

**Contextualizing Narrative Theory:
Reading the Politics of Formal Innovation
in Contemporary Women's Fiction**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

To ignore the strategies and structures through which stories are told, this thesis contends, is to neglect a vital dimension of their politics. Narratology provides productive analytical tools to illuminate the complex and varied mechanics of narrative form, yet it also bears the traces of its structuralist origins. Its value is therefore contingent upon its continuing reformulation as an expansive, pluralist and contextualized critical discipline. Participating in this expansion, this thesis evidences the pertinence and vitality of some narratological models and the limitations of others. It opens up alternative critical possibilities by drawing upon insights within contemporary critical theory, from poststructuralist philosophy to transcultural feminism to sociolinguistics. Above all, my interventions proceed from close readings of innovative fiction by women writers hitherto all but unrepresented in, and therefore potentially subversive of, existing models: Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, Hiromi Goto, Ali Smith, Jackie Kay, Erna Brodber, Dionne Brand, Aritha van Herk.

The first chapter formulates an in-between critical space where feminist and postmodernist theories of narrative intersect. It re-examines metafiction through the lens of auto(bio)graphical practice and feminist poststructuralist theories of self, and introduces the notions of folds and echoes to describe specific structural innovations. Chapter Two examines unconventional uses of second-person address and reconsiders existing narratological approaches in their light, focusing on the 'push and pull of narrative' that the 'you' form enacts. Chapter Three addresses the insufficient attention paid to multiply narrated novels, theorizing them as 'narrative communities' and introducing terms to describe different internal relations between narrators, relations that can often be read as determinedly 'democratic'. The final chapter contests the hegemony of temporal models of narrativity by formulating a 'spatial poetics' that accounts both for how spatial structures can be agents of narrative change and for the complexity of textual constructions of space, which frequently exceed static definitions of 'setting'.

Running throughout is a reconception of narrative as located not with the figure of the narrator, but in relations of intersubjectivity. The narratological criticism formulated here works towards a situated ethics of reading responsive to the politics of writing: it is engaged, relational, and ever in process.

Contents

Introduction: Theoretical Intersections	4
Narratological contexts	13
Outline of chapters	30
Chapter One: Metafictional (Un)foldings? Postmodern Feminist Forms in Daphne Marlatt's <i>Ana Historic</i> and Nicole Brossard's <i>Baroque at Dawn</i>.....	35
Feminist metafiction	39
Feminism and postmodernism: harmony and dissonance	45
Revisioning narrative dynamics	48
Concurrent narration	66
Exploding the container of form: echoes and lines of force	71
Auto(bio)graphical metafiction: reading narrative intersubjectivity	85
Conclusion	95
Chapter Two: The Push and Pull of Narrative in the Second Person	97
Narrative and second personhood	97
Narratological contexts	102
Daphne Marlatt's <i>Ana Historic</i>	114
Ali Smith's short stories	123
Hiromi Goto's <i>Chorus of Mushrooms</i>	128
Conclusion	141
Chapter Three: Democracies of Voice? Communal Narration in Jackie Kay's <i>Trumpet</i>, Ali Smith's <i>Hotel World</i> and Erna Brodber's <i>Myal</i>	146
Narratological contexts	149
The texts	155
<i>Trumpet</i> and <i>Hotel World</i> : segmental narrative communities	159
<i>Trumpet</i>	161
<i>Hotel World</i>	176
<i>Myal</i> : a permeable narrative community	193
Conclusion	208
Chapter Four: The Geopolitics of Form: Spatial Dynamics in Dionne Brand's <i>At the Full and Change of the Moon</i> and Aritha van Herk's <i>Places Far From Ellesmere</i>.....	210
Spatializing narrative theory	216
The texts	223
Narrating diaspora space: <i>At the Full and Change of the Moon</i>	227
Geographies of self: <i>Places Far From Ellesmere</i>	250
Conclusion	273
Conclusion: Towards a Situated Narratological Criticism	275
Appendices	286
I <i>Baroque at Dawn</i> structural outline	286
II <i>At the Full and Change of the Moon</i> family tree	288
III <i>Places Far From Ellesmere</i> front cover image	289
Bibliography	290

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Intersections

Here and now, we are living in what you might call a corporately-narrated world. If we don't think about how stories and narratives are made for us or about us, if we don't even notice anymore, then we're kind of dead.

Ali Smith¹

This project proceeds from a belief in the politics of form, and thus from the conviction that to ignore the workings of narrative techniques is to neglect a significant dimension of textual politics. In its capacity as a 'toolshed'² of strategies for reading narrative, narratology occupies a valuable place within literary studies. Its value, however, is contingent upon its reformulation: as I will argue in the second part of this introduction, the 'classical' structuralist 'science of narrative'³ of the 1960s and '70s must continue to cede to much expanded versions that are inclusive, contextualized, and subject to change. Instead of working with the broad analyses and models typical of narratological theory, my project engages in narratological criticism based on close reading of fictional narratives currently unrepresented in, and therefore potentially subversive of, existing theories. At its heart is a two-way dynamic that echoes James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz's concept of narratological 'theorypractice': 'a critical inquiry that has both a theoretical and a practical dimension and that develops a feedback loop between those two dimensions. Theory helps illuminate narrative texts even as elements of those texts challenge theory and lead to its extension or revision.'⁴ Nicole Brossard's description of the 'ludic (playing with words), experimental (trying to understand processes of writing), and exploratory (searching)'⁵ practices employed by contemporary women writers expose not only descriptive

¹ Cited by Vanessa Craft, <http://www.ideasfactory.com/writing/features/writ_feature33.htm> [accessed 01 March 2005].

² 'Toolshed of narratology' comes from Ingeborg Hoesterey, 'Introduction', in Ann Fehn, Ingeborg Hoesterey and Maria Tatar, eds, *Neverending Stories: Towards a Critical Narratology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 3–14 (p. 9).

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Décaméron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 10.

⁴ James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. x. He and Peter J. Rabinowitz first used the term in the introduction to their edited collection, *Understanding Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994).

⁵ Nicole Brossard, 'Poetic Politics', in Charles Bernstein, ed., *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy* (New York: Roof Books, 1990), pp. 73–86 (p. 77).

but also geopolitical and ethical shortcomings within existing narratological theory and demand that it be rethought. Such a revised theory of narrative is an essential tool for shaping close, responsive practices of reading that reveal *how* women writers are using innovative narrative strategies to re-envision the processes of writing and reading, reshaping our literary landscape.

Since all but a handful of experimental women writers have been uncomfortably positioned in relation to a postmodernist 'canon',⁶ and since studies of narrative form have tended to identify 'experimental' with 'postmodernist', women's innovative texts, especially those issuing from postcolonial and other non-metropolitan locations, are mostly notable by their absence. My readings of experimental strategies in '(ambiguously) nonhegemonic'⁷ fiction redress this imbalance by returning to and revising practices of close textual analysis which, despite contemporary narratologies' ever broadening applications, are still often sidelined by literary theory's privileging of questions of content and context over those of form. But rather than conflating innovations in women's writing with existing postmodernist forms or with transgressive politics, my critical project explores the complex interplay of poetics and politics.⁸ To this end, my 'theorypractice' draws together contemporary narratologies with transnational feminisms and poststructuralist thinking about self, community, narrative, and the relations in between. I am working at theoretical intersections which I envision not as collisions but as sites of fruitful coming together, productive critical spaces opened up by the diverse innovations of contemporary women's fictions.

Though it is admittedly aspirational, I share Hélène Cixous' sense that 'writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought,

⁶ I return to this 'canon' question on page 7.

⁷ This term, referring to groups excluded from certain systems of power although potentially included in others, is borrowed from Rachel Blau DuPlessis and the Members of Workshop 9, 'For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production – the Debate over a Female Aesthetic', in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds, *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), pp. 128–56 (p. 149).

⁸ To borrow from Fred Wah, I mean 'poetics' here, 'not in the theoretical sense of the study of or theory about literature, but in its practical and applied sense, as the tools designed or located by writers and artists to initiate movement and change' (*Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity: Critical Writing 1984–1999* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000), p. 51). Elsewhere, notably in Chapter Four, I sometimes use 'descriptive' or 'narrative poetics' in its theoretical sense.

the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures'.⁹ This is not to locate my study in terms of *écriture féminine* or the search for a 'feminine aesthetic'; my focus on women's writing by no means speaks to an impulse to capture specifically 'feminine' stylistic qualities. On the contrary, I agree with Rita Felski that:

the political meanings of women's writing cannot be theorized in an a priori fashion, by appealing to an inherent relationship between gender and a specific linguistic or literary form, but can be addressed only by relating the diverse forms of women's writing to the cultural and ideological processes shaping the effects and potential limits of literary production at historically specific contexts.¹⁰

To analyse the politics of formal strategies is not to imbue them with an 'inherent ideological valence';¹¹ rather, I conceive it as a careful, relational process of contextualization, in which strategies are related to their immediate textual surroundings and, extratextually, to the instances of writing and reading. Reading *only* women's fiction is a strategic decision, responsive both to persistent bias within the narratological corpus, and to the specific challenges posed by the 'ludic', 'experimental', 'exploratory' work being written by women.

Revisionary theories of narrative, now known, in the plural, as 'post-classical' narratologies, have already reached beyond the corpus of predominantly European, male-authored, realist novels on which their structuralist ancestors were based. Where narratologists have been working to broaden narratology's corpus along interdisciplinary lines, as in Robyn Warhol's work on popular cultural forms and Ruth Page's attention to nonfictional, oral and hypertext narratives,¹² I must admit to upholding the hegemony of literary narratives within narratologies. However, my thesis addresses the continued marginalization within established literary narratology of formally innovative writing, especially fiction written by women or from

⁹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976), Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, trans, rpt. in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 245–64 (p. 249).

¹⁰ Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 48.

¹¹ Brian Richardson argues against such direct conflation of form and politics in 'Linearity and Its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence', *College English*, 62.6 (2000), 685–95 (p. 692).

¹² Robyn R. Warhol, *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feelings and Pop-Culture Forms* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003); Ruth E. Page, *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

non-metropolitan, postcolonial or transcultural locations.¹³ I engage with the inadequacy of our critical vocabularies for discussing formal innovation in fiction, as encapsulated in Christine Brooke-Rose's statement: 'To be an "experimental" woman writer. Three words. Three difficulties'.¹⁴ Until recently, in feminist narratology Austen and Woolf featured heavily, with some attention to Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Toni Morrison. Postmodernist narrative theorists have focused on Beckett, Pynchon, Calvino, Gabriel Josipovici, sometimes delving into Rushdie, Morrison, Hong Kingston or Christa Wolf. More recently, the possibilities of a 'postcolonial narratology' have begun to be explored, for example in a special 'Multiculturalism and Narrative' issue of *Narrative* (1999); in Gabriele Helms's study of dialogism in Canadian literature; and in Gerald Prince's 2005 essay, 'On a Postcolonial Narratology'.¹⁵ Reciprocally, some postcolonial literary criticism is making use of narratological frameworks.¹⁶ However, the politics of mainstream literary production and consumption continues to favour a far too limited 'canon' of writers and to marginalize writing that issues from (ambiguously) non-hegemonic spaces, in particular the many contemporary texts which are experimental but which engage problematically or not at all with the dominant modes of postmodernist fiction: writing, that is, by diasporic writers, by lesbian writers, by writers outside Western literary traditions; fiction published by independent presses or beyond metropolitan publishing cultures.¹⁷ Here, problems

¹³ I quite agree with Brian Richardson's recent proposal that, 'Narrative theory, despite its emphasis on narration and narrators, has not yet systematically examined the impressive range of unusual postmodern and other avant garde strategies of narration' (*Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. ix). However, his book, like Brian McHale's twenty years earlier (*Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987)), tends to identify modernist and postmodernist strategies, with little attention to the tensions between the 'postmodernist' label and certain politics of writing.

¹⁴ Christine Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 250.

¹⁵ Gabriele Helms's *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) successfully brings together multicultural and First Nations Canadian writers with Bakhtinian 'cultural narratology'. Also see Gerald Prince, 'On a Postcolonial Narratology', in James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, eds, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 372–81.

¹⁶ Robert Fraser's *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) undertakes close reading of language, style and form in a range of postcolonial fiction with valuable attention to context and politics. However, while he is engaged in the kind of typologizing narratologists look for, I would argue that his study is impoverished by almost entirely ignoring the vocabularies provided by existing descriptive poetics.

¹⁷ The 'popular'/'literary' fiction divide, in marketing terms, would also be a fruitful point of enquiry here, though beyond the remit of this thesis.

of 'relevance', of 'literariness', of accessibility all combine with a general critical reluctance to engage in cross-cultural reading practices that necessitate a responsible, situated criticism.

For Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, cross-cultural reading on the one hand 'will lead to less certainty, forcing us to recognise [...] the necessarily tentative nature of what we might wish to hold as truths', but on the other 'may help us to discover productive new modes of thinking'.¹⁸ This thesis brings together fiction by British, Canadian and anglophone Caribbean women writers in order to pose a greater challenge to narratological frameworks by testing them against products of diverse literary cultures, the Caribbean in particular having been more or less unrepresented by narratologists to date. Working with these distinct literary cultures, and with transcultural (black Scottish, Caribbean Canadian and Japanese Canadian) productions, demands careful contextualization and a challenging cross-cultural critical practice, an approach which refuses what Judith Butler calls 'the presumed universality and unity' of 'women'.¹⁹ My use of the term 'contextual' rather than 'feminist' narratology, as I will elaborate below, gestures to my 'multiaxial'²⁰ emphasis: it repositions gender politics, or even the established 'trinity of race-sex-class',²¹ as inseparable from the other intersecting axes of power that act upon social experience and find expression in literary acts of writing, publishing, reading.

Although my contextualizing practice is enabled by my research experience in the British, Canadian and Caribbean literary fields, a significant challenge to my analytical approach is set out in a warning by Trinh T. Minh-ha:

'Looking for the structure of *their* narratives' so as to 'tell it the way *they* tell it' is an attempt at remedying this ignorance of other ways of telling and listening (and, obviously, at re-validating the nativist discourse). In doing so, however, rare are those who realize that what they come up with is not [the] 'structure of *their* narratives' but a reconstruction of the story that, at best, makes a number

¹⁸ Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993), p. 21.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 4.

²⁰ Avtar Brah coins 'multiaxial locationality' to articulate subjective positioning as a temporary, contingent intersection of axes of identity rather than as a fixed 'location', in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 178.

²¹ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, 'Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity', in Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 1–33 (p. 19).

of its functions appear. Rare are those who acknowledge the unavoidable transfer of values in the 'search'.²²

How to write responsibly, without imposing an interpretive frame associated with my own academic background or reading such narratives solely in terms of their Other-ness, of Trinh's italicized *they*, is one of the most difficult negotiations of this project. It runs the risk of appropriating the space of the other, or, in Caren Kaplan's words, of 'constructing similarity through equalizations when material histories indicate otherwise'.²³ As Smaro Kamboureli warns, this can result in a "'retreat" response' on the part of a critic intimidated by such a perceived tightrope walk.²⁴ But if narrative theory is to account for more of the myriad stories being told in the world, this difficulty is also one of its conditions of possibility.

Part of my task, then, is the task of postcolonial feminist theory as Sara Mills articulates it: 'not accepting the dominant reading of a text and inserting a positionality for reading otherwise'.²⁵ To this end, the feminist context for my work, far from a second-wave model based on gender difference, is informed by the transnational feminism of Caren Kaplan, Inderpal Grewal and others, which emphasizes relations.²⁶ As Elleke Boehmer suggests,

Feminism must be viewed *both* as respect for the specificity of historical differences between women, *and*, even if aspirationally, as a relational, global process, that permits intersubjective exchange and cross-category comparatism. [...] A qualified, relational feminism that avoids prioritising any one axis of difference over any other should enable women to assert a politically effective even if always provisional consensus about issues in common to be addressed.²⁷

And through Drucilla Cornell's 'ethical feminism' I understand such practice as necessarily ethical, depending on a responsible relationship with and behaviour towards others:

²² Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 142.

²³ See Caren Kaplan, 'The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice', in Grewal and Kaplan, eds, *Scattered Hegemonies*, pp. 137–52 (p. 139).

²⁴ Smaro Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5. She borrows the phrase from Linda Alcoff.

²⁵ Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 20.

²⁶ See Grewal and Kaplan, 'Introduction'; essays in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and also Carole Boyce Davies' notion of 'critical relationality' in her *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 56.

²⁷ Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 13.

The explicit call within feminism by women of color, lesbians, and others designated as outside the matrix of heterosexuality is that white, heterosexual women take responsibility for the way in which they internalize and act out the privileges of 'passing.' This call to responsibility inheres in the aspiration to the ethical relationship and is as a result a crucial aspect of what I call ethical feminism. It can call us to both acts of identification and dis-identification. But it demands of us that we deconstruct the claim that there is an identity that we share as women and that the differences between us are secondary.²⁸

Setting these two statements together juxtaposes two concepts, politics and ethics, which are important to my project but which are not straightforwardly allied, hence my usage requires some contextualization here. The politics of writing, I have begun to argue, is central to my thesis about the workings of narrative form and the critical importance of formal analysis. The addition of ethics enables a particular emphasis on ideas of the response/responsibility evoked through narrative encounters. As I will suggest, thinking ethico-politically means being attentive to the personal and collective responsibility at work as fiction is written and read, as well as to the ways in which systems of power act upon literary production and consumption. I am approaching ethics not along the heavily drawn lines of philosophical tradition, the historical Eurocentrism of which carries a risk of 'moral universalism'²⁹ incompatible with transnational feminisms. Instead, I draw upon a poststructuralist, Levinas-inspired model of ethics that understands affective self–other relations and responsibility towards the other to be constitutive of self.³⁰ As Simon Critchley explains, 'Ethics is not an obligation toward the other mediated through the formal and procedural universalization of maxims or some appeal to good conscience; rather – and this is what is truly provocative about Levinas – ethics is *lived* in the sensibility of a corporeal obligation to the other.'³¹ In this form, conceived as the call to responsibility enacted by a face-to-face encounter, ethics has returned to the forefront of much

²⁸ Drucilla Cornell, 'What is Ethical Feminism?', in Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 75–106 (p. 85).

²⁹ Critiqued by Rosi Braidotti in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 15.

³⁰ See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy' (1984), Seán Hand and Michael Temple, trans., in Seán Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 75–87 (p. 82).

³¹ Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 64.

critical thinking.³² Theorizing self in terms of interrelationality or Simon Critchley's 'ethical intersubjectivity',³³ and therefore as non-unitary, is not to 'fragment' it or to work against the possibility of agency. On the contrary, and as ethical feminism infers, social responsibility is predicated upon 'an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and the others';³⁴ it *depends* upon such ethical retheorization.

There is a distinction often made between ethics, limited to the self–other relation and thus to the private sphere, and politics, referring to a relation with a third party and thus to broader, public issues of social power.³⁵ On the one hand, my work does apply this distinction to literary studies, in that I read certain resistant, exploratory practices of writing and publishing as political (in an admittedly limited sense), while allowing that acts of reading and criticism rarely are. As Andrew Gibson argues, even when driven by political conviction and/or entering the public sphere, criticism operates within a circumscribed intellectual field and with a long-term view towards an 'undecidable future' rather than with the 'urgent temporality' of the political.³⁶ This makes 'ethical' or 'ethico-political' more fitting terms for a sensitive, responsive, engaged literary critical practice. On the other hand, however, as the feminist theories of Cornell, Braidotti and Ewa Ziarek suggest, the two are by no means mutually exclusive. Ziarek's work, in particular, rethinks feminist democratic politics together with ethical obligation and responsibility. She shows how bell hooks' critical theory 'point[s] to the necessary intersection between feminist politics and ethics of difference' by articulating that critiques of power/knowledge can only proceed towards an egalitarian politics in tandem with 'the elaboration of an alternative ethics based on the responsibility for the Other's oppression'.³⁷

³² Since the late 1980s, ethical concerns have increased in general literary criticism, the narrative theory of Wayne Booth, Adam Zachary Newton, James Phelan and others, and in poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial theory such as Braidotti's *Transpositions*, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³³ Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity*, p. 65.

³⁴ Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p. 265.

³⁵ Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity*, p. 158.

³⁶ Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 4–5.

³⁷ Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus*, p. 215.

While there are some clear and other more nuanced distinctions between the ethical and the political, then, there are stronger arguments for their at least partial inseparability, since our private and public responsibilities are not so easily isolated.

The ethical impacts upon my thesis since innovative fiction disrupts expectations and produces effects that shift the ground beneath the feet, drawing a reader into unexpected, sometimes unstable relationships with a text. Whether or not this is construed as a political act on the part of the writer, such disruptive effects overtly foreground the ethical encounter at work through the narrative exchange and, if read responsively, can thus provide a site for the promise and the limitations of intersubjective relations to be explored. As I will elaborate when I engage with theories of narrative ethics later in this introduction, my work assumes that, as Gibson puts it, 'in the context of an [Levinasian] ethics for which ethical and epistemological questions are inseparable, distinctions between modes of narration are also the crucial ethical distinctions'.³⁸ Thus, it is not only the many innovative formal strategies deployed by the writers in my study – Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, Hiromi Goto, Ali Smith, Jackie Kay, Erna Brodber, Dionne Brand, Aritha van Herk – that will pose new challenges to existing narratological models, but also the intensive ethical modes of reading that these strategies invite or even, as in the case of Hiromi Goto, demand. Goto articulates precisely what is involved in her notion of a 'Colour Full' writing – writing, that is, which 'demands that we hold ourselves accountable about how we choose to see. When I write from a specific cultural background, I write from a specific site. The reader must contextualize her own location in relation to and in tandem with this site'.³⁹

Such reading practices are a far cry from the assumptions within the universalizing project of close reading carried out under 'practical criticism' which, as John Barrell points out, 'requires that working-class writers and readers alike, and female writers and readers, should regard their class and gender as contingent to, as irrelevant to, their identity as writers and

³⁸ Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel*, p. 26.

³⁹ Hiromi Goto, 'Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing', in Christl Verduyn, ed., *Literary Pluralities* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998), pp. 263–9 (p. 268).

readers'⁴⁰ (or, to use Susan Winnett's phrase, it makes us 'read in drag'⁴¹). In *The Radical Aesthetic*, Isobel Armstrong proposes a more fundamental revision of close reading: instead of 'this effort to resist desire, a refusal to be overpowered by affect', the task is 'to rethink the power of affect, feeling and emotion in a *cognitive* space'.⁴² She states: 'Arguably, close reading has never been close enough. It has always been the rationalist's defence against the shattering of the subject. It has always been engaged with mastery, and the erotics of the text have been invoked to endorse the reader's power over it'.⁴³ As Robyn Warhol's recent feminist narratological work shows, the 'affective impact' of narratives is not located solely with a reader's individual identifications, but is also produced through 'narrative technique', notably focalization, and can thus be illuminated by narratological readings.⁴⁴ Throughout this thesis (most explicitly in Chapter Two's attention to the dynamics of intimacy and alienation effected by second-person narration), I assert the importance of *closer* close reading to contemporary literary criticism, and work to replace ideas of 'mastery' and the self's rational control over the narrative encounter with an ethical conception of reader-text relations.

Narratological contexts

The roots of the narratological discipline reach as far back as Aristotle's theories on dramatic plot structures in his *Poetics*, and run through the Russian Formalist tradition exemplified by Vladimir Propp's 1928 typology of narrative structure, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. However, it was the French structuralists of the 1960s and '70s – notably Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond, A. J. Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette – who established what is now known as *classical* narratology.⁴⁵ Beginning with the much-cited phrase, 'the narratives of the

⁴⁰ John Barrell, 'Close Reading', in Dennis Walder, ed., *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 131–7 (pp. 136–7).

⁴¹ Susan Winnett, 'Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure', *PMLA*, 105.3 (1990), 505–18 (p. 516).

⁴² Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 87.

⁴³ Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ Robyn R. Warhol, 'How Narration Produces Gender: Femininity as Affect and Effect in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*', *Narrative*, 9.2 (2001), 182–7 (p. 182).

⁴⁵ The term, from the French *narratologie*, was coined by Todorov in *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969).

world are numberless', Barthes' 1966 essay, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', sets out their project:

Is not structuralism's constant aim to master the infinity of utterances [*paroles*] by describing the 'language' [*langue*] of which they are the products and from which they can be generated. Faced with the infinity of narratives [...] the analyst finds himself in more or less the same situation as Saussure confronted by the heterogeneity of language [*langage*] and seeking to extract a principle of classification and a central focus for description from the apparent confusion of the individual messages.⁴⁶

Seeking a theory able to identify those properties shared by *every* narrative (but *only* narratives), it was thus in linguistics that structuralists found a model which seemed systematic and scientific enough to pare narrative down to its essence: a universal 'grammar of narrative' was their Grail. Fundamental to their conception of narrative structure was the identification of two basic levels: story (*fabula*, or underlying chronology of events) and discourse (*szujet*, or narration of these events). In many cases, their results took the form of codes, taxonomies, formulae and involved a laboriously technical vocabulary; add this to the permanent lack of consensus regarding narrative's 'universal' properties and it is understandable that from the outset narratology has been perceived as an arid and reductive critical discourse.⁴⁷ A practice which, as Jonathan Culler puts it, 'does not discover what a sequence means or produce a new interpretation of it but tries to determine the nature of the system underlying the event'⁴⁸ – in other words divorcing form from interpretation and text from context – certainly seems unappealing today. How, then, am I able to arrive at the theoretical intersection where I propose narratology as necessary to contemporary transnational feminist literary studies? What enables the transformation of an outmoded structuralist idea into a vital, shifting and heterogeneous critical practice of 'closer' close reading?

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' (1966), in *Image – Music – Text*, Stephen Heath, trans. (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 79–124 (p. 80).

⁴⁷ See, for example, Jonathan Culler's discussion of Paul Ricoeur's critique (*Le conflit des interprétations*, 1969) in his *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 26.

⁴⁸ Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 31.

Put simply, we might answer that the narratological discipline has never existed as just one idea: it has been expanding and diversifying ever since it began. The German school (led by Franz Stanzel) and American 'New Criticism' (exemplified by Wayne Booth's seminal *The Rhetoric of Fiction*) ran in parallel to the French, along different tracks but ones which later theorists would draw connections between. One of structuralist narratology's core texts, Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1972), has little in common with the 'universal grammars' proposed by other theorists: rather than focusing on the 'underlying' plot (the 'story' level), Genette works primarily on the level of the narration ('discourse'). For Genette, 'the "grid" which has been so disparaged is not an instrument of incarceration, of bringing to heel, or of pruning that in fact castrates: it is a procedure of discovery, a way of describing'.⁴⁹ Indeed, as tools – in themselves solely descriptive but with useful interpretive applications – his influential models of narrative temporality, extra-, intra- and metadiegetic levels, and homo-/heterodiegetic narration⁵⁰ have enduring value for analysing and describing certain mimetic modes of fiction. The fact remains, however, that these classical models are derived from Western male-authored narratives. With Brian Richardson, then, I am arguing 'not for a different poetics but for an additional one; that is, for an anti-mimetic poetics that supplements existing mimetic theories. [...] Only in this way can we begin to do justice to the most effective imaginative achievements in narrative in our time'.⁵¹ Though, of course, a contextualized approach further differentiates itself, because classical narratology's exclusion of issues of both context and the role of the reader mean that its findings lay claim to a universality which contemporary situated modes of thought call into question.

Barthes himself shifted from structural to poststructural analysis in the space of four years, with *S/Z* (1970) installing the reader as 'writer' in the famous declaration: 'In the text, only the

⁴⁹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (1972; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 265.

⁵⁰ Extra-, intra- and metadiegetic levels refer, respectively, to the level of writing, events inside the first narrative, and events within the narrator's narrative. Homodiegetic narrators are present in the story; heterodiegetic ones narrate from outside the story (avoiding what he regards as the imprecision of first/third person).

⁵¹ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*, p. 138.

reader speaks'.⁵² Whereas, in its early formulations, narratology excluded the reader from the play of the text, here it begins to overlap with the realms of reader-response theory. By foregrounding the reader's role, we are faced with a multiplicity of possible (re)constructions of every individual narrative, and the structuralist assumption that narrative structure is fixed and singular, an 'essence' to be revealed by descriptive poetics, is undermined. This also constitutes a significant shift in emphasis from a *linguistic* to a *communicational* model of narrative, a shift which continues through the main narrative theories of the early 1980s, notably those of Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Gerald Prince and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. These theorists worked to model the 'narrative situation', which usually takes the form of a variation on the structure 'author – implied author – narrator – narratee – implied reader – reader', although no single version has been resolved upon.⁵³ Coming from different theoretical directions, Mary-Louise Pratt's speech-act theory (1977) and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's narrative pragmatics (1980) both fed into this communicational, contextualist⁵⁴ version of narrative theory.

Mieke Bal wrote in 1986: 'Narratology is at an impasse. It has ceased to be perceived as fruitful, insofar as it has not succeeded in establishing itself as a *tool*, that is, in putting itself at the service of any critical practice. The result is violent opposition to "formalism," identified wrongly or rightly with structuralism'.⁵⁵ To get past the impasse, Bal suggests positing 'subjectivity as the organizing principle behind narrative'.⁵⁶ She is responding here to structuralism's deliberate dethroning of consciousness as the origin of narrative,⁵⁷ a move which, though in some sense a precursor of later deconstructions of the unified Cartesian

⁵² Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Richard Miller, trans. (1970; London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 151.

⁵³ There has been longstanding debate: for example, in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), Seymour Chatman brackets narrator and narratee as optional; in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2002; 2nd ed.), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues they are essential, but removes implied author and implied reader. Ann Banfield's *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) contests the communicational model's presupposition of a narrator behind each narrative utterance, arguing for the grammatical possibility of sentences with no speaking subject (I consider this debate in Chapter Three).

⁵⁴ Seymour Chatman referred to Pratt, Herrnstein Smith and others as 'contextualists' in part-recognition and part-critique of their project, in 'What Can We Learn from Contextualist Narratology?', *Poetics Today*, 11.2 (1990), 309–328.

⁵⁵ Mieke Bal, 'Narratology as Critical Theory' (1986), in her *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, David Jobling ed. (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1991) pp. 27–48 (p. 27).

⁵⁶ Bal, 'Narratology as Critical Theory', p. 28.

⁵⁷ On structuralism's dethroning of the subject, see Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 28–30.

subject, tended simply to ignore the interactions of self and narrative, and thus invited considerable criticism. Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds* (1978) is an influential and enduring example of narratological work that set out to write subjectivity back into narrative theory through an expansive theory of the modes for presenting consciousness in fiction. Foregrounding the connections between self and narrative has been one of the ways in which, since the early 1980s, narratologists have reconceptualized their discipline in more human terms, and have opened up the practice of narrative analysis as a space for contextual and political readings.

Narratology's 'post-classical' move has proceeded in many directions with a vitality which David Herman describes in one of the most expansive recent books on the topic, tellingly titled *Narratologies*:

Adapting a host of methodologies and perspectives – feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive, reader-response, psychoanalytic, historicist, rhetorical, film-theoretical, computational, discourse-analytic and (psycho)linguistic – narrative theory has undergone not a funeral and burial but rather a sustained, sometimes startling metamorphosis.⁵⁸

Certainly, it is narratology's plural, post-classical incarnations, rather than its early structuralist formulations, which provide the context for my own critical interventions. The theoretical path that explores questions of 'narrative subjectivity' clearly continues through post-classical narrative theory – particularly effective in Monika Fludernik's impressively holistic *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996) – and it is important for my work in that it offers a narratological route that meets the crossroads of poststructuralist, transnational feminist and ethical discourses.

Drawing these into the discussion, I suggest that if storytelling is a means of understanding and sharing with others our ways of being/becoming, then there is an important connection to be drawn between self, community and narrative, one which will differ from story to story, teller to teller, audience to audience. The concept of the narrative or narratable self has been widely influential in recent critical theory; it posits that we give our own and others' identities shape

⁵⁸ David Herman, 'Introduction: Narratologies', in David Herman, ed., *Narratologies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 1–30 (p. 1).

and coherence through a process of narration which is constructed and open to change (albeit constrained), and thus it goes some way to reconciling the poststructuralist dispersal of the humanist self with the need, asserted by non-hegemonic groups, for individual agency.⁵⁹ And, surely, the self–narrative interaction works both ways. That is, conceiving our selves and our relations to others differently might result in different kinds of stories. In the case of fictional narratives, this is no easy equation, but the innovative texts I read in this thesis do experiment with form in ways which directly challenge conventions of self-narration, individual narrative authority and direct address to a narratee.

In ‘Narratology as Critical Theory’, Mieke Bal introduces the notion of ‘narrative intersubjectivity’, which she conceives as a (psychoanalytic) model for textual analysis: she proposes that rather than being read in isolation, the text is re-envisioned as a ‘collective’, relational subject, analysed ‘*together* with its echoes, rewritings, and interpretations’.⁶⁰ Bal’s model is enabling for my own contextualizing practice, especially when combined with Jessica Benjamin’s feminist theory of intersubjectivity, which reconceptualizes the self as ‘reciprocally constituted in relation to the other, depending on the other’s recognition, which it cannot have without being negated, acted on by the other, in a way that changes the self, making it nonidentical’.⁶¹ The internal fragmentation of the self, its interdependence, I will argue, has important consequences for a narrative theory that originates with the individual narrator. These consequences are evoked by fictional narratives as they explore possibilities of intersubjective or communal storytelling or represent social relations through formal strategies. In the process,

⁵⁹ See Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); chapter three of Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Kim L. Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); and autobiography theory including Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh, eds, *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2001); Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). As McNay argues, the self–narrative model ‘suggests a way beyond the antinomies of dispersion versus unity, contingency versus fixity and determinism versus voluntarism around which thought on subjectification and agency often revolves’ (*Gender and Agency*, p. 80).

⁶⁰ Bal, ‘Narratology as Critical Theory’, p. 46.

⁶¹ Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 79.

such fictions decentre the notion of an autonomous writing/narrating/reading subject as fixed locus of narrative authority and fragment narratology's tidy divisions between narrative selves. Writing 'I' comes to encompass the crisis of a *self*-centred writing, with *self* conceived in similarly unitary terms, hence, perhaps, the proliferation of pronominal play and innovations with narrative person in contemporary writing. Without tying aesthetic practices to the female body or to specifically gendered notions of self, I do want to invoke here Cixous' sense that the politics of writing – and hence the politics of form – emerge powerfully through 'this emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak'.⁶²

An important precondition for a narratological approach that foregrounds the intersubjective dynamics of narrative – in terms of both the internal dialogics of stories and the interactive processes of reading – is Monika Fludernik's redefinition of narrative not as a temporal sequence of actions or events, but as located in *experientiality*. Drawing on an extensive range of 'natural' (oral) and written narratives, Fludernik's 'natural' narratology develops a constructivist theory of narrative based on consciousness: 'In my model there can therefore be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level'.⁶³ Vital to this redefinition is her development of the cognitive concept of 'narrativization':

When readers are confronted with potentially unreadable narratives, texts that are radically inconsistent, they cast about for ways and means of recuperating these texts as narratives – motivated by the generic markers that go with the book. [...] This process of narrativization, of making something a narrative by the sheer act of imposing narrativity on it, needs to be located in the dynamic reading process where such interpretative recuperations hold sway.⁶⁴

Narrativization does away with longstanding theoretical wrangling over the question of what constitutes a narrative, locating narrativity beyond the bounds of the text in a move that

⁶² Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 250. For narratological work devoted to writing the body into narrative poetics, see Daniel Punday's recent revisionary study, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁶³ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 13. Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) effects a similar shift: his notion of a 'thought-action continuum' (p. 15) breaks down the 'action'/'thought' binary, rethinking events as *experiences* (p. 31).

⁶⁴ Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology*, p. 34.

empowers the reader and makes narratological practices applicable and illuminating for even the most apparently fractured, 'non'-narratives. The cognitive narratology practiced by David Herman, Marie-Laure Ryan, Catherine Emmott and others leads further towards a theory of narrative constructed around the reader's experience of the storyworld.⁶⁵ While I am not undertaking a cognitive approach here, such work is nevertheless enabling for a contextual practice since it draws interpretive, readerly concerns into the narratological field of enquiry.

My approach to reading literary narratives is indebted to post-classical work on the ethics of narrative, a philosophically-derived field growing in prominence in narratological studies today, and one which intersects closely with psychoanalytically-derived thinking about narrative intersubjectivity. Indeed, in his 1995 monograph on the topic, Adam Zachary Newton calls explicitly upon a Levinasian model of ethics and the notion of intersubjectivity in articulating his 'narrative ethics': 'a narrative ethics implies simply narrative *as* ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process'.⁶⁶ While I would question his reduction of the complex workings of narrative to its ethical dimension alone, Newton's foregrounding of notions of intersubjectivity and responsibility nonetheless makes a compelling argument for an ethical turn in narratology. James Phelan's recent study of narration, *Living to Tell about It*, extends Newton's project, taking a 'rhetorical' approach to narratology which 'not only includes both form and ethics but also sees them as interconnected'.⁶⁷ With Phelan, I conceive the ethics of narrative dialectically, '[tying] ethical response to the techniques of narrative itself' and '[focusing] on the links among technique (the signals offered by the text) and the reader's cognitive understanding, emotional response, and ethical positioning'.⁶⁸ But I

⁶⁵ See Catherine Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension: A Discourse Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), and essays in Herman, ed., *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford: CSLI, 2003).

⁶⁶ Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 11. An influential earlier text in this field is J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁶⁷ Phelan, *Living to Tell about It*, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Phelan, *Living to Tell about It*, p. 22.

place a greater emphasis than Phelan does on the role that narrative's ethical workings play in its politics, and I confront directly the questions they raise about my own critical positioning.

Ethical, rhetorical and, to a lesser extent, cognitive theories of narrative have all fed into my narratological practice in this thesis. But my juxtaposition of (ambiguously) non-hegemonic women's writing, experimental form and transnational feminist criticism means that the project's original inspiration came out of potential conjunctions between two prominent but seemingly conflicting strands of post-classical narrative theory: postmodernist and feminist. It is therefore at this intersection that the rationale for my own interventions becomes most evident.

The feminist narratological project was set out in the relatively early stages of the backlash against structuralist models, in Susan Lanser's 1986 essay 'Toward a Feminist Narratology', where she argues for the coming together of these two seemingly contrasting paradigms.⁶⁹ Despite some opposition on the grounds that context and interpretation should not enter into narratology's formalist project,⁷⁰ over the last twenty years Robyn Warhol, Kathy Mezei, Susan Stanford Friedman, Ruth Page and others have joined Lanser in bringing contextual questions of gender and sexuality to the forefront of the study of narrative form.⁷¹ Warhol articulates feminist narratology's main projects as follows:

(1) finding examples of narrative written by women that posed challenges to the categories of classic narratology, and referring to historical context to account for (the significance of) the gendered differences they observed; and (2) 'reading in detail,' as Naomi Schor memorably called it, applying the analytic categories narratology made available to scrutinize texts very closely and arrive at gender-conscious interpretations of narratives. More recently, feminist narratology has begun to focus on gender not as a predetermined condition of the production of texts, but as a textual effect.⁷²

⁶⁹ Susan S. Lanser, 'Toward a Feminist Narratology' (1986), rpt. in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds, *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 674–93.

⁷⁰ See Nilli Diengott's well-known oppositional response to Lanser's essay: 'Feminism and Narratology', *Style*, 22.1 (1988), 42–51.

⁷¹ The Canadian feminist journal *Tessera* published a special issue on feminist narratology in 1989 (volume 7). Kathy Mezei's *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) was the first edited collection wholly and explicitly devoted to the practice; Susan Lanser's earlier *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) and Robyn R. Warhol's *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) both applied and explored its possibilities.

⁷² Robyn R. Warhol, 'Guilty Cravings: What Feminist Narratology Can Do for Cultural Studies', in Herman, ed., *Narratologies*, pp. 340–55 (p. 343).

This description captures the mobility of the discipline, specifically its movement away from what Ruth Page persuasively argues was an initial rooting in second-wave feminism's 'hypothesis of difference', that 'led to an extrapolated assumption where the difference between "normative" patterns and "non-normative" variations were inflected with gendered values'.⁷³ A feminist narratology as I understand it today, or 'postmodern feminist narratology' as Page labels it, is not simply the analysis by women of women's narratives, and it certainly does not entail the search for a 'feminine aesthetic', an essentializing project which the infinite heterogeneity of women's narratives over time and space necessarily renders futile. Though it remains in the literary field rather than moving into film, television, or 'natural' narratives, my work shares with both Page's and Warhol's the conviction that narrative theory benefits from the continued broadening of its corpus and rethinking of its approach to gender, and indeed cultural politics more broadly. Warhol's description speaks to her own and Susan Lanser's recent feminist narratological work that reconceptualizes gender identity (and, by extension, the relationship between gender and narrative) in Judith Butler's terms, 'as an *effect*, that is, as *produced or generated*'.⁷⁴ My work proceeds from a rather different, although by no means unrelated or incompatible, retheorization of identity, one that is informed by transnational feminism and therefore understands gender as operating within a matrix of other contextual axes and prioritizes *relations* over differences.

It seems to me that a fundamental step in this direction is being alert to what Linda Nicholson calls 'the "value-laden" aspect of theoretical inquiry',⁷⁵ and thus placing greater emphasis on deconstructing certain of narratology's founding assumptions. That is, one purpose of this thesis is to reframe Warhol's observation that 'feminist narratologists never tried to replace the structuralists' systems with alternative macrosystems of their own'⁷⁶ in more critical terms so as to question, as Andrew Gibson's postmodern approach does, 'the durability and

⁷³ Page, *Literary and Linguistic Approaches*, p. 179.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 147.

⁷⁵ Linda J. Nicholson, 'Introduction', in Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–16 (p. 3).

⁷⁶ Warhol, 'Guilty Cravings', p. 342.

power of a feminist narratology that does not sustain the “deconstructive turn” and that ‘adopts models from a science that has never ceased to be masculine in all its predispositions’.⁷⁷ I would argue that the insights of postmodernism are important in enabling the deconstruction of narratology from the bottom up, in order to reconstruct it in the light of the (experimental, decentred, heterogeneous) stories being told by (ambiguously) non-hegemonic writers today.

The applicability of postmodernist narratological approaches to such narratives will inevitably be limited by their political dissonance. Postmodernism has been seen as an exclusive, masculine, Euro-American domain; its uncomfortable relationship with feminism, and what John McLeod describes as its ‘particularly messy divorce’ from postcolonialism,⁷⁸ have both been thoroughly rehearsed in critical commentaries since the late 1980s. Problematic encounters occur, notably, when non-hegemonic groups call for a politics of social transformation yet perceive postmodernism as verging on nihilism. Most troubling for many has been the idea that Lyotardian postmodernism’s declared end of grand narratives extends into a seemingly all-pervasive discourse of fracture and fragmentation which, when applied to concepts of subjectivity, results in the political paralysis of the decentred postmodern subject.⁷⁹ However, I am more convinced by the many feminist and postcolonial theorists who identify in postmodernism’s ‘crisis of authority’ considerable energy and creativity, made possible precisely by the deconstruction of the Cartesian subject and the dissolution of grand narratives.⁸⁰ bell hooks articulates the significance of (ambiguously) non-hegemonic interventions which rethink postmodernism along energetic lines:

⁷⁷ Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 121; p. 123.

⁷⁸ John McLeod, ‘Living In-Between: Interstitial Spaces of Possibility in Timothy Mo’s *Sour Sweet*’, in Steven Earnshaw, ed., *Just Postmodernism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 107–128 (p. 197). The postcolonialism/postmodernism debate has been played out in well-known essays in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, eds, *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), and by Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17.2 (1991), 336–57.

⁷⁹ Examples include Patricia Waugh, ‘Stalemates?: Feminists, Postmodernists and Unfinished Issues in Modern Aesthetics’, in Patricia Waugh and Philip Rice, eds, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp. 341–60, and Nancy Hartsock, ‘Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?’, in Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp. 157–75.

⁸⁰ Brydon and Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions*, p. 25; Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, Elizabeth Guild, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 276.

Postmodern culture with its decentered subject can be the space where ties are severed or it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding. To some extent, ruptures, surfaces, contextuality, and a host of other happenings create gaps that make space for oppositional practices which no longer require intellectuals to be confined by narrow separate spheres with no meaningful connection to the world of the everyday.⁸¹

Given that postmodernism's revisionary theories have their roots in the dissenting perspectives and political achievements of feminist, anti-colonial, civil and gay rights movements,⁸² non-hegemonic groups, should they wish to claim it, have a significant stake in (re)defining what postmodernism is. Indeed, the black intellectual intervention hooks calls for when she proposes that 'to change the exclusionary practice of postmodern critical discourse is to enact a postmodernism of resistance',⁸³ also speaks to the political potentialities of other, postcolonial, feminist challenges to limited, exclusive versions of postmodernism. Let us make, then, not a 'naïve allegiance'⁸⁴ but an informed alliance, in the spirit suggested by Linda Singer of a 'corporation' between feminism *and* postmodernism: 'a strategic conjunction, born of a logic of maximizing utilities'.⁸⁵

Although postmodernist theory – narrative theory included – has been challenged from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, postmodernist aesthetic modes have been recognized as enabling for ethico-political projects. There are many texts whose experimental poetics may not be fittingly described through a postmodernist framework, and much of my thesis therefore

⁸¹ bell hooks, 'Postmodern Blackness', in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991), pp. 23–31 (p. 31).

⁸² See Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 15.

⁸³ hooks, 'Postmodern Blackness', p. 30.

⁸⁴ Marianne DeKoven, 'Male Signature, Female Aesthetic: The Gender Politics of Experimental Writing', in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, eds, *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 72–81 (p. 78).

