of illumination is one that unites sight, sound and flesh in one signifying act: "the visible light created by the sounds / at the stuttered edges of the body"(10, 9-10). With its "semaphoric splendour"(10, 12), the very shape and angles of the body signify.

At its heart, "Visible Spectrum" is a love poem. One of the "impossible convergences"(10, 2) of the poem is that of women's bodies in lesbian desire. The body here is a "border of signs / we can't speak of"(10, 13-14) in a dominant heterosexist discourse. This desire is heard in the dominant discourse as an "accent," the mark of the foreign: "Touching you, she said, my accent trembles"(11, 16). But the 'foreignness' of this accent is ambiguous, for in another context, the dominant discourse would be as foreign, would be marked with an accent of difference. Like the asterisks of "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" and the "etc." in Deleuze's catalogue of binaries, the accent signals excess, as does the silence: "The grain edge of the skin where the light / has stuttered & we saw our silence / Those things we could not speak"(12, 5-7). Language stutters on the physical ground of lesbian desire, refracting into a visible spectrum of linguistic multivalence

that marks the site of alternative sexualities, relationships marked by an accent. Here, "The visible stream of light /[is] Proof of the spectrum"(11, 18) such that the refracted light beam reveals the possible combinations of colours. Thus, language contains its counter discourses, Judith Butler's "necessary failures" that enable resistance.

Placing the emphasis on relationship and mutual constitution of self and Other, Mouré is able to approach a vision of the gestalt structure of 'being in the world' that does not deny any aspect of that being. As part of a feminist agenda, such an attempt begins to evade the Cartesian duality that forces a choice between 'masculine' intellectual and 'feminine' bodily existences. Evading this split, Mouré is able to recuperate the body while avoiding any utopian construction of that body as some essential or extra-discursive space that must be escaped, inscribed or returned to. Such a move locates resistance in the order of the wound, in a self-reflexive understanding of language as constitutive but by no means determining:

The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects.

(Butler 145)

Just one of these "substantializing effects" is "the body," that creature peering at us from across the Cartesian divide.

An important consequence of the concept of the gestalt structure is the erosion of the oppositional stances that enable "the body" in the

first place. "The body," as an entity, is a discursive construction that is fundamentally dis-embodied, which becomes subject to exile and then recuperation, becomes either demoted or elevated, claimed or disparaged as either prison or utopian homestead. Emptied of its populations, "the body" fills with echoes, a barren plain destined to be the battle ground of contesting armies who seek to claim it as either colonized or emancipated territory. The danger for feminism is this echo in an empty phrase - for "the body" is a radical emptiness - and, to quote Mouré quoting Shakespeare's *Henry V*, "An empty vessel makes the most noise" (*Furious*, "Ordinary Cranium" 10). Whose noise fills this container? Whose small voice can be heard over the resonances of the dominant order?

Chapter Three

The Polis: We're Not Angels Yet

Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words; and words
are grown so false, I am loathe to prove reason with them.
William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

All your life you live so close to the truth, it becomes a
permanent blur in the corner of your eye, and when something
nudges it into outline it is like being ambushed by a
grotesque.

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Are Dead*

The burning question now, of course, is: "What has all this got to do with bananas?" All of this discussion about language and body and identity, the echoes filling a "dome / barren of frescoes," is about the terror of bananas. Bananas, we think, are perfectly normal things to have in our kitchens in Ontario, but for Erin Mouré, "it's a terrible thing to have a banana up here. Actually it's very frightening" ("Interview" 38). Considering the vast systems of economic exchange, transportation networks, advertising, tariffs and sales of pesticides and fertilizers, the displacement of populations, the exploitation of labour and consumer markets involved in bringing a banana to Ontario, that we do not feel frightened by a banana attests to the seduction of the normal in language.

The binary nature of language manifests itself pervasively on all levels of our social existence. The mind/body dualism is one of these dichotomies that enable a variety of oppressions, from the notion of woman's 'separate sphere' to Clairol hair colour and liposuction. The apparent logic, even common sense, of binary thinking is at the heart of what Mouré calls "anaesthesia," that comfortable drift toward the centre, "[to] make us forget, or repress, or define in terms acceptable to the [dominant] order" ("Polis" 202). This drift is the current of the here/there binary, the us/them, centre/margin, that serves to co-opt and deflect resistance to oppression. An anaesthetic is administered to the injured in an operation that will attempt to obscure the woundedness of language with the discourse of cure. A patient etherized on a table is unaware of the manipulations that make her 'better.' Whether in terms of gender, economics, race, religion, or sexual object choice, the dominant order occupies the 'said' or 'present' terms of dichotomies of power, enforcing that presence as 'common sense,' while the 'not said' trembles and agitates in the seemingly limitless containment of the 'etc.'

The banana, then, is frightening in its banality, and it is rare that we allow ourselves to be "ambushed" by the "grotesque" of the 'not-said' within its skin, namely, the hundreds of oppressions and manipulations of populations and resources, governments and finances, that permit the 'common' banana to sit on our grocery store shelves for thirty-nine cents a pound. In a small piece called "Wake Up and Smell the Coffee," Bronwen Wallace sees a similar grotesquerie in the coffee

bean:

The extent to which my experience remains my own is the extent to which I have found a chink in the wall of determinism.

And through that chink I can see her. The woman who picked the coffee beans. Or who cleaned and sorted them. Prostituted herself in order to grow them. Watched her husband, her sons, her daughters 'disappear' because they tried to oppose this.

(in Mouré, *Two Women Talking* 51)

The economic imperialism that enables a morning cup of coffee is hidden behind the smiling figure of Juan Valdez⁷ leading his burro through the aisles of North American television grocery stores.

In Mouré's poem entitled, "Poem Rejected By The Globe & Mail" (*Domestic Fuel* 18), the speaker calls to a sleeping industrial Ontario where children must learn to eat Chrysler car parts instead of food:

teach the unemployed to go south
& struggle
with guerilla armies in *the backyard of America*
teach them to stay home & stop electing
the CIA

(20-24)

For Mouré, this phrase, "*the backyard of America*," is the banal banana of language, the agent of anaesthesia. It conveys the fundamental irresponsibility of words, the dangers of unquestioned usage and

⁷ This 'spokesperson' for Columbian coffee in television advertisements significantly does not speak. He is a smiling image sanitized of context and voice.

acceptance of convention as truth:

This way of thinking -- taking conventions as facts -- affects the way we speak. We dehumanize ourselves. That's one of the things that allows Ronald Reagan to call Central America 'the backyard of America!' I thought I was going to have to stop writing in English after hearing that.

(Mouré, "Interview" 37)

The homeliness of the image, the backyard, both conveys and obscures the proprietary tone of an ideology that underlies much of the hidden oppressions of the American (Western) economic ethos.⁸ Words themselves are implicated in this colonization, working to plaster over the chink in the wall in order to obscure our view of the plantation. Words are untrustworthy, are, indeed, "grown so false" that Mouré considers abandoning them.

However, as we have seen, words cannot simply be abandoned, for they are part of the gestalt structure of our 'being in the world,' the necessary ground of identity. Resistance must act within this structure, or not at all. The dominant order, be that patriarchy or capitalism or heterosexism (or...or...or), is a trajectory of language, but one that is by no means inevitable. It is a trajectory that can be changed if its inertia, its appeal to 'truth' and 'common sense,' can be overcome. As Chris Weedon has observed, "truth" is the frictionless surface that enables this inertia: "'Truth' is by definition fixed, absolute and unchanging. It is the final guarantee of the way things

⁸ Note, too, how "Ronald Reagan" becomes a symbol or overdetermined signifier of that imperialism. An empty vessel resounding with many different kinds of echoes.

are. It offers stability and evades questions of interest, in this case, women's or men's interest"(131). To overcome anaesthesia is the role of counter-discourse, Judith Butler's "necessary failures," that applies force in a different direction, that drags the grotesque into the light to scare us out of our slumber. Counter-discourse of this sort insists that bananas are scary.

Mouré's concern, then, is not with the truth that is a blur in the corner of the eye, but with the grotesque. Her poetry, as we have seen in the previous chapters, works continually against the pull of binaries and the seduction of the comfortable, preferring instead the realm of indeterminacy, simultaneity and, as we shall see below, the scandalous. This emphasis is a reaction to the danger of language that congeals in a 'common sense' that allows for no slippage or alternative lines of flight. In "The Words Mean What We Say, We Say" (*Domestic Fuel* 48), this reaction is to "...a fear of no word ever / of no word that does not / mean an object"(8-10). Here, language solidifies into the shape of a gun: "As if a belief is protected / the more guns you sell"(15-16). Like Reagan's "backyard of America," the logic of arms becomes a key to an arsenal of oppressions, where "The power of speech empties our mouths"(21). In this logic, voicing discontent is punished with literal starvation, and, and for the oppressor, the feast of words is equally empty since the words themselves "are grown so false."