⁸⁵ Linda Singer, 'Feminism and Postmodernism', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 464–75 (p. 472). In negotiating a potentially productive feminism–postmodernism relationship, I am further influenced by Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*; DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*; Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990); Janice McLaughlin, 'Feminist Relations with Postmodernism: Reflections on the Positive Aspects of Involvement', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6.1 (1997), 5–15; Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1988).

looks beyond its explanatory possibilities.⁸⁶ However in some cases, rather than acknowledging stylistic proximities with postmodernist aesthetics while resisting the term for its seeming incompatibility with a text's politics,⁸⁷ why not call upon an expanded vision of the postmodern? Indeed, when it comes to narrative theory, I would argue that a postmodern emphasis on multiplicity and the refusal of universal truths provides one of the foundations of a situated, contextual approach. Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Mark Currie's *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998) and attention paid to postmodernist texts by Monika Fludernik and Brian Richardson⁸⁸ have all explored the ways in which the radical experimentations of postmodernist fiction collapse traditional categories and models. In particular, postmodernist texts disrupt a Genettian model of levels in that they can be seen to establish a textual hierarchy deliberately in order to flout or transgress it by transferring elements across boundaries established by mimetic convention: Nicole Brossard's novel *Baroque at Dawn* is an apt example (see Chapter One). Surprisingly, despite the inherent hierarchy within narrative levels, by which certain stories and voices are contained or mediated or considered secondary, feminist narratologists have tended to focus on more 'human' elements: narration, voice, focalization. McHale sets out the diversity of postmodernist strategies of 'ontological frame-breaking', rethinking the narratological vocabulary to include such terms as interruption, infinite regress, short circuit, and *trompe l'oeil*. However, in that McHale uses Genettian terminology (intra-/extradiegetic etc) to describe its own transgression, he is still locating postmodernist strategies in relation to a prescribed 'norm', which is only a norm insofar as it adequately represents a predominantly European novelistic canon. At the

⁸⁶ Erna Brodber's *Myal*, in my view, is one such novel. Although in her monograph on Brodber, June E. Roberts uses 'postmodernist' to describe Brodber's style, I find this misconstrues both the form and the ontology of her writing, and is a pertinent example of where alternative, context-specific understandings of stylistic innovation are called for (*Reading Erna Brodber: Uniting the Black Diaspora through Folk Culture and Religion* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. 7). See my discussion in Chapter Three.

⁸⁷ Two articles that make such a disavowal are Deborah Madsen, 'The Racial Dominant: Postmodernism and American Ethnic Women's Fiction', in Earnshaw, ed., *Just Postmodernism*, pp. 129–55; and Paulina Palmer, 'Lesbian Fiction and the Postmodern: Genre, Narrativity, Sexual Politics', in Earnshaw, ed., *Just Postmodernism*, pp. 157–80.

⁸⁸ See in particular Richardson's 'Narrative Poetics and Postmodern Transgression: Theorizing the Collapse of Time, Voice, and Frame', *Narrative*, 8.1 (2000), 23–42.

point where a model only has relevance in terms of what *isn't* being done, a reconceptualization is called for.

It is Andrew Gibson's *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (1996) which posits the most rigorous challenge, not only to narratology's terms and methods, but to its very foundations. For Gibson, narratology is based on a reductive, fixed geometric 'grid' – a set of categories which teaches us to read along certain axes (of time, voice and frame) – which so far few narratologists have succeeded in escaping, so that 'the geometry of the text and its intelligibility become inseparable'.⁸⁹ He critiques Genette's system of levels as effecting a 'kind of boxing of narrative, [to] "hold it in", confine it within a fixed spatial arrangement',⁹⁰ and posits instead that narrative levels 'are always in hybridised or composite relations with each other. These relations subject the levels themselves to constant modification'.⁹¹ In this way, he continues, '[narrative] allows hierarchical structures to emerge only as phantom shapes which can never prove adequate to the phenomena they seek to formulate'. For Gibson, then, narratology is seen to have imposed its reductive grid on the text, which has in fact never been subject to such clear-cut boundaries. He replaces the notion of hierarchy with 'laterality' and *interference* (the mobility of elements between levels) and calls for the 'pluralisation of the narratological imaginary', the 'diversification of models', and a conception of the text as multiple and polymorphous.⁹² Reading for interference and 'constant modification' fits well with the relational and processual shape of the theoretical dynamic I am seeking to establish. It might also begin to account for the patterns of echoes, merging, or seepage between narrative segments in some non-canonical texts; patterns which, in the example of *Baroque at Dawn*, complicate both realist diegetic levels and postmodernist ideas of rupture and transgression.

From a feminist point of view, Gibson's objection to textual harmony or balance seems to speak to the fractured style of postmodernist thought which has been found to be so alienating

⁸⁹ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 215.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 15.

and apolitical. However, he strategically frames his proposals as transitory and provisional, rather than as fixed replacements, and some – particularly the notions of multiplicity, interference, lines of force that act against segmentarity – offer fruitful points of departure for my project. Furthermore, his approach does not deny the possibility of finding harmony *within* the text; rather, by refusing a *poetics* of harmony, he resists imposing a reductive critical system *onto* it. In this way, Gibson is performing the kind of interrogation of narratology's 'value-laden aspect' which is in fact essential to a situated feminist practice. He exposes how the narratological 'grid' does not innocently follow the paths set out by the text itself; instead, traditional narratologists have mapped onto the text their own fixed paths, which lead towards points which *they* have judged to be of interest. This recalls John Barrell's critique of 'practical criticism' for imposing its 'ideology of control, of balance, of unity, primarily as these are believed to be evinced by the mutual inherence of form and content, and the identification of these with the essential and universal'.⁹³ To read, of course, is always to impose our own logic and training onto a text, perhaps to engage most fully at those points where the story intersects or resonates with our own personal plotlines. To read *critically* is to narrow that plotline even further in that it involves prioritizing certain perspectives and ideas over others. But a contextual, situated narrative analysis, supported by narratology not as grid but rather as 'toolshed' for close reading, is one that will be alert to both form and the excesses and imbalances of force – those echoes, seepages and multiplicities where the text's energy is irreducible.

In her essay 'Contextualizing Feminist Narratology', Kathy Mezei describes the kind of multidirectional project that I am engaging in:

In intersecting with poststructuralism, feminist narratology can shed light on the elusive or decentered subject. Because it no longer assumes (in the form of narrators, focalizers, readers, authors) a unitary subject or fixed subject position, a feminist narratological reading of postmodern texts can fold back the

⁹³ Barrell, 'Close Reading', p. 136.

layers of this subject and expose ambiguities and indeterminacies in a methodical way.⁹⁴

Mezei refers specifically to the way in which feminist narratology's focus on 'the sexuality and gender of author, narrator, character, and reader'⁹⁵ has brought issues of context to the fore. My use of the term is intended to extend Mezei's focus on context, conceiving it in broader terms than gender and sexuality. Despite its now heterogeneous and situated forms, in practice the term 'feminist' still risks privileging women as a homogenous group and thus can too easily suggest an elision of the many other axes of differentiation along which subjects are positioned.⁹⁶ While this is arguably a necessary strategic risk for feminism to take in order for its politics to proceed, my project presupposes that if narratology is to be responsive, contextual and to have relevance for transnational criticism, it must look at how Grewal and Kaplan's 'multiple, overlapping and discrete oppressions'⁹⁷ work within each intersubjective narrative encounter. It is not only women's and experimental narratives, but also narratives from non-hegemonic racial, geographical and class locations which have been left out of narratology's corpus; so I share, for example, Gerald Prince's notion that narratology 'profits from engagements with postcolonial realizations or potentialities since, at the very least, such engagements test the validity and rigor of narratological categories and distinctions'.⁹⁸ For reasons of clarity, then, and to resist prioritizing gender over racial and cultural factors, I propose a *contextualized* narrative analysis which, unlike feminist narratology in its early forms, will be inclusive, dynamic and pluralist: a 'nomadic' critical practice.

My work here is, of course, part of the turn towards 'contextual narratology', a term becoming increasingly current and generalized within the field. However, I do not identify

⁹⁴ Kathy Mezei, 'Introduction: Contextualizing Feminist Narratology', in Mezei, ed., *Ambiguous Discourse*, pp. 1–19 (p. 10).

⁹⁵ Mezei, 'Contextualizing Feminist Narratology', p. 2.

⁹⁶ This is to explore the space of possibility opened up in Page's conclusion: 'postmodern feminist narratology is characterized by diversity, including multiplicity along the lines of culture, ethnicity, sexuality and so on. Others have argued that these other factors are at least as important as gender [...], in which case the primacy of gender as a "master" status variable [...] is thrown open to debate. This in turn might have significant implications for the status of *feminist* narratology' (*Literary and Linguistic Approaches*, pp. 184–5).

⁹⁷ Grewal and Kaplan, 'Transnational Feminist Practices', p. 17.

⁹⁸ Prince, 'On a Postcolonial Narratology', pp. 372–3.

specifically with the ‘contextualist narratology’ discussed, not uncritically, by Seymour Chatman in his well-known essay from 1990.⁹⁹ My practice is more closely related to the emerging ‘cultural narratology’ articulated in recent years by Gabriele Helms and Ansgar Nünning, which similarly sets out to ‘close the gap between narratological bottom-up analysis and cultural top-down synthesis’, ‘[putting] the analytical toolkit developed by narratology in the service of context-sensitive interpretations of novels’.¹⁰⁰ Terminologically, there is little to choose between the two: I prefer the latitude offered by ‘context’, which clearly encompasses textual and extratextual elements, where ‘cultural’ could be interpreted in narrower terms; I would also suggest that describing one’s analytical practice as contextualized clearly articulates its purpose, whereas describing it as cultural risks tautology, all literary studies being cultural practices. Perhaps, too, the idea of contextualizing narrative theory evokes the range of theoretical perspectives upon which my thesis ‘nomadically’ draws: ‘contextualist’ narratologies; postmodernist and postcolonialist literary theories; life writing; (feminist) philosophical thinking about ethics and intersubjectivity; geographical work on socio-spatial relations.

In the end, though, my intention, like Nünning’s, is ‘to tease out the epistemological and ethical implications’ of narrative forms.¹⁰¹ To engage with the demands of innovative fiction by (ambiguously) non-hegemonic women writers, the revisionary narratological practice I am developing here needs to be situated in terms of the complex and shifting positions occupied by both writing and reading selves, and the ethical implications of their relations. In drawing on productive sites of encounter between different theoretical discourses and narrating voices from diverse cultural locations, this project seeks to rethink narratology in terms of a *contextual* ethics of reading responsive to the politics of writing: engaged, relational, and ever in process.

⁹⁹ For Chatman, prominent ‘contextualist’ concepts, accounting for ‘the actual setting in which literature is situated’ are Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s narrative pragmatics and Mary Louise Pratt’s speech act theory (‘What Can We Learn from Contextualist Narratology?’, p. 309). See note 54 above.

¹⁰⁰ Ansgar Nünning, ‘Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology’, *Style*, 38.3 (2004), 352–75 (p. 353). He draws on the concept set out by Helms in *Challenging Canada*.

¹⁰¹ Nünning, ‘Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet’, p. 353.

Outline of chapters

From across my (ambiguously) non-hegemonic corpus of contemporary, by which I mean post-1980, fiction written by women in Britain, Canada/Québec and the anglophone Caribbean, I have identified four areas where I find that the innovations of diverse writers interconnect in their reworkings of fictional form: narrative levels in (feminist) metafiction; second-person address; ‘voice’/narration in multiply narrated texts; and stories that explore socio-spatial relations through narrative dynamics that are as much spatial as temporal. Each of the four chapters to follow engage in ‘theorypractice’, so that on the one hand texts are brought together according to the challenges they ask of existing descriptive poetics, but it is through the close analysis facilitated by narratologies that their formal politics are illuminated. The narrative strategies of my selected texts have directed the structure of this thesis, but so, inevitably, has my own positioning as individual reader (my particular history, location, intellectual training) and the positioning of my project at the intersections I have articulated in this introduction (between feminist, poststructuralist, transnational, ethical and contextual practices).

These intersections run connective lines through the chapters’ distinct fields of enquiry. Repeated attention is paid, for example, to macrostructural dynamics; to temporal or pronominal strategies; to relations between writers,¹⁰² narrators, readers; and, most notably perhaps, my thinking about the relations between self, community and narrative translates into the trajectory the thesis plots from self-writing, to self–other relations, to communities of narration, and finally outwards to the geopolitics of stories that enact socio-spatial relations. Such echoes reinforce the notion put forward by Gibson that narratology’s ‘grid’ is constantly ‘exploded’ by the fluid, multiple, overlapping forces of narratives themselves.

Chapter One reads two self-consciously *written* novels: Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* (1988) and Nicole Brossard’s *Baroque at Dawn* (1995). It focuses on how their fluid, non-linear

¹⁰² Throughout this thesis I substitute the conventional narratological term ‘author’ with ‘writer’, for the simple ideological reason that the women writers I am studying tend to work against their own narrative author/ity, such that the connotations of ‘author’ are inappropriate.

structures disrupt teleological narrative progression in very different ways, but which both combine feminist *and* postmodernist poetics. Whereas analyses of masculine desire-driven plot structures have been at the heart of the feminist narratological project from its outset, this chapter adopts a postmodernist narratological approach to the question of non-linear patterning. My readings draw on Gibson's narratological vocabulary of seepages, migrations and lines of force, with the addition of my own notion of echoes, to analyse how both novels repeatedly transgress the segmentary, hierarchical boundaries which form the foundation of classical narratology's mimetic system of discrete narrative levels. In particular, I look at how each text uses blurring or confusion between writer/narrator/character/narratee in order to foreground its own self-reflexive construction, reconceiving the narrative act as *process*, as a fluid unfolding or becoming. I suggest that, through the presence of a female 'auther'-narrator whose author/ity is dispersed through her intersubjective relations with other narrative selves, *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic* play with auto(bio)graphical discourse in ways that at once intersect with and rethink postmodernist metafictional practice. This chapter engages explicitly with the feminist/postmodernist debate through the specific contexts of Marlatt and Brossard's lesbian feminist poetics: while both are immersed in interconnected, even collaborative, practices of 'writing in the feminine'/'*écriture au féminin*' in Western Canada/Québec, they are also writing from opposite sides of this linguistic and political divide and with divergent relationships to postmodernist aesthetic modes. Together, their innovations enable me to theorize multiple ways in which narratological and postmodernist paradigms might be revised.

If we are to rethink narrative as no longer determined by a unitary 'centre' – the autonomous subjectivity (or 'voice') of the narrator and/or (implied) author – but formed through the complex interrelations of narrative selves, then the narratological lens must shift its focus onto the many and various structures of textual community in contemporary writing. Where Chapter One sees the writing/narrating self blurring with its characters and narratees and where Chapter Three will consider the communal relations between narrators inside multiply narrated novels, Chapter Two looks at direct address as a means of enacting a dialogic self–

other relation through formal strategies. I explore how, by wreaking varying degrees of pronominal havoc, contemporary women writers (re-)structure the relations of narrative intersubjectivity, specifically in terms of the reader's position. Analysing the challenges posed by the use of the 'you' in sections of *Ana Historic* and Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), as well as in second-person short stories by Ali Smith (2003), I contend that the appearance of second-person forms in women's innovative writing represents a determinedly communicative urge, and suggest that existing critical studies of the 'you' form might therefore be expanded to account for the ethical importance of the communicative function of direct address. Primarily, though, this chapter looks closely at the ethics of narrative, thinking about how direct address foregrounds ethical encounters through which the reader is pulled in (or pushed away). I argue that through the play of 'I' and 'you', practices of reading can be elicited which are responsible and situated because the relative positioning of the 'I' as speaker and the 'you' as (implicitly) reader brings into the foreground of narratological analysis the 'politics of (dis)location' and the importance of contextualization. This chapter more than any will make the argument for the interconnectivity of form and context, narrative and ethics, since my own differential positioning in relation to Hiromi Goto's Japanese Canadian feminist and anti-racist novel or Ali Smith's short stories about lesbian love in contemporary Britain is inseparable from how I respond to the ethical call to (dis)identification enacted by their use of the 'you'-address.

Chapter Three progresses from metafictionality and second-person narrative to consider a more overtly communal alternative, commonly referred to as the multiply narrated novel. I turn first to Britain, setting Ali Smith's *Hotel World* (2001) alongside Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), two novels exploring death and non-heteronormative experience by Scottish writers now resident in England, with *Trumpet* also shaped by the interracial presence of the black Scottish body and the intercultural presence of jazz music in British society. The challenges of transnational narratological criticism then become more acute as I look to Jamaica for the distinct but not divorced narrational practice employed in Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988). Whilst the importance of cautious comparisons is felt here, so too is the value and necessity of

practising narratology across geopolitical borders. Reading the three novels, I propose that ‘communal’ narration becomes a more appropriate description than ‘multiple narration’ because, albeit in very different ways, they each draw parallels between the social hierarchies being narrated and the structural hierarchies through which they are narrated. Where Smith and Kay employ what I will refer to as a ‘segmental’ technique, containing different narrators and focalizers within distinct narrative segments, in *Myal* these are ‘permeable’, flowing into one another and continually rupturing its apparently consistent surface. In each of these restructurings of fictional form, narrative selves refuse to be subordinated to or framed by one another: in an echo of Chapter One, I propose that this moves away from conventional textual hierarchies towards a ‘democracy of voice’. Both techniques, but especially the fluid permeability of *Myal*, decentre the concept of voice as ‘the originary centre of discourse’ (*pace* Gibson) and this chapter’s other theoretical intervention is therefore to question the validity of ‘voice’ as a narratological category. This debate brings us to the heart of the collision between poststructuralist and postcolonial or feminist theories; but once reformulating subjectivity as processual and relational is seen as a condition of possibility for agency, rethinking narrative voice in poststructuralist terms begins to accommodate the plural, intersubjective spaces of many contemporary fictions.

The first three chapters, then, explore different aspects of the strategies of multiplicity that characterize the narration of a wide variety of innovative fiction. Chapter Four’s spatial focus entails a greater shift in emphasis, moving into less frequented narratological terrain. Taking up Susan Stanford Friedman’s recent call for narrative theorists to develop a ‘spatial poetics’, this final chapter explores spatial dynamics in Dionne Brand’s novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) and Aritha van Herk’s ‘geografictione’ *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990). These texts trouble classical narratological conceptions of the temporal or event-based structure of narrativity and of space as static ‘setting’, because they put into play alternative structuring devices driven by topological connections, so that locations and journeys become active story-making elements. In developing an analytical approach to narrative’s spatial dynamics, my

readings draw upon postmodern and feminist geographical ideas about spatial and social relations as mutually constitutive, permeable and constantly shifting. In this way, I formulate a 'spatial poetics' that accounts not only for the kinds of spaces written into a text, but also for the different ways in which spaces can be agents of narrative change: the play of movement, travel, transformation, encounter; the (shifting) perspectives or positionings through which spaces are narrated; and the relations of dis/connectivity in between. My interrelational understanding of selfhood and narrative persists, although here the relations connect not only to other selves but also to the *places* in which and through which stories and lives unfold. Juxtaposing Brand's fictional re-mapping of the Caribbean diaspora and van Herk's 'geografictione' exploring the four Canadian sites where she has felt 'at home' again involves a cautious critical encounter alert to the politics of dis/placement that act differently upon the stories of the African and European diasporas. Foregrounding the connections between narrative ethics and locational, transnational feminist practices, this final chapter is engaged with the geopolitics of form.

In each chapter, analysing 'ludic, experimental, exploratory' formal strategies becomes inextricable from analysing how such strategies invite or challenge or resist certain processes of reading. My conclusion will therefore weave together some of the readerly threads that have appeared throughout, in order to think through how (ambiguously) non-hegemonic writing calls for situated, participatory practices of *closer* close reading.

CHAPTER ONE

**Metafictional (Un)foldings? Postmodern Feminist
Forms in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and
Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn***

We live in a fragmented society. We live in story fragments.
And in spite of all, we recreate a coherence.

Nicole Brossard ¹

Mieke Bal has written that ‘the enlightenment ideology of progress is projected in a sense of the linearity of the structure of narrative’.² This sense of linearity endures not only in readings of the trajectories of Realist fiction, but even in many revisionary theories of plot, which, while they might contest the *telos* that long defined narrative structure, continue to conceive narrative in terms of chronological progression. This even after it has been argued, by J. Hillis Miller, that linearity is an illusion and that the narrative ‘line’ in fact more closely resembles Ariadne’s thread – intrinsically broken, looped, repetitive.³ As we will see, and as postmodernist narratologists contend, innovative, ludic narratives which experiment with or exaggerate their own non-linear ruptures and loops have an important role to play in questioning longstanding assumptions of *telos* and stability that underpin narratology’s traditional models. Part of this chapter’s aim, then, is to undertake such a questioning; but my focus on the specific innovations of (ambiguously) non-hegemonic women’s writing will also indicate alternative directions for a revisionary, contextual narratological analysis.

The self-reflexivity regarding the narrative processes and transgression of diegetic levels that are characteristic of postmodernist metafiction makes this an especially productive mode

¹ Nicole Brossard, ‘Fragments of a Conversation’, in Louise H. Forsyth, ed., *Nicole Brossard: Essays on Her Works* (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), pp. 19–33 (p. 19).

² Mieke Bal, *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, David Jobling, ed. (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1991), p. 2.

³ See chapter 1 of J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Brian Richardson makes the related argument that ‘pure linearity’ by no means inheres in the (male) realist novel, but rather has been carefully constructed in, for example, experimental stream-of-consciousness and feminist fiction (‘Linearity and its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence’, *College English*, 62.6 (2000), 685–95 (p. 688)).

for this chapter's critical enquiry. But its pertinence goes further, in that metafiction tends to play with the presence of the writer in the text; in other words, it innovates explicitly with the workings of narrative (inter)subjectivity and thus speaks to one of the key theoretical concerns of this thesis. By focusing my reading on specifically feminist metafictions, this first chapter stages a dialogue between the theoretical ideas articulated in my Introduction: between theories of gender, selfhood, postmodernism and narrative form. As will be the case throughout this project, my critical dialogue here is responsive to the demands of particular texts, and my focus on two novels by Canadian writers Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard is designed to pose substantive challenges to existing narratological thinking. Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988) and Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* (*Baroque d'aube*, 1995)⁴ both resist the teleology and cohesion of plot in favour of multiple alternative narrative processes. Through what might, in Brossard's words, be described as the 'unfurling of polyvalent and multi-directional words',⁵ both texts unfold outwards, but also fold in on themselves, loop back, retake, and so challenge and multiply practices of reading. In analysing their innovative dynamics, narrative transgressions, metafictional and auto(bio)graphical games, I reflect on the positioning of *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* as 'metafictional' texts, and of Marlatt and Brossard as 'postmodernist' writers in order to ask what a feminist *and* postmodernist textuality might look like, and where these novels expose the (in)adequacy of existing postmodernist narratological terminology. Specifically, I work towards a reformulation of feminist metafiction that is responsive to how a central interest in women's selves and stories results in a feminist revisioning of postmodern discourse, a writing practice that overlaps the metafictional and the auto(bio)graphical.

Contextual narratological practice involves attending to the cultural positioning of these writers as it impacts upon their stories. As I will discuss further later, Marlatt and Brossard are

⁴ Daphne Marlatt, *Ana Historic* (1988; London: Women's Press, 1990); Nicole Brossard, *Baroque at Dawn*, Patricia Claxton, trans. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997), orig. pub. as *Baroque d'aube* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1995). All page references will be to these editions and included in the body text.

⁵ Nicole Brossard, 'From Radical to Integral', in *The Aerial Letter*, Marlene Wildeman, trans. (1985; Toronto: Women's Press, 1988), pp. 103–17 (p. 111).

central figures in the feminist writing communities of anglophone Canada and Québec. Both *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* exemplify the practice of 'écriture au féminin'/'writing in the feminine', which was developed in the 1970s by Brossard and other Québécoise feminists and translated, across the border, into the 'writing in the feminine' of Marlatt, Gail Scott, Aritha van Herk and others.⁶ That is to say, amongst many other things, these novels are engaged in (postmodernist) narrative and linguistic experimentation; in challenging the gendered scripts set out for women in life and literature; in articulating alternative modes of narrating the self, the body, and lesbian desire; in crossing the boundaries between fiction, poetry, criticism, autobiography; and in imagining intimate collaborations between women engaged in interconnected acts of writing, reading, desire.⁷ This chapter's Marlatt–Brossard, Canada–Québec pairing provides a particularly enlightening context for this discussion, because the lines of connectivity running between them are also cut across by relations of linguistic, cultural, political and stylistic difference. Where Brossard's Québécoise identity locates her on the margins of both English Canadian and continental French language and culture, Marlatt is a Western Canadian of English and Dutch extraction who grew up in Malaysia and Australia, and we will see that their poetics cannot be entirely divorced from these contexts.⁸

Marlatt and Brossard's writings stage intersections of ideas and an interplay of poetics/politics which are uniquely enabling for this chapter, and which account for my focus on *Ana Historic* and *Baroque* rather than on the British feminist metafiction of Jeanette Winterson or Michèle Roberts, or those very recently published by Caribbean women writers including

⁶ See my reading of van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* in Chapter Four.

⁷ Their connections have brought them together in several critical studies, most resonant here being Susan Knutson's feminist narratological study, *Narrative in the Feminine: Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2000), which is often illuminating in its readings, but runs contrary to my 'post-classical' project in that it directly applies the terms set out in Mieke Bal's 1985 *Narratology* to their innovative works.

⁸ The importance of regional identity within Canada has been much theorized, not least by the many writers who identify more closely with their regional positioning (Albertan/Nova Scotian/Québécois etc) than by their nationality (see Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 4).

Marcia Douglas and Karen King-Aribisala.⁹ It is the extent of the formal experimentation of both *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic* which makes them particularly instructive for my thesis: their explicit interminglings of fiction and theory enable certain metacritical reflections since they put into play the kind of two-way dynamic between fictional texts and critical frames that my project is committed to delineating. Furthermore, establishing a dialogue between Marlatt and Brossard's literary practices enables broader and more complex ways of thinking *contextually* about narrative innovation in relation to ethico-political and intersubjective ideas. Both writers' archival holdings at Library and Archives Canada afford insights into the politics and processes of fiction-writing. Reading their manuscripts and notes gave tangible form to my sense of their open-ended, participatory textual processes; in light of the spiralling metafictional structures of the published texts, this seems to me a particularly apposite critical practice. In this small way, my critical readings/writings contribute a further, metacritical twist in the spiral of meaning-making, another layer in the *mise en abyme* of writing about writing about writing.

The chapter's trajectory begins with a consideration of the extent to which postmodernist metafiction is an appropriate description of the specific formal politics of *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn*; this works to articulate a context-sensitive understanding of their feminist *and* postmodernist practices. I go on to analyse in detail the anti-teleological dynamics of each novel, how they transgress and collapse textual hierarchies through a variety of strategies including 'concurrent narration' and 'echoes' across different narrative levels. The chapter's final move relates such innovations to the models of intersubjectivity which both writers are exploring, and which in turn enable me to rethink the concept of feminist metafiction in

⁹ Michèle Roberts' *The Book of Mrs Noah* (1987; London: Vintage, 1999) in particular can be usefully informed by the analyses in this chapter, though its innovations are less thoroughgoing than Marlatt's and Brossard's. In the Caribbean context see, for example, Marcia Douglas, *Notes from a Writer's Book of Cures and Spells* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005) and Karen King-Aribisala, *The Hangman's Game* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2007). On the formal level, these two novels are apparently less testing of narratological models, but in both the metafictional scenario refers to spiritual forces intruding on the processes of composition, which suggests that a postmodernist vocabulary of *mise en abyme*, strange loops or contradictory temporalities might need rethinking as a context-sensitive conception that allows for other spiritual realities.

relation to innovations in life writing and thus to propose 'auto(bio)graphical metafiction'¹⁰ as a precise articulation of the writing practices in these novels.

Feminist metafiction

In applying the term 'postmodern' to feminist fiction I am conscious of stepping onto well-rehearsed and indeed embattled ground. While 'innovative', 'avant garde', 'experimental', 'exploratory', 'ludic' are all terms for denoting non-realist fiction, in the late twentieth-century context the term 'postmodernist' has gained the greatest critical currency, often as a synonym for experimental practices. Since there is a general and continuing tendency to resist the conjunction of postmodernist vocabulary with women's writing, and especially with feminist and lesbian writing,¹¹ this leaves a gap in critical vocabulary. This is due partly to anxiety over the ethics of such a conjunction, and partly to a broad privileging of politics (of both content and context) over form in the study of feminist fiction, as well as of other 'ex-centric' literatures. My thesis, like Ansgar Nünning's 'applied cultural narratology', directly aims to redress this imbalance by reading form and politics together, by 'clos[ing] the gap between narratological bottom-up analysis and cultural top-down synthesis'.¹²

In the spirit of the 'strategic conjunction' which Linda Singer calls 'feminism *and* postmodernism',¹³ not only 'metafiction', but also terms like 'ontological frame-breaking', *mise*

¹⁰ Frank Davey has previously invoked the term 'autobiographical metafiction' in the title of his essay 'Autobiographical Metafiction in some Texts by Daphne Marlatt and Gail Scott', in Marta Dvorak, ed., *La Création Biographique/Biographical Creation* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes et Association Française d'Études Canadiennes, 1997), pp. 127–34. Implicitly denoting 'the mixing of autobiographical and fictional signs' (p. 127) which Davey is reading, the term is not mentioned or developed within the body of the essay itself. My usage of the term, with added brackets around 'bio', will be more precisely articulated here.

¹¹ See Paulina Palmer's discussion of conflict between postmodernism and lesbian politics, which effectively equates the debate with the feminist/postmodernist debate. Jeannette Winterson's *The Passion* is discussed as lesbian historiographic metafiction, but Palmer insists on the phrase 'strategies associated with the postmodern', rather than conceding some kind of conjunction between the two. Paulina Palmer, 'Lesbian Fiction and the Postmodern: Genre, Narrativity, Sexual Politics', in Steven Earnshaw, ed., *Just Postmodernism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 157–80.

¹² Ansgar Nünning, 'Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology', *Style*, 38.3 (2004), 352–75 (p. 353).

¹³ Linda Singer, 'Feminism and Postmodernism', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 464–75 (p. 472).

en abyme, short circuit (McHale); dual/ multiple/ conflated time (Richardson); fluidities, multiplicities, seepages (Gibson) ought to be claimed as labels applicable to such innovative texts as *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic*. But at the same time, looking forwards towards a contextual narratology requires a different enterprise altogether because the challenges posed by the complex, plural, often indeterminate structural dynamics of these and other novels require a wholly different set of close reading practices, and demand a rethinking of existing narratological vocabulary, postmodern, feminist or otherwise. Indeed, Lynette Hunter has suggested that Marlatt and Brossard both work within what she calls a 'materiality of labour for writer and reader',¹⁴ which speaks to the level of innovation and continual questioning that the texts practice and also require of their readers.

What characterizes the novels in this chapter, like much postmodernist writing, is their foregrounded processes of composition: in both, the narrator is a writer struggling to write and the novel as a whole or in part is presented as the fruit of her labour. Through this metafictional practice of embedding and the presence of a self-reflexive 'auther'¹⁵ figure within the text, these novels explode conventions of plot, diegetic levels, and the narrative situation. *Ana Historic* charts its narrator, Annie, breaking with the marriage script and writing herself into a new lesbian relationship; it is a complex novel (described by Marlatt as a 'fictional autobiography'¹⁶) made up of different strands of stories, about herself, her mother (Ina), and the historical figure of Ana Richards, all 'written' by Annie into one fluid text. Stan Dragland has written of Daphne Marlatt:

A postmodernist? But there is a drive towards meaning in Marlatt's work, a desire to put things together, a movement even towards the logos monster, enemy of most declared postmodernists. [...] She never toys with a reader [...].

¹⁴ Lynette Hunter, *Outsider Notes: Feminist Approaches to Nation State Ideology, Writers/Readers and Publishing* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1996), p. 140.

¹⁵ Terms such as 'auther' and 'lovher' are solutions offered by Brossard's English translators (Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood translating *Le Désert mauve*; Barbara Godard translating *Amantes*) to the feminized forms (*auteure, amante*) available in French but not in English. Susan Holbrook cites Lotbinière-Harwood's 'Eureka' moment upon finding, via a colleague's typing error, 'auther' to translate *auteure* ('Delirious Translations in the Works of Nicole Brossard', in Forsyth, ed., *Nicole Brossard*, pp. 175–90 (p. 183)).

¹⁶ Daphne Marlatt, *Readings from the Labyrinth* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1998), p. 116.

Her muse of indefiniteness and undependability is not the trickster but, now at least, The Mother. On the other hand, her style is process; her sentences don't respect sense as dictated by grammar with its sources in logos-as-logic. Also, she plays the border between genres (fiction/poetry/autobiography) metafictionally: her work is about itself while it's about *herself* and the world. Postmodernist? Yes and no.¹⁷

Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn*, the more overtly postmodernist text, involves the many bodies and voices – the 'synchrones' – which contribute to the production of a novel: friends, lovers, characters, publishers, translators, readers, as well as 'Nicole Brossard' herself.¹⁸ But the central story of Cybil Noland's coming to writing, through encounters with other women, music, philosophy, photography and virtual reality, is in fact one of several narrative levels; the novel is a *mise en abyme* of embedded texts, involving not one but several *author* figures.

Although *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* might fairly comfortably be placed within the familiar category of postmodernist metafiction – and *Ana Historic* could be even more specifically described as 'historiographic metafiction' – they also expose some of the limitations of such a broad categorization.¹⁹ While metafiction's early recognition as a defining characteristic of postmodernist fiction enabled productive new approaches to reading the 'self-conscious', 'self-reflexive' or 'narcissistic' writing of late capitalism,²⁰ the application of the term has since come under scrutiny from various directions. For one thing, as Mark Currie observes, 'the idea of self-consciousness is strangely inconsistent with most postmodern literary theories which would attribute neither selfhood nor consciousness to an author, let alone a work

¹⁷ Stan Dragland, *The Bees of the Invisible: Essays in Contemporary Canadian Writing* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1991), p. 164.

¹⁸ 'Synchrones' is Brossard's term for women who work closely and creatively together ('Mouvements et stratégies de l'écriture de fiction', in Barbara Godard, ed., *Gynocritics/Gynocritiques: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women's Writing* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1987), pp. 227–9).

¹⁹ In *Moments postmodernes dans le roman québécois* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1993) Janet Paterson devotes a whole chapter to Brossard as a feminist postmodernist writer; Heather Zwicker discusses *Ana Historic* as a 'stylistically postmodern' text ('Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*: Queering the Postcolonial Nation', *Ariel*, 30.2 (1999), 161–75 (p. 161)); Stan Dragland describes *Ana Historic* as 'historiographic metafiction', while acknowledging that Marlatt's own term 'fictionalysis' (see below) may be more fitting (*The Bees of the Invisible*, pp. 176–7).

²⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980; London: Methuen, 1984).

of fiction’;²¹ and the term is also incommensurable with the contemporary understanding of the self as non-identical and intersubjective, rather than fully autonomous and self-aware. For another, the term has been limited by its own frame of reference: initially, it was identified with a narrow canon of privileged, theoretically literate, North American male postmodernists (Gass, Coover, Barth, Pynchon); subsequently, it was broadened, notably by Linda Hutcheon, and effectively became an umbrella term subsuming postmodernist fiction. As Ansgar Nünning has recently commented, ‘The identification of postmodernism with historiographic metafiction leads to unwarranted assumptions of homogeneity, and does not do justice to the diversity and scope of innovative developments in postmodernist fiction, let alone in other genres or arts’.²² Rather than glossing over local particulars of specific texts or stylistic practices, a postmodernist narratological vocabulary might provide more rigorous, precise and responsive terms.

The metafictionality of *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic*, while in one sense typical of metafiction as it has been generally defined, is in another sense working quite differently, bound up with a feminist politics of writing. It acquires its own terms in the form of Brossard’s ‘fiction-theory’, Marlatt’s ‘fictionanalysis’, or indeed Aritha van Herk’s ‘fictocriticism’, which provide useful, culturally specific alternatives to a somewhat limited postmodernist vocabulary.²³ At the centre of these novels’ metafictional play – or fiction-theory – is the figure of the woman writer, whose ex-centric position in relation to the politics of literary production comes through in her writerly anxiety, and her difficult search for alternative narrative modes. That is to say, Annie’s creativity in *Ana Historic* has to escape the confines established by her role as her husband Richard’s historical researcher. As her writing fills in History’s erasures, (re)constructing for the colonial schoolteacher Ana Richards an agency and freedom (and indeed a first name) which the historical account denies her, Annie can imagine Richard’s

²¹ Mark Currie, ‘Introduction’, in Mark Currie, ed., *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1–18 (p. 1).

²² Nünning, ‘Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet’, p. 361.

²³ See Daphne Marlatt, ‘Self-Representation and Fictionanalysis’, *Tessera*, 8 (1990), 13–17. Barbara Godard describes Brossard’s ‘fiction-theory’ in ‘Life (in) Writing: Or a Writing-Machine for Producing the Subject’, in Forsyth, ed., *Nicole Brossard*, pp. 191–208; and Peggy Kelly also uses the term in her ‘Fiction Theory as Feminist Practice in Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* and Scott’s *Heroine*’, *Open Letter*, 9.4 (1995), 69–98.

criticism: 'this doesn't go anywhere, you're just circling around the same idea – and all these bits and pieces thrown in – that's not how to use quotations' (p. 81). 'Just scribbling' is her self-effacing reply, scribbling being worlds apart from 'serious' writing, and here exposed as another way in which Western literary culture devalues that which it identifies as 'feminine': the loops and repetitions that characterize the shape of Annie's writing.²⁴ Richard's critique is eventually replaced by the encouragement of Zoe, 'my first, my ongoing reader' (p. 132) and in the end also her lover, for whom Annie's writing is a symbol of her growing agency: 'we give and it is unwritten because it is given, she muses. like all of women's domestic labour. like all of yours except this book' (pp. 131–2). It is the figure of the woman reader as well as the woman writer, then, who is at the heart of feminist fiction-theory.

Just as Annie's project is enabled by Zoe, female creativity in *Baroque at Dawn* is also fostered by the presence of other women: lovers, readers and, notably, translators. Like Cybil Noland, the novelist character in the embedded text, the 'English novelist' presented in *Baroque's* final section as the writer of that text is herself suffering from writer's block: 'I was presumptuous enough to think that what I was writing was giving meaning to my life. Then *I don't write any more* struck me down' (p. 216). But the love affair she has with the Québécoise translator of her novel is profoundly transformative: 'my feeling of pleasure is so strong that a yearning to write comes over me' (p. 247). Or, as Lynette Hunter puts it, 'through translation, presence begins to make material sense once more. With someone else, here the translator in person, the material present can happen'.²⁵ It is both the materiality of desire between women, and the intimate, shared act of reading/writing which translation involves,²⁶ which relaunch the

²⁴ There is an interesting echo here with the scene in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925; London: Penguin, 1992) where Richard (note the shared name) Dalloway corrects the style of Lady Bruton's letter, 'reduc[ing] Lady Bruton's tangles to sense, to grammar' (p. 120).

²⁵ Lynette Hunter, 'The *Inédit* in Writing by Nicole Brossard: Breathing the Skin of Language', in Forsyth, ed., *Nicole Brossard*, pp. 209–238 (p. 234). Citing this article here is in itself an instance of productive female connivance, in that I first read this novel in one of Lynette Hunter's seminars, and our discussions made some small contribution to her writing of 'The *Inédit*'.

²⁶ On the intimacy of feminist translation, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, eds, *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge:

pleasures and possibilities of writing. This is an envisioning of translation 'in the feminine', that conceives translation as an instance of collaborative work. Brossard's metafictional play of translation also makes eminently visible the transformative, rather than neutral or invisible, effect that translation has on the literary text.²⁷ In this sense, *Baroque* recalls an earlier collective writing project between Brossard and Marlatt, where they produced 'transformances' of each other's poems, *Character/Jeu de lettres* and *Mauve*, which aimed to be not direct translations but imaginative re-writings or performances.²⁸ Yet *Baroque* also flags up certain ethico-political dissonances that translation can mask, since in the bilingual space of Montréal from which Brossard writes, where French-English translation is a particularly prominent part of the literary culture and the literary process, the French language is a vital element of Québécois identity, and its marginality in relation to English is a contested political issue.

What these textual examples show is that the novels' 'metafictionality' is distinctly feminist, engaging critically with the gendered power relations which still now, but even more so ten or twenty years ago at the time of writing (1995/1988), impact upon the processes of women's writing and publishing. In this light, and contrary to the notion of feminism and postmodernism's incommensurability, postmodernist narrative form exceeds the perceived confines of ficto/theoretical discourse to become an enabling device for the articulation of lesbian female experience. In *écriture au féminin*, as in *écriture féminine* before it, writing, reading and desire are intrinsic to each other. These feminist metafictionalities therefore necessitate a shift in the definition of metafiction itself, because the 'self-consciousness' they display relates

Polity Press, 1992), pp. 177–200; Barbara Godard, 'Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation', in David Homel and Sherry Simon, eds, *Mapping Literature: The Art and Politics of Translation* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1988), pp. 49–51.

²⁷ Translation theorists have, since the early 1980s, been arguing for such a reconceptualization of translation; a particularly interesting example which takes up the question of the ethical 'scandal' of sidelining translators is Lawrence Venuti's *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). Feminist translation theory has also been a notable force in this movement and, with the notable exception of Gayatri Spivak, much of it emanates from Canada and Québec: Sherry Simon, Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood.

²⁸ Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt, *Character/Jeu de lettres* (Montréal: NBJ / Vancouver: Writing, 1985) and *Mauve* (Montréal: NBJ / Vancouver: Writing, 1986); later reprinted together as 'Acts of Passage' in Marlatt's *Salvage* (Calgary: Red Deer College Press, 1991).

not to a humanist conception of self as autonomous individual, but to an intersubjective self located in always shifting relations with others. Linda Hutcheon's 'narcissistic narrative' seems inapt for the plural and shifting forms employed by Brossard and Marlatt; these forms are not self-centred but relational, they look outward into the communities which write and read novels into being. Echo, perhaps, would be a more appropriate model than Narcissus.²⁹ This shift is a part of how these novels' feminist perspectives strengthen postmodernism's ethical dimension by emphasizing, within their experimental play, the cautious negotiations involved in writing from an (ambiguously) non-hegemonic space and articulating an intersubjective sense of self.

Feminism and postmodernism: harmony and dissonance

In thinking about the intersection between feminist politics and postmodernist poetics which *Baroque* and *Ana Historic* put into play, it is not only the novels' *mise-en-scène* of their own artifice that calls for their positioning as postmodernist texts; they also engage with a range of postmodern devices and tropes. In this way, they evidence postmodernist literature's potential to be, as Monika Fludernik puts it, distinctly *engagé*, unlike the earlier avant-garde forms of American surfiction or the French *nouveau roman*.³⁰ The apocalyptic violence of *Baroque*'s vision of Los Angeles as a city 'armed to the teeth', plus the novel's anonymous sexual encounters, its strange 'flat' characters and tropes of digital imaging and virtual reality, add Lyotardian tropes to its many white spaces, play of *mise en abyme* and, perhaps most strikingly, its innovative linguistic games. *Ana Historic*'s etymological multiplicities, abundance of gaps, fractured typesetting, intertextual juxtaposition of multiple discourses, as well as its questioning of history's patriarchal metanarratives work similarly. But in each case, tropes of postmodernity and an intimately feminine, creative space are mutually transformative. Nowhere is there a

²⁹ An interesting take on Hutcheon's use of 'narcissism' in this way, which critiques her neat separation of her use of the term and its psychoanalytic meaning, is Grant Stirling's 'Neurotic Narrative: Metafiction and Object-Relations Theory', *College Literature*, 27.2 (2000), 80–102. Stirling argues that in fact, theories of narcissism can extend understanding of metafiction.

³⁰ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 306.

clearer example of this than in the second paragraph of *Baroque at Dawn*, which physically locates sensual lesbian experience ‘in the heart’ of the alienation of the postmodern city:

In Room 43 at the Hotel Rafale, in the heart of a North American city armed to the teeth, in the heart of a civilization of gangs, artists, dreams and computers, in darkness so complete it swallowed all countries, Cybil Noland lay between the legs of a woman she had met just a few hours before. (p. 5)

Reading the two texts’ different responses to postmodernist modes of writing reveals a significant point about the plurality of postmodernisms at work in different geographical and cultural contexts. While in *Ana Historic* Marlatt writes (yet also exceeds) Hutcheon’s ‘historiographic metafiction’, Nicole Brossard is affiliated less with North American or European postmodernism than with Québec’s 1960s’ movement of literary *modernité*. As co-founder of the Québécoise feminist practice of *écriture au féminin*, Brossard is positioned, as Karen Gould suggests, as ‘the pivotal link between the projects of *modernité* and radical feminism in the francophone province’.³¹ *Écriture au féminin* is itself a ‘pivot’ between the two, since it combines interrogations of language, narrative, representation and the ‘real’ with writing the body and determinedly anti-patriarchal linguistic strategies. Clearly, the interplay of woman, language, body and desire resonates with the influence of French feminism, but as a strategic and political mode *écriture au féminin* is also distinct, as Gould explains: ‘Brossard, [Louky] Bersianik, and [France] Théoret have – unlike Cixous – consistently understood their own approach to writing in the feminine as a gender-marked experimental writing practice in which women alone are engaged, rather than as an anti-logocentric or anti-phallogocentric approach to writing that male and female writers alike might pursue.’³² While I do not imply a relationship of synonymy between the specificity of writing in the feminine and postmodernist

³¹ Karen Gould, *Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Quebec* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 53.

³² Gould, *Writing in the Feminine*, p. 38. She cites Hélène Cixous’ 1972–3 visit to Québec as sparking debate amongst feminists there. *Écriture au féminin*’s practices of writing the body and its relationship to French *écriture féminine* is also a primary premise of Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli, eds, *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Edmonton: Longspoon/NeWest Press, 1986), notably of France Théoret’s ‘Writing in the Feminine: Voicing Consensus, Practicing Difference’, A. J. Holden Verburg, trans., pp. 361–6.

poetics, it is important to re-acknowledge the sites of overlap between them. I would agree to an extent with Gould's argument that if the term 'postmodern' encompasses multiple versions it therefore 'tends to gloss over cultural differences and historical contexts in favour of unifying philosophical and artistic currents'.³³ However, I would maintain its relevance for describing the kinds of transformations which reshaped Western societies and cultural forms in the latter decades of the twentieth century, providing that it is used with attention to local differences (thus, in Brossard's case '(post)modern' might offer a more appropriate formulation), and that it is conceived as neither apolitical nor ahistorical.