If language contains its own counter-discourses, the metaphor is emblematic of this internal tension. The metaphorical trajectories of

the "piano" of "6 Notes For A Mazurka" (*Sheepish Beauty* 113) pull the word apart into twin images of music and violence. The motion of aestheticization is counteracted as the metaphor's implications are revealed, the grotesque nudged into outline. In the third section of the poem, the piano is an image of a person in a garden: "the yard bright with flowers / & the back bent down / a piano" ("Burst" 8-10). Revealing a different layer of meaning, the metaphor splits open in the fourth section, "Runner": "With a stick or hand your father played that / piano // You yelled & ran"(1-3). With this revelation, the poem unfolds its hidden center, and insists on this new trajectory, where the piano as an instrument of music and art comes to stand simultaneously for an act of violence. The incongruity is shocking.

Not only shocking, the image is scandalous, a private pain forced into the public view of a community of neighbours: "The neighbours closed their windows / The houses were built so close & your yells disturbed / their peaceable dwelling" ("Runner" 4-6). For the neighbours, "The piano rang out" ("Runner" 10), a translation of sensory data similar to that of the car door slam of "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*" which interprets the uncodified in terms of the comfortable. The ease of this metaphorical substitution permits the neighbours' indifference, and sanitizes the event: they shelter within the aesthetic, following the trajectory of the metaphor that leads them away from violence. As a metaphor, the signifier, "piano," is detached from its referent; in the context of the poetic act, words become in-

determinant, "not containers of meaning but / multipliers, three tongues in one mouth..." ("Corrections To The Saints," *Sheepish Beauty* 10).

At the heart of this scandal is the denial of responsibility. Individuals locked in their houses with the windows shut against the noise of their neighbours are lulled by the comfort of words that themselves lack responsibility. Mouré writes: "[Words] aren't objective carriers, we've seen; they aren't 'responsible'. (If they were, they would jump out of Ronald Reagan's mouth and drown, so as never to be spoken again.)" ("Access" 10). If words cannot be counted on to control their own deployment, then the responsibility is ours: "As users of words (at the same time we are beings mediated by words) we have to be responsible" (Mouré, "Access" 10). Sowing the seeds of deconstruction, the poet becomes the responsible agent. Part of this responsibility is to track the hidden trajectories of metaphors, such as "the backyard of America," that run counter to the more comfortable and easily travelled ones. "6 Notes For A Mazurka" insists on travelling the road not taken.

For Mouré, counter-discourse involves a critique of both the individual and of authority, for both are linked to hierarchy and the dominant order. This conviction places the poet herself in a difficult position, for, in order to speak out, she must evade her own authority. Thus, we return once again to Derrida's paradox: how do we deconstruct the ground we stand on? Mouré attempts to answer such a question in her poetic practice by blurring the boundaries between public and private,

poetry and critique, body and polis. Her critique of the individual resituates the body, that last bastion of individual materiality, in the broader context of the polis, positing a civic-organism. The poet-individual is likewise displaced by a community of voices that demystify the poem as an inviolable artistic space. Deleuze's 'becomings' are of special importance to this strategy.

Like the neighbours locked in their houses in "6 Notes For A Mazurka," the concept of the 'individual' permits, in Mouré's formulation, isolation and oppression. Romanticizing the 'individual voice' allows the perpetuation of the dichotomy between the same and difference, a logic of opposition that is ultimately disempowering:

Rousing 'individual' feelings plays with the dynamic of individual power/powerlessness -- and channels energy so it is less disruptive to the Dominant Order. The energy to speak is recuperated into the Order. Because the dominant order also contains 'the marginal.'

(Mouré, "Access" 10)

To counter such isolation, Mouré suggests an identity of community that is based on difference. The apparent contradiction within this statement can be resolved in what Mouré calls "non-congruity." In "Speed or, Absolute Structure," non-congruity operates as context or the signals across boundaries that are constitutive of identity. Social organization based on non-congruity effects a similar deconstruction of the opposition between same/different, emphasizing instead "[the] sense of 'with'-ness, 'joint'-ness that conveys no hierarchy-of-terms. Which is how our community as women can / must exist. As an 'among-many.'

Not reproducing those hierarchies"("Polis" 203). These hierarchies include the 'sameness' of hegemonies (including that of the "correct lesbian") and the multiple 'sames' of fragmented groups ("Polis" 203). The notion of non-congruence has interesting implications for identity politics that turn on the concept of a hegemonic 'sameness' within each of a proliferating number of fragmented groups.

Within the concept of non-congruence, the individual becomes a part or dimension of the greater civic-organism, much like the blood of our corporeal bodies whose abstraction from the whole is a trauma that can lead to death. The individual organism, then, becomes a kind of civic space where one is both constructed as an 'individual' and where one is able to connect through interdependence to the multiple selves of the civic-organism. Mouré identifies this civic context as that which is lacking in much of feminist criticism:

Much writing by feminists in this country has focused on notions of the body and speech, the body as difference, a house of memory, without focusing on the bodily context: the City. Community, that elemental non-congruence. Or if focused on the City, the writing has retraced those same myths, used the same tropes, ie. it is preceded by the Law.
("Polis" 205)

Lacking this broader context, this writing lapses into the oppositional stances that construct "the body" as an abstraction from the whole and that enable a variety of 'common sense' oppressions.

The critique of the individual, therefore, is also the critique of the body-as-individual. The task, then, is to re-establish this

context, to resituate the body within/as the civic organism. In "Including Myself" (*Domestic Fuel* 61-2) the body as guarantor of material identity is dissolved, becoming instead a momentary coalescence in the galactic soup. As we saw in an earlier discussion of this poem, the 'individual' in this case can only exist as part of a speaking community where interaction, not division, constitutes identity.

"Heat This City" (*Wanted Alive* 65) expands the notion of the body as civic space such that private thought is "enough / to heat this city"(2-3). Reciprocally, the civic order, its policies and relationships in a global context, have their consequences for the physical being of the individual: "...China, its cloud blown us yesterday / high over Alaska. / Debris we never asked for, its half-life shining, / if you didn't breathe it"(20-23). Here, the cloud of nuclear fallout knows no boundaries, and, by breathing this product of international industries of energy and arms, we carry the political in our lungs. Choosing not to breathe is not an option.

The context of civic identity is further expanded in "Divergences" (*Wanted Alive* 44-5), where the speaker is situated in a global community that spans space and time: "I am the youngest child of a family that cries its body to sleep, / all over the world"(10-11). The child of the oppressed, the speaker is also an agent of oppression, one of "a long line of gunners" and "maintainers of public order"(16-17). The 'divergences' of these two sides in the past converge in the speaker, a youngest child of two houses.

This, for Mouré, is the special danger the poet confronts as a responsible agent, who, by accepting responsibility must also be constantly aware of this double heritage. Even the writer as witness who seeks to recover a silenced history must beware of reproducing that oppression, of creating an Other and consigning her to "double silence": "[W]hen we write of other women, create memories for them...we tend to create them in our own image, out of our own class and cultural background, our own values and processes. Perpetuating our own Law. Our own privilege" ("Polis" 204). It then becomes necessary to displace 'the poet' as a privileged subject, a necessity that involves a critique of author-ity.

In Mouré's later texts especially, the speaker as an authoritative voice becomes increasingly evasive, displaced into a community of voices that includes other poets, off-stage personages, even critics. The monograph is replaced by the conversation. Even the poetic text itself tends to dissolve its own boundaries by pulling the critical commentary into it, and by expanding outward into a complex web of footnotes and interjections.

In "Metal Desk" (*West South West*, 41), the speaker claims authorship only to deny it later in the poem. Her initial assertion, "... I wrote *sitting at / that metal desk* & therefore it belongs to me" (20-21) is undercut at the end of the poem where the speaker/author/subject literally leaves the poem altogether:

A common error confuses narrator & author.

The woman at the desk is not the narrator,
 & doesn't want to be narrated, no permission
 is given, although she looks a bit like
 the author when she gets up & goes home,
 wearing overshoes in the elevator
 doesn't she

(22-27)

Not the narrator, refusing to be the subject, affirming that to identify anyone as the 'author' would be an error, the speaker has 'produced' a narrative with no origin, like a sentence with no subject. The poem is a kind of trespass in the life of woman at the desk who becomes the topic of a dissertation while we look on, silent voyeurs. But even this 'fourth wall' of the poem is itself transgressed in the last line of the poem, the "doesn't she" which is directed out at us, a face turned to us in conversation.

In the space vacated by the 'author' is the potential for disruption. Mouré writes: "Without this kind of effort, we will perpetrate a reading surface and status quo of social structure that excludes many. And if even one person is excluded we reduce our own humanity" ("Access" 10). This disruption of the reading surface works against comfort in language, the drift of anaesthesia. The interjecting voice of "Nice Poetry" (*Sheepish Beauty* 120-23), for example, admonishes the 'poet' for her attempts to write poetry that will not challenge the reader: "O stop making it so easy on the reader / who wants nice poetry & the line / to stop before the preposition" (3, 4-6). This voice urges the 'poet' to break with convention, to risk being not 'nice,' to permit what Deleuze has called the "stutter" to enter her language.