In fact, what emerges from my engagement with 'postmodern moments' in contemporary women's fiction is an understanding of precisely the multiple and culturally specific shapes it can take. Or, as Paterson observes,

À mesure que l'écriture postmoderne se diversifie, il devient de plus en plus évident que la 'convention postmoderne' n'est ni un dogme, ni une forme figée. Au contraire, chaque oeuvre qui s'y inscrit a le pouvoir d'élargir les paramètres de cette esthétique, d'y apporter des nuances ou encore d'en préciser la spécificité.

[As postmodern writing diversifies, it becomes increasingly clear that the 'postmodern condition' is neither a dogma, nor a fixed form. On the contrary, each work which engages with it has the power to broaden the parameters of this aesthetic, to contribute its own nuances or even to define its own aesthetic specificity.]³⁴

Such an elastic formulation enables a move away from a partial and outdated understanding of the postmodern as nihilistic, or what Paterson refers to as its 'apocalyptic' version, towards a conception that favours 'renouvellement' [renewal].³⁵ Indeed, the interplay between apocalypse and renewal which Paterson uses to describe the workings of the postmodern in Brossard's fiction is a useful framework for thinking about many other feminist and postmodernist fictions; and it intersects with Rosi Braidotti's theory that 'the melancholia of [mainstream

³³ Gould, *Writing in the Feminine*, p. 23.

³⁴ Paterson, *Moments postmodernes*, pp. 84–5. My translation.

³⁵ Paterson, *Moments postmodernes*, chapter 8.

postmodernism] contrasts sharply with the energy and vision of [feminist postmodernists]'.³⁶ Braidotti articulates the relations between the 'intellectual tracks' of postmodernist and feminist thought as 'patterns of dissonance, a polyphonic play',³⁷ and, extending her musical metaphor, I conceive the patterns and energies created from dissonance as a kind of harmony. The following extract from Brossard's non-fiction collection, *The Aerial Letter* (1985), exemplifies how innovative feminist writing can enact a play of harmony and dissonance, meshing deconstructive notions of rupture and fragmentation with the energetic multiplication of possibilities of feminist poetics:

'One-way thinking' falters under a continuous onslaught of words going off in all directions. It is this unfurling of polyvalent and multi-directional words which is going to make way for:

1. Exploding one-way sense
shattering the concept of man as universal
interrupting the circle of femininity
2. Producing a void, a mental space which, little by little, will become invested with our subjectivities, thus constituting an imaginary territory, where our energies will begin to be able to take form.³⁸

Revisioning narrative dynamics

Unfolding, sequencing, trajectory, progression: these are terms which Brian Richardson employs in response to what he identifies as the need for the displacement of the hegemony of plot in narrative theory: 'many narratives resist, elude, or reject this model of plot [as a teleological sequence of events] and its explicit assumption of narrative unity, cohesion, and teleology. This is especially true of twentieth-century texts that remain insistently fragmentary,

³⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, Elizabeth Guild, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 276.

³⁷ Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, p. 14.

³⁸ Brossard, 'From Radical to Integral', p. 111.

open-ended, contradictory, or defiantly “plotless.”³⁹ Richardson suggests that ‘the theoretical study of plot should be subsumed within the logically more capacious category of narrative progression’, a category which delineates ‘a protean, dynamic process, with multiple sources of narrative development operating at different points in the text’.⁴⁰ As I see it, this is a crucial project for feminist narratology to take on, since one of the most common preoccupations of much feminist narratological practice to date has concerned feminist rewritings of the quest plot that supposedly epitomizes ‘conventional’ narrative.⁴¹ Susan Winnett, Judith Roof, as well as Susan Knutson in her study of Brossard and Marlatt, have contested the psychoanalytical approach to plot as desire-driven as masculinist and heteronormative; (male) ‘quest grammar’ is a common object of critique.

However, with Ruth Page, I would argue that such theories repeat an essentialized gendered difference between ‘male’ and ‘female’ plots which echoes the second-wave feminism within which it was produced.⁴² Furthermore, Margaret Homans shows that ‘traditional’ plot structures are common in non-Western and oral cultures where storytelling is often the privileged domain of women, and argues that the ‘masculinity’ of plot so critiqued in the West is thus not a universal, but a local fact produced by white feminists.⁴³ Not only do feminist plot studies often proceed from a universalizing understanding of narrative, with roots in the early twentieth-century formalism of Propp and Tomashevsky, but they also fall into that trap which

³⁹ Brian Richardson, ‘Beyond the Poetics of Plot: Alternative Forms of Narrative Progression and the Multiple Trajectories of *Ulysses*’, in James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, eds, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 167–80 (p. 167).

⁴⁰ Richardson, ‘Beyond the Poetics of Plot’, p. 177.

⁴¹ Teresa de Lauretis’s ‘Desire in Narrative’ has been most influential here (in *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 103–157). Also see Knutson’s work on Marlatt and Brossard in *Narrative in the Feminine*.

⁴² See chapter 1 of Ruth E. Page, *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). In chapter 2 she develops a more flexible but also more systematic approach to ‘plot’ studies.

⁴³ Margaret Homans, ‘Feminist Fictions and Feminist Theories of Narrative’, *Narrative*, 2.1 (1994), 3–16 (p. 8).

Andrew Gibson perceptively points to: ‘The feminist narratologist repeatedly adopts models from a science that has never ceased to be masculine in all its predispositions’.⁴⁴

As a move to destabilize the founding assumptions of classical narratology, Brian Richardson’s recent proposition is one of the motivating forces behind this chapter’s exploration of narrative dynamics.⁴⁵ His point about the possibility of a plurality of structuring devices working together and separately within a narrative text – rhetorical, aesthetic, verbal, alphabetical, repetitive, aleatory, to name but a few – constitutes a vital challenge to the conventionally holistic narratological approach, and one which is elucidated by the writing of Brossard and Marlatt. Such an approach extends narratology’s potential, reframing it as a discipline which is mobile, plural, and subject to change. What structuring logics (in the plural) are at work, then, in *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic*? But also, how do their metafictional reflections on the processes and possibilities of writing (in the feminine) extend or exceed Richardson’s own categories, and what might they invite in their place? These questions are integral to my readings of these novels, and will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Narrative dynamics in *Ana Historic*

Reading Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* is on the one hand to understand precisely what Richardson’s proposal about narrative’s multiple, protean patterns is describing, but on the other it is to recognize several of its limitations. Although a fragmentary text which makes considerable use in its typography of gaps and white spaces – ‘that space on a page that is less silence than sound-box’⁴⁶ – as well as employing devices of collage, juxtaposition and discursive polyphony, it is in fact a fluid, cohesive novel, following the flow of Annie’s writerly imagination.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 123.

⁴⁵ My use here of ‘dynamics’ rather than ‘progression’ gestures to the *multiple* trajectories of innovative texts more effectively than does the linearity implied in ‘progression’. This will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

⁴⁶ Daphne Marlatt, ‘what is the story here?’, in Mary Burger et al, eds, *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2004), pp. 274–6 (p. 274).

⁴⁷ Citing Brossard’s ‘Poetic Politics’, Peggy Kelly suggests *Ana Historic* ‘[embodies] a prose form of Nicole Brossard’s encyclopedic description of language-centred poetry [...]: “shaking the syntax, breaking

Narrative flow is not 'linear' in any conventional, teleological sense, but rather resembles Ariadne's thread: mapping the loops, dead ends, and multiple points of entry of the labyrinth.⁴⁸ Perhaps most precisely, *Ana Historic's* form is announced by its epigraph: 'The assemblage of facts in a tangle of hair' (Susan Griffin). Speaking to a sense of both historiography and narrative as embodied practices, this epigraph also suggests the way in which the novel's apparently distinct narrative strands are in fact intimately tangled, and in places knotted so that one woman's story is inextricable from another's.

To attempt to describe *Ana Historic's* separate strands, then, is inevitably to misdescribe them, but an outline of its workings is nonetheless necessary here. The book is divided into seven parts, which fall into two distinct types but are each made up of a plurality of textual fragments and each separated by a page displaying a short prose piece or poem (I will return to these 'interruptive' pages later in the chapter). The processes of composition of *Ana Historic* speak powerfully to my thesis that form is inherently (though by no means directly or singly) political, that the multiple discourses, complex interweavings and juxtapositions which shape this novel are inseparable from Marlatt's wider writing project. That is to say, far from there being an 'underlying plot' to the novel – a 'main thread' which sets out in linear fashion the 'key events' either of Annie's coming-out or of Ana Richards' life story – the planning and manuscript stages of writing reveal the inextricability of story and form.

Marlatt's notebooks are full of fragments of lines, ideas, wordplay, quotations from historical sources and from her inspiring 'syncrones' (Brossard, Irigaray, Louise Cotnoir), scraps of paper, such that reading the notebooks is not a dissimilar experience to reading the novel itself.⁴⁹ Even in its embryonic state as early as 1978, it is clear that feminist revisionary historiography, with the juxtaposition of fragments from official sources woven into a present-

grammatical law, not respecting punctuation, visually designing the text" ('Fiction Theory as Feminist Practice', p. 90).

⁴⁸ As well as J. Hillis Miller (see note 3), Marlatt herself has thought in these terms: 'Loopy, looping passage of narrative she [Ariadne] holds in her hand. If she would only read/write from where she stands, bringing the outside in with her, confronting the monstrousness of her unauthorized selfhood' (*Readings*, p. 194).

⁴⁹ Notebooks from Daphne Marlatt's fonds at Library and Archives Canada were consulted in April 2006.

day 'i-narrative', was always to be the foundation of this text. 'let the writing make its own connections', Marlatt notes in one of the early notebooks, and this declaration informs every version; 'the form like peeling an onion? layers pulled off. to get the present in out of history' is another model for the relationship between Annie's 'inner' and Ana's 'outer' stories. While still internally fragmentary, an early full draft consists of fifty pages of Annie's/Ina's story, followed by Ana's (including the multiple juxtaposed historiographical fragments), and concluding with a section about Annie and Zoe's relationship. By the final version, however, Marlatt has – quite literally, the notebooks show – cut and pasted from this earlier structure, alternating Annie and Ana's sections, with Zoe appearing occasionally throughout. The formal fragmentations, essential to this novel from its earliest conception, are thus finally woven into a more closely interconnected structure that enacts the intersubjective relations connecting the four women. And, as I suggested above, my reading of the archival documents is itself a participatory act, taking up the text's suggestion of open-endedness and conceiving the final version as part of a spiralling process of inspiration, production, and reception – all collaborative endeavours.

Marlatt's novel, I propose, exemplifies Brian Richardson's idea of a 'protean' form operating through 'multiple sources of narrative development'. The first part, and every alternate one after that, involves both what I call Annie's 'i-narrative'⁵⁰ and a plurality of (actual) historical texts found through her research into 1870s' colonial British Columbia and the life of Mrs. (Ana) Richards. These parts consist of the complex, fluid interweaving of strands I will describe below. In between, the second, fourth and sixth sections focus entirely on the historical narrative(s) surrounding Ana; they juxtapose fragments from diverse archival documents with sections of Annie's fictional rewritings of the official record. These sequences are much shorter and have a more broken logic, both physically and semantically, in that each fragment of text is separated by an asterisk and every asterisk denotes a change in narration,

⁵⁰ Knutson also uses the formulation 'i-narrator' in her analysis of Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone (Narrative in the Feminine)*, p. 67).

with each change also marked typographically (italics for 'official' sources; quotation marks for Ana's diary; lower-case for most of Annie's narration, although conventional capitalization distinguishes her fictionalized, 'written' rewritings of history). Such typesetting might suggest that 'randomly connected' 'aleatory'⁵¹ sequencing or simple juxtaposition is at work. In fact, within Richardson's typology of narrative progression these historical segments follow a mode of ordering that he describes as 'every bit as "functional" as traditional emplotment': 'rhetorical sequencing', defined as 'an intentional arrangement set forth [...] to produce a particular effect: to bring the mind of the reader into closer conformity with the beliefs of the author'.⁵²

The 'effect' sought is an important ethical one: to bring to light, and begin to compensate for, the immensity of the erasures of female and First-Nations bodies from Canada's official written history.⁵³ So, in the sixth section, documentation charting the produce (Congan's tea, Robinson's oatmeal, Price's candles) brought in by the *Star of Jamaica* precedes a section from Ana's journal describing 'Tea at Mrs. A's with S., Mrs. A very big with child [...]' (p. 113), and thus asks the reader to remember the colonial trade which enabled the quintessentially English practice of afternoon tea to rematerialize in Western Canada. Later, Annie's fictionalized version of this tea party transforms it into the scene of childbirth. This scene is intercut with historical fragments identifying Mrs. A(lexander) and S(usan) (the midwife) and thus writing them into textual life; with the biblical line '*To the woman he said: I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth*' (p. 118); and with extracts from a newspaper report about the Dominion Day boat-race, which it seems Mr. Alexander is reading while his wife gives birth upstairs ('his

⁵¹ Richardson, 'Beyond the Poetics of Plot', p. 177.

⁵² Richardson, 'Beyond the Poetics of Plot', p. 169.

⁵³ The processes and violences of the colonial period in Canada – damage to First Nations and Métis peoples, but also to the landscape, to the forests in particular – are present in *Ana Historic*, though nowhere near as prominent as gender issues. Postcolonial and ecocritical ideas are woven with feminist historiography and lesbian politics in Marlatt's writing (and her second novel, *Taken* (Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1996), shifts its emphasis from feminist discourse to colonial issues). Gabriele Helms's *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) is a useful study of how 'Annie's dialogic engagement with [...] quoted documents opens up the discursive fields in which they circulate' (p. 85), as is Manina Jones's *That Art of Difference: 'Documentary-Collage' and English-Canadian Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

mental ticker-tape of what is worthy of attention', p. 122). Not only is the boat-race another example of colonial seamanship, echoing the *Star of Jamaica* passage, but it also sets the labour of male bodies, remembered in print, against the private labour of Jeannie Alexander's birthing body/'vessel', at once condemned by God's Word and erased from the historical record (until now): 'the ships men ride into the pages of history. [...] ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother – ahistoric, muddled in the mundane, incessantly repeating, their names "writ in water"' (p. 121).

But the 'rhetorical' workings of such a sophisticated and unusual sequencing strategy pose a challenge to Richardson's definition. In distinguishing 'functional', 'ideologically charged' rhetorical orderings from basically non-functional 'aesthetic' ones, he implicitly opposes ethical action to formal play. But in this example from Marlatt's writing, while ethical force does inhere in and grow out of the dynamics of narrative sequence, it develops almost as much through the resistance of sequence and the complex reading process which that demands. Rather than sustaining an opposition between the functional and the aesthetic, this text recalls J. Hillis Miller and Adam Newton's conceptions of the inherently ethical nature of narrative acts.⁵⁴ As Marlatt has commented, 'this is not a matter of the narrative line which the reader pursues (a line of crumbs, say, clues) into the thick of the telling and out again... [but] compound interest which accumulates along the way. a complex of connections'.⁵⁵ In other words, the connections between fragments are often tentative or contrastive rather than straightforwardly associative; they follow not a single thematic logic but rather work through the overlaying of several ethico-political trajectories (feminist, postcolonialist, Marxist, historiographic) which offer the reader a multiplicity of possible meanings, and so invite careful re-readings, each time forming potentially different connections. Richardson's notion of the rhetorical aim for 'closer conformity' of beliefs, then, is far from the intention of *Ana Historic*, an intently reader-oriented

⁵⁴ Cf. my Introduction, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 53.

text which challenges the very premises of narrative author/ity rather than seeking to assert it. This is perhaps less the crisis of authority – of loss of ‘mastery’ – commonly associated with postmodernist metafiction, than an ethical feminist reconception of the narrative act characteristic of Canadian feminist fiction theory. In a determinedly anti-phallogocentric sense, it revisits the dispersal of textual author/ity that Barthes delineates with his declaration that ‘to give writing its future’, the ‘myth’ of the Author must cede to the ‘birth of the reader’.⁵⁶

The ordering of the novel’s shorter sections in ways that both resist and insist upon a plurality of connections is a somewhat different dynamic to the one which mostly characterizes its four longer sections. In places, particularly where Annie’s i-narrative breaks off to cite ‘official’, though unreferenced,⁵⁷ historical sources (*italic*) or extracts from Ana’s journal (quote marks), the narrative dynamic operates in much the same way. However, Annie’s i-narrative is consistently foregrounded and its distinct structuring logic results in a greater fluidity of movement and a stronger sense of narrative cohesion. The i-narrative, which is presented entirely in the lower case apart from proper nouns, involves Annie’s own present-tense story (which might in a very limited sense be summarized in terms of a basic ‘plot’ of feminist emancipation: the processes of coming to writing, the end of her marriage and beginning of a lesbian relationship with Zoe). But constantly spiralling out from this, disrupting any straightforward progression, are the many her/historical strands; the looping thread of memory Annie traces back to moments from her childhood and from her dead mother’s life which she is memorializing in her writing; and Ina’s repeated critical interruptions to contest her daughter’s

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968), in *Image – Music – Text*, Stephen Heath, trans. (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142–8 (p. 148).

⁵⁷ A bibliography citing the major sources for these quotations is included in late manuscripts of the novel, and in the Acknowledgements section of the Canadian (Coach House Press) edition (in what is possibly a mistake, no such list appears in the British Women’s Press reprint). In *Challenging Canada* (pp. 81–5), Helms identifies the precise origin of many of the quoted extracts, but this seems to me to undermine the mechanics of the very dialogism Helms is reading, putting quotes *back* into the fixed contexts from which Marlatt has freed them by consistently *not* providing references.

versions of the past.⁵⁸ Clearly, while there are several ‘plots’ running through *Ana Historic*, the novel by no means follows the temporal or causal, event-based logic of traditional emplotment; between its many apparent digressions weaves a labyrinthine thread of memory or, perhaps more significantly, *linguistic* association.

Language is the driving force behind Marlatt’s narrative poetics. Writing on the borderline between narrative and poetry, she transforms the conventions of fictional discourse, releasing new creative energies along multiple trajectories:

here i am, identifying as a poet, with a strong pull towards narrative – how relate the two? – narrative that doesn’t follow a clue to some single centre so much as follow the twists & turns of language, where it gets me to in this labyrinth without a centre – language not utilitarian, something to ‘get me there’ – where after all? there’s nowhere but here: its radiance of meanings ‘duplicat’ (as Cotnoir says) or multiplicit, many-levelled.⁵⁹

Language, for Marlatt, is not merely a medium for narrative, then, but is constitutive of story. One of the main ordering devices in *Ana Historic*, which is also one of its most innovative and creative forms, is the use of ‘verbal generators’, Richardson’s term for that ‘fascinating’ practice typical of the *nouveau roman* ‘that names an object or event which then appears or occurs in the narrative’.⁶⁰ However, Richardson’s formulation needs some redefinition in the light of the texture of Marlatt’s writing. *Ana Historic* is working at the limits of narrativity, redefining narrative as the story that language itself tells, which means that its verbal generators move the narrative on at the level of discourse, *without* the mediation of object/event.

How the kaleidoscope of shapes cast by Marlatt’s linguistic play fall into narrative form can be seen in the sequence of musings set in motion by Annie’s imagining of Ana Richards’ use of the term ‘Proper Lady’.

⁵⁸ I return to consider the role of dialogue and the ‘you’ in this novel in Chapter Two; see p. 117 below for Ina’s interruptions.

⁵⁹ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 52.

⁶⁰ Richardson, ‘Beyond the Poetics of Plot’, p. 172.

'[...] does he speak freely because he sees me wandering of my own free will? I cannot keep only to drawing rooms and the School! I am not a Proper Lady perhaps.'

Proper, she says, Lady capitalized, and it is barely sounded, the relationship between proper and property. the other Ladies at the mill would be wives or daughters-about-to-be-wives [...]. She alone is without 'protection,' as they would say. (p. 32)

Annie takes up Ana's words first to read into them more of Ana's story – the story of how 'she feels her difference from the other women'. Then her writing spirals away from narrative into the kind of wordplay Marlatt desires as a poet: 'lady, *hlaēfdige*, kneader of bread, mistress of a household, lady of the manor, woman of good family'. Linguistic association then leads Annie back to thoughts of the 'ladies of Hastings Mill' discussing fabrics, which, via comparison, cede to Ina's story and to the versions of what is 'ladylike' (p. 33) imposed by Ina on Annie as she grew up. Following language's thread, Marlatt weaves connections and exposes holes: 'words, that shifting territory. never one's own. full of deadfalls and hidden claims to a reality others have made' (p. 32). Ana's, Ina's and Annie's constructions of 'lady' all also exist in the context of social discourses of femininity, which as Annie shows in her next narrative move, offer only two polarized versions: lady or tramp.

– but it wasn't that i wanted to be a 'lady,' i wanted to be like the other girls, sexy but not too much [...].

– and what about 'nice'?

yes, nice girls don't... i didn't realize the only alternative to lady you knew, was tramp, though that was a line i heard often enough on one of your records. tramps were girls who smoked in the bushes behind the corner store (doo-wop, doo-wop). [...] tramp was a word nice girls used to brand those outside their group – tramp, slut, bitch. (pp. 33–4)

Her digression about 'tramps' brings the rhythms of the popular song into her narrative prose, but also brings into focus the way in which popular cultural forms carry gender codes which stamp themselves onto the way women are seen and see themselves, whilst also sometimes allowing ways out, alternative ways of being (as in the case of Ana Richards' piano, which provides her with an independent teaching income). The flow of linguistic association, then, in that it follows all its digressive urges, radiates meaning across the borders of time, space and self, to draw connections and contrasts between the selves the text is narrating.

The last of Brian Richardson's ordering devices that is relevant to *Ana Historic* plays a vital part in the coming together of Annie's and Ana's story lines: the (Borgesian) 'forking path'. Classical narratological accounts of plot are based on events, temporally connected and hierarchically organized as major and minor (Barthes' nuclei and catalysers; Chatman's kernels and satellites⁶¹). Significantly influenced by Genette's classic study of narrative time, narratology presumes a distance between the time of the story and the time of the narrating which fixes that story in time. By contrast in *Ana Historic*, as we have seen, the narrating unfolds as Annie composes it, which means that each story, rather than being neatly embedded or complete, is subject to change: its telling still in process, its 'events' still to be decided. The most striking example of the effect of this fundamental shift in narrative structure, which collapses narratology's traditional divide between story and discourse and constitutes a radical move away from narrative *telos*,⁶² is when Ana Richards' fantasy of independence materializes into an 'event' that dramatically alters the course of the plot. Ana dreams: 'She wanted to be free or at least freer [...]. She wanted to know what it would be like to rent rooms in the Granville Hotel or the Deighton, buy a piano (passing ships had them sometimes), give music lessons and forget about answering to school trustees' (p. 104). Here Annie's fictionalized character surprises her by taking the bare bones of historical detail (an account by Alice Patterson has already provided the information that Mrs. Richards did indeed buy a piano, p. 48) and transforming them into an emancipatory plotline that echoes her own: 'Ana, what shall I make of you when you make of yourself more and more? now you want to give up your cottage at the mill [...] and live in a Gastown hotel' (pp. 104-5). The forking path that follows not only writes Ana out of her prescribed fate – 'fate. that path that led to marriage or death, no other fork in the trail' (p. 99) – but it also marks a major change in the narrative stakes and in the

⁶¹ See Barthes' early structuralist model in his 1966 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image – Music – Text*, pp. 79–124; and later Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁶² The challenge to narratology's classic *fabula/sujet* divide has been widely theorized for many years now. A convincing argument for its collapse is Barbara Herrnstein Smith's 'Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories', in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 209–32.

understanding of the novel as a whole, or rather, the understanding that it is *not* a finished whole, but a process.

'The barque Whittier carried a piano among its cabin furniture. The master sold it to a Mrs. Schweppe, who resold it to Mrs. Richards, and then the school teacher also gave piano lessons in her rooms in Gastown.'

or

'Mrs. Schwappe (?) sold it to Mrs. Richards, school teacher, who lived in a little three-room cottage back of the Hastings Sawmill schoolhouse, and afterwards married Ben Springer.' (p. 106)

The second of these passages is recognizable as Alice Patterson's actual account of events, drawn from British Columbia's history books, which appears at two previous points in the narrative (as the only italic passage to describe Mrs. Richards, it is no coincidence that it is the only one to appear more than once). The first of the above passages, though in fact another historical quotation, represents the version Ana has just imagined for herself, and its appearance opens up the gap between authorized versions. The result is not an undermining of Annie's 'reliability' as narrator – something she never claims for herself anyway – but the awareness, characteristic of historiographic metafiction, of the subjective, storied nature of every historical account.⁶³ History is too full of forking paths and (woman-shaped) holes to convey any kind of 'truth'. The fork enables Annie's final break with the confines both of historiography and of her marriage, so that the rest of the story she tells about Ana is no longer the official version, but tells of an independent female piano teacher with a lesbian lover, Birdie. That is, it tells, or rather 'rehearses',⁶⁴ the story of Annie's own life. Making i-narrative and historical reconstruction into alternative versions of one another creates what Marlatt describes as 'a historical leak for the possibility of lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia';⁶⁵ this novel draws together the lives of two women living a century apart, showing the continuity of women's history across time. To repeat my terms from earlier in this chapter, *Ana Historic's*

⁶³ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁶⁴ Helms discusses it in this way in her chapter on the novel in *Challenging Canada*, p. 75.

⁶⁵ Marlatt, 'Self-Representation and Fictional Analysis', p. 15.

narrative dynamics set up a tension between the 'harmony' of fluid connective logic(s) and the 'dissonance' of the minimal narrativity formed through discursive fragmentation, while they also work within the overarching coherence that comes of presenting the text as the one Annie is writing.

Narrative dynamics in *Baroque at Dawn*

The structural patterning of Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* could be described in almost inverse terms: exuberant, spiralling stories which are subject to huge ruptures as the novel progressively reveals (and transgresses) its many layers and embeddings. Its 'multiple sources of narrative development', to borrow Brian Richardson's words, are thus very different to *Ana Historic's*. Reading becomes a kind of detective work as we unpick clever, often hidden connections. This difference in the two novels' formal structures holds true for their compositional processes: where Marlatt brings together a collection of scraps and fragments then writes around and through them, allowing them to an extent to make their own connections, Brossard's planning process is orderly, proceeding from structural diagrams and clear plans. As with Marlatt's writing, however, Brossard's plans do not serve to translate a basic story onto the page; they are, from the outset, every bit as complex and multi-layered as the final result. Unfolding its pleats and levels so as to find the 'story' underlying the 'discourse', as classical narratology would do, is thus a practice doomed to failure by *Baroque's* spiralling, interconnected form. Indeed, its structure is remarkably complex, participating in the explosion of classical narratology's triad of time, voice and frame which postmodernist fiction is widely recognized to undertake. Brossard's novel might well be read as exemplary of playful, illusionary North American metafictionality. But, as in much feminist metafiction, there is also a transformative enterprise at work, which finds renewal in impending apocalypse; a thread of harmony through dissonance.

The complexity of *Baroque's* form is such that I append an outline (Appendix I) to complement my description here. The novel is a *mise en abyme* in five sections. The first, 'Hotel Rafale', is about a woman writer, 'Cybil Noland', who is struggling to write, but is then

revealed to be the beginning of an embedded novel which is being written by the central character of the next three sections, also named Cybil Noland.⁶⁶ Playfully, as I will discuss later, Cybil remembers meeting an *English* novelist called 'Nicole Brossard' at a conference on autobiography (p. 47). The fifth section, however, reveals a second layer of embedding: the previous four are re-read, not only as a novel by an (unnamed) English woman writer, but also in fact as a Québécoise-French *translation* of this novel. This fifth section provides the English novelist's reflections on the process of its translation and publication. Since this is also in French, we are possibly meant to deduce that it too has been translated, although the English novelist has a French mother so we could also read this final section as a sign, consonant with Brossard's commitment both to female relationships and to the French language, that she has turned from her father's language to her mother tongue. At every level, there are repeated references to an unnamed woman in a red coat, 'the Hyde Park woman', who appears in different relation to each of the novel's women writer figures and whose presence, we will see, is one of several ambiguous, blurred elements that undermines the apparently clear levels of embedding. Furthermore, when reading the English translation of *Baroque*, which I am citing here, another level of mediation is added by its actual anglo-Canadian translator, Patricia Claxton. Claxton's afterword extends the novel out into the paratext, adding another level of narration to the diegetic play of Brossard's work, and, in thoroughly metafictional style, further breaking down the distinction between the fictional and real worlds.

Baroque at Dawn is a text that simultaneously employs several of the devices identified in Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction: 'trompe l'oeil'* (when section one, 'Hotel Rafale', is demystified as an embedded fictional text); 'interruption' (when auto(bio)graphical references bleed into otherwise fictional texts); a kind of 'strange loop' (when day one of writing the novel for the English novelist (p. 251) loops us back to the same scene imagined for the Hyde Park woman by 'Cybil' (p. 17)); and most obviously the novel's play of auto(bio)graphical *mise en*

⁶⁶ I use inverted commas to refer to the textual persona on the lower narrative level.

abyme, or 'Chinese-box' or '*babushka*' narrative (in that 'Cybil' appears in Cybil's novel; the Hyde Park woman in the English novelist's; and 'Nicole Brossard' in Brossard's).⁶⁷ Barbara Godard has described *Baroque* as a 'vertiginous perspectival and temporal play between the virtual and the actual',⁶⁸ a description which echoes McHale's ontological 'flickering' while eschewing its potentially relativist connotations.⁶⁹ Certainly, the novel makes continual and almost unquantifiable transgressions across the hierarchical boundaries with which classical narratology purports to separate narrative levels and frames; central to my reading, however, is the fact that its 'vertiginous play' produces not only rupture and breakdown but also a constructive, energetic poetics.

In terms of the novel's emplotment, the two radical ruptures that occur in sections two and five, with their revelations that we have been reading one and then another embedded text, mean that any sense of *telos*, of a single progressive narrative line, is broken. What we encounter instead is a multiplicity of mini plots, each with a different ordering logic: the first section follows the basic temporal logic tracking a brief hotel-room affair between 'Cybil' and La Sixtine, but this is constantly fractured as the intimacy of their desire repeatedly stimulates stories, linguistic and philosophical digressions, questions: 'There between the stranger's legs, questions arose, insistent, intrusive questions [...] seeking alternately to confirm and deny the world and its *raison d'être*' (p. 8). We then step out of this embedded fictional world onto another diegetic level featuring Cybil the writer: each of section two's seven chapters stand for one day of the week in which Cybil is waiting to meet oceanographer Occident DesRives and photographer Irène Mage, with whom she will be embarking on a creative project at sea. Section three, a year later, spans the women's stay in Buenos Aires, waiting to embark onto the *Symbol*, and section four narrates their experiences on board, including Cybil and Irène's affair

⁶⁷ See the chapter 'Chinese-Box Worlds', in Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987). The latter two terms are used by Fludernik in *Natural Narratology*, p. 273.

⁶⁸ Godard, 'Life (in) Writing', pp. 201–2.

⁶⁹ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 39.

and, finally, Occident's death. Section five makes the unexpected leap to yet another diegetic level, and relates the love affair between the English writer of the Cybil Noland novel and her Québécoise translator, through whose agency the entire work is purported to have been transformed into French.

A rational logic and clear structure of embeddings is apparent here. However, this fails to account for the fact that, throughout, the narrative line is repeatedly broken by digression, memory, imagination, desire. Each section divides itself in different ways: by asterisks, days, numbered chapters, titled chapters, and in the final section the fragmentary form of one short prose piece per page, thus refusing any sense that *Baroque* is following a monologic narrative progression. Brossard moves between modes of narrative representation: the hyper-narrative, almost too long, too detailed, family saga that La Sixtine tells (pp. 21–8); the blank page representing Cybil's virtual reality experience aboard the *Symbol* (p. 169); the abundant white space and fragmented structure of the final section in which a whole page might be devoted to a single sentence, a single abstract thought (p. 210); the 'Brothers Demers' chapter that takes the unmediated form of a dramatic script (pp. 162–8); and the 'Porno' chapter that ironizes the visuals and male perspective of the porn film being screened: 'The woman pulls off the man's pants. She massages or polishes or dries the man's thighs, hard to say which. [...] Fast forward. The woman is seen kneeling, ass on. The man pokes about, knowingly like a dog' (p. 158).

Such plurality of formal patterns and discursive modes is further multiplied by the fact that each ordering is a site of radical polyvalence where alternative meanings and digressive thoughts or stories radiate or spiral outwards from each narrative moment. This multiplicity breaks down the distinction between 'plot' and digression, between the 'real' and the fictional within the diegetic world. The unfolding of events across the novel's many narrative spaces and along its identifiable temporal axis, otherwise known as its discernible 'plot', is in a state of constant rupture, the narrative 'line' branching out since every 'event' stimulates in the focalizing *author* a series of memories, philosophical musings, or linguistic play. To borrow Brossard's own words, the texture of *Baroque* constantly 'explodes one-way sense'.

So, in the first section, when a radio report brings the violence of the outside world into the erotic space of 'Cybil' and La Sixtine's hotel room, Cybil is provoked to remember a time in London when she imagined a woman who 'lacks vocabulary to describe the violence erupting in cities' (p. 15). As the report's 'solemn voice' continues, 'The Hyde Park woman reappears. [...] The woman is writing, and in Cybil's mind this should be enough to silence the portentous voice. Finally a calypso tune effaces all disasters. La Sixtine takes the opportunity to get up and slip on her panties, asking as she does where Cybil is from and what has brought her to this city' (pp. 16–17). Here, storyworlds collapse into one another: the radio brings violence into the *lovers'* intimate space, which is then further displaced as Cybil's imagination transports her somewhere else (or possibly, since she identifies with her imagined Hyde Park woman, as *someone* else). It takes the radio's calypso to return her to the 'real', which La Sixtine then tries to have her convert into a story. This works as a kind of *mise en abyme* for the collapse of intra-/extradiegetic distinctions in this novel. The scene echoes not only the many overlaps between the different purportedly 'embedded' texts, but also the spiralling metafictional dynamics of the novel, which brings a transformed 'real', in the form of the anglophone 'Brossard' figure, into its own fictional sphere. In fact, this scene also works as a subtle, easy to miss example of one of Richardson's 'verbal generators'. The Hyde Park woman, as her words for the 'volcano of violence' fail, is spooning sugar from her sugar bowl, so when, in the final section, one of the first things the English novelist writes is 'The sugar bowl looks like a volcano' (p. 201), a connective logic is established between the two stories in such a way that it troubles the frames that separate them. (I will return to this echoic device in detail later in the chapter.)

In her narratological study of the emplotment of Brossard's novel *Picture Theory*, Knutson suggests: 'she reinvents the baroque, with its spiralling curves, displacing classical restraint by an outrageous exuberance and reliable intellectual virtuosity'.⁷⁰ And Lianne Moyes has argued:

⁷⁰ Knutson, *Narrative in the Feminine*, p. 188.

Clearly, Brossard's lesbian feminist project sits uneasily within the religious fervour of the Counter-Reformation so crucial to the Baroque period. But the Baroque was also a period of substantial cultural transformation, including radical changes in conceptions of the subject; a period preoccupied with passion, with making the material (paint, marble, language, fabric, flesh) yield to signs of emotion; a period whose overelaborated surfaces are heavy with multiple, even contradictory, significations; [...] and a period associated with ornament, detail, and other categories identified as feminine. In this sense, whether they resist, mobilize, or recontextualize the baroque, Brossard's texts certainly have a stake in exploring it.⁷¹

To think of *Baroque at Dawn* as a 'baroque' text is not only to pursue a thread that originates with its title, but it is also to engage a vocabulary that gestures usefully to the elaborate dynamics of its form. Again, to cite Moyes, in this novel the baroque 'offers Brossard a conceptual framework in which to explore further the oscillation between sense and nonsense', an oscillation which Moyes incisively reads as involving 'the transition from a culture of books to a culture of proliferating images and imagination' to which Cybil 'bears witness'.⁷² Moyes asks how the novel's 'playful rereadings of the baroque', its homoerotic readings of the intensity/ecstasy/violence of baroque art, push the limits of lesbian feminist discourses of sexuality: 'In *Baroque at Dawn* [the baroque] is a way of writing the ambivalence of the text's relationship to technology, violence, passion, ritualized suffering, Christianity, queer culture, S/M, and relations of power among women'.⁷³

I am referring here to the Baroque as Gilles Deleuze, drawing on Leibniz, conceives it, since Brossard's text closely fits his definition of baroque narratives as 'stories enclosed one in the other, and the variation of the relation of narrator-and-narration'.⁷⁴ For Deleuze, 'the Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds. [...] Yet the Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity,

⁷¹ Lianne Moyes, 'Nothing Sacred: Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* at the Limits of Lesbian Feminist Discourses of Sexuality', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 70 (2000), 28–63 (pp. 28–9).

⁷² Moyes, 'Nothing Sacred', p. 32.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Tom Conley, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 61. Roberts' novel *The Book of Mrs Noah* could also be treated as baroque in form.

fold over fold, one upon the other.’⁷⁵ And it is specifically the fold which I am interested in here, as the site of conjunction between unity and difference:

A flexible or an elastic body still has cohering parts that form a fold, such that they are not separated into parts of parts but are rather divided to infinity in smaller and smaller folds that always retain a certain cohesion. Thus a continuous labyrinth is not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surroundings.⁷⁶

Reconceiving narrative dynamics as infinite and tentatively connected *foldings* speaks to the relational, processual, subject-to-change characteristics of a feminist *and* postmodernist poetics.

While in one sense a heavily and repetitively plotted novel, with characters scripted towards lesbian desire and *écriture au féminin*, *Baroque at Dawn* is also a radically fragmentary text whose ruptures, as well as the repetitions themselves, multiply narrative trajectories and trouble (without destroying) the cohesion of such scripts. *Baroque*'s foldings exceed the categories of progression proposed by Richardson precisely because they disrupt the very idea of narrative as progression. Later in this chapter, I will read this transgressive patterning as the site where Brossard's narrative innovation is at its most challenging. To borrow Andrew Gibson's terms, I will suggest that this is where 'form becomes merely a provisional container to be exploded repeatedly by force'.⁷⁷

Concurrent narration

In the above readings I have engaged with what is ostensibly the form, the shape on the page, of the two novels. But is it not the case that in doing so I have been trying to pin form down, imposing closure on the texts? Is reading for the precise dynamics of form not in some sense a teleological act that these novels resist? One such site of resistance is the replacement of the

⁷⁵ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 58.

past tense with the present, with what Uri Margolin calls 'concurrency'. Concurrent narration is an increasingly popular device which has played a major part in the dethroning of the traditional conception of narrative as a finite form, because:

The narrator does not possess, by definition, any temporal distance from the actions and events, no external later point of vantage from which s/he could survey and define the structuredness of the reported sequence as one integrated whole [...]. The narrated domain is a world in the process of becoming, progressively taking shape as it is being narrated, not a bounded whole. It is not yet possible, therefore, to elicit a pattern from the succession, describe it in terms of macro-coherence, plot, or narrative theme.⁷⁸

Concurrent form tells stories of becoming rather than being; it reconceives narrative as *process*, both flattening out its foundational hierarchies and denying its conventional *telos* or sense of an ending. In direct contrast to Peter Brooks's work on 'the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages and strive toward narrative ends',⁷⁹ concurrent narrative works to disrupt any such *telos* of reading. As such, it intersects with the ethico-political aims of feminist writing as Lorraine Weir set them out at Canada's seminal 1983 'Women and Words' conference: 'in setting aside the illusions of closure, completion, stasis, perfection, [...] we enter the possibility of the open text, [...] the writing which exists not to valorize its author/ity but to be activated in the process of reading/making/collaborating'.⁸⁰ Concurrency, then, is a particularly enabling strategy for those texts which might in postmodernist terms be called metafictional, but which in feminist terms might rather be thought of as narratives of coming-to-articulation, of *autherity*.

Baroque at Dawn's strategy of narrative tenses is notable for its shifting movements between past and present,⁸¹ and is one manifestation of how Brossard explores questions of time

⁷⁸ Uri Margolin, 'Of What Is Past, Is Passing, or to Come: Temporality, Aspectuality, Modality, and the Nature of Literary Narrative', in David Herman, ed., *Narratologies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 142–66 (p. 152).

⁷⁹ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* ([1984] Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. xiii.

⁸⁰ Lorraine Weir, "'Wholeness, Harmony, Radiance" and Women's Writing', in Ann Dybikowski et al, eds, *in the feminine: women and words/les femmes et les mots: Conference Proceedings 1983* (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985), pp. 131–5 (p. 134).

⁸¹ The play of tenses in the novel is transformed by translation: the fluid movements of Brossard's French are at times replaced with grammatically correct English because, as Patricia Claxton writes in her Afterword,

and the rapid changes characterizing (post)modern civilization, which she describes her engagement with in an interview:

Present, speed, sensations are elements which have always seduced me. And yet I am unable to separate myself from the slowness that is so necessary for writing and for reading, for emotion and for desire. Therefore, in order to understand, I am trying to produce encounters between the present that I associate with silence and presence and the volatile present that short-circuits ancient odours secreted in the course of the last five centuries.⁸²

The 'double-time feeling' Cybil frequently experiences is symptomatic of such a rupture in the temporality of existence. But 'double time' also serves the novel's metafictional narrative dynamics; as the narration shifts from present to past and back again, the relative positioning of stories and characters moves with it, and the mimetic illusion is repeatedly unsettled. So we first enter the conventional past-tense form of the opening page:

First the dawn. Then the woman came.

In Room 43 at the Hotel Rafale, [...] Cybil Noland lay between the legs of a woman she had met just a few hours before. (p. 5)

But in the second section, after an asterisk, conventional narrative discourse ruptures and the story continues in the present, which reduces the distance between the focalizer, Cybil, and the reader: 'In the room the air conditioner is making an infernal noise. Dawn has given signs of life. Cybil can now make out the furniture shapes and see, reflected in the mirror on the half-open bathroom door, a chair' (p. 6). This anti-mimetic alternation of tenses continues, flaunting the constructedness of fictional discourse and flagging up the metafictionality of the novel-within-the-novel device which will later be revealed. Only the final section, involving the English novelist's affair with the translator, is told entirely in the present tense, emphasizing its diegetic status as the 'real' story in which all others are embedded. (This, of course, is a further metafictional trick, since that section is 'written' by an anglophone writer.) Closing in

'Curiously, English is more rigid than French when it comes to verb tenses. A French text may drift back and forth from present to past and back again in a single sentence' (*Baroque*, p. 260). Temporal inconsistencies are therefore difficult to attribute either to deliberate strategy or to awkward translation.

⁸² Brossard, 'Fragments', p. 33.

concurrent mode, and with a series of questions (finally: 'What are we to look for in the very desire for comparisons and closeness?'), *Baroque* determinedly resists any sense of an ending.

The role of the concurrent mode is even more prominent in the narrative dynamics of *Ana Historic*. The processual sequencing of Marlatt's text works together with its predominantly lower-case typography to give the impression of a draft version, a journal or interior monologue, rather than a published or publishable text,⁸³ and this is where much of its indeterminacy originates, where it emphasizes the reader's constitutive role. Margolin illuminates how appropriate a form concurrent narration is for Marlatt's textual politics when he writes: 'concurrent narration is located on the cusp or borderline between factivity and indeterminacy, actuality and virtuality, ontic and purely epistemic possibilities in the narrative domain'.⁸⁴ This idea of virtuality and possibility, as in the 'forking path', is central to Marlatt's critique of the self-assumed (f)actuality of historical record which opposes itself to the contingent despite almost inevitably being built upon it. Because it is in the present and thus subject to change, postmodernist techniques such as un-narration, retake, and McHale's notion of apocryphal history⁸⁵ do appear in *Ana Historic*, particularly through Annie's increasingly inventive approach to Ana's story, which involves not only writing her own text, but also rewriting the historical record itself. Whereas in some postmodernist fiction these techniques serve to convey ontological fracture and incommensurability, here, combined with concurrence, they work *within* the ontological framework to convey the arbitrariness and indeterminacy of history's own thread.

The concurrent mode also enables the novel's destabilizing of narratology's clear divide between author/narrator/character which, like its hierarchical arrangement of levels and person, is built on a model of past-tense realist narrative in which the narrator, even when writing an I-

⁸³ The lower case is also intended to resist the patriarchal naming strategies usually evoked by capital letters.

⁸⁴ Margolin, 'Of What Is Past', p. 153.

⁸⁵ 'Apocryphal history' supplements or displaces official history, 'flaunting' its violation of realism (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 90).

narrative, can justifiably be seen to be a different self than s/he was at the time of the narrated. In concurrent narration, there is no time lapse between the narrator as 'character' and the narrator as narrator; there is no distinction between the narrator as she tells herself and the narrator doing the telling. As with the forking path, then, telling becomes a process of construction through which the narrator's self, in all its multiplicity and relationality, is narrated; and this revision of self as intersubjective is profoundly troubling to the notion of an autonomous Author figure.

Clearly, then, concurrent narration is a mode which has important destabilizing and deconstructive effects, particularly regarding a Genettian model of temporality defined by the distinction between the time of the narrated and the time of the narrating. Yet, because it is characterized by fluidity rather than rupture and is in many ways *more* mimetic than conventional retrospective narration, it has not been labelled a 'postmodernist' mode nor confined to 'experimental' texts. Rather, it is a mode whose increasing currency is evidence of how the very foundations of what we call 'narrative' are changing dramatically in line with a world where doubt and contingency prevail; it is to understand narrative structure not as hierarchically ordered, reducible to a single point of origin, or defined by events, but as *experiential*,⁸⁶ tracing a dynamic which is as fluid, unlikely, contradictory or collective as human experience. Concurrence is a notable example both of the vitality of narrative discourse and of its always historically situated characteristics; and it also gestures to an important site of intersection between feminist and postmodernist writing: the collapsing of hierarchical structures and the assumptions underlying them. I am engaging here, of course, with the interconnection of politics and poetics, but more specifically I want to read these texts in terms of what I conceive as the 'textual democracy' they enact at the level of form.