For Deleuze, the best writers are those who can stutter, who can be multilingual in themselves, who can speak like a foreigner in their own language. This 'foreignness' is the heart of conversation, the defeat of homogeneity: "Multilingualism is not merely the property of several systems each of which would be homogenous in itself: it is primarily the line of flight or of variation which affects each system by stopping it from being homogenous"(4). "Nice Poetry" is such a conversation. The poem consists of multiple voices in dialogue, interjecting and disrupting the flow of the 'nice poem' that the 'poet' attempts to construct. Out of this interaction arises a rhizomal growth or line of flight of which none of the interlocutors can claim authorship. This growth is the "becoming":

It is like Mozart's birds: in this music there is a bird-becoming, but caught in a music-becoming of the bird, the two forming a single becoming, an a-parallel evolution -- not an exchange, but a 'confidence with no possible interlocutor', as a commentator on Mozart says; in short, a conversation.

(3)

Like "*photon scanner (blue spruce)*," which reproduces the physical processes of thought across the margins of the pages, "Nice Poetry" enacts the becoming of conversation, effectively displacing any possible claim to authority ("my conversation," in the context of the becoming, is an impossibility).

Among the many voices of the poem there is: that of the 'poet' working to construct her lyric; the interjecting voice that protests the

drift of the lyric; an exterior commentator present in the form of italicized notes 'outside' the body of the poem; the voice of the brother, the ostensible 'subject' of the lyric whose corrections ruin the poet's line breaks; a fifth, offstage voice whose criticisms are only implied. None of these voices is meant to represent the last word, but their interaction serves to increase the frustration of the 'poet' who sees her narrative control dissolving in the *melée*. Even her brother, who is supposed to be the 'matter' of her text, refuses to be objectified. Like the woman in "Metal Desk," he gives no permission, challenges her ability to write him:

"'Homes' not 'poems' he shouted, that's my
brother, eating more hay
& ruining the line breaks.

What if I went out & did that to his fie
ld?

(7, 3-7)

The 'poet' retaliates by breaking the signifier of his special and defining landscape, the *fiel*d. No one voice is permitted to occupy the position of authority for long.

No matter how much the internal structure of the text represents the authorless conversation, however, there is still the nagging awareness of Mouré-the-poet. The poem's action still takes place within the artistic confines of the poem over which she has ultimate control. Mouré addresses this problem of the lingering authority by laying bare the poetic process and collapsing the imaginative space of the poem as a

whole, revealing its conceit. Again, the interjecting voice plays a role:

The caress of wind, nightly,
 whooshing over the hay bales.
 O get those hay bales outa here,
 there's no hay

on the boulevard St. Michele
 (5, 1-5)

The imaginative space of the poem is the farm, but the meta-space of poetic production is a restaurant on boulevard St.-Michele. By collapsing these two spaces together, the interjecting voice reveals the lyric as a fraud and undermines its claims to realism and direct referentiality. In fact, there is no way even of knowing if boulevard St.-Michele is the place of production at all; it too is a space of construction. By admitting this fundamental un-reality of the poem's space, Mouré derails all truth claims and possible gestures to absolute reference, and the poem as an inviolable world unto itself becomes instead a place of indeterminate borders.

Much of the overflow from poems like "Nice Poetry" is taken up in footnotes and commentaries. In pieces such as "Ocean Poem" (*Furious* 48) and "Song of a Murmur" (*Sheepish Beauty* 77-9), the footnotes poke fun at the academic convention of the explanatory supplement. In "Song of a Murmur," for example, the second note refers to the explanation offered by the first note, saying, "Note to people who have difficulty laughing at themselves: the above note explains nothing and is a JOKE" (79). By

joking about academic convention, the notes also serve to broaden the terrain of the poem by making it into its own supplement. As Stephen Scobie suggests: "[The notes] are excess, unnecessary to its completion; yet at the same time they supply what (it) is missing, they move to fill its gaps, and in doing so open up further gaps and incompletions of their own"(72).⁹

While the poem flows into this supplementary space, these notes also co-opt the apparatus of critical commentary, that space of 'objective authority' and judgement. Just as "Nice Poetry" lays bare the conceit of poetic realism, the notes to "Song of a Murmur" force the critic to occupy a self-reflexive position with regard to the poem's critique of her own practices. While the text asserts on the one hand that, "[t]his is a complex poem whose socio-political implications deserve deciphering"(79), on the other hand, it laughs at such an endeavour saying, "You may well ask: WHAT socio-political implications? It's clear that the poem doesn't have any"(79). Instead of providing critical commentary, the notes forestall it, moving to undermine the critic's project from within the poem itself. The criticism is both pulled into the poem and disqualified by the terms of this construction.

Commentaries such as "Corrections: 'Executive Suite'" (*Sheepish*

⁹ Stephen Scobie's essay, "The Footnoted Text" deals exclusively with the relationship between the numbered sections of "The Acts" and the other poems of *Furious*. These numbered sections are indicated in the table of contents of the collection as footnotes to specific poems, creating a complex intertextual web. Since the footnotes occur only in the table of contents, this, usually supplementary, page becomes an integral part of this web of intertext.