⁸⁶ Fludernik's *Natural Narratology* cites 'experientiality' rather than 'plot' as the most basic property of all narrative (pp. 12–13). See my Introduction, p. 19.

Here, however, my project needs to move beyond existing narratological studies of postmodernist forms: McHale's, Hutcheon's, but also Richardson's and Fludernik's. Post-classical narratologies expose the limits of structuralist narratological vocabularies, typologies and realist-based corpuses, showing how 'experimental' texts break the sequences of 'conventional' ones. However, the radical, bottom-up deconstruction of narrative theory that Andrew Gibson's *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* undertakes is based on the idea that the very foundations of conventionality continue to be misconceived. As my Introduction explained, for Gibson, narrative has never been a 'grid' ordering and containing the chaos of 'reality', but rather has had a grid imposed upon it by narratology itself, a grid made up of the triad of parameters, time, voice and frame, which continue to provide a framework for narrative analysis, and to reduce narrative complexity to the segmentarity of form, paying no attention to the excesses of 'force'.

Exploding the container of form: echoes and lines of force

As I noted in my Introduction, Gibson has persuasively argued that narratology is 'pervaded by a "geometrics"',⁸⁷ which means that it 'has repeatedly constructed the space of the text as a unitary, homogeneous space, determined by and organised within a given set of constants. Narratological space has seldom been disturbed by blurrings, troubling ambivalences or multiplications'.⁸⁸ He proposes a pluralized narrative theory which, as well as studying form, also takes account of how 'force', in the Derridean sense, exceeds and transgresses the segmentarity of structure via 'migrations of particles', 'cross-currents', 'lines of force'.⁸⁹ The next part of this chapter will examine, in the light of Gibson's radical postmodern revisioning of narrative theory, how the energetics, the play of 'force' at work in *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic* radiates trajectories of meaning – Brossard's 'explosions of sense' – which cut across

⁸⁷ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 58.

those set out by form. This is to move towards a mode of narrative analysis that conceives formal exploration not only as an oppositional aesthetics defined in relation to a perceived 'convention' or 'norm' which its 'experiments' subvert, but also as something which might require wholly different frameworks. To read for narrative forces and foldings, rather than always to focus on the narrative line, its *unfolding*, is a mode of close reading where the narratological work of unpicking ceases to strip form from content/context and begins to multiply rather than to unravel the pleasure of the text. If, as Gibson argues, narrative has never been a grid, but only read through one, and if it is re-read as that which 'allows hierarchical structures to emerge only as phantom shapes which can never prove adequate to the phenomena they seek to formulate',⁹⁰ then we can see how a postmodern narrative theory is also feminist: narrative is conceived as a space of plurality and energy, and textual power relations come under scrutiny as we move towards the kinds of textual democracies that I will further conceptualize in Chapter Three.

In both *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn*, voices of characters, narrators, narratees, even 'real' authors are constantly drawn into relations of indeterminacy, where self and other enter into transformative intersubjective relations. These texts are separated into distinct segments, but the dynamics of similarity or ambiguity constantly cross-cut the borders of difference. Here, through the presence of what I will refer to as *echoes*, Marlatt and Brossard engage a non-linear reading process based on loopings and retakes, but also on a reading for comparison, if comparison is understood in the sense Brossard uses in *Baroque*: 'comparison stimulates ambition, envy, desire and [...] thinking that enables us to proceed to action, which is to say, to equalizing the differences between objects and individuals' (p. 160). To describe the cross-cutting dynamics, I employ a term which Gibson in turn adapts from Deleuze and Guattari: 'lines of force'. These, simply put, are the textual trajectories that cut across form; allusions to other parts of the text or other texts in the form of cross-currents or 'migrations': 'lines of force

⁹⁰ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 234.

transpose textual elements, traverse the dimensions established by segmentarity, and make them indefinite'.⁹¹ The 'line' is a major trope in *A Thousand Plateaus*; most commonly cited is the 'line of flight', the path of escape from the 'segmentarity' of the State apparatus, but 'force' is a more expansive notion which does not carry with it the resonance of colonial discourse implicit in notions of State/margins. In fact, if used carefully, Deleuzian theory's explosion of binary thought and resistance of originary myths finds useful applications in both postcolonial and feminist theoretical work.⁹² As Gibson recognizes, reading the patterns played out in feminist postmodernist fictions benefits considerably from the radically anti-hierarchical premises of Deleuze's philosophical work. Yet, in fact, Brossard's own formulation of 'exploding one-way sense' articulates something very similar, suggesting another way in which writing in the feminine dialogues with and extends postmodernist conceptions of narrative.

Narrative echoes in *Baroque at Dawn*

Images of force and explosion accommodate the presence of violence and the apocalyptic in much of Nicole Brossard's writing, as in *Baroque*'s opening metaphor of a city 'armed to its teeth'. Yet 'lines of force' might displace some of the subtlety of the resonances and repetitions at work in her writing. Louise Forsyth uses 'arteries' to convey Brossard's textual movements: 'The highly charged synergy passing among her words in arteries other than normal syntactic and narrative paths causes her texts to pulse with the rhythms of emotional, erotic, intellectual and spiritual ardour'.⁹³ This term works harmoniously with the corporeality of Brossard's writing, but favours poetic over formal precision. For me, encountering figures (like the red-coated Hyde Park woman) or phrases that I am conscious of already having seen within the text,

⁹¹ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 58. He adapts the term from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), for whom Derrida's 'Force and Signification' was formative (in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass, trans. (1978; London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–35).

⁹² Rosi Braidotti shows feminist versions. Edward Said and Edouard Glissant are important postcolonial examples, though more recently there have been critiques of the application of Deleuzian philosophy to non-Western contexts (see John K. Noyes, 'Nomadism, Nomadology, and Postcolonialism: By Way of Introduction', in the dedicated issue of *interventions*, 6.2 (2004), 159–68).

⁹³ Louise H. Forsyth, 'To Write: In the Feminine Is Heavy with Consequences', in Forsyth, ed., *Nicole Brossard*, pp. 34–51 (p. 36).

transforms reading *Baroque* into an experience of déjà-vu: a dissonant echo (louder and more dissonant than the echoes other novels create through intertextual references) which at once unsettles knowledge and multiplies the points of engagement between myself and the text. I therefore suggest that the myriad lines of force which traverse *Baroque* work as a tissue of echoes, collapsing separation or segmentation between narrators, characters, spaces, moments. And in this way, they invite reading to follow a dynamic that is central to the novel's vision for collaboration in the feminine, that of *comparison*: 'Sniffing the other out. Comparing. Never feeling alone' (p. 21).

A reader might, on first reading in particular, experience *Baroque* as Lynette Hunter has described: as 'a text through which the images pass too swiftly, through which syntax hurtles our body'.⁹⁴ And once the 'vertiginous nausea' has passed, s/he might still follow the flow of connectivity and desire towards the end, feeling from time to time those frissons of déjà-vu but letting them pass, and finishing with a sense of the merging and confusion of selves and stories. Comparing Karen McPherson's essay 'Writing the Present' with Alice Parker's *Liminal Visions* uncovers friction between one reading which works on the immediacy of the surface effects of merging and confusion, and another which, almost mathematically, begins to unpick the complex structures underlying them. For McPherson, the novel's final section 'forges and at the same time baffles connections and identifications, for the levels of narration in the novel are so interwoven as to confound any attempt to untangle them'.⁹⁵ Parker's analysis, in contrast, finds beneath this confusion 'the complex enfolding of dimensions we can only calculate mathematically, a *mise en abîme* of texts within texts';⁹⁶ and adds that 'the critical and analytical focus is on the narratological relationship of writer to character and voice, the ways in which

⁹⁴ Hunter, 'The *Inédit*', pp. 234–5.

⁹⁵ Karen S. McPherson, 'Writing the Present in Nicole Brossard's *Baroque d'aube*', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 30.3 (2000), 361–82 (p. 374).

⁹⁶ Alice A. Parker, *Liminal Visions of Nicole Brossard* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 202.

they are mutually constitutive, and the ontological significance of constructing such intersecting worlds'.⁹⁷

My own work, narratologically driven as it is, comes closer to Parker's, but McPherson's reading has considerable value in exposing how, although *Baroque* asks the reader to recognize its formal play, its indeterminacy is part of how it *makes sense*: 'It is ultimately less important to be able to identify the narrator of "Un seul corps..." as *one* of the writer characters in the novel than to identify her *with all* of them. In its referential indeterminacy, the final section of *Baroque d'aube* essentially presents what it names: *one single body for comparison*.'⁹⁸ In the slippage between readings, in the dissonance which runs through a reading community as we try to engage with the complexity of Brossard's writing, inheres an ethical moment of defying 'one-way thinking'.⁹⁹ It answers a resounding *yes* to Janet Paterson's question: 'les romans postmodernes québécois ne nous invitent-ils pas en effet à lire *différemment* et à penser *autrement*?' ['don't Québécois postmodern novels in fact invite us to read *differently* and to think *otherwise*?'].¹⁰⁰

What makes my reading of *Baroque at Dawn* such a complex and multidirectional process are the echoes of apparently minor images or words which resurface from time to time, drawing lines of connectivity and overlap through the text, and creating what Gibson, drawing on Deleuze, calls 'intensities'.¹⁰¹ Tracing the echoes is to articulate how the novel makes sense to me, and hopefully also to open up new pathways of meaning. The usual passage through a novel, along which much is forgotten, particularly descriptive details, is ruptured again and again by this strategy which sends a closely attentive reader arcing back and forth through the narrative in search of these connections. Echo: a woman by the sea, hair flattened by the fierce

⁹⁷ Parker, *Liminal Visions*, p. 207.

⁹⁸ McPherson, 'Writing the Present', p. 375.

⁹⁹ For example, the different readings of *Baroque* as mathematically ordered (by Parker) and an inextricable muddle (by McPherson).

¹⁰⁰ Paterson, *Moments postmodernes*, p. 130. My translation.

¹⁰¹ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 58.

wind, an image which obsesses 'Cybil' (p. 12; p. 39) and comes also to the English novelist (p. 206). Echo: women walking in cities. Echo: Buenos Aires and the tango, a vital imaginative and physical experience for 'Cybil' (via La Sixtine's story), for Cybil (visiting the city), and for the English novelist dancing tangos with her translator in Montreal. Echo: the arch of an arm, where the morning light in 'Cybil's hotel room evokes 'the movements made by heroines when, upon awakening, they gracefully stretched their arms, raising arches of carnal triumph in the air' (p. 8), which resonates powerfully much later, in the English novelist's description of her mother: 'Daybreak all pink and the colours she claimed to see in sounds when she stood against the window of a morning, making a great circle of life with her arms' (p. 221).¹⁰²

On the one hand, these look simply like literary themes, the recurrent presence of an image or sound or setting. On the other, the resurfacing of echoes (metamorphosing, like Echo herself) inside apparently different story levels collapses the ground on which the traditionally hierarchical, level-based conception of narrativity stands, an example of how 'form – again – becomes merely a provisional container to be exploded repeatedly by force. Force is made most perceptible precisely in its deformations of form'.¹⁰³ *Baroque's* intensities are sites where memories and imaginations overlap, and where 'cross-currents' of language and story traverse the novel, cutting lines of force from one body to another and making for an intersubjective space of writing in the feminine.

The echoes also resonate within the novel's metafictional play, in that they provide clues to the intertextual, intersubjective relations between stories and selves. Both the mention of many other texts and writers throughout the novel (Beckett (another echo), Carroll, Hugo, Hébert,

¹⁰² Other sweeping arm gestures occur when a violinist describes holding the bow as 'graceful, fertile, and excit[ing] the imagination like the gloved arm of an elegant woman' and dismisses his audience with 'a wave of his hand over his head', a gesture in which La Sixtine reads 'a libertarian use of air space', and adopts at the end of her own performances (p. 32); and also when Cybil 'absentmindedly drew the back of her hand across the table. This raised an immense breaker you would think straight out of a Hokusai engraving' (p. 145). Lianne Moyes' 'Nothing Sacred' (p. 36) alerts me to another echo as she describes the arm of Adam stretched out towards God in Michaelangelo's painting; this repeated gesture, then, might be read as a reclaiming, a reposing of this work of art and its religious symbolism.

¹⁰³ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 58.

Bersianik...), and Brossard's generous and playful use of epigraphs, like 'We are a race enslaved to narrative' (p. 43) and 'There is another problem – how is one to judge an author's sincerity' (p. 199), have a similar effect of casting the reader's imagination wide in search of intertextual connections and comparisons. A distinctly (post)modernist device of the dispersal and fragmentation of meaning, perhaps, but this is also a strategy *au féminin* for levelling the hierarchies of author/ity and voice in favour of a collaborative textuality: 'one single body'.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the passage of the Hyde Park woman through the novel, and the implications this has for Brossard's games with auto(bio)graphical reference. This unnamed, red-coated 'Hyde Park' woman, who here seems to be the smallest of the Russian dolls which Brossard's novel sets in relation, not only refuses to stay put by weaving her way in and out of the rest of the text, but with her father's books stacked 'like three Towers of Babel' (p. 16) she is finally revealed to be *almost* identical with the English novelist herself, whose own books are stacked 'like a Tower of Babel' (p. 217). In that (almost) the same figure – her metamorphic narrative echo – is both the innermost and the outermost 'doll', this is in fact not a Russian-doll structure at all, but takes a far more permeable pattern through which formal order collapses in on itself as narrative selves are deliberately placed in complex relations of identity and difference.

To elaborate, the novel's clearest echo is the repetition, word for word, of the phrase, 'The sugar bowl looks like a volcano' (p. 16; p. 201). The first occurrence of this image is itself full of echoes: 'Cybil Noland' imagines it first as a thought in the mind of the Hyde Park woman, having tea and trying to write her novel, but in fact it arrives from elsewhere. On the previous page, 'Cybil' hears a radio item about horrific acts of violence occurring in her fictionalized world of cities 'armed to the teeth'; immediately afterwards, 'she thinks about the morning she spent in a Covent Garden café' imagining this woman novelist as one who 'lacks vocabulary to describe the volcano of violence erupting in cities' (p. 15). Later in the same passage, 'the sugar bowl looks like a volcano' not only resonates with the earlier 'volcano of violence', but also shows how the language of 'Cybil's memory of this imaginary scene is itself transformed by the

radio broadcast she has just heard. When the sugar bowl image reappears at the end of the first page of 'One Single Body For Comparison', it is being used by the English novelist in reference to the tea tray in her Montreal hotel room in the period after having finished her novel. A jolt, a remembrance of having heard these striking words before, is a clue, asking us to move against the linear flow of the text towards its end, thinking back instead to words and images already experienced, and *comparing*. Initiated by this strong echo, piece by piece (notably through the comparison between pp. 15–16, p. 217 and p. 251) the clues connect the English novelist to the Hyde Park woman, but in ways (as with the booktower(s) of Babel) which deny complete identification (which Brossard had originally envisaged in her plans),¹⁰⁴ conveying instead a dynamic of comparison and interrelation between narrative selves, at once distinct from one another and drawn together in 'one single body'.

Indeed, tracing the path of the Hyde Park woman through the novel reveals a remarkable pattern of interrelation and fluidity of identity. In 'Hotel Rafale', she appears as an imaginary figure in the mind of 'Cybil Noland' (p. 15; p. 34). In 'Rimouski' she is the red-coated heroine of one of Cybil Noland's early novels, remembered by Irène Mage (p. 82). In 'Buenos Aires' there is an echo with Cybil and/or her English friend Lay, when they decide to spend time in a suite overlooking Hyde Park (p. 99). And in 'The *Dark Future*', she is a red-coated figure imagined by Cybil, once with 'eyes made up in Egyptian fashion' (p. 142) so that they echo the hieroglyphs 'Cybil' sees in La Sixtine's eyes (p. 34), and later in Hyde Park spontaneously reading aloud from *Alice in Wonderland* before speaking to Cybil about her French mother and English father (p. 178), echoing both the biography of the English novelist herself and of the fictionalized English 'Nicole Brossard' who Cybil met in London at a conference on autobiography (pp. 47–8). The possibility of identity between 'Nicole Brossard', the English novelist and the Hyde Park woman is evoked but also undermined by this very explosion of

¹⁰⁴ From Brossard's (undated) *cahiers préparatoires* in Box 11 of her archival holdings.

impossible manifestations of sameness and alterity. As Alice Parker observes, in *Baroque*, 'Writing scrambles the pieces so we no longer know the ontological status of the worlds the characters inhabit, or who invented whom. What matters here is their Sibylline power'.¹⁰⁵

Lines of force in *Ana Historic*

Ontological confusion, invention and the strength of female community are sites of convergence between Brossard's and Marlatt's texts; however, they are also sites of difference both in terms of the texts' feminist politics and their postmodernist poetics. What is most challenging about *Ana Historic* is that, like *Baroque*, it consistently refuses segmentary structures: not only do the stories, present and historical, bleed into and echo one another, but the narrative selves also merge into each other as their life-lines intersect in the process of storytelling. Rather than McHale's 'ontological frame-breaking', *Ana Historic*'s model is closer to Andrew Gibson's, in which there are no frames so solid as to require dramatic breakage: the text is its own telling, a text in process. Annie writes: "history says of her..." but when you're so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact – what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up' (p. 56). Structurally speaking, a frame is a means of control imposed upon multiplicity by a mediating subject. Instead, narrative levels in this novel are illusory, set up only to collapse into a 'tangle of hair'. Almost a decade before Andrew Gibson published his postmodern narrative theory, then, Daphne Marlatt's writing *practice* set out a similar challenge: *Ana Historic* defies the segmented narratological grid but demands by its very complexity a close, analytical reading process that can follow the interweavings of story and hear the echoes of voice.

In Gérard Genette's classical formulation, 'any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed'.¹⁰⁶ But how to define what is extradiegetic (belonging to the level of writing), intradiegetic (at the level of the first narrative) or meta-/hypodiegetic (at the second-degree

¹⁰⁵ Parker, *Liminal Visions*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁶ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (1972; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 228.

level) in *Ana Historic*? True, there is a text-within-the-text in the form of the specifically 'written' text that Annie is writing – the third-person fictionalized narrative of Ana's life – but this is a fragmentary, partial account which is fleshed out through its intertextual relations to the many other fragments surrounding it. Likewise, the historical extracts, quotes from Ana's journal and dialogues between Annie and Ina are not 'embedded' texts, they are threads running into and transforming one another. Framing plays an important part in narrative's ethical workings in that it establishes who speaks and who they speak for, determining how we come to hear what we hear. By refusing to embed one story within another, the techniques of juxtaposition and echo refuse the hierarchical textual power relations (antithetical to Marlatt's feminist project) which the conventional arrangement of levels represents in favour of a textual democracy.

Marlatt has discussed her novel precisely in terms of 'cross-cuttings' between discourses:

yes, that's what i want to work with, these cross-cuttings or intersections (colonialism, feminism, otherness, isolation & eccentricity (madness), Ina's struggle, & Annie's not to repeat it – Annie's feelings of 'belonging' (to this place, Vancouver – as well as being 'Canadian,' what that might mean?) cross-cut with her displacement as a woman.¹⁰⁷

Polyphony opens texts up to the possibility of dissonance, of indeterminacy which geometrics cannot contain. It functions here through the novel's multiplicity of texts and intertexts. Only a few pages into the novel, Annie's narrative of memories of her childhood spent in Vancouver's woodland breaks off, and the first entirely other discourse enters in the form of an italicized extract from an historical document. It begins '*Douglas fir and red cedar are the principal trees*' (p. 13), which relates it to the previous section via the continued treatment of a woodland theme; but the extract's relationship to the narrative is far more complex and interwoven than this. It follows shortly after Annie's memories of the woods: 'that part she and her sisters called the Old Wood, moulted and softened with years of needle drift, tea-brown, and the cedar stump

¹⁰⁷ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 15.

hollow in the middle where they nestled in a womb, exchanging what it's, [...] sniffing the odour of tree matter become a stain upon their hands like dried blood' (p. 12). Here, she lays claim to this womblike, body-like space, not just territorially but by discursively feminizing it. The italic version of the woods, on the other hand, is one to which men lay claim, not to play in but to plunder. Through dramatic contrast, the personification of the womblike cedar stump where the sisters 'nestled' works to convey the violence of the use of trees '*largely [...] for shipbuilding, bridge work, fencing, railway ties, and furniture*' (p. 14). Importantly, the extracts are marginalized in terms of their relative length and frequency, their prosaic factuality nudged aside in favour of an other subjective poetics based on the experiential. The absence of references to the extracts' real sources (besides a list of source texts secreted in the Acknowledgements), which come from Marlatt's extensive research in Vancouver's archives, denies the almost entirely male-authored historical record any higher factual status than Marlatt's and Annie's fictional creations. Discursive hierarchies, like narrative ones, are thus called into question.

A few pages later, the woods are discursively constructed differently again; this time Annie quotes from the writing of 'an immigrant school teacher' (not named, but certainly implied to be Ana) sitting in the forest: 'To touch the soft fingerlings of Fir, the scaly fronds of Cedar! – Underfoot, a veritable pelt of needle droppings' (p. 20). Structurally speaking, the echoes between the three versions of the woods prompt questions about the dynamics of intertextual relations between the different internal texts, and this question is important for understanding the processual and polyphonic nature of textual construction as Marlatt dramatizes it on the page. Is the sisters' Old Wood an entirely independent memory, or has it taken its specificity from the historical texts which Annie has come across in her research? In the case of the echo of Annie's needle drift and womblike cedar stump in Ana's 'soft fingerlings' and 'pelt of needle droppings', the latter certainly appears to be the case. The interpretive problem the reader has, of course, is that, as with the other historical extracts, there is no source reference to suggest that Ana's journal is a 'real' document rather than another invention of Annie's. Is Annie re-

remembering her childhood through the lens of another woman's written memories, or inventing a historical journal that finds itself filtered through her own personal memories? There is no determinable answer to that question. Here the technique of juxtaposition rather than embedding or running into the body of the main narrative is at its most potent: the reader might ask questions of each internal text, why is it there? How is it different from, but also, crucially, similar to the texts it sits between? Polyphony calls for the novel to be read not along a dynamic of linear relationality but according to its echoes, repetitions, 'lines of force'. Meaning radiates in multiple directions, making unexpected relations at different points both within and outside the text, as part of each reader's particular interaction with it.

For this reason, it is important to consider in some detail the site where form most seems to explode: on the pages of prose/poems that separate the seven parts of the novel, what I will call the 'interruptive' pages. There is a revealing irony to the fact that the first piece, consisting solely of the statement 'a book of interruptions is not a novel', appears on a page which is itself a kind of 'interruption' between Annie's i-narrative and her historical writing. The interruptive pages, however, are not isolated from the other narrative strands because each interruption resonates outwards. For example, the interruption

come back, history calls, to the solid
ground of fact. you don't want to fall
off the edge of the world – (p. 111)

has a significant effect on my reading of the sequence that follows it. For the first time in the asterisk-divided sequences, the alternation between male factual discourse (about a boat-race) and female fictional discourse (about Mrs Alexander giving birth) is further broken up by Annie's digressions, all of which engage in a linguistic play of associations that highlights how gendered the languages of the two discourses are:

*FALSEHOOD OF THE HOUR: 'That Philander is "down" on the "Pearl."
That he has any reason to be...'*

*

the ships men ride into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels of their destiny. the ship R.H., H.O. ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother – ahistoric [...]

*

After the flurry of things to be attended to – Harriet and hot water, the children upset by a sense of crisis [...] – now there was quiet and waiting. Now there was the apprehension Ana felt staring through a bedroom window in the evening light, amber and viscous as honey. (p. 121)

The ‘solid ground of fact’ that history calls Annie to is shown here to be the shifting sands of language. We have all fallen off the edge of the world, but rather than falling into the absence of the dash’s implied silence, we discover that sailing over the horizon brings us to new stories.

The next interruption picks up the former’s last word (yes, another connection across; another tangled strand):

worlds apart she says
the world is

a-historic
she who is you
or me
‘i’

address this to (p. 129)

And again, the poem on the final page of the novel is an ‘interruption’, but also a continuation, picking up the multiple pronouns of the previous interruption, and transforming them into its opening ‘we’. Concluding with ‘reading / us into the page ahead’, this strand playfully transforms the novel’s ‘conclusion’ into an interruption, something in-between, which will continue beyond the confines of the book.¹⁰⁸ The interruptive pages themselves, then, establish their own interconnective logic, their own story, which even further disrupts the status of interruption as isolation and fracture.

Beyond the subversion of textual hierarchies, however, the story of the interruptions has another function which impacts upon the path a reader might take through the novel. Whereas

¹⁰⁸ Cf. my discussion of this final poem in Chapter Two, p. 122.

the alternate narrative sequences presented up to now lead me to a conception of the novel that can assimilate the considerable textual hybridity into the organizing logic of Annie producing a novel, these interruptions ask serious questions about the viability of such a harmonious reading. The initial interruptive line, 'a book of interruptions is not a novel' (p. 37), raises the first major ontological doubts about what we have been reading up to this point. Who is interrupting with this literary critique? Is it Annie, in her anxiety about the literariness or the worth of what she is writing, predicting her implied readers' criticisms? Or Ina, in a typically brusque critique of her daughter's mingling of fiction and history? Is it an unreferenced quote from some conservative literary critic? Or is it the metafictional presence of the *auther* herself? A loose page from Marlatt's archives suggests this might be 'a larger consciousness than Annie's', 'outside the novel' but 'non-specified', and while this by no means provides a definitive answer, it connotes a sense of indeterminacy which wins out. Through this process of working out, of thinking through, of reading as a set of questions rather than a series of answers, *Ana Historic* enables, for the engaged close reader, a reading practice that aims not so much for closure as for process.

I have argued that in most of the novel the combination of juxtaposition and echo both establishes and resists the harmony of a shaping narrative consciousness (albeit a consciousness that is multiple and in process). In the interruptions, however, the words are isolated on a page between two blank pages, entirely unframed and in a position where extratextual citations often appear but with no indicators as to their origin or how they should be received. The reader, then, is in control (though perhaps also at a loss) and has three choices: s/he might conclude that this *is* a book of interruptions and thus not a novel; a novel and thus *not* a book of interruptions; or both and thus the statement is false. The first reading focuses on the fractured presentation of the text, the juxtaposition of different and apparently different discourses; the second looks for connections, thematic and otherwise, which allow the text to be narrativized, assimilating its multiplicity into harmony; the third does both and neither: it recognizes the tension between narrative coherence and continual rupture as the tension inherent in writing/reading. The

breaking into narrative with a criticism or, as in the second prose piece on the page, a question about a character ('what is her name? she must have one [...]'), is characteristic of all but the most distracted of readings; in other words, even in a classic, entirely uninterrupted realist novel (if such a thing were to exist) interruptions appear in the text as the reader engages with and constructs her/his version of it.

In this way, Marlatt is writing the writing and reading process not as a single line leading through a text towards an end that will define our remembering/re-reading of the text, but rather as the 'tangle of hair' of the epigraph: many interwoven strands (some broken or split) with different roots and ends, and not necessarily all belonging to a single head – we have our heads together producing this novel, Marlatt, Annie, Ana, Zoe, and I. The interruptions are one of the few elements of the text not attributable with reasonable confidence to Annie's narrating self; thus they represent the textualization of intersubjectivity, and of the tension between division (of genders, sexualities, cultures, generations, conveyed by the fractures) and community (conveyed by the echoes and connections). Here we can see *Ana Historic's* narrative strategies working in terms of the two faces of women's experience as Marlatt formulates them elsewhere: 'over and over again, women return to what they have in common, their experience as women, both its bitter side, defined in opposition to patriarchal culture at large, and its joyous side, as they reaffirm their kinship and rediscover a shared tradition of women-affirmed writing – a writing, as the Québécoises say, in the feminine.'¹⁰⁹

Auto(bio)graphical metafiction: reading narrative intersubjectivity

In *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn*, a dynamic of collectivity cuts across both linearity and the fragmentation of multiple or incommensurable modes. The novels work in different ways towards a poetics of intersubjectivity (in the feminine), and in each case this pluralization of narrative subjectivities is one of their most innovative challenges to novelistic convention. This

¹⁰⁹ Daphne Marlatt, 'In the Feminine', in Dybikowski et al, eds, *in the feminine*, pp. 11–13 (p. 12).

chapter's final critical move enacts an internal metamorphic echo as I revisit ideas about the novels' metafictionality and draw them together with Marlatt and Brossard's play of auto(bio)graphical reference, so as to reinterpret both critical frames in the light of the structures of intersubjectivity, the blurring of narrative selves, that we have seen to be vital to the novels' formal innovations.

In a 1986 essay, 'Narrative Subjectivity', Mieke Bal re-envisioning the narrative situation in terms of the interaction between different subjectivities, where each speaker, focalizer, actor is viewed from the point of view of the speaker, focalizer, actor on the next diegetic level.¹¹⁰ While this is a productive notion for my study, I have shown that the distinct and hierarchically arranged diegetic levels which Bal's theory presupposes are dissolving in feminist metafiction. Jessica Benjamin's feminist psychoanalytical work on intersubjectivity suggests why situating selves and others relationally has enduring value for understanding the ethico-politics of textual relations in innovative feminist writing: 'What psychoanalysis considers the problem of overcoming omnipotence is [...] always linked to the ethical problem of respect and the political problem of nonviolence.'¹¹¹ Indeed, crucial to the writerly anxiety affecting both *Cybil* and *Annie*, as fictional substitutes for Brossard and Marlatt, is the move away from a sense of the Author as sole originator of a finite masterwork, towards a model of collaborative creativity in which a woman writes her life, but with the help of many others: the readers, writers, translators, lovers that Brossard calls 'syncrones'. This enacts the kind of female 'connivance' which Brossard cites as her own inspiration: 'Work spaces among women linked by a project are stimulating and productive, and I have always associated pleasure, friendship and festivity with them.'¹¹²

¹¹⁰ In Bal, *On Story-telling*, pp. 146–70.

¹¹¹ Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 94.

¹¹² Brossard, 'Fragments', p. 28. I would argue that community does not do material good if it exists purely as an idealized scene of intimacy and collaboration that sidelines the discord and failed interactions which also define the dynamics of intersubjective encounters; in both novels, such dissonances necessarily do arise.

In *Baroque*, as elsewhere in Brossard's work, the writer/reader/translator relationship acts out such a vision of connivance prominently through its pronominal structures. The English novelist initially refers to her Québécoise translator impersonally, but by the end of the novel, which has been written mostly in the third person, with some shifts into first and second, 'we' has become the prominent pronoun. Writer and translator, now *lovers*, addressing each other as 'tu', are 'physically of the same mind about many ideas. Our thoughts overlap' (p. 246). Thus, the intense and erotic connivance between writer and translator echoes the 'festivity' (as well as the age difference) of 'Cybil' and La Sixtine's affair in 'Hotel Rafale', ending the novel as it began, with a scene of lesbian desire; of 'one single body for comparison'. As we have seen above, though, the closest community is created through narrative echoes themselves, which trouble the borders of the skin, overlapping the various writing/reading/translating figures within the text.¹¹³

Such a blurring of narrative selves is also a defining feature of *Ana Historic's* poetics. Annie's mother and, later, Zoe both rewrite her stories, Ina by repeatedly interrupting her narration and Zoe through her critical readings of Annie's work-in-progress. The narratees become instrumental in storytelling, and as they reshape her writing, Annie's sense of self increasingly overlaps with Ina's and Ana's stories, until hers and Ana's plotlines merge when they both choose the same fork in the path leading away from the heterosexual marriage script. Told to 'pull yourself together', Annie wonders '(myself? yourself? theirs?)', and she explains to Ina, 'i feel myself in you, irritated at the edges where we overlap' (p. 17). The replacement of 'I' with 'i' not only resists the hierarchical connotations of capitalization, but also constitutes a refusal to write under the narrow shadow of the dominant, proprietorial 'I' which

¹¹³ In the planning stages (Boxes 11 and 12 in her archives), Brossard worked with many different possible framing systems: an insensitive male editor figure whose edits the fictional writer is subverting; La Sixtine reappearing later outside of the 'Hotel Rafale' novel-within-the-novel section within which she is a character; and a late manuscript draft has a less elusive version of the final part with a stronger narrative line, narrated by the Hyde Park woman who reveals herself to be a friend of 'Nicole Brossard' and the author of the book written about the voyage aboard the *Symbol* (entitled *Spectacles*). The transformations Brossard makes between these preliminary ideas and her final arrangement of narrative frames seem to share a tendency: they ebb away some of the clarity around who is/is not whom, increasingly blurring the various narrative selves.

Virginia Woolf writes against in *A Room of One's Own*;¹¹⁴ it subverts the singular to make space for plural selves within the expression of the *i*, and to suggest that the *i*, like the writing itself, is subject to change, a self-in-process.

Articulating relational structures of self and community, these novels move from 'narcissistic' metafictional practices towards 'connivance'. This shift is furthered by both writers' revisionary engagement with the conventions of autobiographical reference, which constitutes a particularly playful and important element of their feminist *and* postmodernist ethics *and* poetics. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain in their study of feminist and postcolonial auto(bio)graphical practices, 'traditional "autobiography" has been implicated in a specific notion of "selfhood." This Enlightenment "self," ontologically identical to other "I"s, sees its destiny in a teleological narrative enshrining the "individual" and "his" uniqueness'.¹¹⁵ Life writing, or the yet broader category of self-writing, becomes a major site of innovation for (ambiguously) non-hegemonic writers who proceed from their own specific sense of being-in-the-world, and encompasses a wide spectrum of practices, from biography and autobiography 'proper', through diaries and *testimonio*, to autofiction and (semi)autobiographical novels. The term autobiography itself has been subject to revisions: for Smith and Watson it is 'a practice and act, rather than one genre'; Liz Stanley and Laura Marcus both use 'auto/biography' to collapse the boundary between the two traditional 'genres' of life writing,¹¹⁶ while 'autography' stages a further vocabulary shift, removing the association of *bios* with the *telos* of a whole or complete life story. In her study of feminist autography, Jeanne Perreault specifies that, 'In autography, I find a writing whose effect is to bring into being a "self" that the writer names "I,"

¹¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; London: Hogarth Press, 1930), p. 150.

¹¹⁵ Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, 'De/Colonization and the Politics of Discourse in Women's Autobiographical Practices', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. xiii–xxx (p. xvii).

¹¹⁶ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists', in Phelan and Rabinowitz, eds, *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, pp. 356–71 (p. 368); Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

but whose parameters and boundaries resist the monadic'; it is a mode of writing which 'invites the reader to reconsider the imbrications of subjectivity, textuality, and community'.¹¹⁷

Brossard and Marlatt's self-presencing in their novels, I will argue, adds a further *extradiegetic* dimension to the already considerable structural complexity of their fictions. Narratology's approach to the question of the author has tended to limit itself to Wayne Booth's 'implied author' figure, although poststructuralist theory has brought this notion under revision.¹¹⁸ In calling upon auto(bio)graphical theories, however, I am not suggesting a return to a notion of the author *in* the text with authority over it. On the contrary, I rely upon a poststructural conception of the autobiographical act and its writing/reading subject(s) not as originators of story but as constituted through the process of narration; and I suggest that contemporary women's writings of self ask important questions of both autobiography theory and narratology. For Smith and Watson, narratology has never accounted for the troubled fiction/non-fiction distinction which recent innovative auto(bio)graphical practices enact.¹¹⁹ Both *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* rethink the relation of writer to text by testing the limits of the auto(bio)graphical/fictional relationship; Marlatt has referred to her novel as a 'fictional autobiography',¹²⁰ and Brossard's text includes an English novelist character called 'Nicole Brossard'. The metafictional framework I began with and the auto(bio)graphical framework I conclude with resonate through one another, and a dynamic set of self-writing practices develops in between.

Susan Knutson, in her study of Marlatt's long poem *How Hug a Stone*, traces the development of Marlatt's 'knowing and narrating "i"', and writes of its narrator: 'She resembles

¹¹⁷ Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 2.

¹¹⁸ See Ruth Ginsberg and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's notion of 'author-versions' in 'Is There a Life after Death? Theorizing Authors and Reading *Jazz*', in Herman, ed., *Narratologies*, pp. 66–87, and Susan Lanser's rethinking of the implied author as a 'reading effect' in '(Im)plying the Author', *Narrative*, 9.2 (2001), 153–60, (p. 154). These will be considered in more detail in Chapter Three.

¹¹⁹ See Smith and Watson, 'The Trouble with Autobiography'.

¹²⁰ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 116

Daphne Marlatt, but it would be a mistake to claim that she is Daphne Marlatt.¹²¹ Rather, Knutson argues, ‘the subjectivity signified by the lower-case “i” is constructed as the sensing body listens for meaning(s), multiple and dialogic’.¹²² In choosing to narrate her novel in the first-person ‘i’ mode, Marlatt at once invites autobiographical identification and constantly defers it, by using a different proper name for the character-narrator of Annie.¹²³ There is no autobiographical pact here, in Phillippe Lejeune’s terms,¹²⁴ nor is there any textual indicator of autobiographical intent, save the i – which is problematized anyway by its lower-case form. But Annie’s constant sense of blurring between her own life and those of her characters or narratees works within the broader metafictional scheme of the novel as a whole to project outwards; to suggest that this is what is inevitably at stake in writing:

(there goes Annie, assuming she’s different from each of them. safe in her parentheses, her own cover story. [...] ...

break the parentheses and let it all surface! falling apart. we are, i am. we have fallen apart. the parts don’t fit. not well. never whole. never did. (p. 150)

As always in auto(bio)graphical fiction/fictional auto(bio)graphy, the existence of this blurring of lives is dependent on the reader playing the game – knowing more or less about the writer’s life and being willing to transfer that knowledge into her/his reading of the text. That is to say, fictional auto(bio)graphy is dependent on context: in *Ana Historic*’s case it is dependent on readers knowing about Marlatt’s biography, as those who have read any of her other (semi)autobiographical works would.¹²⁵ Perhaps the contextuality of the form gives an idea as to its value for feminist writing: it calls for the reader to explore the community that is set up between her/himself, the writer, the text and its context. As Marlatt writes elsewhere, ‘When

¹²¹ Knutson, *Narrative in the Feminine*, p. 79.

¹²² Knutson, *Narrative in the Feminine*, p. 90.

¹²³ Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: The Bodley Head, 1933) is a radical and influential example of displaced autobiography. Later, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (London: Heinemann, 1963) and Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (London: Michael Joseph, 1962) also play games with naming.

¹²⁴ Phillippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

¹²⁵ Frank Davey, informed by his personal relationship with Marlatt, provides an account of what is/is not autobiographical in *Ana Historic*: the details of Annie’s family being different from Marlatt’s, but many other details being in common, down to the model of family car (‘Autobiographical Metafiction’, p. 129).

text becomes context, when it leaves behind the single-minded project of following a singular lifeline, a singular i, when it drops out of narrative as heroic climax and opts for narrative as the relation of context, of what surrounds us, then we are in the presence of a writing for life'.¹²⁶ Such writing defies narrative autonomy, replaces the idea that a text fits itself into a predetermined genre with the idea that genre identity is built up through the reading of the text itself, paratextual markers and the context of its publication.

Resisting any easy identifications, Marlatt insists that if her work is autobiographical, it is not in the conventional sense. If *Ana Historic* is life writing, it is a (fictionalized) biography of Mrs Richards, or even of Ina, as much as it is auto(bio)graphical fiction. But in that these selves are non-identical, intersubjective, overlapping, so do their auto(bio)graphical stories constantly exceed the boundaries of the individual life. Marlatt relates that, while writing the novel,

whole phrases came back to me that were my mother's [...]. The long maternal heritage that shaped me. I discovered that this was not only personal. For when I read from the book women in the audience would laugh with recognition at certain passages [...]. This sense of a larger inheritance which embeds the personal runs counter to the ideology of the self-created individual. Telling it requires a narrative of subtle interrelations, a matrix as significant as the individual figures which flare into focus and then recede into its texture, its textuality even.¹²⁷

It strikes me that the shape of *Ana Historic*'s play with genre and intersubjectivity is comprehensible only in the context of the close feminist *and* lesbian *and* writing community which is so essential to Marlatt's sense of her self and of her writing (my *and*'s indicate Marlatt's own particular position in this particular intersection of communities, and their non-exclusivity – made up of women and not, lesbian and not).

In the late 1970s, speech-act theory applied to literature, and later drawn upon by fictional worlds and autobiography theorists, demonstrated the shared internal properties of fictional and non-fictional discourse, which meant that only the context in which it is presented and received

¹²⁶ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 127.

¹²⁷ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 116.

– the communicational situation – could allow interpretation of a text as fictional or otherwise.¹²⁸ What is important in *Ana Historic*, however, as in much ‘writing in the feminine’, is not the distinction between fact and fiction, or what is implied by the writer as opposed to what is said by the narrator/character or understood by the reader. The importance is precisely the confusion of these narrative positions achieved by the play between fiction and auto(bio)graphy. For Marlatt, auto(bio)graphical practice enacts Nancy Miller’s concept of the performance of self in the space between fact and fiction.¹²⁹ Or, in her own words, ‘autobiography is not separable from poetry for me on this ground i would-call fictionalalysis: a self-analysis that plays fictively with the primary images of one’s life, a fiction that uncovers analytically that territory where fact and fiction coincide’.¹³⁰

The refusal of framing techniques in this novel, the continual dispersal of narrative hierarchy into juxtaposition and lateral movement, means that, beyond the unenlightening conclusion that Daphne Marlatt *really* wrote this whole book which was then published and printed and distributed, the question of what is mediated by whom and on how many levels is continually deferred. I would suggest, however, that there is one site where we might be *invited* to hear the voice of a ‘Daphne Marlatt’ figure speaking over Annie’s, and that is as the originator of the prose/poems of the seven interruptive pages. I find this supported in particular by the fact that these interruptions, at first very like prose, become more and more poetic, with the last being a fully developed, typically Marlattian poem. Marlatt is an established poet and *Ana Historic* is her first novel. As this is a ‘fictional autobiography’, Marlatt the writer is almost perfectly concealed behind the narrating figure of Annie who is created in many respects in her image. Nevertheless, there are places where the two outlines do not match, and Marlatt’s poet self, excluded from the production of this first novel, is one such mismatch. As such, the

¹²⁸ See Mary-Louise Pratt, *Towards a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

¹²⁹ Marlatt, ‘Perform[ing] on the Stage of Her Text’, in *Readings*, pp. 200–212.

¹³⁰ Marlatt, ‘Self-Representation and Fictionalysis’, p. 15.

increasingly poetic interruptions might be read as the interruption of Marlatt the poet into the prose writing of Marlatt the novelist; here, the border between fiction and poetry (already showing cracks where Annie's play of linguistic associations makes meaning radiate according to a radically non-linear logic) is opening up. We can read it as 'Marlatt', then, who is anxious that *she* might be producing a 'book of interruptions' rather than 'a novel'.

This is not to locate the writer as sole textual authority; on the contrary, her entry into the text serves precisely to dramatize her own split-ness: split between poet and novelist, between outside and inside, between narrating her own story (as auto(bio)grapher) and finding it filled with echoes of others' (as historian/novelist). In this way, the recurrent questions asked on the interruptive pages defer textual authority as far as possible; the text seems to be being carried away from Marlatt by Annie, whose own text is being carried away by Ana, Zoe, and Ina. The third interruption – 'she keeps insisting herself on the telling / because she was telling me right from the beginning / stories out of a life are stories, / true, true stories and real at once' (p. 67) – is thus read as Annie speaking of Ina or Ana, but also as Marlatt speaking of Annie. And the final 'interruption', the closing poem, becomes not just Annie and Zoe coming together in love and in writing/reading, but also an interaction between Annie, Marlatt and the reader: part of the whole intersubjective process by which this text is produced:

we give place, giving words, giving birth, to
each other – she and me. you. hot skin writing
skin. fluid edge, wick, wick. she draws me
out. you she breathe, is where we meet.
[...] it isn't dark but the luxury of being
has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading
us into the page ahead.

The presence of auto(bio)graphical play is on the one hand a not unusual metafictional means of foregrounding what McHale terms the 'ontological dimension' of the text;¹³¹ but on the other hand, it is an energetic model of textual *authority* based on a feminist revisioning of (inter)subjectivity. And while in *Ana Historic*, the self-reference is oblique, in Brossard's novel

¹³¹ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 120.

it is explicit and highly innovative, constituting a small but crucial element of the narrative situation. Indeed, Brossard's self-reflexive play with auto(bio)graphical reference is a vital clue to how intersubjectivity operates in *Baroque at Dawn*, and in writing in general. That is to say, poststructuralist theory's destabilizing of concepts of self, narrative and language has shifted the ground beneath autobiographical practices, so that the writing of the self is only ever the construction of one possible *version* of that self, and in language that is itself always metamorphic. It is therefore impossible to posit identity between writer and character, between self and self-representation. The not-quite-identity of the Hyde Park woman and the English novelist is one example of such impossibility, but more challenging is the presence within *Baroque* of a successful, feminist – but anglophone and *English* – novelist, 'Nicole Brossard'. Encountered once at the London autobiography conference and again at a publicity event in Buenos Aires for the translation of one of her books (pp. 118–21), on each occasion 'Brossard' inspires Cybil Noland with her writerly philosophies. A *mise en abyme* develops since, like Brossard herself, Cybil has not been able to avoid giving a character in her novel her own name, thus 'transgress[ing] a convention observed by those who since time immemorial have evaded reality the better to plunge impetuously into its spectacular, theatrical dimension' (p. 47). The problem, for Cybil, is that to write autobiographically constitutes 'an audacity whose narcissism put [her] off a bit'. But, having discovered literary precedents, and because Cybil (like Brossard) gives her name to a character who is determinedly *not* herself, her act of self-writing is not narcissistic, but creates an enabling interconnectivity between character, narrator, writer, and indeed translator. Again, this performs a shift from Narcissus to Echo. In a further twist, in Cybil Noland's experience of virtual reality, she is transformed into a woman giving birth on November 27, 1943 (p. 183); in this virtual moment, which is Nicole Brossard's actual date of birth, character gives birth to *auther*, and author/ity turns on its head.