Beauty 19) and "Coda: Robert O's Rules of Orderr" (*Sheepish Beauty* 45) perform a similar act of dissolving the boundaries between poem and critique, largely by satirizing the critic herself. For example, in "Corrections: 'Executive Suite,'" which comments on the preceding poem, "Executive Suite," Mouré writes: "The spelling of the word 'ther' is deliberate and will be questioned in Toronto." This statement neatly anticipates questions that might be asked as well of "Orderr," a word that will be questioned by spell-checking programs everywhere. In such statements, the speaker carries the poem's challenge to convention into the territory of the critic and asserts that "[p]oetry is a place of infinite possibility..." (Mouré, "Resonate" 47) in spite of attempts to limit such potential through the act of critical interpretation.

Such an incursion into critical territory raises interesting questions for such critics as Rhea Tregobov who asks:

But is this Mouré seriously critiquing her poem? Or has she adopted the mask of some Anglo, propriety-mad, Philistine, you-know-something-is-happening-but-you-don't-know-what-it-is Mr. Jones of a reviewer here primarily to ward off rather than invite, critique, response?

(54)

As we have seen, Mouré's tongue-in-cheek commentaries do tend to head the critic off at the pass in much the same way that her complex intertextual weaves and multiple possibilities of reading in poems such as "Everything: The Cortex" seem to thwart conventional methods of critical dissection. Such poetic strategies reveal an attitude that would seem to ally Mouré with Deleuze, who writes: "Judging is the

profession of many people, and it is not a good profession, but it is also the use to which many people put writing. Better to be a road-sweeper than a judge"(8). It is not, however, at judgement *per se* that Mouré directs her critique, for a lack of critical judgement enables anaesthesia. Rather, her challenge is to the establishment of criticism as a space of special power and truth, an indictment Deleuze has made of philosophy which seeks to enforce one acceptable mode of thinking:

A formidable school of intimidation which manufactures specialists in thought -- but which also makes those who stay outside conform all the more to this specialism which they despise. An image of thought called philosophy has been formed historically and it effectively stops people from thinking.

(13)

It is not critical *thought* that is the problem here, but the tyranny of the academy that creates demarcations that protect critique as its special and privileged domain. As my discussion of Mouré's transgressive strategies in chapter one illustrates, an analysis of Mouré's poetic practice necessarily involves the critic in a re-evaluation of critical methodology. Poems like "Everything: The Cortex" resist the critic's attempt to dissect their complex structures as well as her desire to remove herself from the picture to some objective ground. Tregobov's discomfort derives from the unsettling experience of having the object of study suddenly look back at her.¹⁰

¹⁰ Much the same way that the brother of "Nice Poetry" looks back at the 'poet' and messes up the line breaks. The toehold of authority is a precarious one.

This relationship with the academy is, however, a complex one for, as Tregobov observes:

[T]o the degree to which Mouré shelters within the walls of theory, rather than making it the internal bone structure of her writing, she is supporting her innate smartness with a theoretical underpinning that has all sorts of powerful structures (ie. the Academy) valorizing, honouring and codifying it.

(60)

At its heart, this is a question of accessibility. By asking, "who can read Mouré and not feel stupid?"¹¹ Tregobov is pointing toward the difficulty of Mouré's poetics which is grounded in theories of language and its role in defining both our bodily and civic identities. If she does indeed "shelter" within the walls of theory, does Mouré in fact perpetuate the very forms of privileged specialized knowledge she seeks to challenge? Does her poetry exclude many, when exclusion is, for her, dehumanizing?

There is no denying that Mouré's texts demand a great deal of work from her readers, but as the interjecting voice of "Nice Poetry" demonstrates, Mouré is not concerned with making anything easy for anyone, even herself. Revealing the grotesque is an act fraught with anxiety and, while revelation might be an important aspect of the work, it is the anxiety that is ultimately the point. Mouré's poetic practice

¹¹ This question puts the reader in an untenable position. If I answer "I can" I am a) separating myself from the 'uninformed' masses, an act of intellectual egotism which perpetuates my own role as an 'authority'; b) lying; c) "sheltering" behind the same walls of theory that Tregobov erects for Mouré. Is there no way out?

makes bananas scary. Therefore, rather than defend her work against accusations of inaccessibility, Mouré responds with a critique of accessibility itself.

For Mouré, accessibility is the capital agent of anaesthesia, a sense of comfort and belonging that serves the dominant order: "Literal meanings of the 'accessible' just place women and working-class people, as the lowest common denominator in the reproduction of the social order" ("Polis" 206). 'Meaning' is culturally generated, and like the formidable intimidations of right-thinking philosophy, actually impedes critical judgement and allows the poet and her readers to be that much more easily co-opted by the dominant order. She writes:

Yes, breaking those neural patterns hurts, it can be confusing -- that god, 'meaning', crumbles and we say *meaningless, meaningless* -- but this saying is just the dominant order crooning inside us, afraid its commodities will lose us, so it calls us back to it. It longs for us. We love it.

("Access" 10)

The challenge of inaccessibility serves, then, to redirect the energy of subversion toward the ends of oppression such that a populace wooed by comfort and the path of least resistance loses the will and the ability to resist.

If Mouré does shelter within the valorizing walls of theory, which means at present within the academy, she also attempts to challenge the existence of those walls, to deconstruct the ground she stands on. Yet the danger of co-option is always present, as Bronwen

Wallace writes in a letter to Mouré: "Let's not kid ourselves. Language-centered writing can be just as easily co-opted as any other kind....We can all be 'used by convention.' They've got the guns. We have the numbers, but we're not angels yet"(Mouré, *Two Women Talking* 23).¹² Mouré has herself observed this possibility of being "recuperated as marginal into the civic order" or being disqualified as illegitimate, unqualified or partisan ("Polis" 205). In this case, even opposition is recuperated as part of a binary system that pits the self against some Other and constructs the only possible space for emancipation to be that which is outside of the very systems that constitute identity. This is a disqualification of a different sort, one that is often called 'madness' or 'nonsense' by which the dominant order ejects that which threatens it into a space beyond a border of its own construction.

¹² Government funding of the arts is an excellent example of this conundrum. All of Mouré's collections have been published with financial aid from the Canada Council. In fact, of the twenty-four collections of poetry and literary journals in my personal library, all but one, *Carousel*, produced at the University of Guelph, receive government assistance. Is this co-option or an excellent example of the power producing its own sites of resistance?

Conclusion

Getting Out Of The Ending

You will get out of the ending by falling fully-clothed into
the sea.

Erin Mouré, *Furious*

Sisyphus lifting ellipses
they reassert themselves in silence
at the foot of the hill

Throughout her work, Erin Mouré uses language to interrogate language's oppressive modalities, exploiting the gaps in its frictionless surface and claims to truth and absolute reference. Part of a strategy of resistance to patriarchal modes of Naming, this interrogation seeks to alter the trajectory of language that devalues and silences the voices and experiences of those deemed 'marginal' and 'other'; it is a poetics that applies force to resist inertia: "It isn't that to change the weight and force of English will *necessarily* make women's speaking possible. But to move the force in any language, create a slippage, *even for a moment...* to decentre the 'thing', unmask the relation..." (*Furious* 98) breaks down oppressive binaries. This gesture to the end of binary machines is the trace of the transgression, that flashpoint of neither/nor existence that collapses into the linear exhaustion of re-presentation in words.

Mouré's work is characterized by this exhaustion, the central

term of her poetics, the preposition, itself an unstable state that collapses under the weight of the noun/verb. Nowhere is this more evident than in her discussion, indeed nostalgia for, a pre-linguistic space. Her article, "Poetry, Memory, and the Polis," betrays this yearning for the extra-discursive when she invokes a "pre-linguistic memory, the memory of the mother," the "gaps in language where maternal non-sense is"(206). This is the privileged space of PURE REASON. This is also the frustration inherent in her poetics, a frustration reflected in my analysis of simultaneity that cannot resist linear presentation: PURE REASON is not knowable except through the order of the wound, the always already state of otherness, a fact of which Mouré is painfully aware: "We have only the symbolic to give us the terms to discuss what precedes its laws"("Polis" 206).

Beyond this admission, however, is a further suggestion, one that Judith Butler makes and which informs much of my reading of Mouré's poetic work, that the 'pre-linguistic' is itself constructed by, and is a function of, discourse; the extra-discursive is, in fact, a discursive phenomenon, always already constructed as origin from a state of otherness. Mouré's poetic practice enacts her awareness of such construction, for her work does not seek to escape language, but to effect transgression within it, even though the transgression is impossible to represent.