Evidently, *Baroque at Dawn* enacts Smith and Watson's idea that somewhere between and beyond the inadequate generic categories of fiction and autobiography is a different space of multiplicity and interrelation, a space that offers an enabling point of departure for *écriture au*

féminin. Baroque, like *Ana Historic*, thus fulfils what France Théoret describes as ‘the task of women’s writing to undermine the unary vision of the speaking subject’.¹³² Transforming the processes of writing into the communal activity of *authership*, the novel rethinks female selfhood beyond the borders of the individual’s skin, because, ‘in order to be aware of oneself as an individual, that is as a unique being in the world, one must first of all recognize one’s membership in a group or a community’.¹³³ *Baroque*’s female community is formed not of multiple ‘I’s, but of selves, like the Hyde Park woman, which are fluid and permeable, intersecting with others in textual spaces of intensity.

To increase the specificity with which we talk about these two texts, and about other examples of experimental, self-referential, auto(bio)graphical fiction too,¹³⁴ I propose ‘auto(bio)graphical metafiction’ as a useful term, which draws both on such feminist revisionings of autobiographical discourse as Jeanne Perreault’s and on the characteristically postmodernist device of metafiction. Bringing intersubjectivity into the way we read such texts constitutes a further challenge to the narcissism of both critical frames, and accommodates the radical rethinking of self, community and narrative at work in Marlatt and Brossard’s writing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the liminal generic positioning and self-theorizing of *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* have continually exposed the limitations of individual critical frames, whether postmodernist, feminist, narratological or autobiographical, and have thus been valuable for my articulation of a pluralist approach to narratological criticism within which rigid, segmentary

¹³² Théoret, ‘Writing in the Feminine’, p. 364.

¹³³ Nicole Brossard, ‘Tender Skin My Mind’, Dympna Borowska, trans., in Borowska, ed., *In the feminine*, pp. 180–2 (p. 180).

¹³⁴ Susanna Scarparo’s *Elusive Subjects: Biography as Gendered Metafiction* (Leicester: Troubador, 2005) looks at a similar intersection between biographical, metafictional and feminist writing practices in genre-blending experimental writing from the U.S., Australia and Italy. Scarparo’s idea of ‘biography as gendered metafiction’ resonates with my work, but emphasizing the biographical over the fictional as she does is not quite fitting for these texts.

analytical 'grids' become inappropriate, and close attention to the many echoes and interferences across elements of narrative becomes essential. But this chapter has also been thinking its way through ideas about narrative (inter)subjectivity, neatly captured by the opening sentence of Jeanne Perreault's study of feminist autography: "'I" and "we" are the most important words in the writing(s) of contemporary feminism'.¹³⁵ The (im)possibilities of writing 'I'/'i' are at the heart of both Brossard's and Marlatt's narrative strategies, as they have been for so many feminist writers across the twentieth century. Rather than concepts of subjectivity being seen as a site of conflict between feminisms and postmodernisms, Brossard and Marlatt's writing has enabled an understanding of how productive encounters between the two can be. Indeed, as feminist auto(bio)graphical metafiction, *Ana Historic* and *Baroque at Dawn* ask us to think about what Smith and Watson call 'the ethics of naming, framing, and responding'.¹³⁶ Their intricate interplay of politics and poetics has required engaged, participatory strategies of reading. In beginning to think about narrative in ethical and intersubjective terms, however, 'I' and 'we' must be joined by another. So, in the following chapter, my attention turns to the 'you' pronoun and considers how the increasing use of second-person narration in contemporary writing speaks to a desire to bring the ethical encounter into the foreground of narrative form.

¹³⁵ Perreault, *Writing Selves*, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Smith and Watson, 'The Trouble with Autobiography', p. 364.

CHAPTER TWO

The Push and Pull of Narrative in the Second Person

‘Second persons’ engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement – whether in fondness or in fury. [...] Imposing meaning on someone else’s existence from a position removed from it, or ignorant of and indifferent to its specificities, is at the furthest remove from second-person knowing. [...] By contrast, empathy at its best resists closure, invites conversation, fosters and requires second-person relations.

Lorraine Code¹

Narrative and second personhood

This chapter proceeds from an understanding of ‘you’ as the pronoun of relationship, whose power ‘is based on recognizing the personhood of the other and hence the possibility for interaction’.² Through my readings of women’s innovative texts, I consider how the narrative ‘you’, or narration in the second person, can effect an engaged, intersubjective relation between self and other, which complicates reductive binaries of opposition and difference and relocates selfhood within matrices of community and relationship. I will argue that responding to the exigencies of second-person narration is a particularly interactive process, one in which ‘narrative ethics’ plays a constitutive role. My analytical practice, therefore, will combine close reading of the *formal* workings of narration in the second person with careful attention to its *ethical* dimensions; in other words, I am drawing an intersection between narratological approaches to the second person and Lorraine Code’s feminist philosophical model of ‘second personhood’. Following Annette Baier’s proposition that ‘persons are essentially *second persons*’,³ that the self’s development into an agentive, unique individual can only proceed out of its primary and continuing dependence on others, Code articulates a theory of relational, socially produced subjectivity that works against Kantian individualistic notions of

¹ Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 125–6.

² Irene Kacandes is drawing here on Emile Benveniste’s pronoun theories from his *Problems in General Linguistics*, ‘Narrative Apostrophe: Reading, Rhetoric, Resistance in Michel Butor’s *La modification* and Julio Cortazar’s “Graffiti”’, *Style*, 28.3 (1994), 329–49. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

³ Annette Baier, ‘Cartesian Persons’, in *Postures of the Mind*, p. 84, cited in Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 82.

‘autonomous man’. Her feminist philosophical move is meaningful not only for an understanding of the dialogic dynamics with which many contemporary women’s narratives disrupt the monologic author/ity of traditional modes of discourse, but also because, as I will go on to contend, it gestures towards a situated, participatory mode of critical reading/writing where we ‘engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement’.

In what follows, I develop the premise of the previous chapter by working towards a conception of narrativity based not on one central narrating voice but on networks of relationality, rethinking narrative subjectivity in terms of *intersubjectivity* in which selves and voices develop primarily in relation to others, as social, communal beings. I examine how contemporary women’s narratives employ distinctly *dialogic* modes of storytelling, drawing intra- and extratextual tellers and audiences into close engagement. While underpinned by dialogism in the broad Bakhtinian sense, as a function of all verbal utterances,⁴ my use of the dialogic or ‘interindividual’ refers more specifically to the overt and strategic foregrounding of the dispersal of a single narrative authority through the presence of a second person, a narratee. In a 1988 ‘conversation’ with Daphne Marlatt and other Canadian feminist writers, Gail Scott argues that ‘women’s struggle has added a new ideological slant to the notion [of the dialogic], underscoring the transgressive nature of writing as dialogue among women that modifies both the writing and the reading (and the writer and the reader)’.⁵ Almost twenty years later, the relational, collaborative, transgressive potential of writing-as-dialogue means that it continues to be an enabling and important mode not only for a transformative feminist poetics but also for other (ambiguously) non-hegemonic writers writing against the limitations of narrative conventions. The dialogic mode, exemplified perhaps by Nathalie Sarraute’s reframing of

⁴ ‘Discourse (as all signs generally) is interindividual. [...] The author (the speaker) may have inalienable rights upon the discourse, but so does the listener, as do those whose voices resonate in the words found by the author (since there are no words that do not belong to someone).’ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘The Problem of Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Other Human Sciences: An Essay of Philosophical Analysis’ (c.1960), pp. 300–1, cited in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Wlad Godzich, trans. (1981; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 52.

⁵ Barbara Godard, Susan Knutson, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott, ‘In Conversation’, *Tessera*, 5 (1988), 7–12 (p. 9).

fictional discourse in the form of dialogue in her 1980s work,⁶ is thus a means of deconstructing the traditional forms of Western literary storytelling, and *reconstructing* narrative itself as an intersubjective or ‘second-person’ space.

While I by no means intend to map any single ideological intention onto the second person, I would argue that the form does have a particularly potent ethical force.⁷ Narrative’s ethical dimension is never more explicit than when it calls for a direct response; that is, when it takes the form of writing-as-dialogue, when it addresses ‘you’. My textual analysis in this chapter will engage with existing narratological approaches to second-person narration, looking at some of its more common usages in two recent short story collections, Michèle Roberts’s *Playing Sardines* (2003) and Cherie Jones’s *The Burning Bush Women* (2004), before turning to three more complex examples, each of which intimately connects politics and poetics to distinct ends: Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* (1988), Ali Smith’s *The Whole Story and other stories* (2003), and Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994).

Narration in the second person is an increasingly frequent, although still relatively rare, stylistic choice and one that poses considerable challenges to the founding assumptions of structuralist narrative theory. Dennis Schofield sums up its innovations as follows:

Traditional concepts of narrative subjectivity and authority figure narrative agents, especially the narrator, as stable and self-identical – and therefore as providing readers with stable, distinct modes and positions of subjectivity with which to identify. The Protean second-person point of view, however, seems to reject this identification to produce an *intersubjectivity*, an ephemeral and fluid *subject-in-process*.⁸

Second-person fiction addresses a ‘you’ both inside and outside the text and thereby crosses the intra-/extratextual boundary differently each time (non)identification occurs. Its use reflects a

⁶ Her auto/biographical fiction *Enfance* (1983) is a well-known example, though *Tu ne t'aimes pas* (1989) is a more challenging conversation between multiple parts of an individual self (Nathalie Sarraute, *Œuvres Complètes*, Jean-Yves Tadié, ed. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996)). Sarraute’s innovations have seen her work often labelled as *nouveau roman*, and even famously (by Jean-Paul Sartre) as ‘anti-roman’, and in that her dialogic fictions approach dramatic scripts, I would argue they explore a limit space of narrativity.

⁷ I concur with Brian Richardson that it serves no one purpose (‘Linearity and Its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence’, *College English*, 62.6 (2000), 685–95 (p. 689)).

⁸ Dennis Schofield, ‘Beyond *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield*: The Radical Potentials and Recuperations of Second-Person Narrative’, *Style*, 31.1 (1997), 96–117 (p. 110).

desire to disrupt conventional relationships between the various participants in the narrative act (that is, between writer, narrator, character, narratee and reader) as well as to make new connections between these narrative selves, creating a relational, dialogic model of textuality. The echo with an ethical feminist approach to narrativity is clear: as Barbara Godard suggests in conversation in *Tessera*, the dialogic mode 'produces a new subject position, not a unitary subject, "I-for-myself," but a heterogeneous subject, "I-for-another" and the "not-I-in-me"'.⁹ In this sense, writing 'you' moves towards a model of the self's interdependence, its 'second personhood', where the narratological and philosophical senses of this term work in synchrony.

Code writes: 'The practice of "second person" discourse has the emancipatory potential to open up freer discursive spaces than those constructed and constrained by the objective, impersonal forms of address characteristic of the anonymous "public" activities of late capitalist societies.'¹⁰ In exploring how Code's notion of second-person knowing¹¹ can be read into second-person narrating, I am thinking about the 'quality of engagement', the 'fondness or fury' which the use of the 'you' as an engaging, and sometimes alienating, device invites. To begin with this ethical dimension, which Code characterizes as empathetic, is to establish one of the most important elements of second-person discourse for my project: by inviting the reader to read her/himself into the text, the persistent presence of 'you' demands a 'second-person' readerly practice; one which is more engaged, participatory, potentially more intimate, than other modes. It offers an identificatory position which, if taken up even momentarily, disrupts the objectivity and distance that classical narratologists tended to adopt. It reorients processes of writing and reading around textual and extratextual *relationships*. In other words, the narrative 'you' invokes the kind of *closer* close reading that Isobel Armstrong has argued for; her argument for allowing 'affect' into the process of critical reading resonates with Lorraine

⁹ Godard et al, 'In Conversation', p. 12. There is a clear echo here of Luce Irigaray's concept that "'She" is indefinitely other in herself' ('Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un' (1977), Claudia Reeder, trans., rpt. in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 99–106 (p. 103)). For Irigaray, this doubleness is located in the body: '[woman's] sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus, within herself she is already two' (p. 100).

¹⁰ Code, *What Can She Know?*, pp. 86–7.

¹¹ Code's focus is on the impact of 'second personhood' on (feminist) theories of knowledge. I adopt her terminology although somewhat removed from her specific philosophical, epistemological context.

Code's emphasis on the ethical potential of empathy as second-person mode.¹² In bringing together rigorous formal analysis of fictional narratives with a reading of their affective dynamics, my work resists the (often gendered) thought/feeling dichotomy Armstrong, and indeed a long line of feminist thought, deconstructs. Admittedly, the notion of an engaging or inviting textuality might seem to echo that rhetoric of intimacy which is familiar from earlier theories of reader-text relations: Barthes' model of the seductive, flirtatious, desiring text or Wayne Booth's model of reading as friendship.¹³ But hostility, resistance, even the 'fury' Code describes, can (on the part of text and/or reader) be as much a function of second-person relations as intimacy or friendship; indeed, Code underlines the risk of empathy becoming a potentially inappropriate mode of engagement if wielded insincerely or in a context of social inequality. Understanding how a second-person narrative achieves its impact involves locating those sites where the 'you' creates a moment of disidentification or distancing, as well as the invitations and intimations it might open up. So, analysing second-person narration comes to involve what I call the 'push and pull' of narrative.

Drawing together two transcultural Canadian writers (Daphne Marlatt is of British parentage, raised in Malaysia and Australia; Hiromi Goto the daughter of Japanese immigrants raised on the Albertan prairies) and Ali Smith, a Scottish writer now based in Cambridge, this chapter will 'proceed with caution', to borrow Doris Sommer's term.¹⁴ Reading the use of a particular formal strategy across cultural and ethnic divides, not to mention across writers' different relationships to feminist, anti-racist and lesbian politics, is a necessary constituent of a contextualized narratological practice with a broader corpus, but it also runs a concurrent risk of forcing connections by cutting across difference.¹⁵ Rather than neatly extracting the form and function of the 'you', then, its workings must be situated in intra- and extratextual contexts,

¹² Cf. my Introduction, p. 13.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Richard Miller, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 6; Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Doris Sommer, *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Cf. my discussion of transnational feminisms in my Introduction (p. 9).

considering why it is deployed, to whom it might (or might not) gesture, and by whom it is received. The ‘you’ form should also be given the space to exceed or contradict pre-existing methodological frames, not least through the affective responses it can so strongly provoke. In fact, what becomes clear from reading second-person narratives from distinct (trans)cultural spaces is that the form is used in diverse ways and produces different reading effects; and this diversity is itself testament to the necessity of a contextual narratological approach that can accommodate plurality and hybridity. Furthermore, the ethical encounter foregrounded through the ‘I’–‘you’ exchange begins to delimit the terms of critical and readerly engagement as it draws the reader into momentary or sustained identification with the narratee. As such, it is one of the ‘rhetorical moves’ through which, Sommer argues, certain texts might call for ‘caution’:

Worry should be part of the work, if we learn to read the distance written into some ethnically marked literature. A variety of rhetorical moves can hold readers at arm’s length or joke at their pretense of mastery, in order to propose something different from knowledge. Philosophers have called it acknowledgment. Others call it respect.¹⁶

Narratological contexts

To explore the workings of this narrative strategy, the rest of this chapter draws the relationality at the heart of Code’s philosophical use of the ‘second person’ into productive dialogue with the grammatical and narratological senses of the term. Indeed, tracking the many sites of overlap between the relational, grammatical and narratological applications of ‘second person’ becomes an instructive means of understanding the workings of plurality and ambiguity inherent in that narrative form; an ambiguity which begins, in fact, with the difficulty of its definition. In post-classical narratological vocabulary, ‘second-person narrative’ does not simply refer to any narrative where ‘you’ appears extensively; instead, as Suzanne Keen has recently commented, ‘a critical consensus has not yet emerged on how to describe it, or rather, how to delimit it so as to distinguish it from other narrative situations that include the second person, such as the “you”

¹⁶ Sommer, *Proceed With Caution*, p. xi.

addressee of epistolary fiction, remarks addressed to a narratee, or extended apostrophes'.¹⁷ Keen goes on to summarize the extent of the consensus as follows: 'Second-person narration refers to a protagonist as "you." This conflates the protagonist called "you" with the narratee, or even with the real reader.' In order to qualify as second-person narration 'proper', the 'you' must therefore have a *narrative*, not merely communicative, function; s/he must have a role in the story. It is the *narrative* 'you' which, by troubling the boundaries between discrete narrative selves, undermines several of narrative theory's foundational structures and has provided a stimulating object of study for some post-classical narratologists. This is not to suggest that the communicative 'you' has been wholly disregarded; on the contrary, Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions* is an example of the fruitful application of narratology, more specifically feminist narratology, to the study of direct address, looking as she does at the gender politics behind engaging ('feminine') and distancing ('masculine') narrators in Victorian fiction.¹⁸ Indeed, while formal disruptions are certainly of importance in my readings of women's contemporary innovations with the 'you', in many cases its communicative and narrative functions are in fact intertwined. The texts I am reading call for a re-examination of the basis for narratology's current definition, and my analyses lead towards articulating an alternative conception.¹⁹

The argument for the value of the more communicative form is evident from the richly innovative and playful short story collections of Anglo-French writer Michèle Roberts, which engage references from contemporary culture to Greek myth to the feminist gothic and make frequent use of direct address along the way. But the three examples in her collection, *Playing Sardines*,²⁰ would not fit into the specific narratological definition of second-person narration

¹⁷ Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 46.

¹⁸ Robyn R. Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ This touches on the terms of the debate over whether narrative is always communicative. Ann Banfield argues 'The context of speech is the context of communication; the literary context of represented speech and thought is narrative. The latter is precisely not communication' (*Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 122). She posits that even second-person address can relate to an absent addressee, functioning as apostrophe, not communication (p. 129). Mary Louise Pratt's *Towards a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), along with many others, argues the other side (which my readings support).

²⁰ Michèle Roberts, *Playing Sardines* (London: Virago Press, 2003).

because their narratee is not the *main* protagonist; nevertheless, their use of the ‘you’ merits brief attention here. Particularly useful is the variable of ‘peripherality’ which Monika Fludernik develops to account for the differing extents to which ‘I’-narrators are telling their own as well as ‘your’ story.²¹ In Roberts’ stories, the ‘you’ address tends first and foremost to reinforce the story of the narrating ‘I’; and since the ‘you’-narratee remains peripheral, current narratological frameworks would question their status as second-person narration ‘proper’.

Playing Sardines contains three examples: ‘The Cookery Lesson’, a message from a stalker to her unsuspecting prey composed entirely inside the narrator’s head; ‘Blathering Frights’, a set of three conversations (of which we hear only one side); and ‘Hypsipyle to Jason’, a letter of longing composed, but neither written down nor sent, to an absent lover (a rewriting, its title suggests, of Ovid’s *Heroides* 6). The first and last – as well as Roberts’ earlier story, ‘Your Shoes’²² – belong firmly in the category of what Irene Kacandes calls ‘extended narrative apostrophe’, and describes as ‘short-circuited communication’,²³ that is, addressed to a specific but absent narratee who therefore cannot respond. The one-sidedness of the conversation in ‘Blathering Frights’ similarly appears to short-circuit any potential for response, also coming close to apostrophe. This, then, is a narrative practice for bridging impossible distance or, as described by the narrator of ‘Hypsipyle to Jason’, of ‘conjuring presence’ out of absence: ‘this letter, my ship that sails to you, my freight, my spell magically conjuring your presence on paper, [...] words I shall not need to write down and send to you because you will have come back’ (p. 196). Fludernik’s description of the intimacy of the ‘you’ is as pertinent here as it will be for the three main texts I look at in the latter part of this chapter:

The involving, dialogic function of *you* [...] allows the thematization of troubled relationships of a variety of kinds in which the ‘you’ text’s apostrophic quality correlates with the enactment of emotional tensions between the

²¹ Monika Fludernik, ‘Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism’, *Style*, 28.1 (1994), 445–79. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

²² Michèle Roberts, ‘Your Shoes’, in *During Mother’s Absence* (1993; London: Virago Press, 1994), pp. 73–82.

²³ Kacandes, ‘Narrative Apostrophe’, n.p.

partners, foregrounding the see-saw of mutual attraction and repulsion, outgoing affection, and inhibiting domination in such relationships.²⁴

Although Roberts' stories are not indicative of the second person at its most innovative, and although the 'peripheral' positioning of their narratees means they may be left out of narratology's range of enquiry, their use of the 'you' is nonetheless significant for an ethical feminist poetics and bears witness to the need to read the form's more diverse manifestations. By enacting textual intimacy where physical intimacy is impossible, Roberts' stories foreground narrative's affective dimension; and by engaging the reader in the tensions between narrator and narratee, they delineate narrative's ethical stakes, asking for our participation in negotiating the unequal relations of knowledge, passion and risk operating between 'I' and 'you'.

Crucial to the recent upsurge in interest in the second person, however, has not been its ethical or affective dynamics, but rather the recognition that experimentation with the form 'requires nothing short of an extensive and radical revision of the standard narratological treatment of person or voice'.²⁵ That is, in the sense that it refers to a fictional protagonist as 'you' rather than 'I' or 's/he', second-person narration, as Brian Richardson and others have argued, forces the traditional binary opposition between first and third person to be expanded to accommodate a third²⁶ (which is further pluralized in the twentieth century by other modes such as impossible and multiple narration²⁷). In potentially conflating character, narratee and reader under the 'you', the form's 'protean' qualities also threaten to collapse the other *either/or* boundaries on which structuralist theories are based. As Monika Fludernik explains:

Whereas the typical story-telling mode allows the reader to sit back and enjoy a narrative of another's tribulations [...], second-person texts (even if only initially) breach this convention of distance, seemingly involving the real reader within the textual world. By doing so, they not only break the frame of narration (consisting of discrete levels within a model of communicative

²⁴ Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case', n.p.

²⁵ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 222. For a range of studies of the second person, see the dedicated 1994 issue of *Style* edited by Fludernik (28.1).

²⁶ In referring to the more commonly recognized categories of 'person' I am following Dorrit Cohn; Gérard Genette has always contested the concept, preferring homo-/heterodiegesis.

²⁷ See Brian Richardson's 'Strategies of Narration' figure, in 'I Etcetera: On the Poetics and Ideology of Multipersoned Narratives', *Style*, 28.1 (1994), 312-27 (p.324); also his more recent *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

circuits) and violate the boundaries of narrative levels, but they additionally foreground the processual and creative nature of story telling.²⁸

Furthermore, since '*You* is typically ambiguous in its applications to self and other and to a definite or indefinite reading',²⁹ it can open up radically indeterminate spaces within the text. In particular – as we will see in Ali Smith's stories – unlike 's/he', 'you' enables delayed or deferred gender identification and is therefore a provocative means for writers to destabilize (to 'queer') the 'straight', heteronormative assumptions which certain readers are likely to make.³⁰

For all these reasons, narratological models have begun to shift away from the traditionally rigid levels and inside/outside divides in favour of axes of what Fludernik calls 'existential continuity'.³¹ However, I would argue that such narratological revisionings have not gone far enough; protagonist(s) and narratee(s) (and even real readers) have tended to be conflated within the scope of reference of the narrative 'you', but the 'you' form also operates along a different and distinctly communicative axis that problematizes those definitions that insist on its *narrative* dimension. Richardson's recent *Unnatural Voices* does begin to bridge the gap by introducing an additional type of second-person narrative called 'autotelic', which accounts for 'direct address to a "you" that is at times the actual reader of the text and whose story is juxtaposed to and can merge with the characters of the fiction'.³² This category opens up greater communicative possibilities, yet it is limited to narratives where the reader is explicitly interpellated. We will see, however, that the texts I am interested in here fit within his 'standard' type, where the instability of the 'you' is accommodated, but where its communicative aspect is still underplayed.

Amongst the various narratological attempts to model the forms and functions of second-person narration, an essay by Irene Kacandes seems to me to provide the most workable

²⁸ Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case', n.p.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ A prominent example is Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992). See also Susan Lanser's essay about it, 'Queering Narratology', in Kathy Mezei, ed., *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 250–61.

³¹ Fludernik, '*Natural*' Narratology, p. 245.

³² Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*, p. 30.

example of a relationship- and communication-centred model.³³ Rather than adhere to the more rigid narratological categories which privilege the narrative over the communicative ‘you’, my analysis will locate the variety of second-person narration along Kacandes’ ‘spectrum of reversibility’, with reversibility defined as ‘the ability of an addresser and an addressee actually to exchange positions, to be in turn speakers and listeners’.³⁴ Hers is a more fluid model, in which the uses of the ‘you’ are understood to ‘range between a dialogic pole (total reversibility possible, although not necessarily realized) and an apostrophic pole (where, the linguistic markers of dialogue notwithstanding, communication can flow only in a single direction)’.

While contemporary women writers use forms from across this spectrum, it is the large proportion of *dialogic* exchanges – between lovers, enemies, a woman talking to herself – that enact the vitality and ethical force of the form. As my readings will show, however, the second person radically challenges the structures and limits of conventional narrative not only along the axis of ‘reversibility’, but also along the axis of reference, in terms of the extent to which the ‘you’ addresses, often ambiguously and by virtue of its ‘protean’ nature, more than one narratee on different diegetic levels and across the intra-/extratextual boundary. While Kacandes takes account of this in her own readings, her model in itself does not. Nonetheless, I am compelled by Kacandes’ argument that ‘the conventions of reading may diminish, but evidently cannot entirely extinguish, the appellative power of the second-person pronoun’:³⁵ to a certain degree the reader is always drawn into an identificatory relation with the ‘you’-narratee. Another term which needs to enter more frequently into discussions about the form, then, is one that connects the narratological and ethico-communicative senses of second personhood, drawing the reader into the frame: ‘identification’ is an axis of relationship which needs attention. As Judith Roof summarizes, ‘identifications with characters or positions in narrative are produced not so much

³³ Although based on what I read as a flawed conflation of narrative *person* with narrative *voice*, Matt DelConte’s recent model is interesting since it is another attempt to prioritize the dialogic, communicative dimension of second-person texts (‘Why *You* Can’t Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative’, *Style*, 37.2 (2003), 204–19). In contrast to ‘the model of narration that centers on voice or narrator’, DelConte accords greater importance to the narratee as *listener* (p. 204).

³⁴ Kacandes, ‘Narrative Apostrophe’, n.p.

³⁵ Kacandes, ‘Narrative Apostrophe’, n.p.

by image gestalt but more by a self-placement in a narrative economy that is partially determined by the dynamics of that narrative'.³⁶ The reader's processes of identification, which narrative encounters so often call upon, are especially powerfully provoked by direct address and should therefore enter into the foreground of analysis. This is especially true for examples of second-person narration which, unlike Roberts' short stories that fit fairly neatly into Kacandes' dialogic–apostrophic spectrum, require more complex reading processes.

Besides the various kinds of direct address which are not classed as a strictly narrative 'you' (epistolary fiction for example), several possible narrative situations can be identified under the umbrella of second-person narration 'proper': the 'you' can be a character-narratee if directly addressed (like Ina in *Ana Historic*) or a character who is *not* the narratee (as we will see in Cherie Jones's 'The Neighbours'³⁷); but it can also be self-referential (the narrator talking to herself in Cherie Jones's 'The Illusion of Raiment' or the auto(bio)graphical protagonist of Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* (see Chapter Four)); generalized (like the Western tourist visiting Antigua in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*); or indeed, to repeat Richardson's category, 'autotelic' (referring to the actual reader). Narrative theorists, notably Fludernik and Richardson, have devoted considerable critical energy to developing models capable of categorizing this diversity. But even within the above categories ambiguity arises. Fludernik offers the excellent example of Sunetra Gupta's 1993 novel, *The Glassblower's Breath*, an entirely second-person text which is apparently self-referential, with consistent internal focalization by 'you' until the very end, when an 'I'-narrator declares himself and 'destroys the previous illusion of immediacy' by giving the story a distinct addressee.³⁸

³⁶ Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 153. Roof argues that identification as sameness is a heteroideological process, 'the alibi for a range of contradictory, sometimes incoherent positionings', and that identification might do more to help narrative change the way we think if it worked as 'the management of differences', p. 160.

³⁷ Cherie Jones, *The Burning Bush Women* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2004).

³⁸ Sunetra Gupta, *The Glassblower's Breath* (London: Phoenix, 1993) referenced in Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case'. The novel begins with apparently internal focalization: 'That night, you dreamt, that instead of dying fresh as a blade of grass, last year, one winter afternoon, your sister had lingered [...]. Yet, in truth, she had left you, smiling, joking of the smell of dead rats in her urine' (p. 5). But pages from the end it shifts into direct address 'It will be hard, my beloved, to justify his absence, his roots are many, they curl about

There is also a classic form of second-person narration that resists a clear narratorial position, with no single identifiable narratorial 'I'. In these rare second-person texts with no discernible narrator, of which (arguably) Michel Butor's 1957 *nouveau roman*, *La modification*, is still the most cited,³⁹ the moment of recognition lasts barely beyond the first 'you' because, without the sense of a communicative impulse on the part of a speaker, the 'you' seems located within the borders of the storyworld. Kacandes has labelled this form, with an unknown narrator and a 'you' who is not the narratee, 'radical narrative apostrophe' and placed it very near her apostrophic pole, since 'communication is even more unnatural and nonreciprocal because not only is the addressee incapable of response as in traditional apostrophe, but also because the speaker, the source of the discourse, is obscure as well'.⁴⁰ The impulse to identify, as we will see in the later parts of this chapter, is a function of the fact that narrative in the second person tends to foreground its own communicative purpose through the presence of a distinct 'I'-narrator and an identifiable situation of enunciation, so this narratorless category ought to displace the identificatory scenario. The difficulty with this category, however, as Kacandes explains with regard to critics' different responses to (and classifications of) Butor's novel, is that because of the readerly impulse to 'naturalize' narrative in terms of a communicational scenario, radical narrative apostrophe often cannot be immediately distinguished from a category which belongs very near the opposite, dialogic pole, namely self-address. In fact, and without deliberately playing with readerly expectations as Gupta's novel does, two apparently straightforward second-person stories from Barbadian writer Cherie Jones's first collection, *The Burning Bush Women*, convey the inherent instability of the form by showing how the force drawing the reader into the 'you' position can eclipse subtle differences in narrative mode.⁴¹

this earth in confounding sinews, my brothers will have to struggle to hide his tracks, and the secret of his death will fester within you, forever, my lovely.' (pp. 265–6).

³⁹ As Richardson points out, Butor's was not the first, but merely the most-cited example; the form can be traced as far back as 1833, and across the first half of the twentieth century in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930) and Mary McCarthy's 'The Genial Host' (1941). See Richardson, 'Linearity and its Discontents', p. 689.

⁴⁰ Kacandes, 'Narrative Apostrophe', n.p.

⁴¹ The 'you' has been particularly uncommon in anglophone Caribbean fiction, and Jones's collection is a good example of its increasing use. That said, her inspiration perhaps derives from Jamaica Kincaid's collection, *At*

On first reading, 'The Illusion of Raiment' and 'The Neighbours' are apparently similar in terms of narrational mode, both written towards a 'you'-protagonist by a seemingly covert narrator and thus both seemingly apostrophic. But closer reading shows that in fact the former is self-referential, whereas the latter is an example of 'radical narrative apostrophe'. 'The Neighbours' begins with a description of a street scene – drunks on the stairs, 'a dog lounges somewhere in their midst' – before introducing the 'you' as follows: 'You hear them the moment you step onto the first concrete step' (p. 136). The dog's vague location 'somewhere' and the narratee-protagonist hearing rather than actually witnessing the scene locates the focalization as external, minimizing the communicative frame and placing this story towards Kacandes' apostrophic (non-reversible) pole. In contrast, 'The Illusion of Raiment', where 'you' is an adulterous wife about to leave her husband, contains no such external markers; instead the movement back and forth through her memories of meeting her husband and her lover are suggestive of interior monologue. This reading is supported by the use of conditional 'you might' forms which eschew any semblance of narratorial omniscience and culminate in the story's conclusion, confirming the narrative's status as a process of self-justification with a present narrator and as a dialogic (reversible) example of the form: 'you are not sure exactly how you will explain it to him when you cannot do so to yourself but you believe you owe him that much. "Pella," you might say. "There is something I have to tell you"' (p. 51).

The first thing to note here is how subtle the distinguishing markers in the two stories are: on first reading, and likely beyond, both seem to employ the second-person form in a similar way. Secondly, while the distinction between internal and external focalization often impacts upon whether and how a reader identifies with the 'you', the effect here is perhaps not as clear-cut as we might expect. This, I would argue, is due to what Fludernik has described as second-person narration's conflation and transgression of existing narratological categories; something

the Bottom of the River (1978; London: Picador, 1984), since Jones's story 'Bride' closely echoes the form of Kincaid's 'Girl' (they are both examples of the imperative mode of second-person narration). Also noteworthy is Grace Nichols' novel, *Whole of a Morning Sky* (London: Virago, 1986), which alternates conventional third-person narration of a Guyanese family moving home with the self-referential second-person narration of the daughter. Like Jones's 'The Illusion of Raiment', Nichols employs the 'you' form as an empathetic device.

that is immediately apparent from 'The Neighbours'. Although we are looking at the 'you' from an external point, we are also unavoidably drawn into her position: we see her simultaneously from without and within. In this way, the process of reading this story is structured around a tension between engagement and distance: we are at once implicated in the character's complicity with her son's crimes and judgemental of it. Because there is almost inevitably at least a moment of surrender to what Kacandes calls 'the appellative force of *you*',⁴² we are called to empathize in ways which other narrative modes cannot so directly evoke. In other words, the natural context for storytelling is a communicative one, so that when we read 'you' we often naturalize it as invoking such a communicative frame even if, as in the case of radical narrative apostrophe, this is to read against the grain.

Given its expansive and challenging possibilities, it is no surprise that the use of the second person, once a rare literary phenomenon, is on the increase. Half a century after *La modification* caused a stir by being written entirely in the narrative-'you' form, it is still unusual to find a wholly second-person novel, but opening a collection of short stories today frequently reveals at least one 'you' narrative.⁴³ Monika Fludernik comments that, 'as second-person texts become more and more common, their markedness also decreases apace and, particularly in the realm of the second-person reflectoral short story, [the] point of conventional inconspicuousness has now very nearly been reached'.⁴⁴ While I would not contest that a form which was long considered excessively, often awkwardly, stylized has now become a familiar feature of fictional discourse, this claim for its 'conventional inconspicuousness' stands on weaker ground, not least because it might be disproved with the appearance of each new collection. Again and again, the second person reveals itself to be an evocative means of representing and deepening emotional tensions (love, loss, fear, misunderstanding, hatred) between narrative subjects. Even when the form approaches the apostrophic rather than the dialogic end of the spectrum of reversibility, as

⁴² Kacandes, 'Narrative Apostrophe', n.p.

⁴³ Michel Butor, *La modification* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1957). The 'you' refers throughout to the fully characterized main protagonist. Gupta's *The Glassblower's Breath* is another example.

⁴⁴ Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case', n.p.

Roberts' stories and Jones's 'The Neighbours' do, the ambiguity of reference of the 'you' works to open up narrative as a dialogic and readerly space where our responsive participation is strengthened by the immediacy of the second person. These are compelling arguments for resisting Fludernik's notion of the conventionality of the form. Yet the relative positions of narrator, narratee-protagonist and reader in Roberts' stories are as stable and differentiated as the inherent indeterminacy of the 'you' will allow; on the sliding scale formulated in existing theories, the second-person mode is at its least disruptive here. Even this relative conventionality nevertheless speaks to the possibility that, in attending only to those limit-cases where second-person narration undermines narratology's classical foundations, post-classical narratologists have sidelined many of its other playful – and ethically significant – manifestations, effects, and affects.

The term 'second-person narration' has stuck despite, or perhaps because of, its status as a form which overlaps – even deconstructs – existing narratological categories, as well as its complex and ever-diversifying versions which make definition increasingly difficult. Invoking readerly involvement, effecting the collapse of levels and boundaries, and loaded with the potential for indeterminacy, the second-person mode requires the kind of revised narratological criticism that this thesis is engaged in. Indeed, given its inherent plurality, as well as its intimacy, or what Fludernik calls 'the involving, dialogic function of *you*',⁴⁵ it is clear that contemporary writers' uses of the second person have considerable potential for an innovative, situated politics of writing, and demand similarly revised, engaged practices of reading and criticism. Otherwise put, writing and reading 'you' involves an overtly communicative, dialogic act of reaching across textual boundaries. What my approach aims to achieve, then, is a reevaluation of some of the many and conflicting ways in which contemporary narratologists are categorizing the 'you' form. To this end, my readings are responsive to the diverse uses of the narrative 'you' in a range of recent women's fiction and also pay attention to the kinds of dialogic encounter that the texts command.

⁴⁵ Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case', n.p.

My analyses in the rest of this chapter explore fictions which employ the second-person mode in dynamic and challenging ways, with significant implications for theories of narrative and subjectivity. I begin with a reading of the play of different narratees in Marlatt's *Ana Historic* in order to demonstrate how the indeterminacy of the 'you' offers an effective means of exploring the overlaps and interconnections between selves; this part therefore works in dialogue with my analysis of the novel's narrative intersubjectivity in Chapter One. Moving on to examine, more briefly, the more straightforward dialogics of (lesbian) love stories in Ali Smith's most recent collection, *The Whole Story and other stories*, consolidates my reading of the vitality of the 'you' form within writing profoundly concerned with desire. In both of these examples, second-person address is a powerful way in which desire might be articulated in narrative outside of the masculinist paradigms of Peter Brooks or Roland Barthes. At the same time, the 'you' opens up the possibilities of gender identification, enabling both writers to destabilize heteronormative assumptions. Desire provides a further bridge into my analysis, in the concluding part of the chapter, of Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, a novel which also at times addresses a lover-narratee. As with *Ana Historic*, however, *Chorus* is a complex, multi-layered novel with multiple narrators and narratees: 'you' is addressed both in a metafictional frame story, where it refers to a lover, and within embedded stories of intergenerational, intercultural relations in a Japanese Canadian family, where it refers to (and potentially conflates) one or more female relatives. In this final part of the chapter, however, rather than reiterating issues of indeterminacy and intersubjectivity, my reading focuses more explicitly on the ethical questions I raised earlier. Because, to borrow Goto's own phrase, *Chorus* is a determinedly 'Colour Full' text which overtly plays out its feminist and anti-racist politics through its form.⁴⁶ The ethical response the text calls for, and the ethical challenge it deliberately poses for readers such as myself who are not 'Colour Full', necessitates a different kind of interrogation of narratology's existing models of second-person narration, and one in

⁴⁶ Hiromi Goto, 'Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing', in Christl Verduyn, ed., *Literary Pluralities* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998), pp. 263–9 (p. 266).

which my own readings are constantly under scrutiny. My critical trajectory therefore begins immersed in the intricacies of formal play and ends immersed in the ethics of reading, while always attending to the imbrication of the two. The thread of desire that connects the three texts increasingly unravels, as the intimacy and collaboration central to Marlatt's writing gives way to the alterity and marginality articulated through Goto's.

Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*

In *Readings from the Labyrinth*, Daphne Marlatt calls for:

a writing that examines the shifting relations between i + you (both un-gender-marked) + she + she, let alone he – as well as the fixed & oppositional us + them: to undo that opposition, place the lesbian i at centre of her world & finger the variegated strands of the network of relations she is in the midst of & which she reorders by her very presence.⁴⁷

Resisting the conventions of narrative authority, as I have shown in my previous chapter, *Ana Historic*'s non-standard pronominal structures collapse the clear distinctions between writer, narrator, character, narratee and reader, replacing them with interconnected selves. As Stan Dragland puts it, 'Daphne Marlatt's personal pronouns always need watching, never more so than in *Ana Historic*. Her sliding use of pronouns is in fact an index of the relational way her work makes meaning'.⁴⁸ Speaking to Susan Winnett's call for new structuring paradigms as alternatives to the 'masculinity' of the climactic plot, this relationality is the representation in narrative form of the sense of maternal inheritance which the novel explores, and of the many historical and contemporary others that make up the self. Because, for Marlatt, 'the selfhood that women's texts narrate is not a heroic selfhood that overcomes, so much as a multi-faceted one (if indeed it can be called *one*) that stands in relation to all that composes it'.⁴⁹ The confusion of subjectivities transforms the divided, hierarchical relations of the narrative

⁴⁷ Daphne Marlatt, *Readings from the Labyrinth* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1998), p. 40.

⁴⁸ Stan Dragland, *The Bees of the Invisible: Essays in Contemporary English Canadian Writing* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1991), p. 184. He goes on to analyse the function of the 'she' (as the pronoun of the Goddess) in the novel, with little attention to the workings of 'you'.

⁴⁹ Marlatt, *Readings*, p. 16.

situation as conceived in classical narratology into just such a multi-faceted, relational model or, as I argued in Chapter One, into a 'tangle of hair'.

Ana Historic's narrative 'you' is a prominent site for such transformation because it provokes in the 'cautious' reader an increased self-reflexivity regarding her/his own practices of reading, and because it shapes every strand of the text: each of the three main 'characters' (not to mention 'you' who is reading) are at times denoted by 'you' as well as by 'she'. Yet across the criticism on Marlatt's novel, the use of this significant formal device is frequently noted but rarely explored.⁵⁰ Pamela Banting's analysis of Marlatt's use of the 'you' in her poetry collection, *Touch to My Tongue*, is productive in bearing witness to the form's other, intently ethical and affective dimension so important to this later novel. She cites part of Marlatt's poem 'Kore', which concludes with an alternative etymological version of the word, *yu*:

lips work towards undoing (*dhei*, female, sucking and suckling, fecund) spurt/
spirit opening in the dark of earth, *yu!* cry jubilant excess, your fruiting body bloom
we issue into the light of, sweet, successive flesh...⁵¹

Here, Banting suggests, 'the second-person pronoun [...] supplements Otherness with the cry, jubilation, and excess' so that to say 'you' ('*yu*') is 'simultaneously to *enact* Otherness, and one's pleasure in the Other. Saying "you" is the exaltation experienced at the entering in to oneself of the Other'.⁵² Reading this poem's second-person play as Marlatt's refusal of 'the reduction of two to one implicit in the traditional mathematics of love in the western world', Banting gestures to the importance for *Ana Historic's* poetics of a linguistic means of writing the relations of intimacy outside the bounds of heteronormative scripts for narrative, sexuality and subjectivity.

Ana Historic opens with a typical literary third-person narrative relating a woman's isolation, but after just two pages the form ruptures:

⁵⁰ An exception, though one which still does not go into as much detail as I seek to here, would be Keith Green and Jill LeBihan, 'The Speaking Object: Daphne Marlatt's Pronouns and Lesbian Poetics', *Style*, 28.3 (1994), 432–44.

⁵¹ Daphne Marlatt, *Touch to My Tongue* (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1984), p. 23.

⁵² Pamela Banting, *Body, Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1995), pp. 186–7.

wishing, even, that what she knew could be there would be there and she be taken, lost, just to show them. who? her parents who went out leaving her alone to defend the house. her mother who...

my mother (who)... voice that carries through all rooms, imperative, imperious. don't be silly. soft breast under blue wool dressing gown, tea breath, warm touch... gone. [...] I-na, I-no-longer, i can't turn you into a story.

(pp. 10–11)

It is at the very instant when the narrator begins to describe her dead mother that the distance invoked by the third person collapses and Annie steps out from behind the neutrality of the authorial mask. In this way, the shift reflects not only her need to speak the more personal 'i' (which resists the author/ity that the upper-case 'I' asserts), but also occurs because her relationship with her mother cannot be conveyed via a one-way channel of narrative agency: ethically speaking, an alternative to representing the other is allowing the other to represent herself, whether or not she is able to do so.⁵³ As Green and LeBihan observe: 'The construction of a subject inevitably denies "the Other," always already establishing a power struggle through grammatical structure between the subject and the object [...]. But [there is] in Marlatt's prose an attempt to give voice to that "other" by making "you" the discourse centre.'⁵⁴ Writing her mother back to (textual) life – 'it's up to me to pull you through. this crumbling apart of words. "true, real." you who is you or me. she' (p. 11) – Annie narrates entirely in the second (*and* first) person. This becomes a cathartic narrative process, working against the separation imposed not only by Ina's death but also by their troubled relationship in life, the result of her mother's traditional (non-feminist) values and eventual mental illness. The potential for connection offered by 'you' is opposed to the separation and distance of 'she'; the third-person pronoun is too abstract, too finite to allow Annie to tell her mother's story.

Importantly, this narrative relationship opens up the dialogic potential of 'you'. Once Annie begins to use her research on Ana Richards to imagine – that is, to fictionalize – details

⁵³ This is to touch upon the debate perhaps most famously engaged by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', revised and expanded in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Green and LeBihan, 'The Speaking Object'. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

of Ana's life (writing her back into textual existence just as she does for Ina), Ina's voice interrupts and the narrative mode switches to dialogue:

listen, there is even the sound of a piano tinkling through the smoke of clearing fires. someone is playing Chopin...

– now you're exaggerating.

– how would you know?

– you always did. you should've gone into theatre, not history. (p. 22)

Here, bursting through the conventions of apostrophic address, Ina, the purportedly absent narratee, talks back across the barrier between life and death: as we will also see in the texts by Ali Smith and Hiromi Goto, addressee becomes speaker and 'i' becomes 'you', turning the tables on conventional structures of narrative authority which place the narrator at the centre. In place of a narrative politics of representation, a shared and shifting system of textual power relations is constructed. In this interruptive dialogue, the mimetic illusion that Annie is simply telling Ina's story is ruptured: by speaking back, the absent narratee-protagonist violates the frame in which she is a story, a representation, and steps onto the same level as the narrator. The higher diegetic level on which narrator and narratee conventionally stand is exposed as an illusion; it falls in on itself, throwing together writer, narrator, character, narratee, reader as versions and echoes of each other. The indeterminacy and multiplicity of reference of the 'you' pronoun – plural/singular, general/specific – thus provides a strikingly effective means of echoing at a linguistic level *Ana Historic's* intersecting life stories.

If Ina is Annie's consistent and intended addressee, she is by no means the only one: as the novel progresses, Annie's attempt at privileging Ina as narratee cedes to other selves who move out of representation onto the plane of narration, into the position of narratee. As I will show later, Annie's most significant other narratee is her reader and eventual lover, Zoe, but she also experiences other moments of connection – notably with her childhood friend Donna and with Ana Richards – where the impersonal 'she' temporarily cedes to the 'you'. In a brief scene from her youth, for example, Annie remembers going with Donna to Princess Pool, where they display their teenage bodies for a group of boys. As Annie tires of this performance of

heterosexual femininity and leads Donna to a secluded part of the pool, Donna's pronoun changes from 'she' to 'you': 'then we were swimming and then you were flailing around. [...] i can still remember the feel of your body as i fought you back, as i hugged you back to air' (p. 83). Donna becoming 'you' does not entail a shift into the 'higher' diegetic position of narratee; rather, the move from third to second person is fluid and occurs solely on the level of discourse. Since the change takes place at the moment the girls cease to be bodies on display, the 'you' is being used both for its indeterminacy, which moves Donna beyond the fixed, gendered representation of the 'she', and for its intimacy: Annie speaking 'you' here is not an act of empowerment, as it is towards Ina, but an act of *desire*.

In narrating her developing relationship with Zoe, Annie's use of the 'you' is again connected to its intimate potential. Zoe enters the text fairly late as a third-person 'character' sitting with Annie over coffee, a 'stranger i happen to meet in the archives, thumbing her way through the photographs. we get talking and she wants to know all about my writing' (p. 59). She is soon revealed to be nothing so straightforward: her second appearance a few pages later comes in Annie's unprompted exclamation, 'and what is madness, Zoe?' (p. 63). Barely even introduced, Zoe momentarily springs out of her confined character status into the position of narratee. Direct address here is Annie's unconscious expression of repressed desire; while her urge to revive her mother in writing means that Ina cannot be contained inside 'she', Zoe must remain at this distance, as a 'stranger', because Annie's heteronormative world depends upon not allowing her lesbian desire to take shape. Judith Roof's interrogation of the 'structural and ideological relations between narrative and sexuality' in *Come As You Are* speaks to the textual dynamics here,⁵⁵ because in examining how the figure of the lesbian might elude her circumscribed, 'heteroideological' narrative versions so as to change the story, Roof identifies the narrative middle as one potential site for 'doubt, risk, and uncertainty', as a chaotic space between orderly beginnings and ends where new stories might emerge.⁵⁶ In my reading, the

⁵⁵ Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xxxiv, developed in chapters 2 and 3.

narrative drive pulling Annie towards the telos of telling Ina's and Ana's stories is disrupted by, among other things, this emergent lesbian possibility, a possibility which operates not only in terms of content but also as an innovative narrative practice.⁵⁷ Once Zoe becomes 'you', once there is seepage between the levels separating character and narratee, she exists on the same narrative plane as Annie – she pushes her way into her world.

Only towards the very end of the novel, once Annie begins to admit to her desire, does this change occur: 'she is my first, my ongoing reader. you, i want to say. but you are not reading this as i write and Ina is – in my imagination, Ina i would give birth to, enter her into the world. but it is Zoe's hand that rests beside mine on the table top' (p. 132). Annie is writing for, writing *towards*, her absent mother; she argues 'you're not the empty dress of some character hanging on the line. you go on living in me, catching me out. my fear, my critic' (p. 141). But Ina remains a construct, a version written by her daughter. Zoe, on the other hand, is *present* in the narrative present as Annie's 'real' reader and critic. Zoe's third-person pronoun does not mask her position as narratee: as Annie's reader, Zoe's function echoes the real reader's, and both the intimacy and the space for readerly identification that the 'you' creates are at work beneath the surface of her 'she'. The hierarchy of narrative relations that locates the narratee on a higher level than the character thus seems to be subverted. In fact, because *Ana Historic's* narrative participants move fluidly between pronouns and in and out of roles, it is clear that this novel is not structured according to the conventional mimetic system of discrete levels and separate subjects, but follows the intimate logic of interconnectivity and closely links Marlatt's feminist politics to a feminist poetics.

As with Zoe (and because the coming together of narrative selves is a gradual process, unfolding only as their stories do), it is late in the novel before Annie addresses Ana Richards directly for the first time: 'Ana, what shall i make of you when you make of yourself more and

⁵⁷ As a 'coming out story', *Ana Historic* might, for Roof, be an example of narrative *failing* to escape the climactic narrative structure that heteroideology has normalized; however, I would argue that the novel's intercutting, echoing stories and its open-ended conclusion are, if not entirely subversive, at least disruptive enough to begin to change the story.

more? now you want to give up your cottage at the mill, safely the school-marm's place, and live in a Gastown hotel, you who have scarcely sipped the red wine of communion' (p. 104). In another example of the chaotic potential of the narrative middle, Annie's narratorial control over the story is slipping here, and very soon she reaches the forking path where she asks:

the question is: will you let yourself be escorted home [...] by this eager and voluble man on account of whom you will move your piano from the schoolhouse (or wherever it is) to a parlour in Moodyville [...]

or will you manage to live in hotel rooms where you give lessons and become Gastown's first music teacher [...] a secret friend perhaps to Birdie Stewart
(p. 108)

The first path is the 'true' one, as narrated in the history books, but it is the second which Annie and Ana follow. The narrative process here resists both narratorial and cultural coercion, refuses imposed heteronormative relationships or trajectories of being.

In (re)writing Ana's ending as a lesbian love story, Annie is writing her own lifeline into her character's: Ana's fictional choice echoes Annie's 'real-life' one (and, for that matter, the autobiographical one that Marlatt herself once had to make). Here, then, the 'you' of 'will you let yourself' becomes a location for the blurring of narrative selves in that Annie's questions simultaneously address three possible 'you's: speaking to Ana, Annie gives the character control over her own plot; speaking to herself as *writer* she expresses creative doubt over the choice of fictional ending; speaking to herself as *woman* she constructs an analogy (a trial run, perhaps) for the decision she is facing: whether to leave her husband for Zoe. Yet again, three conventionally discrete diegetic levels (four, if the extratextual, autobiographical reference of 'you' is counted) merge in the inherently ambiguous space opened up by the second person.

This forking path between two plotlines has another significant effect, though, in that it provokes a significant retake for the reader when Ana's alternative ending is later revealed to have been Zoe's idea, initially considered by Annie – ironically – as 'a monstrous leap of imagination' (p. 135). Zoe, it turns out, is not only reading Annie's book for her, but she also influences its writing as she writes her way into Annie's life. As their selves move closer together, they blur with Ana and Birdie (Birdie's brown eyes and 'caustic tongue' (pp. 108–9),

for example, echo back to Zoe's 'brown eyes, brown, challenging me' (p. 90)); so that by making a lesbian ending possible for Ana, Zoe makes it possible for Annie too. As reader becomes writer, Annie's narrative authority is radically disrupted, and storytelling becomes an intimate, collective act.⁵⁸ Through what Fludernik has referred to as *Ana Historic's* 'rampant pronominal ambiguity and multivalency'⁵⁹ and its play of transgressive, overlapping narrative positions, the play of desire between Annie and Zoe is enacted. For Marlatt the choice between 'she' and 'you' (or 'i') is not a choice of narrative distance or of levels of mediation, but a site of *force*, where bodies continually exceed the subject positions in which they are located. Her innovative poetics, then, are inseparable from a feminist politics which re-envision the self as relational and ever in process (constantly under narration) or from a project to reshape story outside the 'heteroideological' script.

Ana Historic's ending powerfully conveys – and expands – a multiple, processual, intersubjective model of feminine and lesbian selfhood. Whereas in most of the novel the 'you' has denoted a particular individual, most often Ina, the poem on the last page works against closure by opening wide the plural possibilities of the 'you' and invites the reader to read herself in:

we give place, giving words, giving birth, to
each other – she and me. you. hot skin writing
skin. fluid edge, wick, wick. she draws me
out. you she breathes, is where we meet.
breeze from the window reaching you now, trees
out there, streets you might walk down, will,
soon. it isn't dark but the luxury of being
has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading
us into the page ahead.

As Green and LeBihan have observed, the pronouns here have so many potential references that 'locating a speaking subject in the poem proves astonishingly difficult'.⁶⁰ Read as the culmination of Annie's story, the poem is Annie's too; she is writing her own ending to Zoe, and Zoe finally slips out of 'she' into the intimacy of the 'you'. But even within this

⁵⁸ In Marlatt's archives (Box 16) her notes reveal an early intention to publish the novel with Zoe's handwritten comments reproduced in its margins.

⁵⁹ Fludernik cites the novel very briefly in her *'Natural' Narratology*, p. 244.

⁶⁰ Green and LeBihan, 'The Speaking Object', n.p.

straightforward reading there is a certain ambiguity of voice: the last five lines could belong to Annie, but equally, with 'you she breathes, is where we meet', Annie could be introducing Zoe's voice and then ceding the rest of the page to her. Here, the indeterminacy of the 'i'–'you' relation subtly but powerfully conveys the possibility that this poem is the lovers' collective act of writing, and writes the sense of shared selves and a shared future into the very syntactic structure of the text. Such a reading sees the novel as a regenerative cycle: in its very first paragraph, Annie awakes 'in the dark. only it wasn't dark had woken her to her solitude, conscious alone in the night of his snoring' (p. 9), and the textual echo in the final 'it isn't dark but the luxury of being has woken you' shows how Annie's story has carried her from alienation to togetherness.

But to limit the poem's pronominal reference to the dialogic relation between the lovers does not acknowledge how, as Green and LeBihan argue, 'The closed paradigm of the I/you of discourse participation is extended [in the poem] to accommodate the "other" of discourse, the third person'.⁶¹ Another possible reading of the poem therefore opens up a more expansive understanding of the novel's ending, and asks a reader to question the desire for narrative closure. Standing alone on an unnumbered final page, the poem resists simple assimilation into the rest of Annie's narrative. The 'we' 'giving words, giving birth, to each other' can be read as an *authorial* voice describing the process of writing a character who is in some way also an autobiographical image of the writer's self. In this reading, Annie becomes 'she' and the 'you' addresses *me*, outside the text, meaning that here, at the very end, *I* am drawn intimately inside it. *I* am written in in terms of my desire (which reading has awakened) to connect with the story and the selves it narrates; to remember them and carry them forward onto my own 'page ahead'.

These multiple meanings are not solely the result of pronominal indeterminacy; the poem deliberately melds together writing and sexual desire in the metaphor of 'hot skin *writing* skin' (my emphasis). As a result, both interpretations – one textual, one sexual – are inscribed into the poem, and separating them out runs contrary to the dynamics of the rest of the novel, reducing

⁶¹ Green and LeBihan, 'The Speaking Object', n.p.

plural narrative potentialities to an either/or logic. Imposing a 'straight' reading that does not acknowledge how sexual/textual relations between women are here inextricable does violence to Marlatt's deliberate 'queering' (to use Susan Lanser's term⁶²) of narrative structures. If I am to position myself, however briefly, as the 'you' of this poem, I cannot detach myself from my body, pretending that 'the luxury of being' is not intimately tied to pleasure; I can only begin to engage with its vitality if I allow myself the frisson of desire it so powerfully evokes. In this way, the novel demands practices of close reading which, in Isobel Armstrong's terms, break down the boundary between cognitive thought and affective response. Marlatt's work exemplifies Barbara Godard's argument that the dialogic is enabling for feminist writing practices because it 'produces a new subject position, [...] a heterogeneous subject, "I-for-another" and the "not-I-in-me"'.⁶³ Through its many 'you's – and 'i's and 'she's – *Ana Historic* exceeds analysis along traditional narratological lines of levels or stable narrative functions and voices, requiring instead a theory proceeding from the conditional, always mutable, interconnections between narrative selves.

Ali Smith's short stories

Sharing a concern with the dialogic 'I-for-another', though not within the same context of 'writing in the feminine', Ali Smith's second-person stories are motivated by the intensity of feeling between lovers; her writing draws bodies together by setting their voices in conversation. In her 1999 collection, *Other Stories and other stories*, more than half of the stories use the 'you' address, mostly to refer to a lover-narratee to whom the first-person narrator is telling a story.⁶⁴ Rather than challenging the conventions of fictional discourse, as Smith's more innovative later stories do, these stories seem to employ direct address to two

⁶² Lanser, 'Queering Narratology'. Cultural conventions, she argues, inform any reading, thus narratology's traditional separation of text and context has masked heteronormative assumptions; 'queering' narratology means reading against such binary assumptions.

⁶³ Godard et al, 'In Conversation', p. 12.

⁶⁴ Ali Smith, *Other Stories and other stories* (1999; London: Penguin, 2004). The exception being 'instructions for pictures of heaven' (pp. 139–56), which has a second-person protagonist for its first section, although not throughout.

main ends. First, they write storytelling itself as a form of intimacy between lovers and employ the dialogism of the 'you' address to play this intimacy out at the narrative level. The opening of 'a story of love' speaks to the workings of this strategy:

Tell me a story, I said.
 Okay, you said. Any particular kind of story?
 A love story, I said since we were in bed [...] and it was cold, the first true
 chill of winter.
 Okay, you said. There was once a boy who really wanted to own a dog.
 A boy and a dog, I said. Does it have to be a boy? It's always stories of
 boys and dogs. Can't it be a girl?
 Yes, you said, it can be a girl; true love stories are always
 interchangeable.⁶⁵

This notion of interchangeability connects to the second function of the 'you' in Smith's love stories. Unlike Marlatt's writing 'in the feminine' – the 'lesbian poetics' that Green and LeBihan directly connect to her pronouns – Ali Smith's frequent use of the second person sidesteps the fixed, potentially limiting grammar of gendered personal pronouns and their marking of relationships as either hetero- or homosexual. Her stories deal with lesbian relationships, and the unmarked gender of the 'you' delays or permanently defers the revelation of the lovers' gender so as to halt a 'straight' reading in its tracks, to force the reader to re-read, and in so doing asking her/him also to rethink (to 'queer') any heteronormative assumptions s/he might have made. Isn't this a poetics that writes to expose and resist the limitations of scripts readily provided by a long narrative tradition based on fixed gender relations?

In the second-person stories from her 2003 collection, *The Whole Story and other stories*, this quality of indeterminate gender identification remains important but Ali Smith develops her use of the mode into a more innovative, more overtly dialogic form. The narrator of 'believe me'⁶⁶ recounts a conversation between herself and her lover in bed, in which she invents an entire alternative life for herself as a married woman with children. This story at first irritates her lover for its unambitious scope ('You're so unradical', 'you could have been a superheroine', is the taunting response), but then draws *her* (the lover's female gender is

⁶⁵ Smith, *Other Stories*, p. 169.

⁶⁶ Ali Smith, 'believe me', in *The Whole Story and other stories* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), pp. 119–27.

revealed part way through) to re-invent herself too as the mistress of her lover's 'husband', turning the story's initial happily-married script on its head. The opening lines, 'I'm having an affair, I said. / No you're not, you said' (p. 119), are mirrored at the turning point where the 'you' takes control of the fantasy (though the 'I' still narrates it):

I'm having an affair, you said.
No, you're not, I said.
With a man called Eric, you said. I'm pretty sure from your description
that it's the same Eric. (p. 125)

In finally declaring her love for the 'wife', the 'mistress' brings the relationship full circle, back to the lesbian couple in bed, telling each other stories: 'luckily we are quite talented at reading each other' (p. 127). The indeterminate gender of the 'you', as opposed to 's/he', constructs the story along a deliberately ambiguous logic, both in terms of its self-mirroring structure and its intentional teasing out of a lesbian reading of the lovers' relationship from what is at first an ungendered context.

'believe me' is almost wholly a dialogue, with minimal narratorial intervention from the 'I', but elsewhere in this collection, in 'being quick', 'may' and 'the start of things', Smith takes the dialogic potential of the 'you' form even further. Rather than an 'I' who occupies the discursive centre, these stories are narrated from an 'I' to a 'you'-lover who not only *can* but *does* reply. That is, these stories pivot on the moment where narration switches from one 'I' to the other; they open up a shared, dialogic space for the narratee-protagonist to speak back into the text in a way that challenges conventional textual politics by sharing narrative authority equally between 'you' and 'I'.⁶⁷ In the final story of the collection, 'the start of things',⁶⁸ the first section narrates one side of a relationship in crisis (as the narratee locks the narrator out of the house); then, after an italicized middle section, the positions of narrator and narratee are reversed so that 'you' becomes 'I' and narrates the second half of the crisis story (as the narratee locks her/himself out too). In this light, the central segment, which moves forward in

⁶⁷ This is to touch upon the idea of a textual 'democracy' which I will explore in relation to Smith's work in the following chapter.

⁶⁸ Ali Smith, 'the start of things', in *The Whole Story*, pp. 167–78.

time to show the lovers in bed, making up by lighting a fire and telling stories, reveals itself to be unattributable to either one or the other narrator, remaining instead in the space between, connecting their voices in that inseparable relation, 'we': '*We are in bed with our backs to one another. The wind is howling on the roof and battering at the cardboard taped over the broken window. [...] We are inches away from each other. I can feel the reach of each inch. In the end I give in and begin [the story]*' (p. 170). In Judith Roof's terms, from this unsettled narrative middle issues a narrative model that works away from the assumptions and limitations imposed by heteroideology upon the stories we tell and consume.

All the second-person stories in *The Whole Story* create a mirroring structure in which 'I' and 'you' switch places, echo one another, or are even indistinguishable from each other, transforming the unitary subjects of the narrative situation into Godard's heterogeneous 'I-for-another'. Writing in the past tense (closing the story before we begin to read it), the second person for Ali Smith is less about drawing the reader into a play of dis/identification than about reconstructing the narrative situation as a site of intimacy and intersubjectivity between lovers who, as well as sharing a bed, share the same narrative level in the story of their relationship. In effect, combining the first and second person, refusing any hint of the 'peripherality'⁶⁹ of either, brings these stories towards narration in the first person plural: the 'we' of lovers' shared space. The pronominal strategies of Smith's stories enact the intimacy that their content gestures to, and the narrative act itself becomes an act of desire (although not necessarily determined by the teleology of climax). Sometimes falling together into the 'we' form, but always also remaining separate as 'I' and 'you', back to back, this is multi-personed narration of a kind that insists upon textual community but also upon the distinct position of each self within it.

Smith's writing, in other words, proceeds from a conception of narrative that is intently ethical, in the Levinas-derived sense of the intersubjective model of narrative ethics which Adam Zachary Newton has developed. Especially pertinent here is Newton's (re)conception of 'narrative as relationship and human connectivity, as Saying over and above Said, or as Said

⁶⁹ Fludernik's term, cf. note 21 above.

called to account in Saying; narrative as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price'.⁷⁰ I would argue that by making present, for however brief a moment, the 'real' reader in the text as 'you', this ethical process of Saying and connectivity is foregrounded; the reader's role is cast in what Newton calls the 'recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition' that narrative ethics signifies.⁷¹ We have seen this in the blurring of lives, selves, pronouns amongst the participants in Marlatt's narrative acts – herself and myself included. We have seen it in the intimate storytelling acts that connect Ali Smith's lovers and, via the 'appellative force of "you"', potentially project that connection out to her reader too.

At the same time, the frequent brevity of an initial moment of dis/identification means that it might collapse into a different relation, one that can itself evoke a specifically ethical encounter: an encounter defined not by sameness or empathy or desire but by difference, distance, even resistance. So, Ali Smith's elision of discretely individual or fixedly gendered identities in writing the lovers' dialogic encounters creates ambiguity and asks for 'cautious' (re)readings as, in several of her stories, a 'real' reader who begins with heteronormative preconceptions is provoked to pause and re-read. Indeed, in reading the second-person dynamic at work in many innovative fictional narratives by women, the relations of privilege and difference come vitally into play in shaping how (and whether) 'recognition' and encounter might occur. In designing a complex and sometimes difficult dialogue between reader and text, the 'you' form asks important questions about the ethics of receiving, as well as transmitting, narratives. Inseparable from the 'you' form's foregrounding of readerly response and responsibility is a heightened affective response, of the kind Isobel Armstrong values, which occurs as the reader experiences that (fleeting) moment of being personally addressed.

The notion of an ethics of second-person narration, and specifically the responsibility called upon by a dialogic narrative encounter to engage with the otherness of a text without assimilating it, is more fully explored in the last section of this chapter. Here, I focus on *Chorus*

⁷⁰ Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 7.

⁷¹ Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, p. 12.

of *Mushrooms*, a Japanese Canadian novel which engages with racial, ethnic and gendered otherness in complex and challenging ways. That Hiromi Goto's dialogic and second-person strategies overlap significantly with both Smith's and Marlatt's writing, despite their distinct contexts of production, is an argument at once for the contemporary vitality of the form, for its efficacy as a mode for writing about intimate relationships, and for both the usefulness and necessary caution of transcultural narratological work.

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Not unlike *Ana Historic*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a book of inextricable layers of narrative, voice and selfhood; its 'chorus' of overlapping, echoing stories are woven into a complex novel about the material importance of storytelling and the many different forms which Japanese Canadian identity can take. The 'underlying' story (at least, as I plot it) involves Murasaki/Muriel Tonkatsu,⁷² who grew up on an Albertan mushroom farm with immigrant parents desperate to assimilate and with her Obāchan (grandmother), Naoe, defiantly determined to retain and pass on her Japanese heritage. When Naoe slips away for a renewed life on the road with a newfound cowboy-lover, Murasaki and her parents finally begin to explore this heritage; Murasaki's adult story is thus a diasporic, Japanese (and) Canadian one. The experience of reading *Chorus of Mushrooms*, however, defies such a simple, linear, monologic story in multiple ways and, vitally, it exposes the insufficiency – indeed, the failure – of the above attempt to summarize its 'plot'. This failure is inevitable because the form of the novel's telling is itself actively, imaginatively constitutive of the story being told. Exceeding the rigid segmentarity of the narratological grid, *Chorus's* formal strategies demand the kind of close reading that is energetic and dynamic enough to interweave form with content and with intra-, inter- and extratextual contexts. Most importantly for the current chapter, I will argue that

⁷² I will refer to Muriel/Murasaki simply as Murasaki from here on as this is the name her narrative sections are labelled with, and the name she claims for herself: 'My name is Murasaki. My mother calls me Muriel, but I out-grew that name when I came to realize that I came from a specific cultural background that wasn't Occidental'. (Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994; London: Women's Press, 1997), p. 189. All future references will be to this edition and included in the body text.

Hiromi Goto's dialogic strategies create a push and pull of dis/identification which is a particularly effective means of bringing the play of affect into the act of reading.

Chorus opens with an italicized 'frame' story in the second person, in which Murasaki and her lover are in bed and the 'you'-lover asks her to tell a story about her Obāchan. This framing strategy purports to embed the rest of the narration within its higher storytelling frame (and interrupts the narration several times to remind us of this); the 'embedded' narration in five main parts is then further divided by sub-headings which purport to distinguish Naoe's and Murasaki's autonomous narrating voices. However, we receive frequent signals about their interconnectedness, the dialogism of their stories: Naoe suggests to Murasaki, 'Why don't I talk sometimes and you just move your lips and it will look like you're the one who's talking' (p. 127), and this ventriloquism is played out in a later exchange between Murasaki and her lover: "I'd like to speak with your Obāchan sometime," he said drowsily. / "You are..." (p. 183). As the two women move between memories of youth and their respective present-tense love stories, their narratives progressively merge together, both via numerous textual parallels and echoes and because of their powerful familial connections (echoing the story of maternal inheritance so important to Marlatt's novel too). *Chorus's* complex pattern of interweavings also draws in other hybrid modes, including Naoe's revisionary versions of Japanese folk legends; dialogues between the two narrating women (across the boundaries of narrative time and space); sections of third-person narration; and newspaper articles. Thus, both by bleeding into one another and by intermingling with other narrative modes, the apparently multiple strands and distinct voices in which Murasaki and Naoe tell their stories continually subvert their own subordinate, 'embedded' narrative status and resist the segmented reading which the novel's form at first suggests.

Goto's 'Colour Full' feminist politics infuses her poetics: through the echoes, seepages and indeterminacies which construct its narrative space as dialogic, processual and resolutely anti-mimetic, *Chorus of Mushrooms* collapses the hierarchical systems that underpin the very notion of distinct narrative frames or voices. While Goto's innovations with form make some degree of

narrative analysis indispensable, the body of criticism on *Chorus* is focused on ethico-political questions around diasporic identities and transcultural reading practices, stopping short of the close formal reading practices my project enacts in order to map out a more detailed understanding of Goto's textual politics.⁷³ Narratological frameworks, notably Fludernik's theorization of the second person and Kacandes' spectrum of reversibility, can provide an additional vocabulary for how *Chorus of Mushrooms* achieves its powerful rhetorical effects. Reciprocally, of course, the extent of Goto's innovations and the ethico-political force of her novel enable me to push further against the limits of narratology's existing models.

Most overtly, the context of Goto's writing is gendered female and racialized in specifically Japanese Canadian diasporic terms, using as it does numerous Japanese phrases, myths and cultural references, although the axes of differentiation it establishes are of course far too complex and contingent to capture. It is the work of an educated Albertan, an immigrant, a poet, an anti-racist writer exploring what it is to be 'Colour Full', exploring what Fred Wah calls the poetics of the hyphen ('that marked (or unmarked) space that both binds and divides'): how 'to make the noise surrounding [the hyphen] more audible, the pigment of its skin more visible'.⁷⁴ *Chorus of Mushrooms*'s publication in Canada by NeWest Press (Alberta) and in the UK by the Women's Press, however, marks out (as Goto acknowledges) specific, mainly white Western audiences. Within these multiplicities and tensions, and given the racial, cultural, geographical and (in the case of its use of Japanese script) linguistic distance from which I come to the text, my own attempt at a situated engagement with *Chorus* will, as it must, focus on the dynamics of where and how ethical tensions arise.

⁷³ Guy Beauregard, 'Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora', *West Coast Line*, 29.3 (1995–6), 47–62; Mari Sasano, "'Words Like Buckshot": Taking Aim at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*', *Open Letter*, 10.3 (1998), 38–53; Mark Libin, 'Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*', *Canadian Literature*, 163 (1999), 121–40 and "'Some of my best friends...": Befriending the Racialized Fiction of Hiromi Goto', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 73 (2001), 93–121; Steve McCullough, "'Trust Me": Responding to the Threat of Writing in *Chorus of Mushrooms*', *English Studies in Canada*, 29.1/2 (2003), 149–70.

⁷⁴ Fred Wah, *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity: Critical Writing 1984–1999* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000), pp. 72–3.

Opening with a story being told in an intimate space, *Chorus* goes on to place the act of storytelling at the heart of its major textual relationships: between Murasaki and Naoe (as Naoe creates her own versions of Japanese mythologies and encourages Murasaki to do the same), and between each woman and her lover. Importantly, and where Goto's novel asks more of its reader than Smith's love stories do, is that its many representations of storytelling acts continually emphasize the active role of the listener:

(Murasaki: Obāchan, this story. Is this a story you heard when you were little?

Naoe: Child, this is not the story I learned, but it's the story I tell. It is the nature of words to change with the telling. They are changing in your mind even as I speak.) (p. 32)

Consequently, and more consistently than in *Ana Historic*, *Chorus* projects out towards the reader an active role in the narrative process, a role which is most overtly signalled by the prominence of forms of 'you' address in the 'frame' story and in the embedded conversations like the one above. The reader's role comes with considerable responsibility: in foregrounding the narratee and repeatedly insisting upon the importance of being able to 'listen before you hear' (p. 2), the novel's basic narrative and pronominal structures are infused with a specific ethics of reading. Goto writes: 'My subject position and the subject positions of my readers are something that I must be conscious of, incorporate into the integrity of the text. I live in a racialized environment, and the politics of my writing is distinctly Colour Full.'⁷⁵ With these statements, she sets out the challenge to her readers: to read with integrity, and in context, both hers and our own. She also highlights one of the most striking features of *Chorus of Mushrooms*: that the politics of self-location are inscribed into the body of the narrative. As Steve McCullough observes, 'Ideas of textual responsiveness and readerly answerability [...] find narrative parallels in the diegetic construction of *Chorus* itself, which presents a personal encounter demanding response as essential to the production of textual meaning.'⁷⁶ My reading(s) of *Chorus* will engage with these ethical challenges, attentive to Doris Sommer's

⁷⁵ Goto, 'Alien Texts, Alien Seductions', p. 266.

⁷⁶ McCullough, "'Trust Me'", p. 156.

related warning about the limited access which some 'ethnically marked' texts offer: 'the slap of refused intimacy from uncooperative books' which detains readers 'at the boundary between contact and conquest'.⁷⁷ When is a slap more sharply felt than if addressed directly at *you*?

Mark Libin has confronted this question of his own positioning as white male critic reading *Chorus*, by exploring how its narrator both 'befriends' and excludes him:

Goto's writing forces me, the white reader, to take a risk, to attempt an impossible proximity, to jar against the boundary – between whiteness and the racialized, between inside and outside, between pleasure and discomfort, between self and Other – always taking into account the 'puerile desire' inherent in my attempt.⁷⁸

While his sense of his own otherness in relation to the text is something I think Goto does deliberately work to invoke through distancing strategies, by reducing alterity to the racial Libin simplifies the complex axes of difference that mediate between people, and appears to read whiteness as somehow beyond race. Working instead on a more technical level, to show *how* the shifting and dialogic dynamics of the second-person form enable Goto to construct a push and pull of narrative relations, can enable a precision and proximity that help to see through such overarching assumptions about how the novel and its narrator are 'racialized'. The impulse to self-reflexive, responsible reading which Libin's essay recognizes and acts upon, however, certainly seems to me to be a crucial part of a response to *Chorus*'s project. While the prominence of the 'you' situates the reader in a position of interpretive power – 'You know you can change the story' are the novel's last words – with power (albeit deliberately temporary and conditional) comes responsibility. Repeatedly, we are urged to 'listen before you hear'; to respect the cultural specificity of Murasaki's anti-mimetic, non-linear tale.

The 'frame' story, as the site where the reader is most directly engaged, will be the focus of my analysis, but this is not the only dialogic strategy in play. There is an echo of Marlatt's poetics (and Smith's for that matter) which is significant for thinking through *Chorus*'s dialogism. By means of the many conversations between Naoe and Murasaki which break into

⁷⁷ Sommer, *Proceed With Caution*, p. ix.

⁷⁸ Libin, "Some of my best friends...", p. 117.

their first-person narrative segments and are set apart inside indented parentheses, the novel both radically transgresses the rules of authorial mimetic narration and provides a model of respectful narrative communication between me as a white reader and this ‘Colour Full’ text. The ‘you’ in these instances is, in Kacandes’ terms, fully reversible, since the two women are literally in dialogue with one another. The complex function of the dialogues, in which the women support each other through the processes of storytelling, is the result of the novel’s two narrative lines – parallel, but beginning and ending at different points in time. One timeline consists of Naoe’s past-tense narrative of her young life in Japan up until the end of World War II, and her present-tense narrative of living on the prairies with the young Murasaki and her parents. Murasaki’s timeline, on the other hand, is different: her past-tense narrative refers to the same time frame as her grandmother’s present-tense one, whereas her own present is located some years later, when she is approaching thirty. This double temporality works to set Naoe and Murasaki on parallel (albeit misaligned) tracks, as it allows both women’s love affairs to be narrated in the present tense. In themselves, these two timelines are chronologically coherent; the conversations, however, serve to connect them in defiance of both realistic temporality and the discrete levels of narration that would locate the two narrators in hierarchical relation, Murasaki’s narration framing her Obāchan’s.

It is when Murasaki breaks into her own narration to ask ‘Obāchan, are you listening?’ (p. 58) – ‘Yes child, always’ – that she first seems to be addressing Naoe not from the time of the story but from the time of the narration. Two pages later, when she asks ‘Where are you now, tonight?’ (p. 60), it becomes apparent that this conversation, and therefore possibly all the others, is taking place across both time and space. And later still:

(Murasaki: Obāchan! Obāchan! OBĀCHAN! [...])

Naoe: *Hai! Obāchan da yo. Dōshita no, sonnani ōkina koe o dashite?*

Murasaki: Oh, Obāchan. Am I losing my mind? I can understand what you’re saying, and how can we be talking anyway?! I must be insane.

Naoe: *Ara*, Murasaki, that doesn’t sound like the granddaughter I know and love. There are stranger things in life than two people who are close being able to understand one another.

Murasaki: Yeah, but over distance and time? Not to mention life. You're dead after all, aren't you?

Naoe: Of course not! As if I would be ready for death. [...]) (p. 130)

While the reader might naturalize the illogicality of this narrative situation by assuming that Murasaki is *imagining* the conversations – that the mode is in fact not dialogue but apostrophe – similar examples are initiated by Naoe from within her sections too⁷⁹ and, more confoundingly, what is said in Naoe's past time begins to impact upon the events of the present story. In the last two conversations of the novel, Murasaki locates herself not in the time of Naoe's disappearance, but in her own present, aged nearly thirty; and Naoe advises Murasaki to try to communicate better with her mother, Keiko, specifying that she should let Keiko clean her ears (p. 162). Following these conversations, Murasaki narrates the past-tense account of her improving relationship with Keiko, including the first episode of ear cleaning. At this point the narrative invites a major double-take: the events of the 'story' no longer pre-exist their narration on the 'discourse' level some years later. Instead, the lessons Murasaki learns from her dialogues with Naoe about Japanese food and ear cleaning actually decide the course of events taking place in the story time.

A significant challenge is posed to conventional individualist and event-based conceptions of narrative by the presence of the dialogue form and its enacting of ethical I–you relations, especially when this transgresses the mimetic relations between narrative selves (as does Marlatt's). Narratology's tendency towards one-way thinking here can be reframed in terms of a dynamic, even occasionally *reversible*, narrator–narratee relationship. But as I have suggested, Murasaki's appeals to her grandmother across the space–time of their separation also speak to an anxiety about how to listen to and (re)tell stories, an anxiety that is paralleled in the 'frame' story as it takes a step closer to its reader and projects some of that caution towards her/him. It is in such reader-oriented terms that I will approach Goto's use of the second person in the present-tense exchange between lovers in the italicized 'frame' sections.

⁷⁹ E.g., p. 113 and p. 171.

At once fixed, in denoting the lover, and extremely fluid and contingent in terms of readerly identification, the 'you' established in the 'frame' is what David Herman has called 'doubly deictic': it 'makes of the reader a fellow player, who is suspended between a fictive world and his own real world, and who stands simultaneously inside and outside the fiction'.⁸⁰ Reader–narratee identification in *Chorus* is an interesting departure from what Fludernik describes as the way in which second-person texts tend to work. Usually narration begins with a generalized 'you' – that is, 'a "you" with which the reader in the role of "(any)one" can identify'⁸¹ – but soon shifts to refer to a specific narratee, thus distancing the reader. Particularly interesting, though, are the exceptions to this rule, 'texts in which the generalized reading ("you" equals "one"), in the form of a very specific reader role, persists despite the narrowing of reference, and it does so because in these texts the desired effect is precisely to make the reader feel personally responsible, personally caught in the discourse and exposed to its political thrust'. It is this sense of personal responsibility, of narrative ethics, that Goto achieves in her use of the dialogic second-person form.⁸²

There is of course a danger inherent in the assertion that reading is always or only a question of identification, that our enjoyment and understanding of a text is contingent upon our being able to identify with writer/narrator/character along gendered/racial/cultural or any other axis of identity. Besides the fact that it is impossible to position oneself within the bounds of any number of identity categories, this is also, as Rita Felski writes, 'to shrink the many functions and facets of reading down to the single fact of self-recognition'.⁸³ That said, where the second-person pronoun appears, that moment of being drawn into identification is inevitable, and the dynamics structuring how that affective impulse does or does not persist further into the text cannot be ignored, since it is an essential component of how Adam

⁸⁰ David Herman, 'Textual *You* and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*', *Style*, 28.3 (1994), 378–410. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

⁸¹ Fludernik, 'Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case', n.p.

⁸² See Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (New York: Plume, 1988) for another significant example; as I discuss briefly in Chapter Four (note 101), she addresses this short, at times bitterly critical guide to Antigua to a white Western sun-seeking tourist blind to the sacrifices and injustices the island people suffer at the hands of 'your' neo-colonial power.

⁸³ Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 42.

Newton's ethical 'dramas of encounter and recognition' are being played out in the dialogue between speaker and listener/reader.

Within the opening section, *Chorus* departs from the usual 'narrowing' pattern Fludernik identifies, beginning: 'We lie in bed, listen to the click of blinds [...]. My shoulder, my arm, the swell of my hip. The curve of my thigh. Lean lightly into you' (p. 1). Here the narratee is initially located in bed with the narrator (where the reader is not). Mark Libin makes a useful, if fleeting, observation about this opening: 'The text initiates itself with a pronominal gesture of inclusiveness. The textual community invoked by the pronoun "we," however, is reconfigured by the verb phrase that follows – "lie in bed" – which constructs a situational specificity that suddenly distances the reader from the pronoun.'⁸⁴ Apart from this possible first instant of recognition, however, the whole first paragraph establishes a specific and intimate scene of 'skin touching skin'. While the pleasure evoked in this scene potentially calls a reader into imaginative engagement, its formal design works to distance her/him, and problematizes Barthes' 'pleasure' or 'erotics' of the text. A gap opens up here between an affective and an analytical response, a gap which could vary with each unpredictable instance of reading.

It is only when the 'you' first speaks, to ask for a story, that its reference in fact widens out to invite readerly identification, and this occurs of course because the lover's request is the same one a reader implicitly makes upon opening a novel:

'Will you tell me a story about your Obāchan?'
'Yes,' I close my eyes and breathe deeply. Slowly.
'Will you tell me a true story?' you ask, with unconscious longing.
 [...]
'[...] bear with my language, won't you? My Japanese isn't as good as my English, and you might not get everything I say. But that doesn't mean the story's not there to understand. Wakatte kureru kashira? Can you listen before you hear?'
'Trust me,' you say.
I pause. Take a deep breath, then spiral into sound.
'Here's a true story.'
Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi... (pp. 1–2)

⁸⁴ Libin, 'Lost in Translation', p. 128.

The widening-out of reference is, unusually, slightly delayed in this example, and has the subtly different effect of unsettling from the very start any easy identification. Just as the politics of difference require me continually to interrogate my subject position and locate myself relationally, so the narrative opens with a process of re-reading and rethinking ('I was outside the text, but now I am asked to see myself inside') that will structure the whole reading process. Even within the above passage, the narrator announces she will be speaking Japanese, creating slippage between a non-Japanese-speaking reader and the narratee, as well as introducing one layer of (cultural) translation between the story we are reading and the story as it is being told (who, we may ask, is translating?). Indeed, throughout the novel, the italicized lovers' story shifts between the apparently generalized 'you' who is the listener, and thus projects out to the 'reader', and very specific accounts of 'you' and 'I' as lovers buying a futon, having coffee, visiting parents, or getting fingers and tongues stuck to the ice on the garage door.⁸⁵ Alternating, in terms of the reader's identification, between invitation and alienation, between friendship and unfamiliarity, Goto's doubly deictic 'you' effects a push and pull of narrative. In Newton's terms, the text's ethical paradigms continually shift from seductive to aggressive to instructive; this narrative encounter, for me, unfolds in contingent, mutable, self-conscious ways.

The lover-narratee, if read as identical to Murasaki's 'fresh-off-the-boat' Japanese flower-arranging lover (p. 54), occupies a very different subject position to my own as, among other things, a white female British reader, so how is it that I feel drawn, albeit not constantly, into 'his' position? Firstly, although the lover is inside the text while I am outside, we are both extradiegetic in relation to the body of the story being narrated (although such clean-cut levels collapse as the narration proceeds). But the deliberate indeterminacy of the 'you' no doubt also has a considerable impact here. Until page fifty-four, the lover is confined to the frame, unidentified, yet even once Murasaki mentions her lover in the 'embedded' story and the narratee-lover breaks into the story to react – "Hey!" you interrupt, "are you talking about me?" (p. 55) – the italicized sections persist in their ambiguity. It is the readerly impulse to

⁸⁵ These events appear on pages 78, 132, 55, 27 respectively.

narrativize, then, that connects the 'embedded' and 'frame' lovers. As Guy Beauregard observes, 'The lover is unnamed and ungendered, and thus has an extremely flexible and fluid identity, through which Goto can refuse to "fix" the erotics of story-telling into homo/heterosexual or allo/autoerotic paradigms.'⁸⁶ While I would argue that the lover's gender does in fact lean towards the masculine (the few possibly suggestive details are the lover's rough palms (p. 1), large boots (p. 27) and, perhaps most tellingly, the fact that Murasaki's conservative mother 'loves you so much, she would eat you up if she could' (p. 55) which makes a lesbian reading unlikely), I would not contest that the 'you' opens up a fluidity of gendered location that is non-exclusive.

The racialization of the narratee is perhaps more significant in terms of the push and pull the novel effects; the racial and cultural difference – the hyphen's 'noise'⁸⁷ – that *Chorus* explores is translated in formal terms into the presence of embedded (revisionary) Japanese myths and untranslated Japanese linguistic elements. Himani Bannerji, an Asian Canadian writer, relates: 'In another language, I am another person, my life another life.'⁸⁸ The incorporation of Japanese words and phrases, then, is a vital way in which Goto inscribes her specific cultural location into the language of her text. As Sherry Simon writes, 'translation today as a reality and as an ideal has more to do with discontinuity, friction and multiplicity than it has to do with the creation of new commonalities. Culture no longer offers itself up as a unifying force; language, nation, culture no longer line up as bounded and congruent realities.'⁸⁹ Goto's refusal to translate for what she admits is a mainly white Western readership is a marker of just such cultural friction, of the fact that 'difference exists, all cannot be understood, language could and can be a barrier'.⁹⁰ Since we know from the beginning that the narratee-

⁸⁶ Beauregard, 'Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*', p. 54.

⁸⁷ Wah, *Faking It*, p. 73.

⁸⁸ Himani Bannerji, 'The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience', in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995), pp. 159–79 (p. 168).

⁸⁹ Sherry Simon, 'Translating and Interlingual Creation in the Contact Zone: Border Writing in Quebec', in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 58–74 (p. 72).

⁹⁰ Goto, 'Translating the Self: Moving Between Cultures', *West Coast Line*, 30.2 (1996), 111–13 (p. 112).

lover speaks Japanese, and later that s/he is familiar with Japanese cultural forms like the cooking of *sekihan* (p. 182), identification for the white non-Japanese-speaking reader is by no means straightforward.⁹¹ The sense of disorientation, of being located as alien in relation to the textual world, which non-translation provokes in the non-Japanese-speaking reader is crucial to the push and pull of the reader-text relationship. Whereas Goto's acknowledgements page refers the reader to several contextual works elucidating the Japanese myths embedded in the novel, by refusing to translate Japanese words, and sometimes presenting them in Japanese characters thereby preventing the non-Japanese-speaking reader from even 'hearing' them, she positions that reader on a level of knowledge inferior to every other participant in the narrative situation. If, as Goto argues, 'the crux of translation is who is translating and for whom', then the point of non-translation in this novel is that the participants in the various levels of narrative exchange can understand each other in both languages, and that it is the reader who is displaced to the margins.⁹²

The indeterminacy at *Chorus*'s heart means that Goto's reader is confronted by unsettled relations of centre and margin, self and other; beneath possible assumptions about cultural Otherness, the ground is continually shifting. One of the strongest forces that does draw me, as reader, across the extratextual divide into the position of narratee is the narrator's attempt to educate her lover in the art of listening-before-you-hear, which in fact progressively turns into frustration at the lover's insistence on 'true' and logical stories:

'You switch around in time a lot,' you say, a bowl of coffee resting in your palms. 'I get all mixed up. I don't know in what order things really happened.' You lift the coffee to your lips and slurp at hot liquid. Nibble a dry Italian biscuit and look expectantly up at me.

I tip my chai to my lips, and lick sweet aromatic milk that lingers. I want to just ignore you. You with your dry biscuits and expectations. But it would be rude and you have listened with care and intelligence. You have participated in the story.

(p. 132)

⁹¹ I noted earlier that our engagement with a text is of course not contingent upon our sharing with writer/narrator/character any particular axes of identity, but that since the second person's double deixis plays on precisely this process, it is necessary to unpick how it works here.

⁹² The exceptions to this are Murasaki's parents who, since leaving Japan, discover they can no longer speak, or in the case of her father, hear, Japanese. However, they do not transgress their status as characters and as such do not affect the levels put in place by the narrative situation.

Despite my interest in experimental texts, which means that switching around in time is certainly not something I find alienating, this exchange nonetheless presences me as the 'you' because, as a reader educated in the Western tradition, reading along alternative patterns – i.e. resisting the urge to naturalize, to gloss over the 'illogical' – is still a self-conscious act. Not only is there a tone of aggression towards the narratee here (*'You with your dry biscuits and expectations'*) that casts me as intruder in this story, but further distance is established between narrator and narratee/reader by way of the opposition between 'your' dry Italian biscuits and coffee and her sweet aromatic milk and chai. She is located here in the rich and delicious realm of Asian flavours while we (the lover and I) consume the dry products of European culture, othered again in relation to a centre-position (claimed, but also frequently *de-centred*) which is distinctly Japanese Canadian. At the same time, in another example of this text's push and pull of narrative, our participatory work as 'listeners' is acknowledged.