A factor of exhaustion, Mouré's discussion of the 'pre-linguistic' traces this collapse into a conceptual framework that insists that a transgression must partake of the 'from-into.' that is,

must transgress a border between two places. Such an insistence is a denial of the terms of transgression, which can only come into being in the moment of transgression. 'From' and 'into' have no meaning within that moment. Thus, the fundamental instability of the prepositional poetics. Unable to stand alone, the preposition is always flung back into the noun/verb system, leading to a kind of madness:

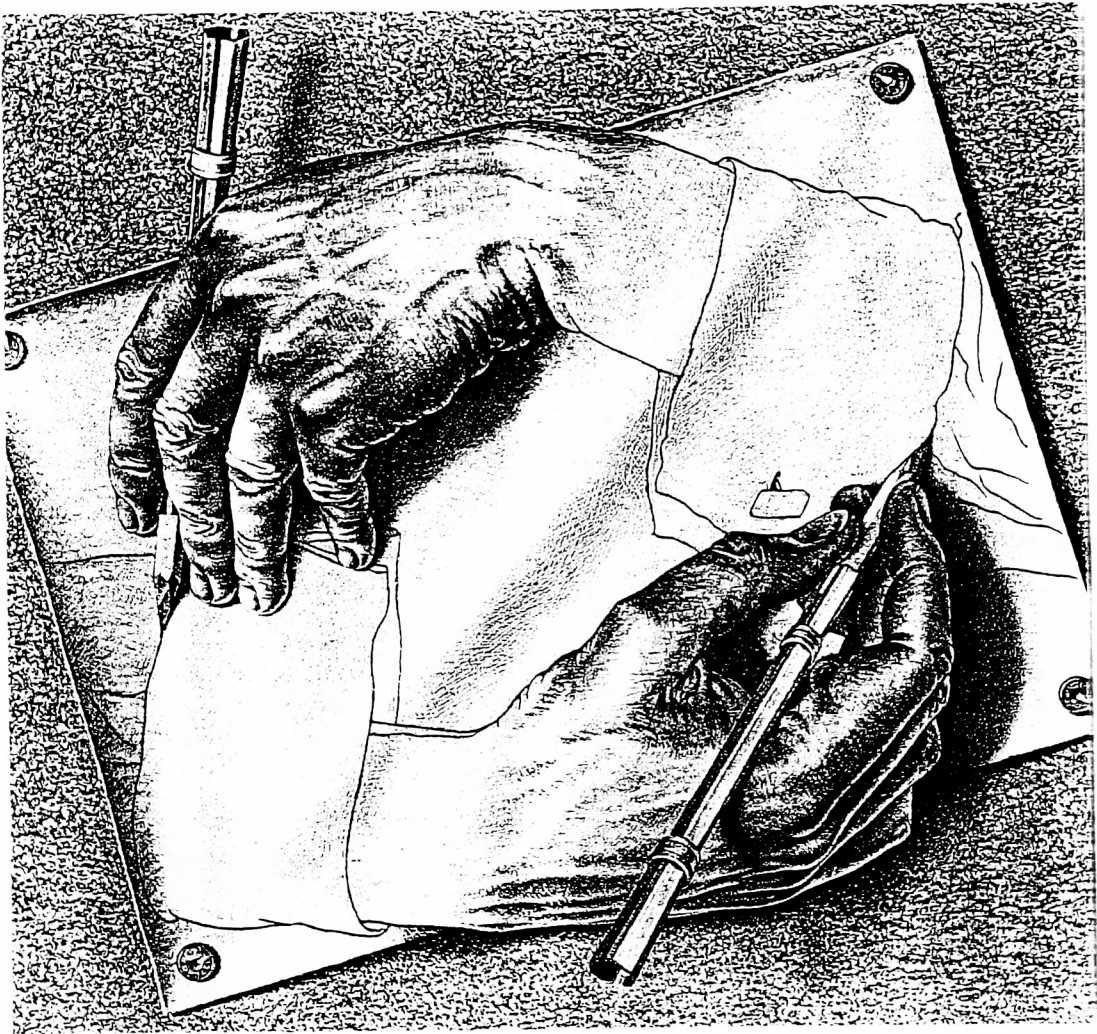
The relation drove her mad. Motion & name *matter*. The problem with the preposition is, *no inflection. Time & space, but an unvalued grammatical relation. Seen as a dependency, rather than recognized as a value: the space between over before, by.* As if the preposition is the woman's sign because it is relational. But can't get anywhere, because in the language it has no power, & can't exist alone.

(*Furious* 97)

Here is the danger that is of deep concern for Mouré in her construction of a theoretical framework for her practice; there is always the potential for the subversive energy of the preposition to be co-opted by the dominant order as 'marginal,' and, from the perspective of the centre, effectively powerless. Within the terms of this binary, the preposition is doomed to dependency because it cannot stand alone in a system that values the individual over the relational. The only place that the preposition can stand alone is at the site of transgression, where, paradoxically, 'from' and 'to' have no meaning. Here is where we get out of the ending.

Sisyphus begins lifting ellipses again.

Illustration



"Drawing Hands" by M.C. Escher

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