Towards the end of the text, the subject of the 'you' in the 'frame' sections actually changes temporarily, becoming simultaneously generalized and specifically self-referential:

You decide to leave, go on a journey, and people will say this and that. They want to tag you with something so that questions are neatly answered. A reason for everything around them. She's troubled, she's searching for something. Or she's running away. [...] The journey begins inside my head. (p. 192)

Here, the narrator refers to herself first as 'you', then 'she', before returning to the 'I', playing with the potential ambiguity of shifting pronominal relations. The lover-narratee disappears from this and the following italicized section, although the closing 'frame' section reverts to the intimacy of the second person for the narrator's final 'thank you' to her lover/listener/reader. But as a reader, the above passage is still an instance of when I am overtly invited to identify, this time not with the narratee but with the narrator herself; it is a move of distinct intersubjective intimacy through which I become self rather than other. This is, of course, only a momentary position, subject to change. The overlapping and seepage between voices, positions and stories in *Chorus of Mushrooms* means that its structuring intersubjective relations are constantly shifting; the selfhood it narrates is always in process and constituted in terms of its

relation to other selves inside and outside the text. Through its second-person strategies,⁹³ *Chorus* asks that we ‘engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement – whether in fondness or in fury’ (Code); it asks, that is, that we read *as* second persons.

Conclusion

While they use the ‘you’ form in multiple ways and very differently from each other (in *Ana Historic* it fluidly connects the various textual selves and speaks to Marlatt’s project of writing an intimate female reading/writing community; in *Chorus of Mushrooms* it serves to make the reader think through the responsibility of her/his own relationship to such a narrative community), both novels project out to their reader in their final lines an invitation to participate in the narrative act. Marlatt’s ‘the luxury of being has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead’ and Goto’s ‘you know you can change the story’ are both endings which open up a dialogic space for the reader to respond to the text. While Ali Smith’s stories do not act upon ‘real’ readers’ processes of identification in quite such a foregrounded way, their use of reversible structures work to unsettle the fixity both of narrating positions and of gendered story scripts. In innovative writing by women, we have seen, the second person reconceives narrative as an intersubjective transaction that is subject to change; the dominance of voice and narrator in traditional narrative theory is displaced by the intervention of the reader and the concurrent pluralization of narrative possibilities. Perhaps this is what Naoe means when she says:

Murasaki-chan, we have only come part way in the telling and the listening. We must both be able to tell. We must both be able to listen. If the positions become static, there can never be stories. Stories grow out of stories grow out of stories. Listening becomes telling, telling listening. (p. 172)

But the readerly empowerment to ‘change the story’ is a double-edged sword which risks overwriting the selfhood expressed by the text, and Goto’s ‘Colour Full’ textual politics prevents easy identification with the ‘you’ she writes to. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating what

⁹³ This effect is added to by other textual devices that ask the reader to rethink her relationship to the text, such as the occasional inclusion of Japanese sentences, untranslated and unexplained.

Bannerji refers to as the 'tone of translatedness':⁹⁴ the way in which diasporic writers find not only their writing but their selves filtered through a distorting process of cultural translation.

Reading the second person in these novels and short stories leads to an understanding that for these writers it is never only, if at all, an experimental literary tool for deconstructing the frames and structures of narrative or the analytical 'grids' critics bring to them. It becomes instead a site for the creation, the reconstruction, of the relationships and ethical encounters which the processes of reading and writing are, for these writers at least, all about. It is for this reason that Irene Kacandes' spectrum of reversibility provides a useful vocabulary for second-person narration: its apostrophic and dialogic poles relate to the workings of narrative communication, which means that this model can expose the implicit textual power structures through which narrative selves are given voice, or are silenced. Also enabling is its flexibility, which Kacandes highlights: 'different moments in a single literary work might occupy different positions on the spectrum. And [...] individual readers might perceive a text as more or less dialogic, depending on their receptivity to the appellative force of *you*'.⁹⁵ This flexibility is vital, since those texts in this chapter which do approach the apostrophic pole tend not to remain fixed there for long: Ina's voice breaking into Annie's narrative from beyond the grave; Smith's lover-narratees telling their side of the story; Naoe's speaking to Murasaki across time and space are all striking examples of the apostrophic being set up only to collapse into dialogue. And as I read them, even apostrophic stories, such as the examples by Michèle Roberts and Cherie Jones at the beginning of this chapter, never entirely 'short-circuit' communication because to some extent the reader feels a stronger than usual pull into the narratee's position and is therefore drawn to closer, more engaged participation in the narrative act. In the second-person mode, therefore, communication reaches out *beyond* the bounds of the text.

I suggest that even Suzanne Keen's recent and relatively broad definition of second-person narration as that which 'refers to a protagonist as "you" [and thus] conflates the protagonist

⁹⁴ Bannerji, 'The Sound Barrier', p. 165.

⁹⁵ Kacandes, 'Narrative Apostrophe', n.p.

called “you” with the narratee, or even with the real reader’, does not lay as much emphasis on the communicative force of the ‘you’ form as its functions in the texts I have been reading imply.⁹⁶ My objection is a fairly nuanced one; take, for example, the following incisive observations about the form (and its theories) by James Phelan:

The greater the characterization of the ‘you,’ the more like a standard protagonist the ‘you’ becomes, and, consequently, the more actual readers can employ their standard strategies for reading narrative. However, as recent commentators on second-person narration have consistently observed, most writers who employ this technique take advantage of the opportunity to move readers between the positions of observer and addressee and, indeed, to blur the boundaries between these positions [...]. In short, it is not easy to say who you are.⁹⁷

While Phelan’s foregrounding of the reader’s role in ‘you’ texts and his description of the dramatic impact of its more radical manifestations are persuasive, my readings have shown that even where there is no such ‘blurring’, where the ‘you’ is clearly characterized, the pronoun still carries an inherent ‘appellative force’ (Kacandes) that resists, or at the very least complicates, ‘standard’ reading strategies. I would argue that a moment of identification always, though to varying degrees, occurs at the point of reception, and that this is a defining element of narrative in the second person; a communicative and readerly factor that is currently underplayed. Loss, desire, madness, guilt, anger all motivate the use of the second person because, as the ‘pronoun of relationship’, it creates tension between narrative selves and casts the reader into a role where to remain neatly outside the text, relieved of the ethical negotiations it asks of ‘you’, becomes impossible. In every case, the *context*, both intra- and extratextual, in which these women writers have employed the form is one where the workings of empathy (as fondness or fury) – of Code’s ‘second-person’ relations – play a vital part in the narrative process.

While theorists certainly have accounted for what Fludernik describes as the ‘involving, dialogic function of *you*’ and its drawing-in of the reader, they still bias their studies towards the *narrative* uses of ‘you’ which most radically disturb the tenets of classical narratology. This is

⁹⁶ See note 17 above. Keen’s definition is broad in the sense that it does not specify that it must be the main protagonist as some definitions do, and in that it does gesture towards the importance of the real reader.

⁹⁷ James Phelan, ‘Self-Help for Narratee and Narrative Audience: How “I” – and “You”? – Read “How”’, *Style*, 28.3 (1994), 350–65. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

an important revisionary project, of course, and one which the texts I have been reading feed into, as indeed will my brief return to the function of the narrative 'you' in my reading of Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* in Chapter Four. However, the energy expended on distinguishing the narrative from the communicative 'you' can perhaps be seen to reveal more about the theorists' motives than about what is actually happening in contemporary fictions. That is, for so many contemporary writers, it is the communicative, dialogic function of the 'you' that makes it most compelling precisely because it predicates an *ethics* of reading: a responsive and responsible reading practice that participates actively and reflexively in a dialogic relationship with the text. In her essay, 'The Sound Barrier', Himani Bannerji describes her own urgent need to break out of the fictional mode in which she begins, into critical prose in the second person: 'You see, on the verge of writing, having written, I am still uncertain about the communicative aspect of it. I must reach beyond the authorial convention, break the boundaries of narration, its progression and symmetry, and speak to you directly: in a letter, which you will answer to the author in you.'⁹⁸ The immediacy and reciprocity of the relationship established the moment 'you' is spoken is defined here as an explicitly ethico-political tool. If in second-person fiction the 'you' is a fictive narratee-protagonist, then it is also a *real* reader: it addresses, however briefly, me and you and all those culturally and historically specific individuals who hold the book in their hands. To return to Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions*, which argued that engaging direct address has long been read (and sidelined) as an 'embarrassing', because 'feminine', cultural form,⁹⁹ we see that this ethical dimension of the 'you' form – drawing individual persons into second-person relations, making us think about our positionality within a community of writing/reading selves – is still being set aside in favour of ever more complicated attempts to classify and categorize it.

⁹⁸ Bannerji, 'The Sound Barrier', p. 164.

⁹⁹ See preface and chapter 8 ('Direct Address and the Critics') of Warhol, *Gendered Interventions*.

A situated study of the second person necessarily goes beyond the binary gender opposition on which Warhol's is based,¹⁰⁰ to take into account the many other axes of differentiation which (ambiguously) non-hegemonic writing makes essential, but in this form it becomes an important site for further critical interventions. Post-classical theories of the narrative 'you' emerge as illuminating but insufficient because they neglect the importance of narrative as communication, as relationship, as difficult and cautious ethical encounter. A plural approach to theoretical discourse, one which invokes elements of gender theory, of the politics of difference, of fictional ethics and the feminist/poststructuralist revisioning of subjectivity (as intersubjectivity or 'second personhood'), offers a far more expansive understanding of *how* contemporary fiction is rewriting the very shapes and structures of narrative. In the following chapter, my trajectory from the troubled author/ity of metafictional texts with an author-figure at the centre, through the dispersal of authority via dialogic, I-you modes, will lead into strategies of polyvocality in texts exploring social relations via narrative communities.

¹⁰⁰ In Warhol's study, 'engaging' address is 'feminine'; 'distancing' address is 'masculine', although she is careful to show how various Victorian writers cross these gender divides. She has since restated her argument in non-binary terms, in "'Reader, Can You Imagine? No, You Cannot": The Narratee as Other in Harriet Jacob's Text', *Narrative*, 3.1 (1995), 57-72.

CHAPTER THREE

Democracies of Voice? Communal Narration in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*, Ali Smith's *Hotel World* and Erna Brodber's *Myal*

The question – Can a subject relate to the other without assimilating the other to the self through identification? – corresponds to the political question, Can a community admit the Other without her/him having to already be or become the same? What psychoanalysis considers the problem of overcoming omnipotence is thus always linked to the ethical problem of respect and the political problem of nonviolence.¹

In *Shadow of the Other*, Jessica Benjamin articulates a potential theoretical intersection between an intersubjective, non-autonomous theory of self, ethical engagement with others, and inclusive political frameworks. She infers a close parallel between her psychoanalytic formulation of intersubjectivity and a model for democratic community politics. While there cannot be any easy equation between textual and actual politics, I would suggest that if self is at least partly constituted through narrative,² then the ways in which we tell and receive stories are constitutive of the relations we develop with others. Multiplying and diversifying the dialogic urge explored in my previous chapter, the increasing presence of multiply narrated novels in anglophone literatures over the past twenty years or so has worked to disperse singular narrative authority. Omnipotence comes to be replaced with contingency; individual 'voice' with strategies of polyvocality; one-way narrative communication with intersubjective 'conversation'; narrative hierarchies with narrative democracies.³ Proceeding from the idea that multiply narrated novels can reshape some of the ethico-political frameworks of both writing and reading, this chapter develops my study of the interplay of politics and poetics in

¹ Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 94.

² For theoretical work exploring the relation between self and narrative, see my Introduction, note 59.

³ Multiple narration as I use it here goes back to Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931) and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935). Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1989) are particularly well-known examples; in the Canadian context, recent examples include Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (New York: Warner Books, 2003) and Lisa Moore's *Alligator* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2005). Issuing from outside metropolitan centres, Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984) and Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (Auckland: Penguin, 1986), as well as Brodber's novels, bear witness to the value of collective narrative techniques in diverse minority literary cultures.

contemporary women's fiction by taking a contextual narratological approach to the (democratic) *social* relations played out through (multiple and counter-hierarchical) *formal* ones. Through three different examples – Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), Ali Smith's *Hotel World* (2001) and Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988) – I examine their move away from hierarchical relations of embedding or framing towards what I call, after Ali Smith, 'democracies of voice'.⁴

The importance of multiple narration for my thesis lies in its transformation of the narrative situation: I propose that with a plurality of narrating and focalizing agents, whether intimately connected or strangers, a novel becomes a *narrative community*. The best-known theorist of the multi-voiced novel is of course Mikhail Bakhtin, but Bakhtin's identification of dialogism as characteristic of novelistic discourse in general speaks to a less determinedly exploratory form of narrative multiplicity than I am interested in here. Thus, rather than Bakhtin's 'polyphonic' novel, I draw upon Susan Lanser's definition, in *Fictions of Authority*, of 'communal voice' as the 'spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority'.⁵ But my approach deliberately does not equate community with collectivity, since the former as I understand it encompasses the internal ruptures of dissent, difference and inequality which the latter smoothes over. In the texts under scrutiny here, connections can be drawn between their plural, relational narrating scenarios and the broader social relations they narrate; it is for this reason that I prefer the specificity of the term 'communal narration' to the more generic 'multiple narration'.

With this model, I do not mean to invoke a generalized sociological concept of 'community'. Instead, I am using the term to describe how multiply narrated texts actively create connections between narrative selves even where such links appear to be minimal or absent. Useful here are elements of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's sociolinguistic formulation

⁴ Ali Smith quoted at <<http://www.encompassculture.com/readerinresidence/authors/alismith/>> [accessed 01 March 2005].

⁵ Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 21. Lanser's study does not aim for a comprehensive typology, focusing on three specific strategies of voice employed to distinct ideological ends by women writers: 'authorial', 'personal' and 'communal'. My work engages with (and extends) the 'communal', and mainly one of its three subdivisions: 'sequential' form (a series of 'I's), rather than 'singular' ('I' speaks for a collective) or 'simultaneous' ('we').

of ‘communities of practice’: a means of ‘insisting that both language and gender are fundamentally embedded in social practice, [...] [which] involves not just individuals making choices and acting for reasons: it also involves the constraints, institutional and ideological, that frame (but do not completely determine) those individual actions’.⁶ While I work in a more abstract field than their study of ‘face-to-face’ speech practices among specific groups, and while I stress communities’ internal differences as well as their ‘mutual interest or concern’,⁷ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s contextualized approach theorizes an instructive dialectic relationship between an individual voice and the context in which s/he speaks. In narrative fiction, different narrators might belong to different ‘groups’ yet, by juxtaposing or interweaving them within the framework of a multiply narrated novel, the whole is presented to the reader as a kind of ‘community of [narrative] practice’ which has its own set of framing constraints in the form of narrative expectations and connections – constraints that will change in the context of each new reading.

In applying a political concept of democratic communal relations to multiply narrated texts, I am reading the intersubjective, conversational dynamics of narrative as (potentially) speaking to an equitable model of social relations that centres not on individual agency or reified class hierarchies but on complex and multiple positionings of selves. In other words, this is a model informed by Chantal Mouffe’s inclusive concept of ‘radical democracy’. According to Mouffe, ‘the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and equality should apply’.⁸ In a fully pluralist society, a radical democracy will by definition remain an unattained ideal because intersecting axes of struggle are always at work, and social movements must be understood relationally in terms of their distinct, sometimes conflicting

⁶ Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5.

⁷ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, p. 5.

⁸ Chantal Mouffe, ‘Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics’, in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 368–84 (p. 371). This continues ideas from her highly influential book, co-authored with Ernesto Laclau and first published in 1985, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

needs: 'Once it is accepted that there cannot be a "we" without a "them" and that all forms of consensus are by necessity based on acts of exclusion, the question cannot be any more the creation of a fully inclusive community where antagonism, division, and conflict will have disappeared'.⁹ In thinking about narrative *democracies*, I am moving away from the idealizing implications of Lanser's emphasis on collectivity, towards a conception of the intersubjective relations between self and community as both antagonistic and mutually constitutive. Communities necessarily consist of pluralities and affiliations, dissonances and oppressions, competitions for authority, and the constant potential for change through interaction. Fictional *narrative communities* play out such relations through their formal and discursive strategies, making close narrative analysis a particularly incisive and productive critical tool. And while, in a literal sense, the parameters of the text demarcate the boundaries of the narrative community since communities are defined by what they exclude as well as what they include, with each reader's involvement the text comes to be situated in a different context so that the contours of its community of (narrative) practice are redefined. My analyses will therefore also illustrate how, in the absence of a consistent homo- or heterodiegetic narrator, the relations between narrative selves – reader included – keep shifting. The ruptures, gaps and differences that mark this intersubjective model of narrative, I suggest, call upon readers to trace or to imagine connective relations between various differentially positioned narrative selves, invoking flexible and participatory reading practices.

Narratological contexts

Throughout this chapter, I attend to the challenges posed to both classical and post-classical narratologies by these three novels and by my contextual readings of them. Fundamentally, I begin to bridge the gap left by the lack of sustained analysis of so-called 'multiple narration' and its diverse fictional manifestations, which remains an extremely broad and undefined mode. This lack is itself a factor of a more problematic question about the low, or weak, narrativity

⁹ Mouffe, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics', p. 379.

which texts made up of several mini-narratives are perceived to have.¹⁰ Narratology is founded upon a 'natural' model of narrative communication in which a single narrator tells and holds authority over a story; classical approaches to speech and thought representation therefore tend to operate at the level of the utterance, breaking down multiply narrated texts into component parts where a single narrating agent (or function) can typically be identified. The reconstitution of the whole, the relations between different narrative situations at different moments, have tended to be neglected within narratological analysis. This chapter contends that, for the plural fictions of the contemporary period, such micro-level analysis needs to be systematically combined with a macrostructural approach, a framework that looks globally at the whole text.

Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds* takes a significant step in this direction, arguing that narratology's existing 'internalist' accounts of the representation of consciousness need to be revised in response to the fact that minds (characters' included) are not private but socially situated and contextual.¹¹ Catherine Emmott's recent sociocognitive work to analyse 'social space', which she defines as 'social relations between characters who are within narrative contexts',¹² also posits 'the need for a complex overarching model of narrative processing that takes into account the range of different ways in which characters can be cognitively prominent and recognizes the complexity of social situations in narrative texts'.¹³ In much the same way, I would argue that the 'social space' of communally narrated novels demands an approach to speech and thought analysis which attends to the structural relations between utterances. That is to say, analysis of Genette's classic elements of 'who speaks' and 'who sees' must run

¹⁰ The multiply narrated novel can overlap with the short story cycle (defined as a collection of interlinked stories, independent and interdependent at once, though by no means always multiply narrated). Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is an example of a limit case, generally referred to and marketed as a novel but also read as a short story cycle (see Rocío G. Davis, 'Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwige Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*', *MELUS*, 26.2 (2001), 65–81). The term 'novel in stories' is one attempt at categorizing this generic middle ground, though it is a category more popular among writers/publishers than critics, an exception being Margot Kelley, 'Gender and Genre: The Case of the Novel in Stories', in Julie Brown, ed., *American Women Short Story Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 295–310.

¹¹ Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2004), chapter 5.

¹² Catherine Emmott, 'Constructing Social Space: Sociocognitive Factors in the Interpretation of Character Relations', in David Herman, ed., *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford: CSLI, 2003), pp. 295–321 (p. 296).

¹³ Emmott, 'Constructing Social Space', p. 319.

concurrent with relational questions of *how* the whos – the speaker and the spectator – are connected, and what ordering patterns or formal devices work to situate them. How these relational and intersubjective workings of narration establish or deconstruct narrative hierarchies and thus speak to the interplay of politics and poetics is what this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, is exploring.

The other narratological challenge I posit here extends the previous one, but also reaches beyond narrative theories to cultural and philosophical thinking about selfhood. When read against texts that employ plural, communal, intersubjective narrative forms, narratology's singular approach to narration and its orientation around a self-identical, autonomous, agentive narrating 'voice' – connotative of a humanist model of selfhood – is shown to be contingent, to tell only part of the story. Rewriting 'narrative voice' can take the form, as in *Trumpet* and *Hotel World*, of multiple authorities where the use of a number of differentially positioned narrating agents asks readers to attend to the relations in between stories, and to what is at stake in the foregrounding of one character/narrator over another. Or, more challengingly, as I will suggest in relation to *Myal*, pluralizing 'voice' can involve a thoroughgoing interrogation (in the spirit of Andrew Gibson's postmodernist deconstructive project) of the cultural specificity of narratology's founding assumptions about the narrator as autonomous organizing consciousness and originary centre of discourse. Both deconstructive and non-hegemonic concepts and critiques of 'voice' are enabling for understanding why multiple narration might be asking us to read differently, and how we might begin to do so.

Susan Lanser justifies the centrality of voice to her feminist study of narrative authority through a now well-rehearsed critique of poststructuralist theories: 'Despite compelling interrogations of "voice" as a humanist fiction, for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power'.¹⁴ Indeed, 'voice' as a metaphor for social agency has been valued by many non-hegemonic groups in their negotiations with hegemonies.

¹⁴ Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, p. 3.

But the grounding of such a 'politics of voice' in the autonomy of the individual both elides the socio-political forces acting upon her/him¹⁵ and reduces political agency to that which can be articulated through speech, assuming voice is a stable, impermeable means of self-expression. The potential for resistance found within, for example, 'black' musical forms or strategies of silence complicates a politics based on voice,¹⁶ as does Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's concept of a specifically black female form of heteroglossia, 'speaking in tongues':

As gendered and racial subjects, black women speak/write in multiple voices – not all simultaneously or with equal weight, but with various and changing degrees of intensity, privileging one *parole* and then another. One discovers in these writers a kind of internal dialogue reflecting an *intrasubjective* engagement with the *intersubjective* aspects of self, a dialectic neither repressing difference nor, for that matter, privileging identity, but rather expressing engagement with the social aspects of self ('the other[s] in ourselves').¹⁷

Henderson is operating in a specifically black feminist context, and speaks particularly to the discursive plurality we will see in *Myal*, but her idea of speaking in multiple, differently privileged discourses as a means to thinking the other-in-the-self also touches on the broader connection I am drawing in this chapter between a 'democratic' textual politics and a communal poetics. Informed by ideas of voice's instability, permeability, constant variation and interference, my interventions into narratological approaches respond to these non-hegemonic versions of the singular speaking self as well as to metropolitan poststructuralist versions.

Through my readings of some of the diverse forms and ethical workings of communal narration, this chapter will develop an understanding of 'voice' not as a narrative universal but

¹⁵ When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak declared 'The subaltern cannot speak!', it was an exasperated response to the many and diverse muting forces acting to silence the subaltern woman. Critical responses, however, have tended to reassert the urgency of the possibility of voice, as Spivak notes in her revised version of the essay, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 281–312.

¹⁶ Calypso, drumming or jazz are identified as possibilities in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'The History of the Voice', in *The Colonial Encounter: Language* (Mysore: University of Mysore Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, 1984), pp. 1–42; and Marlene Nourbese Philip, 'The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy', in *She tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks* (London: Women's Press, 1993), pp. 76–91. Philip's work also explores the significance of silence as resistance to linguistic colonizations.

¹⁷ Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* (New York and London: Meridian, 1990), pp. 116–142 (p. 137).

as an *effect* of reading. As Andrew Gibson argues, the term ‘voice’ – and indeed ‘narrator’ – is ‘inseparable from the sense of a subjectivity intimately inhabiting the text’.¹⁸ With Monika Fludernik, I find that ‘narration’ should be the privileged term since it avoids this metaphor for presence and accommodates the spectrum of narrator-functions which can be conceptualized along ‘a gradual scale between an overt (personalized) narrator persona and a more covert narrative voice all the way to an objective backgrounded narrative function in reflector mode narrative’.¹⁹ I endeavour to keep ‘voice’ for instances where what Richard Aczel calls a ‘voice effect’²⁰ is audible. So, unlike Lanser’s study of communal form in fiction, which is centred on communal *voice*, that is on texts with multiple first-person narrators, my study of communal *narration* contests the hegemony of this narratological tenet by also attending to texts where focalization and/or discursive style shifts between several characters, without necessarily being told in their voices. This is to begin to acknowledge Alan Palmer’s assertion that narratology’s treatment of consciousness has been in ‘the grip of the verbal norm’.²¹ Nevertheless, as even the most deconstructive approaches to narration concede, when reading a story our cognitive processes do tend to impose a communicational framework, to create a pervasive (if metaphorical) sense that somebody is *speaking*. Thus Gibson asks, ‘do we know how to attend to the muteness of narrative, how *not* to hear it?’²² And in fact, for my work, reading for those sites where a voice effect fades in or out is part of understanding a text’s communicative and, by extension, *affective* force – that which helps to establish the relations of positionality connecting narrative selves and is therefore crucial in shaping responses to a novel’s ‘social space’.

Given Aczel’s notion of the resilience of voice effects in narrative, we might endeavour to move from a model of narrative communication based on singular speech roles to one which

¹⁸ Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 145, p. 143, p. 169.

¹⁹ Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 443.

²⁰ Richard Aczel, ‘Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts’, *New Literary History*, 29.3 (1998), 467–500 (p. 472).

²¹ Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, p. 53.

²² Andrew Gibson, ‘“And the Wind Wheezing Through That Organ Once in a While”: Voice, Narrative, Film’, *New Literary History*, 32.3 (2001), 639–57 (p. 643).

takes into account the interactivity and interdependence of storytelling practices. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré's analysis of the dynamics of conversation intersects usefully with the intersubjective approach to communal narration that I am formulating, and it also partially overlaps with the contextualization of language use conceived within Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's model of 'communities of practice'. Davies and Harré replace the traditional idea of fixed conversational 'roles' with a pluralist and contextual concept of 'positionality', which takes 'the social meaning of what has been said [...] to depend upon the positioning of interlocutors' and accounts for the speaker's position at the moment of utterance/interaction, while by no means reifying that position.²³ They propose that positionality is 'the appropriate expression with which to talk about the discursive production of a diversity of selves – the panorama of Meadian "me"s conjured up in the course of conversational interaction'.²⁴ Rather than the emphasis on shared situations which 'communities of practice' denotes, in Davies and Harré's approach, conversation works on a smaller scale and is more prominently defined as a site of dissonance since it focuses on differential roles rather than on common speech practices. Admitting that communal narration is *not* conversation, nor even, in many cases, a particularly close analogy, once conversation is so flexibly and intersubjectively modelled, thinking of novels as conversationally structured (in which I would include the reader) helps to underline the significance of the relations in between 'voices'. Positionality might offer a productive and contextual way of conceiving of the interactional experience by which readers and narrative selves position one another – and the power relations involved.

While recuperating Lanser's notion of 'communal' form to denote the complex workings of fictional narrative communities, then, I am also adapting it. If we envision voice as a palimpsestic *effect*; if we attend also to linguistic plurality, to musicality, perhaps even to silence; if we situate speech in the context of conversation, as intersubjective encounter in

²³ Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20.1 (1990), 43–63 (p. 45).

²⁴ Davies and Harré, 'Positioning', p. 47.

which the reader participates, then we arrive not at a crisis of individual agency, but at a far more appropriate understanding of communal narration's plural, relational, permeable possibilities. By attending to the ethico-political relations embedded within innovative narrative strategies, and always also to the ethics of my own readings of those strategies, I attempt to bring together under the heading 'communal narration' novels from distinct contexts of production without cutting across the significant differences between their uses of the form. My broad concept of 'democratic' narrative communities, which itself has different resonances for *Trumpet*, *Hotel World* and *Myal*, is directed at enabling a discussion of how social questions of inequality and inclusion are not contained within the *content* of a text, but can be further elucidated at a *formal* level through the development of communal narrative strategies. At the same time, by thinking about the forms and functions of communal narration in distinct cultural contexts, including the Caribbean where narrative theory has rarely intervened, my readings will again demonstrate the value and viability of a contextualized narratological criticism.

The texts

It is important to note certain points of contact between *Trumpet*, *Hotel World* and *Myal* which affirm the possible benefits and insights of transcultural criticism; benefits, that is, beyond the argument underlying my whole thesis: that narratological criticism, if contextually located and understood as an ethical transaction between text and reader, is an indispensable tool for understanding the relations of sameness and diversity within literary activity. The diasporic or rooted locations of writers impact on the kinds of communities under narration. Interesting in Smith's novel is the way it explores a loosely British (but not specifically Scottish)²⁵ social context while simultaneously refusing specific localizing indicators; it is in a 'ubiquitous'

²⁵ Certain critics expect the kind of identifiably Scottish locations, characters or questions of 'Scottishness' that Smith's fiction tends to avoid. See, for example, Alison Lumsden, 'Scottish Women's Short Stories: "Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended"', in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden, eds, *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 156–69 (p. 162). This is not solely a national point for Smith's work though, because, as we saw with her short stories in the previous chapter, she constantly resists defining her characters according to the familiar identity matrix of gender/race/space, calling instead upon more open identifications.

Global Hotel in an unidentified town that, as the final chapter self-reflexively tells us, ‘the heft and scant of this book have been so tenuously anchored’ (p. 229). The voices of Kay’s novel work differently in that they do clearly foreground local differences between communities in London and rural Scotland, but *Trumpet* also radiates outwards to encompass the imagined communities of jazz-lovers and magazine readers who respond to Joss’s death.

In Brodber’s case, too, much as she is a writer rooted in her home soil of Woodside, Jamaica, she has also worked in the United States, and is published by New Beacon in London.²⁶ Her diasporic connections, her attachment to what she calls the ‘continent of black consciousness’, are significant, and speak to an engagement beyond the borders of her home community and a commitment to articulating for a diasporic audience the impacts of and resistance against colonial theft. Unlike her later novels which look to the ‘continent of black consciousness’, *Myal* is a novel about *local* community relations, where diasporic connections are shown to work perniciously (Ella’s life in America ends with her ‘tripping out in foreign’ and needing a myalist cure). Even here, though, local and diasporic are permeable concepts since Brodber’s story of rural Jamaican community is shaped by arrivals, departures and returns and by the presence of creolized cultural and spiritual forms. In particular, the hybrid cultural form of jazz music is enabling for Brodber and for Jackie Kay, as it has been for many others,²⁷ in modelling a poetics that is improvisatory and collective (a democratic music, if you like) *and*

²⁶ Brodber’s relative marginalization within literary critical discourse – and her absence from narratological studies – makes her work particularly relevant to the inclusive revisionary project I am undertaking here. This marginalization might be attributed to her magical realism which fits uncomfortably in the anglophone Caribbean’s social realist tradition (see Timothy Reiss, ed., *Sisyphus and Eldorado: Magical and Other Realisms in Caribbean Literature* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002)); or to her residence in rural Jamaica, which Alison Donnell argues alienates her from postcolonialism’s favoured diasporic/‘Black Atlantic’ paradigms in favour of a revaluing of the local (*Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 127). Or, it might simply be read as a function of her Jamaicanness: Shalini Puri suggests that the Caribbean region is ‘marginalized from the canon of a Postcolonial Studies still dominated by the English Crown and still often conceived in terms of East/West binaries’ (*The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 2).

²⁷ Black American modernists Langston Hughes, Claude MacKay and Ralph Ellison are major examples of such a cultural trend (see Michael Borshuk, *Swinging the Vernacular: Jazz and African American Modernist Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006)); as well as, more recently, Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

that connects black diasporic communities, as what Edouard Glissant calls 'the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world'.²⁸

Such connections do not exist between Brodber and Ali Smith; however, in terms of the social 'democratics' which I find to be at work in *Hotel World*, the presencing of the disempowered, the relative distancing of the powerful, Smith's novel does share a purpose with *Myal*. Their disempowerment functions very differently, of course; whereas my treatment of *Hotel World* will locate this in relation to a specifically European political map of 'radical democracy', in *Myal* it relates to a context of struggle and resistance located in the specificity of the Caribbean socio-political and spiritual space, where what Glissant calls a 'participatory democracy' for 'small countries' is still being worked out.²⁹

All three readings attend to the innovative structures, alternative 'voices' and (democratic) politics of communal narration, as well as to the ethics of reading it; and the differences between the texts' usages of the form allow me to gesture to the broad and diverse possibilities it offers fiction writers. Communal narration as I conceive it is always multiperspectival and relational, but its relations of positionality might be dissonant, harmonious or variable; fictional communities of practice might be smaller groups with shared interests or connections (families, for example), or akin to broader social groups pervaded by difference. They can be structured in a potentially endless variety of ways which defies typologizing but rewards description. In both *Trumpet* and *Hotel World*, a story surrounding a character's death is told from diverse perspectives ranging from loved ones to (near) strangers. My analyses of these novels will argue that the relations between different narrational modes – specifically person, tense, and effects of

²⁸ Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Betsy Wing, trans. (1990; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 73. Also, in chapter four of her book, *The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day* (London: New Beacon, 2003), Erna Brodber explains how 1950s' music, including jazz, first gave her a sense of Jamaica's connections to a wider black continent. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* famously places jazz music at the centre of modernity's transcontinental black cultural exchange. And, as Silvio Torres-Saillant explains, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's series of three articles 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel' (published in *Bim* between 1967 and 1968) argue that an 'aesthetic mode' based on jazz is appropriate for a number of Caribbean novels (*Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 136).

²⁹ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, J. Michael Dash, trans. (1981; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 255.

narrative irony and empathy – echo and reinforce the *social* relations mediating between narrating and/or focalizing characters. In this way, communal form impacts significantly on textual politics, on how they deal with social relations of privilege, difference, intolerance, as well as loss and desire. I identify both novels as examples of what might be called ‘segmental’ communal narration (constructed of separate, differentiated sections), although within this category much variety is possible: serial, repetitive/ recursive, alternating, cyclical or interruptive strike me as just a few possibilities. My reading of *Trumpet* will focus in particular on the patterns of identification fostered by its different narrated segments, their recursive ordering and the relations established between them. *Hotel World*’s greater variety of narrative modes across its serially ordered segments will then enable me to engage in a more fine-grained narratological analysis of how socio-political relations can be played out through form.

The final part of this chapter turns to a narrative community that works rather differently. Whereas Kay and Smith’s novels draw together a range of perspectives, some relatives, others strangers, Erna Brodber’s *Myal* unfolds almost entirely within a small, rural Jamaican community. Its typesetting suggests a relatively conventional narrative framework, divided into chapters with consistently heterodiegetic narration and various shifts into character focalization, free indirect discourse, dialogue, and so on. Upon reading, however, it is soon clear that no individual narrator, no single subjective centre is present in *Myal*, nor can free indirect discourse alone account for its workings. Instead, the narration is unstable and shifting, ‘speaking’ at different moments in distinct, incommensurable, sometimes indeterminate voices. Suggesting that Brodber creates a narrator-function which is neither ‘I’ nor ‘we’, which is not bound by the limits of an individualist conception of self but moves through various subjective positions, I read *Myal* as another kind of narrative community, where narration does not issue from segmented, individual voices or consciousnesses but is continuous, flowing in and out of multiple, often unidentified or plural *positionings*. In each case, I am concerned with how different modes of voice or narration, and the relations between them, are constitutive of the specific social relations making up narrative communities.

Trumpet and *Hotel World*: Segmental Narrative Communities

Jackie Kay's first novel, *Trumpet* (1998), and Ali Smith's second, *Hotel World* (2001), engage a similar narrative logic: a dead character and the impact of the death upon the lives of others, as well as a structure that moves through a series of differentiated narrative positionings to explore certain social and representational hierarchies. The sociology of the novel, in the sense that owes much to Bakhtin's work on polyphonic discourse,³⁰ centres in *Trumpet* on issues of difference and (in)tolerance, and how social relations are read and (re)written over and over through their representations by the media, by official discourses, by other people. The social dimensions of *Hotel World* centre on the ubiquitous, globalized 'hotel world' as a site for transitory but potentially transformative encounters between people from different strata of social life. Despite their innovations and their overt imbrication of the formal and the ethico-political, neither novel has been the subject of close narratological reading. In the case of *Hotel World*, which is concerned with axes of social privilege in a non-specific white British community, this may simply be because there has been almost no scholarly work published to date; *Trumpet* by contrast has invited numerous critical readings exploring its auto/biographical 'traces',³¹ its representations of the positioning of the black body in rural Scottish society and, most frequently, its positioning of the *trans* body in heteronormative society, often in terms of Butler's work on performativity and materiality.³² But while *Trumpet*'s polyphonic, jazz-like structure never goes unmentioned, neither has it been read closely enough. I suggest that, in their use of *communal* narrative form, both novels employ an important yet under-explored area

³⁰ See M. M. Bakhtin's highly influential 'Discourse in the Novel' (1934–5), in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422.

³¹ See Linda Anderson, 'Autobiographical Travesties: The Nostalgic Self in Queer Writing', in David Alderson and Linda Anderson, eds, *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 68–81; and Judith Halberstam, 'Telling Tales: Brandon Teena, Billy Tipton, and Transgender Biography', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 15.1 (2000), 62–81.

³² See Halberstam, 'Telling Tales'; Irene Rose, 'Heralding New Possibilities: Female Masculinity in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*', in Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene, eds, *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 141–57; and Patrick Williams, 'Significant Corporeality: Bodies and Identities in Jackie Kay's Fiction', in Kadija Sesay, ed., *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 40–55.

of contemporary novelistic innovation, showing how recent fiction is speaking to some of the hardships, challenges and triumphs of community in contemporary Britain.

Both texts use communal narration to differentiate between their various participants at the level of narrative form itself, and in the process they require of the reader an ethical endeavour in which s/he interrogates her/his own patterns of (dis)identification, or what Diana Fuss calls 'the play of difference and similitude in self-other relations'.³³ In this, I share Andrew Gibson's understanding of the imbrication of ethics and narrative form:

In the context of [a Levinasian] ethics for which ethical and epistemological questions are inseparable, distinctions between modes of narration are also the crucial ethical distinctions. Thus ethical distinctions would be involved, for example, in differentiations [...] between an 'omniscient' third person narrator and one who professes only a limited or partial knowledge of the world narrated; between a third person narrator-character who is absent from the world narrated and one who is a character in the story he or she tells.³⁴

In the debate over whether person is a 'merely one linguistic trait among others' (Genette)³⁵ or constitutive of 'a profound change in narrative climate' (Cohn), I side determinedly with Cohn.³⁶ The apparently grammatical choice of tense has a similarly significant impact upon the distance or immediacy of the narrative situation, as Uri Margolin's work on present-tense or 'concurrent' narration suggests. While Margolin resists defining concurrence as having any specific effect, he admits the possibility that 'the depth and intensity of the reader's immersion, involvement, and participation in the game of make-believe are enhanced by doing away with retrospective global summation'.³⁷ Narratological analysis will enable me to show how writers' choices of narrative tense and person far exceed the grammatical, impacting upon the relative positionings of their subjects, and constituting, but not reifying, their 'democracies of voice'.

³³ Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

³⁴ Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 26

³⁵ Dorrit Cohn and Gérard Genette, 'A Narratological Exchange', in Ann Fehn, Ingeborg Hoesterey and Maria Tatar, eds, *Neverending Stories: Toward a Critical Narratology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 258–66 (p. 265).

³⁶ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 14.

³⁷ Uri Margolin, 'Of What Is Past, Is Passing, or to Come: Temporality, Aspectuality, Modality, and the Nature of Literary Narrative', in David Herman, ed., *Narratologies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 142–66 (p. 162). See my discussion of concurrent narration in Chapter One.

Trumpet

Upon the death of famous jazz trumpeter, Joss Moody, his doctor, undertaker, family, friends, and quickly the international media, find written on his body the secret of his female biological sex which he and his wife, Millie, have carefully guarded for decades, even from their adopted son, Colman. At the same time, as Linda Anderson observes, in death Joss's body remains 'opaque',³⁸ it withholds his narratives of self, and into this silence the world around him speaks its own versions. Plural versions of Joss's life- and death- and body-narratives make up Jackie Kay's complex, sensitive, and multiperspectival novel. Segments narrated or focalized by many of the people whose lives came into contact with Joss are woven together into what has been called the multivocality or polyphony of *Trumpet*'s structure. For Irene Rose, the 'inevitability' of society's heterosexual matrix 'would work to sustain the complex synergy of the ubiquitous, wilful ignorances owned and practised by all the peripheral characters', *except* for the novel's communal strategy: she argues that the 'choric juxtaposition' of narrative versions is transformative, releasing the 'liberatory potential' of Joss's transgressive identity.³⁹ We might see Alan Palmer's 'situated identity' – the notion that 'our identity is distributed among the minds of others'⁴⁰ – being explicitly played out here, but of course it is not only Joss's identity that the novel is constructing; the contextual, social dynamics of the narrative community itself are crucial to Kay's story. The tensions that run between the instances of ignorance and empathy in the many versions of Joss are themselves constitutive of that notion of community as a site of antagonism and negotiated otherness which constrains any utopian potentiality; the 'liberatory' function of the text, then, depends upon our reception of the *whole* narrative community and our perception of the non-heteronormative possibilities in the spaces between individual, partial versions. Though perhaps only gestural in terms of the novel's detailed

³⁸ Anderson, 'Autobiographical Travesties', p. 77.

³⁹ Rose, 'Heralding New Possibilities', pp. 147–8. Note that Victoria Arana also describes *Trumpet* as 'liberatory narrative', in 'Jackie Kay: The Fiction of Liberation', *Sable*, 9 (2006), 19–31 (p. 24).

⁴⁰ Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, p. 168.

movements of form, I will consider later how jazz might be heard in *Trumpet's* overlapping stories, each improvising their own take, dissonant or harmonious, on Joss's solo.

Opening the novel, our first encounter is with the bereaved, scared, lost, even guilty widow. The first-person narration in Millie's sections, which are the most numerous in the novel and the only ones to use the 'I' consistently, does not take the form of interior monologue tracing the fluency of her thought processes. Instead, in the present tense and following her first weeks as a widow, Millie consciously *narrates* her movements and her thoughts, organizing them, evaluating, justifying:

I wish I could see Colman. What could I tell him – that his father and I were in love, that it didn't matter to us, that we didn't even think about it after a while? I didn't think about it so how could I have kept it from him if it wasn't in my mind to keep?

I wash my face with cold water. I am so tired. I have become a different person. The way I think is different. I know this; I can remember that I used to have more space inside my head. Now it is crammed full with worries.⁴¹

The communicative impact and 'voice effect' of Millie's narration is greater than if we encountered her mental language; it works as a more direct appeal to the reader, in which she invites us to read the immediacy and intimacy of her loss, and implicitly makes a plea for understanding. With 'What could I tell him?' Millie asks her readers to share her dilemma, actively engaging us as she works out her own ethics of storytelling – how to explain to Colman his father's life. The generalized second-person pronoun is used on occasion to invoke a shared, affective response. A page in, Millie says: 'I am exhausted. [...] Of course you are going to look demented if some hack hides behind your hedge, snaps and flashes the moment you appear. How else are you going to look?' (p. 2). Later, remembering the early days of their courtship: 'I approach him and ask him out. It is 1955. Women don't do this sort of thing. I don't care. I am certain this man is going to be my lover. When you are certain of something, you must take your chance' (p. 12). Here, through the present tense (used for all of her memories of her relationship with Joss) and the momentary 'you'-address, Millie's narration opens up the space

⁴¹ Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (1998; London: Picador, 1999), p. 22. All page references will be to this edition and included in the body text.

for recognition between herself and her audience, making a call to identification. Listen to the romantic in you, she asks, as she tells us 'this man is going to be my lover'; but as Diana Fuss makes clear, this is a risky strategy because 'identifications are mobile, elastic and volatile', they are 'sites of erotic investiture continually open to the sway of fantasy'.⁴²

If seduced by Millie's love story, we might read the revelation that follows as a moment of great tenderness, but its framing as an unfolding mystery also risks being read as a fetishized moment of *disidentification*, of otherness:

I'm excited watching this man undress for me. Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped round and round his chest. He starts to undo them. I feel a wave of relief: to think all he is worried about is some scar he has. He should know my love goes deeper than any wound. [...] I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm.

It is light outside now, a frail beginning light. [...] The sea is calmer today, shamed by last night's excesses. It is lying low, all blue and growling innocence. I am safe. I will go down to the shops. I have an appetite for the first time in days. (p. 21)

The line space, followed by the present-day reality of grocery shopping: Millie is careful to relocate herself as 'ordinary woman', to situate this narrative's possible otherness within a framework that would reopen the potential for identification. That is to say, her representation of Joss stands in stark contrast to the sensationalism of others, and the careful interweaving of the quotidian with the unexpected is an attempt to naturalize the latter in the hope of enabling identifications with Millie.

Significantly, as the only consistently first-person narrator, Millie is in a privileged position to do so. If we consider (*pace* Gibson) that narrative mode correlates to a certain ethical position, then the immediacy and the directness of Millie's puts her in charge of her own representation, locating her representational power at the top of the narrative hierarchy. So, when she describes her daily ritual of bandaging Joss's breasts, there is a careful elision of sentiment and downplaying of significance through a discourse of care (determinedly asexual) which seeks to justify her secrecy: 'That was the closest I came to them, wrapping them up. He

⁴² Fuss, *Identification Papers*, p. 8.

put his arms in the air whilst I tucked in underneath and then pinned carefully [...]. That was it. Other than that, they didn't exist. Not really' (pp. 239–40). That final sentence, of course, is a slippage in her version, an understanding of the other story alongside the one she is telling. But if Millie is at the top of *Trumpet*'s narrative 'hierarchy', then evidently this is not a hierarchy arranged according to relations of social power. It could perhaps be described instead as a hierarchy of tolerance, or of intimacy, in that the greatest time, space and/or narratorial agency is accorded to those who do not denounce or ridicule or objectify Joss. The multiple perspectives through which his story is told are not in free play, but are arranged and mediated to varying degrees so as to construct a democracy of *representation*.

Judith Halberstam describes *Trumpet* as '[honoring] the life narrative of a passing man' by 'weaving together a patchwork of memories from Joss's survivors, but mainly his wife, and making that patchwork into the authentic narrative'.⁴³ Millie's forty-page opening section is longer by far than all others, except Colman's first, and in these two prominent and sharply divergent perspectives, there are perhaps remnants from *Trumpet*'s original structure: Kay conceived and initially wrote in only two voices, Millie's and Colman's, with Millie as central character.⁴⁴ But the novel's strength, and possibly its most important ethical move, has been its explosion into a far more nuanced, pluralistic form, inclusive of not just two but a multiplicity of perspectives straddling the spectrum of (in)tolerance, from which Joss's own, even after his death, is not excluded. Working down through the novel's own narrative hierarchy, I consider the prominent positioning of Colman and the heavily ironic positioning of Sophie Stones, the unethical journalist he becomes involved with, before moving on to the 'voices' of the 'People', those sections narrated from the peripheries of Joss's life.

⁴³ Halberstam, 'Telling Tales', pp. 71–2.

⁴⁴ I refer to my conversation with Jackie Kay about the formal development of the novel, University of Leeds, 2 May 2006; and also to comments from a 1997 interview while she was writing *Trumpet*, when she describes its central character as a bereaved widow (Nancy Gish, 'Adoption, Identity, and Voice: Jackie Kay's Inventions of Self', in Marianne Novy, ed., *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture* (2001; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 171–91).

Colman's first section is subtitled 'Cover Story', evoking its materialistic and sensationalist style in which he lets loose a flood of intimate family histories: his parents' kisses, their closed bedroom door (p. 66), and his own bitter reaction to the revelation. 'Cover Story' is the closest the novel comes to the representation of realistic spoken discourse, of someone telling a story, with markers of speech including idiom and abbreviated grammatical forms. Colman's wry discursive style, although not entirely lacking in alliterative quality, stands in contrast to the elegance and poetry of his mother's voice: 'He never hit me,' Colman begins. 'Never raised a hand or a fist. A belt, a buckle or a boot. I'll say that for him. Not once. Hardly ever raised his voice. Didn't need to. He'd hold my hand in the street. Liked that. [...] It was all right, it was, being Joss Moody's son. Only when I became Colman Moody did everything start to become a total fucking drag' (p. 45). The spoken quality of his discourse is cemented when, later, he says: 'I wore glasses. Don't any more, as you can see' (p. 61). Rather than this 'you' addressing an unspecified audience and hence implicitly the reader, as we are likely to assume up to this point, here Colman is shown to be speaking aloud to an intradiegetic narratee. Thus, when he says, 'I'm not a bitter guy. Don't get me wrong. Please. [...] No man wants a fucking lesbian for his father' (p. 66), the plea not to 'get him wrong' is one that operates within the storyworld as well as in terms of the ethical relations projecting out from it: Colman is anxious to see himself constructed sympathetically in the eyes of his listener. By this point it is possible to guess the identity of this listener to be Sophie Stones, the amoral tabloid journalist and ghostwriter who, at the end of the opening section, Millie had denied her son would ever speak to. This section, therefore, provokes a retake, calling to be (re)read not as direct speech, but as indirect speech transcribed by Sophie. Whether Colman's bitterness and vulgarity are entirely his own or exaggerated constructions of a mercenary journalist is perhaps not a major question, but at least a possibility.

Colman's next section, suggestively entitled 'Interview Exclusive', in fact begins by demonstrating the extent to which Colman's narrative is orchestrated by his interviewer (though he is later evasive to varying degrees): 'The first time, right? Right, the first time I brought a

girlfriend back home, my father was weird, come to think of it, very weird' (p. 117). Later in the section, the narrative mode shifts into Colman's internal focalization and then, within one paragraph, into Sophie's:

Colman hears himself say, 'Well, it's obvious, isn't it...' (He can't quite believe he is saying it, but he is.) 'Obvious. he got a kick buying me that shit because he wasn't a man. [...]' Sophie Stones fixes her eyes on his. This is more like it. This boy gets better every day. He's grasped the plot. 'Good,' she says and turns the tape off and writes down something in her notebook. Squiggles. Must be shorthand. She could be writing anything; it's all jibberish to him. (p. 123)

Their collusion, but also their competitive tension in which each distrusts the other and is out to get something, is played out in the 'social space' constructed by the narrative dynamics here. Their perspectival positions are distant, but through shared physical space they are gradually implicated, tied up in one another's versions, as their collaborative exposé project progresses. Several later sections follow this irregular pattern, shifting between first- and third-person narration and alternating Colman and Sophie's focalization; it will take some time for Colman to extricate himself, although the mediating heterodiegetic narration in the above passage already shows the chasm between their approaches to Joss's story and the ethics of telling it.

While Colman's sections tend towards the heterodiegetic, in the sections 'Money Pages', 'Style' and 'Interior', Sophie becomes the only other character to speak in a first-person voice, yet her insistence on referring to herself in the third person works, ironically, to create the narrative distance commonly associated with the third-person mode. Far from being a gesture of narrative authority, direct access to Sophie's thought processes means that her unsympathetic, often caricatured character is her own construction; the considerable narrative irony is the result not of a narrator's judgemental mediation but of a gaping ethical void: 'Soon I will crack him. I plan to trumpet the story everywhere. Spark up a blaze of publicity. Ignite the paparazzi. [...]' The word transvestite has got more in it than the word cross-dresser. [...] *Transvestite* has a nice pervy ring to it' (p. 126). The ethics of biography is being negatively evoked here, and Kay's

writing practice in her fictional biography is set against Sophie's hackery.⁴⁵ The effect of Sophie's 'I', then, is increasingly to isolate her, and demonstrate her ignorance of the changes taking place around her, as Colman comes to forgive his father and she loses her exclusive. For example, a late section entitled 'Editorial' is a deliberate and overt piece of narratorial irony, not in itself, but in its *relation* to Sophie's surrounding sections. The 'editorial' asks, 'What does the ghost writer do if the ghost gets cold feet?' and concludes, 'Many ghost writers believe they are the real authority on their subject and not the ghost themselves. They tend to get irritable if the ghost disagrees with them' (p. 262). This sets Sophie up for failure as, in the following piece, she elaborates on her ideas for the book, and even begins to write it, ignorant of Colman's desertion. In this specific context, the first person works very differently, facilitating narrative irony rather than narrative empathy. The case for a localized, relational analysis of the workings of narrative form is here clearly made; the laws of narrative are contingent.

The narrative community that transforms the embattled triad of loving wife, resentful son and exploitative journalist into a far more complex social space 'speaks' to us in the third-person: a host of characters, in sections mostly headed 'People', relate their diverse encounters with Joss's story. Whereas in *Hotel World* we will encounter a clear hierarchy of 'voice' that uses narrative strategies of intimacy in inverse proportion to hegemonic positioning, Kay's novel is less stratified in terms of the politics of its narrative modes. This does not imply that form is therefore less 'democratic' in this text but that, rather than a political democracy, it enacts something closer to a democracy of intimacy. It gives space and equal authority to dissenting perspectives and, as we have seen, reserves the greatest narrative empathy for Millie, and the only narrative irony for Sophie. *Trumpet's* narrative form, its democracy of representation, puts into practice the tolerance that it presents as a force for community, a

⁴⁵ Halberstam, 'Telling Tales', p. 73. She refers to Diane Wood Middlebrook's ethically dubious biography of jazz trumpeter Billy Tipton, whose life story provided the skeleton for Kay's fictionalization published in the same year.

community which, to reiterate Benjamin's words from my epigraph, can 'admit the Other without her/him having to already be or become the same'.

The dominant narrative mode in the various 'People' sections is free indirect discourse (FID), or what Dorrit Cohn labels 'narrated monologue' and defines as 'a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse'.⁴⁶ Here, the narrator-function does not adopt an omniscient approach to the consciousness of its characters (indirect discourse, or Cohn's 'psycho-narration'); instead, although mediated, their 'voice' is at least (spectrally) evoked. Hence critics' frequent, though not uncontested, citing of FID as a truly 'double-voiced' discourse and its status as a particularly enabling, because ambiguous and inherently plural, strategy for writers.⁴⁷ Fludernik's extensive study of FID speaks to its complexity on several interpretive planes:

Free indirect discourse will always have to rely on a reader's active interpretative strategy [...] whether in establishing a 'voice', or even a figural perspective in which the character's consciousness is foregrounded against a backgrounded inconspicuous narrating instance. It is for this reason that free indirect discourse becomes so eminently useful as a means of *deliberate ambiguity* [...], but can likewise be treacherous because it fails to clearly separate the speaker's and the reportee's attitudes.⁴⁸

In *Trumpet*, this narrative mode is used to represent the consciousness both of near-strangers, who treat Joss's transvestism with derision or disgust, and of others, like his drummer and his mother, who love him deeply.

The second section of *Trumpet* gives the account of one of these many more tenuously connected characters, Doctor Krishnamurty: this short piece narrates her part in the post-mortem reconstruction of Joss's gender identity as the first, after Millie, to see Joss's dead body. Like subsequent 'People' sections focalized by various peripheral characters, including the registrar, the funeral director, the Moodys' cleaner, and the drummer in Joss's band, this section

⁴⁶ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Conceived as a shared textual space blurring character's and narrator's discourse, FID is a potentially subversive, because 'double-voiced', mode much explored in feminist narratological studies (see several of the essays in Kathy Mezei's *Ambiguous Discourse*). 'Dual voice' is a model Fludernik contests, however (see p. 182 below).

⁴⁸ Fludernik, *Fictions of Language*, p. 81.

is narrated in the third person and the past tense, internally focalized by the doctor: 'There were many bandages wrapped around the chest of the deceased which she had to undo. [...] Each wrapping of bandage that she peeled off felt unmistakably like a layer of skin. So much so that the doctor became quite apprehensive about what kind of injury the bandages could be hiding' (p. 43). Not only do we read here an unsentimental, rather uncomfortable echo of Millie's tender account of the first time Joss undressed for her, but the narrative distance, both temporal and emotive, created between the experiencing 'she' and the reader also opens up a space for a different reading of the moment of revelation. That is, without employing an overt narrator to evaluate or criticize Doctor Krishnamurty's response, Kay's narrative avoids making definitive moral judgements; the nuances and indeterminacies of FID encourage the reader actively to consider what is at work in the shocked and often judgemental reactions of the various peripheral characters. In that this mode of narration less readily constructs 'voice effects', a reader's affective response is likely to be a less intimate one.

Narrative community in Kay's novel, I suggest, is above all concerned with the workings of relationality. This means that, as the above example shows, far from reading voices and thoughts in isolation, a dynamic narrativization is at work which draws connections and transforms one narrative in the light of another. Despite typographical appearances, segmental communal narration is thus subject to constant 'interference', to use one of Gibson's terms. So, Millie's experience of the bandages leaves its ghostly trace within Doctor Krishnamurty's different account, and so, traces of the doctor's actions with her red pen haunt the registrar's story: 'Mohammad Nassar Sharif had never in his life seen a medical certificate where male was crossed out and female entered in red. On the grounds of pure aesthetics, Mohammad found the last minute change hurtful. The use of the red pen seemed unnecessarily violent' (p. 77). As well as these strangers' perspectives, set at a distance via the narrative mode, later in the novel come similar sections from those closer to Joss: the cleaner, the school-friend and, most powerfully, the drummer. Both his school-friend and his mother offer important narrative

perspectives because they know Joss only as Josephine, and thus inscribe the traces of his transgendered journey into *Trumpet*'s communal biography.

The narrative mode in the section of Joss's drummer and friend, Big Red McCall, is the same as the others, but the intimacy and affection driving his account of Joss's self paint a very different picture. Fittingly, I would argue, of all of these 'People' sections, the drummer's develops the strongest sense of a narrative 'voice':

McCall loved nothing more than a wee jam with Moody. A wee practice. Just the two of them. Blowing room. They'd doodle and noodle and smear. They'd make the odd clinker. [...] Big Red McCall was not the least bit interested in his private life. He was no gate-mouth. He had never clyped in his life. Some blokes liked to blether and gossip but McCall wasn't one of them. (p. 147)

Whereas in most instances of FID in the novel we 'hear' a few select turns of phrase or idiom to begin to characterize the focalizer's 'voice', in Big Red's section colloquialisms abound and the almost audible hybrid of Scottish and jazz discourses stand out amidst the comparatively Standard English of the rest of the text.⁴⁹ In this sense, *Trumpet* is an extension of Kay's project in her early poems about the legendary blues performer, Bessie Smith, where she brought together different cultural modes to articulate something specific about her own hybrid racial identity: 'What you end up with is an experiment I suppose, something new or something different: a Black voice that is Scottish and Blue'.⁵⁰ Despite Big Red's third-person pronoun, I would argue that the illusion of orality perhaps momentarily creates a 'voice effect' that overpowers the fact of the dislocation between voice and written language. I will return to this in a context where language is a far more contested site, in Brodber's *Myal*.

At work in the poetics of relationality, the play of intimacy and distance, is the impulse to plot not simply Joss's positioning within his close and broader communities but also his construction *by* them. Vital to Kay's textual politics, then, are the two moments when the absent

⁴⁹ This is not to reify standard English as the privileged mode of written language, although historically this has been the case; it is a question of the impact of style-shifting, of the relations between styles, rather than the inherent characteristics of any particular style (I would not, for example, want to make the same point about Irvine Welsh's work or Niall Griffiths'). It is in the *space between* that resistance might be read, and this will be particularly significant for my thinking about linguistic pluralism in *Myal*.

⁵⁰ Jackie Kay, interviewed by Nancy Gish ('Adoption, Identity, and Voice', p. 179).

presence is given voice, as Tracy Hargreaves suggests: 'The subject position from which Joss speaks is always liminal; his is a spectral voice haunting the text, a metaphysics of presence, and yet his speaking is also, in a very literal sense, a matter of life and death, implying that there is much, politically, at stake in his speaking.'⁵¹ There are two sections in the novel in which Joss is given a (spectral) voice, but rather than trying to explain or identify himself through a coherent self-narrative, he situates himself in the full complexity of his context. The penultimate section, 'Last Word', is Joss's letter to Colman in which he tells not his own story but his father's. Joss writes: 'It is quite simple: all of this is my past, the sum of my parts; you are my future. I will be your son now in a strange way. You will be my father telling or not telling my story. [...] You will change me or hold me dear' (p. 277). On the one hand, this is to say, with many contemporary theorists, that the self is constituted through narrative; on the other hand, it suggests that self comes through social and historical context, through a process of identification and repetition, passed as if from father to son. Or as Joss puts it, 'the present is just a loop stitch', although the loop is perhaps more like a spiral as each generation is marked by a different kind of in-betweenness: Joss's father's colour; his gender; Colman's parentage.

The other section accorded to Joss himself, entitled 'Music', is the heart of the novel, literally and figuratively. It too locates self-construction as processual and contingent, but to the constitutive narrative and socio-historical forces that act upon the individual it adds the rhythms of jazz. In the third-person, present-tense form, it describes Joss's feelings while playing his trumpet, and the liberation music gives him from the heavy socially-imposed layers of selfhood: 'He plays his false fingers. Chokes his trumpet. He is naked. This is naked jazz. O-bop-she-bam. Never lying. Telling it like it is' (p. 132). 'His leather lips. His satchelmouth' (p. 131) evoke the iconic figure of Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong, transplanted here across the African diaspora, from New Orleans to London via Scotland (Satchmo is transplanted along a different diasporic trajectory when he appears as the Jamaican healer, Percy the chick, in Brodber's

⁵¹ Tracy Hargreaves, 'The Power of the Ordinary Subversive in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*', *Feminist Review*, 74 (2003), 2-16 (p. 15).

*Myal*⁵²). Like Big Red's, Joss's mental language partly gestures to an (impossible) linguistic rendering of jazz, with which Kay enters the growing group of writers, especially black writers, for whom jazz becomes an expression of the African diasporic connectivity, and the legacy of slavery in particular.⁵³ The passage ends:

So when he takes off he is the whole century galloping to its close. The wide moors. The big mouth. Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. Nothing weighs him down. Not the past or the future. He hangs on to the high C and then he lets go. Screams. Lets it go. Bends his notes and bends his body. His whole body is bent over double. His trumpet pointing down at the floor then up at the sky. He plays another high C. He holds on. He just keeps blowing. He is blowing his story. His story is blowing in the wind. He lets it rip. He tears himself apart. He explodes. Then he brings himself back. Slowly, slowly, piecing himself together. (p. 136)

At the very centre of the novel, this piece positions itself as Joss's solo performance, his trumpet singing his story in the democratic, because improvisatory and conversational, literary jazz which Kay works to orchestrate in this novel: 'I was interested in how a story can work like music and how one note can contain the essence of the whole. I wanted to write a novel whose structure was very close to jazz itself. So the registrar, the drummer, the cleaner all interested me because they gave the same story a different note'.⁵⁴ Although such jazz discourse is a long way from conveying the timbres and rhythm of the music itself, and although we do not encounter Joss's 'voice' in this section, the focalization is entirely internal, and the frequent runnings into sound – 'O-bop-she-bam' – and constantly changing rhythm and pace of the

⁵² Erna Brodber explicitly makes this allusion in 'Beyond a Boundary: Magical Realism in the Jamaican Frame of Reference', in Reiss, ed., *Sisyphus and Eldorado*, pp. 15–24 (p. 18).

⁵³ Cf. notes 15 and 25 above. African American theorists, a particularly fitting example being Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage, 1999) (p. 4, p. 9), claim the cultural specificity of jazz and the blues, its locatedness in the U.S. post-slavery context, and thus question its relevance elsewhere. But Kay's work makes its own transformative claim for musical and poetic forms that are 'Black, Scottish, Blue'. Alan Rice points out, 'It is while playing African American musical forms that he [Joss] comes to terms with the ambiguities of his seemingly schizophrenic identity. But it is not only his gender ambivalence that he plays out, not even particularly that, but also his position as a black person on the fringes of a predominantly white Europe' ('Heroes across the Sea: Black and White Fascination with African Americans in the Contemporary Black British Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Jackie Kay', in Heike Raphael-Hernandez, ed., *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 217–231 (p. 228)). See also Carole Jones, "'An Imaginary Black Family": Jazz, Diaspora, and the Construction of Scottish Blackness in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*', *Symbiosis*, 8.2 (2004), 191–202.

⁵⁴ 'An Interview with Jackie Kay', *Bold Type*, 3.1 (1999). <www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0499/kay/interview.html> [accessed 31 July 2006].

narration, as well as the immediacy of the present tense, mean that we come close to ‘hearing’ him as we read. But this is determinedly not the agentive, self-identical voice of an individual; rather, it is the spectral traces of a self located in its complex histories. Whether the third-person form serves to capture him in performance, locating reader as audience; whether it is to deepen the sense of Joss’s *bodily* absence from the narrative community; or whether it simply avoids undermining Millie’s positioning as dominant first-person narrator, the relation of ‘Music’ to the whole enables Joss’s self-construction to take its place among the many other external constructions under narration. True to what Paul Berliner calls ‘a musical conversation that the improviser enters on many different levels simultaneously’, a call-and-response engaging self, band, instrument, audience, past performances,⁵⁵ as he plays Joss ‘breaks it down’ by way of his whole past (memories of his birth, his girlhood) and his whole future (a vision of his ‘deathday’ (p. 133)). Once inside the music, ‘all his self collapses’ (p. 135). It constitutes that open and provisional democracy of representation, where Joss’s self is neither wholly silenced nor self-determining, but exists within a matrix of competing versions.

Hargreaves observes that *Trumpet* ‘gestures towards a postmodern account of selfhood (at the same time as it appears to instate a self-determining humanism) in which the notionally extra-textual Joss is always in process as he is repeatedly cast in different narrative forms’.⁵⁶ As Joss Moody is multiply and variously constructed by others – as a lover by Millie; both father and ‘freak’ by Colman; a curiosity by Sharif; a transvestite and ‘weird as fuck’ by Sophie Stones (p. 127); a genius by Big Red; a beautiful childhood girlfriend by May Hart – their narrative versions come together in a plural and thoroughly intersubjective biography, a layering of representations, each altered by its encounter with the others. Intersubjective, too, in that the narrative segments never centre on Joss alone; the story of the narrating or focalizing self is constructed as it constructs the other, involving a complex ethical relation between these many pseudo-biographers and their elusive ‘subject’. It is through Kay’s careful and often brief

⁵⁵ Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 497.

⁵⁶ Hargreaves, ‘The Power of the Ordinary Subversive’, p. 7.

characterizations of even the most peripheral of characters that *Trumpet* can be said to be *communal* narration. Sites of dissonance between versions in this text are not signs of radical postmodern fragmentation, but of distinct yet overlapping contexts, each impacting on how individuals narrate themselves and others; they are characteristic of a textual community that is not reductively homogeneous but brings together dramatically different and often conflicting positionings.

In this analysis of the narrative workings of what might be called *Trumpet's* democracy of representation, one strategy, and one voice, has been left out: the voice which comes closest to an authorial presence and hence to potentially disrupting the democratizing potential of communal narration. As I will show in the following section, a late appearance from an authorial voice will also complicate the narrative politics of Smith's *Hotel World*. Useful for thinking about the relationship of the authorial voice to the communal text is Ruth Ginsberg and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's theory of 'author-versions', which is based on one of the best known jazz novels, albeit one in which the mode of communal narration is closer to *Myal's* than to Kay's or Smith's work: Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. Author-versions 'orchestrate the process of narration from the outside yet simultaneously emerge from within the fictional world by way of both thematic and structural designs'.⁵⁷ Though potentially disruptive to a communal poetics, Ginsberg and Rimmon-Kenan argue that the narrative authority wielded by such a figure is not necessarily irreconcilable with a 'democratic' textual politics:

How can one speak for a community without labeling it and stereotyping the individuals who belong to it? The challenge is to represent a group while respecting the freedom and diversity of its members. It is for this purpose that any version must be seen as open and provisional [...] For the same reason, narrators must renounce authority, speak not about a character, but with him.⁵⁸

Trumpet's potential 'author-version' narrates two short sections towards the end of the novel, each headed 'Editorial'. The second (p. 262) is the ironic critical comment about failed

⁵⁷ Ruth Ginsberg and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'Is There a Life after Death? Theorizing Authors and Reading *Jazz*', in Herman, ed., *Narratologies*, pp. 66–87 (p. 67).

⁵⁸ Ginsberg and Rimmon-Kenan, 'Is There a Life after Death?', p. 84.

ghostwriters mentioned above. The first 'Editorial' begins, 'What happened to Josephine Moore? Look at this photograph. There she is, bright as a button, chocolate brown eyes'; and it ends, 'Look at this photograph. Look at it again. And again. This is Josephine Moore when she was seven years old. The woman next to her, holding her hand, is her mother, Edith Moore. This photograph was taken in Greenock, the small Scottish town where Josephine Moore grew up' (pp. 254–5). Though perhaps catering to her/his reader's curiosity and taste for personal histories, above all this is a section asking us to look again, to locate Joss not in a sensational tabloid story but within an intimate, familial setting. The direct voice has narrative authority here, but uses it to ask questions about representation rather than to give answers; most strikingly, the direct 'you'-address makes this *stylistically* the most engaging piece in the novel. The position of this 'editor' figure within the narrative hierarchy is dependent on the framework established by aptly selected section titles which Kay borrows from the style of glossy magazines. The headings 'Editorial', like 'People', 'House and Home', 'Cover Story', and of course the obligatory 'Obituaries' (which gives Joss's dates and album titles, stripping biography of body (p. 208)), frame this novel as a comment on media culture and an indictment of the sensationalist media representations that make Sophie rich and see Millie persecuted. Located literally in this context, the 'editor' is responsible for overseeing all the representations that appear in the novel, including the intolerant and the ignorant, and in this light s/he is complicit with them. But a democracy of representation is a vital alternative to a damagingly biased and limited media culture, and this is what the 'editor' of *Trumpet* has achieved. S/he has, to return to Ginsberg and Rimmon-Kenan's terms, respected the freedom and the diversity of the narrative community; through free indirect discourse and some first-person narration, s/he has spoken *with* them. Like a jazz composer, s/he has allowed the score to be (re)written over and over by the improvisers.

In my reading of *Trumpet* as an example of a segmental narrative community – a text with different narrating/focalizing agents contained within distinct segments, but where the ordering of these segments is recursive, the different selves appearing repeatedly – the concepts of

segmentation and community have been in tension, and it is precisely this tension that constitutes my understanding of how communally narrated novels work. While such novels mark the divisions between their diverse and conflicting selves, these same selves are drawn into intersubjective relation through the community-making power of narration-as-conversation. In this way, an ethical practice, responsible and participatory, is developing that brings the contextual workings of positionality into play, and via the unstable affective dynamics of identificatory processes implicates the reader in those relations. Analysing Ali Smith's more overtly socio-political novel will bring this clearly into focus.

Hotel World

Towards the end of the first section of Smith's *Hotel World* (2001), its dead teenage narrator, Sara Wilby, describes the people she sees on the streets as 'a wall of faces shifting and falling like water';⁵⁹ later, the final section returns to each face and, with the privileged access of omniscient narration this time, tells a little more of her or his story. Elsewhere, walking down a residential street, Penny glimpses through the lit windows moments of other lives and is 'repelled and energized by it, the knowledge that she could be brought together with someone else by the simple flick of a switch from light to dark' (p. 163). To encounter these brief insights into other lives is to touch upon the experience of reading *Hotel World*: one night in the Global Hotel, several months after Sara Wilby died there (plummeting several storeys, her body crammed into a dumb waiter), four other women cross paths and all five stories intersect. Moving through the novel's six sections, lights are briefly switched on, illuminating each textual life: Sara's (spectral) account of the months since her death; Else, who begs on the street outside the hotel, but tonight is invited in; Lise, the receptionist struck down with a mysterious illness; Penny, a journalist reviewing the hotel; and Clare Wilby, who visits the hotel to witness the site of her sister's death. The final section is different: like *Trumpet*'s 'Editorials', it is

⁵⁹ Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (2001; London: Penguin, 2002), p. 27. All page references will be to this edition and included in the body text.

narrated by an unidentified voice which I will suggest inscribes a potentially writerly presence into the text.

Notable parallels with *Trumpet*'s narrative strategy – the reconstruction from plural points of view of the facts surrounding a death, the inclusion of the spectral 'voice' of the dead, the creation of narrative empathy or irony via shifts between hetero- and homodiegetic modes – are combined in Smith's work with a more overt intertwining of narrative and social hierarchies. *Trumpet* is focused on identities, and on the many different selves we can be at different times and for different people, so communal narration serves primarily to construct plural versions of Joss Moody; the *recursive* ordering of segments, which means each narrative line (Millie's; Joss and Sophie's; Joss's own) is told in parts, interrupted by other versions, serves to disrupt any continuity of identification and to render each version more contingent. In *Hotel World*, the chain of events following Sara's death brings a narrative community briefly together in order to explore the intersubjective dynamics and social structures of the 'hotel world' itself; its ordering, as we will see, takes a *sequential* form, with temporal progression from segment to segment and just one segment per narrating agent, which potentially allows identificatory processes longer to play out. Perhaps, although this is to simplify matters significantly, where Kay's novel foregrounds issues of gendered, sexual and racial identities, Smith's focus is on the axes of economic and class privilege.⁶⁰ Erna Brodber's *Myal*, we will see at the end of this chapter, works all three concerns into its fabric.

As Ali Smith has commented, the writing of *Hotel World* has its origins in 'the notion of transience that hotels are all about, and at the same time the notion of tiered social hierarchies'.⁶¹ This relates not only to the considerable metaphoric parallels established in the novel between the textual world and the hotel world (people, like stories, are segmented within their adjoining rooms, but connected by the pipes, phonedines, lift shafts, revolving doors that cut across such

⁶⁰ I understand class here not as fixed, outdated categories 'lower/middle/upper', but as a complex matrix of interrelated social factors, including wealth, education, employment, family life.

⁶¹ Ali Smith quoted at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/1551211.stm>> [accessed 01 March 2005].

segmentary structures), but it also foregrounds the importance of the politics of social relations to Smith's work. The Global Hotel as a corporate institution establishes the relations of privilege which divide Penny, the well-to-do guest and journalist, from Lise, the receptionist, and both from Else, the homeless woman outside; but as well as imposing such social boundaries, the hotel functions as a site of anonymous and transitory meetings which allow for their transgression, for hegemonic centres to be shifted. So that when Lise defies company regulations to give Else a free room for a night, Penny at first takes Else for 'some kind of druggy eccentric guest or maybe even a minor ex-rock star' (p. 139), though this imagined transformation lasts barely beyond the brief time that Else is located within the 'contextual frame' of the hotel.⁶² As I will show, the play of (narrative) hierarchies in the textual world parallels the (social) hierarchies of the hotel world: the use of communal narration, juxtaposed rather than embedded, constructs a 'democracy of voice' based, as in Mouffe's radical democracy, not on reified relations between autonomous individuals, but conceived in the intersubjective relations between a plurality of deconstructed selves.

In the light of existing narratological enquiries into the significance of the first-/third-person choice and of 'concurrent' narration, the experimentation with different modes of temporality and representation of consciousness in *Hotel World* flattens out – rather more radically than does *Trumpet* – the classically hierarchical system of narrative levels. The alternative, Smith's 'democracy of voice', brings an alternative politics of narrative form to the fore of the reading process. This is achieved not least through the novel's self-reflexive formal device of naming the six sections according to their temporal strategies – 'past' (Sara), 'present historic' (Else), 'future conditional' (Lise), 'perfect' (Penny), 'future in the past' (Clare), and 'present' (authorial narrator).⁶³ My reading of 'communal narration' in this novel concentrates on the mechanics of Smith's innovative strategy of using a distinct narrative mode for each of

⁶² Emmott, 'Constructing Social Space', p. 304.

⁶³ Though these titles do usually indicate the dominant narrative tense they also speak to the specifics of each character's story. Thus, they make exceptionally clear the intrinsic relation between a tale and its mode of telling.

these main sections. Here, far more overtly than in *Trumpet*, first/second/third person and past/present/future tense are not merely formal choices, but establish textual power relations and thus enable the subversion, within the *narrative* hierarchy at least, of characters' relative positionings within the *social* hierarchy. There is not a renunciation of hierarchy *per se* within this novel, then, but rather an inclusive democratic version that accords articulating agency in inverse proportion to social agency. Unlike *Trumpet's* democracy of intimacy which structures its community around relationships to Joss, here, different story-versions are constructed from different *social* positionings; and even more so than with *Trumpet*, it is our task as readers to identify the antagonisms and exclusions at work within communal relations as well as the points of consensus. I argue that it is through this device above all that *Hotel World* 'asks a reader to do quite a lot of work, and to participate';⁶⁴ it writes the wranglings of radical democratic relations into its narrative community, while actively suggesting how we might read them.

The voice, or more precisely the scream, 'Woooooohooooo what a fall' (p. 3), which opens the novel belongs to the character with the least hegemonic positioning of all: that of the ghost of the teenage chambermaid and swimming champion, Sara Wilby. As for Millie and, variably, for Colman, the first-person pronoun's unmediated effect of immediacy makes it suitable here for the task of 'resurrecting' Sara.⁶⁵ The intimacy of the first-person form, and particularly the interior monologue form of Sara's sister Clare's narrative, which Cohn describes as a 'limit-case' of the first person,⁶⁶ will also give Clare's section towards the end of the novel added poignancy, deploying narrative empathy to great effect as, to an even greater degree than Millie's, it accords us direct access to her mental processes of grief. Sara Wilby speaks from a fixed narrative present at half past four on the afternoon of her last day as a ghost, recounting in the past tense everything prior to this point. The title 'past', therefore, describes the dominant narrative tense, but also reinforces the fact that this present-tense first-person

⁶⁴ Ali Smith in discussion at <<http://www.encompassculture.com/readerinresidence/authors/alismith/>> [accessed 01 March 2005].

⁶⁵ The dead narrator is a playfully subversive feature of some postmodern fictions, a striking example being Maggie Gee's *Dying, In Other Words* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981).

⁶⁶ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 15.

narrator is a spectral self: incomplete (her senses fading fast) and distinct from the physical body in its grave (which, in the novel's most surreal turn, she visits and converses with).

In conjunction with her 'I' pronoun, and her positioning as the first narrator in the novel, which gives her some degree of influence over how the subsequent stories will be read, Sara's adoption of an overtly communicative stance, often addressing an extradiegetic 'you', means that it is her voice – launching with that almost audible 'Woo-hoo' – that most engages the reader and thus strengthens Sara's presence in the other stories that follow. Yet this is problematic for the very concept of narrative voice and its humanist foundation, since the 'voice' which most overtly and engagingly 'speaks' in this novel issues from a self which, in addition to the antimimetic fact of being dead, is in the process of breaking apart, deconstructing, mind already distinct from body and progressively losing language: 'Seeing birds. Their wings. Their beady . . . The things they see with. [...] The word's gone. I had it a moment ago' (p. 8). Playful and subversive, Smith's strategy accords maximum narrating agency to the most (literally) silenced. Indeed, Sara's closing 'Time me, would you' sets us on a path along the narrative 'line' that leads from 'now' – i.e. half past four – through the early evening when Penny and Else check into the hotel, into the night when Lise finds Clare crying by the open lift shaft, having indeed attempted to 'time' her sister's final fall, until morning, when the authorial narrator tells the new day's stories, and Sara's voice appears once more on the last page, fading out with a final 'WOOOoo-hoooooo'. At the point of fade-out, we can stop timing; her fall is at last finished and she has left the physical world, but not before she has presided over the narrative world.

A reading of the use of the third person for the three middle sections in between the two sisters' narratives speaks to the considerable complexity and multiplicity within this mode, and this is where Smith's narrational strategy becomes more complex than Kay's. I have suggested that *Hotel World* works to establish and then transgress the narrative hierarchies which reflect the social tiers that locate Penny in a position of power and Else outside the hegemonic order,

with Lise somewhere in between. The third-person pronoun positions all three women already at one remove from the agency of direct speech and thought accorded Sara and Clare, but the relations established between narrator and character (and hence between reader and character) are different in each, as is the precise kind of narrative mode used, and these differences are constitutive of their shifting relations to the established narrative order.

The dominant mode in Else and Lise's sections is free indirect discourse: the narrator-function does not have an omniscient insight into the characters' consciousnesses, instead each woman is the dominant focalizer within her narrative segment. Nor are the character's thoughts usually directly quoted (Cohn's 'quoted monologue'), although this happens frequently in Penny's section, and its dynamics will prove revealing. However, there is considerable scope for variation within FID, and this is what makes it capable of effecting the stylistic plurality that represents the play of intersubjective relations in *Hotel World*. For Dorrit Cohn, 'The narrated monologue [or FID] is [...] essentially an evanescent form, dependent on the narrative voice that mediates and surrounds it, and is therefore peculiarly dependent on tone and context'.⁶⁷ This touches upon three elements of FID that are important for my reading of *Hotel World*: that a character's 'voice' is established but that it is temporary and can be dominant or subordinate to the narrator's or somewhere in between; that its relation to the narrator's discourse can vary according to the tone ('friendly or hostile, empathic or ironic'⁶⁸) and the amount – or absence – of the latter's mediation; and that this is an 'evanescent' and context-dependent mode. I would expand Cohn's sense of 'context' to encompass the extratextual because, to recall Fludernik, FID relies for its effect on each reader's 'active interpretative strategy'. In fact, Fludernik's cognitive approach to FID complicates the common 'dual voice hypothesis' on which Cohn's analysis is based since it understands 'voice' as 'voice effects', a communicative situation projected by the reader rather than the text, but since I am concerned with reading as well as writing processes, both approaches are useful. FID is thus clearly a mode that speaks to my

⁶⁷ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 116.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 66.

conception of narrative as a situated, relational, ethical act and one which calls for a similarly conceived narratological practice.

In terms of the representation of consciousness, the second section ('present historic') denies the reader access to Else's personal 'I', presenting her through the mediating lens of the third-person form, and might be read as a comment on the way in which social prejudice sees the homeless objectified and stereotyped, or not seen at all. Apart from the distance imposed by narrating at one remove, however, a close reading of FID in Else's narrative section finds a narratorly discourse to be only minimally perceptible. 'Fictional facts' ('he thought', 'she said') of course have their place, but are as neutral in tone as possible and the narration reverts as soon as possible to evoke Else's own linguistic style, as in the opening lines: 'Else is outside. Small change is all she's made, mostly coppers, fives, tens. The occasional coin is still shining like straight out of a Marks and Spencer till, but most of them are dulled from all the handling and the cold. Nobody ever misses it, do they, a penny, that's fallen out of the hand or the pocket on to the street?' (p. 35). By 'coppers, fives, tens', and certainly by 'like straight out of a till', the idiom is her own, and by the end the entire utterance issues from Else's mind. The frequent interruption of fictional facts by her spoken voice asking a passer-by for change means that her own speech takes precedence over, is allowed to break into, the mediating narration:

She is
 (Spr sm chn?)
 sitting near a grating through which some warmth rises. (p. 35)

What Cohn describes as the 'monologic effect' narrated monologue/FID can achieve,⁶⁹ is therefore maintained to a great extent, and combined with the present tense gives Else as much control of her narrative as the third-person mode allows, locating her as far as possible in her own context, rather than in terms of an externally imposed (authorial) idea. As such her intelligence, extensive knowledge and philosophical tendencies come through almost unmediated, not mocked or patronized.

⁶⁹ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 116.

This is reinforced by the predominantly present-tense mode of Else's section. Its concurrence means that Else's relation to her own story is open-ended, undefined, subject to change; this narrative mode conveys the way in which homelessness strips her of social agency or the power to change her life, without precluding the possibility that this change could occur. For Else, life on the streets is life in the present tense – temporality has meaning only from day to day – but in Else's case is also haunted by memory, by the 'historic'. In this sense, the use of form reflects existing social hierarchies; however, I would argue that the use of the present tense also challenges them. That is to say that by making her story more 'vivid',⁷⁰ it subverts the idea of her invisibility, of the societal absence of the homeless body by emphatically *presencing* Else in her own story. In the narrative hierarchy, unlike in the social one, Else occupies a relatively privileged place.

In terms of narration, Lise's section, 'future conditional', is the most ambiguous, in many ways suggesting that she is narrating her own story in the third person. However, a distinctly narratorly voice enters at times to undermine such a reading. The use of the third person for Lise has less to do with her social status than with the fact that her illness has divided her from herself. Her narrative begins with a question on a medical form, '*Tell us about yourself*', and her first utterance is in the first person: 'Well. I am a nice person.' Immediately afterwards, though, the mode shifts into the third person, implying that Lise's initial statement is quotation, either of what she has written on the form, or of what she intends to write. Some pages later, however, the narrative returns to a more direct form, quoted monologue:

How many days have I been holding this form in my hand? Lise wondered. Have I lost money?
Deirdre would know.
As soon as she could, Lise would begin it. I. As soon as she found the pencil. Am.
A nice person. I try to be one.
[...]
I am no great shakes. I am no saint. I am no world-changer. [...] If someone asks me to work a shift for him or her, I will, of course I will, if I can.

⁷⁰ *OED* defines the present historic as a feature of 'vivid narrative', 2nd ed. (2003), p. 823.

Would've. Did. Was. Everything – cars, buses, work, shops, people,
 everything – other than this bed she was lying in was into a different tense now.
 Now: I am a sick person. I don't do anything. My skin hurts. My face hurts. My
 head hurts. (pp. 87–8)

Certainly, the first sentence is a clear example of quoted monologue, but I would argue that the subsequent shift into a sustained first-person monologue which runs for over two pages makes this what Cohn calls a 'borderline case' in which only the 'minimal inquit frames' – in this case 'Lise wondered' – distinguish between autonomous interior monologue and third-person quoted monologue.⁷¹ In fact, the single interruption of the third person into the middle of this passage – 'Everything [...] other than this bed she was lying in was into a different tense now. Now: I am a sick person' – supports a more complex, borderline reading of Lise as both 'she' and 'I'. The suggestion here is that Lise's sense of all but the immediate moment has vanished, as has her sense of self in time, her 'I'. It becomes possible here to read Lise as narrator of her own text, referring to herself in the past tense and as 'she' because she feels split from her own self, and thus from any stable articulate 'voice'.

Like its perspectival positioning, the temporal location of Lise's story is indeterminate: 'It was some time in the future. Lise was lying in bed. That was practically all the story there was. In a minute she would sit up. [...] That's what she would do. She would do it. In a minute' (p. 81). The section's title, 'future conditional', is as much a summary of her story as a narrative tense: confined to her bed by an undiagnosable illness, in that unwell space 'of no apparent narrative' (p. 84), Lise's future is uncertain. Indeed, the tense usage in this section is extraordinarily unstable, and inextricable from her sense of dislocation, of being 'into a different tense now'. Not only does the future conditional itself involve a combination of past-tense and conditional forms, but the narrative 'present'⁷² – that is, the night the women meet in the Global Hotel – is narrated in the present tense. This means that moving *backwards* from

⁷¹ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 66.

⁷² This 'present' is in inverted commas because it is not a single point in time, but a period of some hours between the afternoon of the day the women meet and dawn of the next; this 'present' progresses from one narrative section to the next, but is also progressive within some of the narratives.

Lise's illness to her account of that night, we in fact move from the past tense into the present, a contradictory trajectory further complicated by deictic markers that contradict the verb forms: 'That is then, this was now' (p. 119). Indeed, throughout this section Smith explodes the codes of realistic narrative chronology: narrating the future in the past tense is a narrative convention, but shown here to be a logical anomaly, because time is concurrent; a series of present moments, each present to itself.

The sense of indeterminacy in Lise's narrative relies heavily on the potential for ambiguity within free indirect discourse. Unlike in Else's section where there is no narrator flaunting her/his presence, later in Lise's narrative there are several occasions when this does happen, and the earlier ambiguity gives way to a distinctly authorial narrative mode. This is nowhere more apparent than in the embedded two-page account of five minutes during the early evening of the night in the hotel which is followed by an 'authorial' commentary upon it. The commentary extracts and elaborates upon some of the details from the account with an often comically exaggerated attention to detail that flaunts the commentator's omniscience: '*Takes the pen out of her mouth:* [...] It will be an hour and forty-five minutes before the pen is completely dry' (p. 111). Authorial control is conveyed not only through superior knowledge, but also through relative temporal positioning. The summary of the night's events is concurrent – to the extent that it traces Lise as she watches five minutes, 6.51 p.m. to 6.56 p.m., pass on a clock face – but the following commentary unfolds *in reverse order*, starting at 6.56 and moving backwards to finish on the summary's opening sentence. The effect of this reversal of narrative time is not to disturb the realistic chronology of the basic story as in other postmodern fictions⁷³ – this remains remarkably intact – but to contradict the apparent concurrence of the present-tense account by introducing a narrator function, also narrating in the present tense, which locates itself in a knowing position beyond the narrative present. It flags up the presence of an authorial narrator function behind the text which has the power to reverse narrative time, to narrate what

⁷³ For example, Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow, or the Nature of the Offence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991).

the focalizing character has ‘unremembered’, and to extrapolate beyond the time of the (present) narrative, and even entirely beyond the temporal scope of the novel into the future tense:

In bed ill in six months’ time, Lise will be unable to recall the precise scent of the Global lobby. In two years’ time, on holiday in Canada and desperate to get out of a sudden spring snowstorm, she will shelter in the Ottawa Global and as she enters its lobby will unexpectedly remember small sensory details of her time spent working for Global, details she would never (she will think to herself afterwards, surprised) have imagined she even knew, and which remind her of a time in her old gone life before she was ill and before she got better, a time which she has almost completely forgotten she had. (p. 111)

Lise’s future, then, is in fact far from ‘conditional’; it is already designed by a narrator here written into the text, refusing the pretence of invisibility, and highlighting – not to say revelling in – the imbalance in knowledge between character and narrator. The self-effacing narrator-function of Else’s story thus changes completely in Lise’s, at first stepping back and strengthening the autonomy of Lise’s voice through the first-person pronoun, but later intruding in the most omniscient of ways. This continual shifting of narrative mode, tense and voice in this section conveys with great force the profound confusion and destabilization of Lise’s sense of selfhood.

In contrast, the next segment is, like its title, ‘perfect’. Narrated entirely, unwaveringly, in conventional perfect-tense form, Penny’s story conveys control and togetherness; the ‘perfection’ of a whole, coherent narrative reflects that of her successful, well-dressed life. But there is a flipside which comes with her ambitious relation to the social hierarchy: in direct contrast to Else’s sense of selfhood, the ‘perfection’ of identity implies its fixity, and thus excludes the possibility of change, just as the rigid past-tense form fixes the story as definitively complete. So when Penny connects with Else on their night-time walk through the streets, she discovers her potential for empathy, recognizes Else as ‘interesting’, rather than objectifying her by her poverty, and gives her a generous cheque, because ‘It has made a real difference to me, meeting you tonight’ (p. 173). Back in the hotel, Penny calls to cancel the cheque, but during the call she pauses: ‘In the frozen moment she remembered: the width and narrowness of money’ and other remarkable things Else had told her (p. 177). She cancels it regardless, and

with relief because ‘for a minute there, the universe had shifted. [...] But something which had been forced open had sealed up again’ (p. 178). The moment of potential transformation (offered at the beginning of the novel by Sara when she sees Penny enter the hotel and observes: ‘her life could be about to change’ (p. 30)) evaporates, and Penny’s ‘perfection’ is reaffirmed by erasing the facts which do not fit; but beneath it, now, the void is visible.

Just as Penny’s narrative is the opposite of Lise’s in terms of a fixed sense of time, so it is in terms of narration. Compared to Lise, who never actually speaks aloud, and Else, who only rarely does (and then without vowels), Penny does have a *voice* which is quoted frequently. Arguably, however, the spoken voice operates at the surface of the self whereas consciousness’s silence exists somewhere deeper. The narration of Penny’s consciousness is dominated by fictional facts and inquit statements – the narrator’s phrases of description and introduction – to a far greater degree than either of the others, which means that the reader observes her from without almost as much as s/he hears her internal thoughts. And when quoted monologue is used, as it frequently is in this segment, it does not function as it does for Lise to bring the narrative mode close to the first person; on the contrary, it actually imposes narrative distance:

Now she [Else] had slipped out from under Penny’s arm, squatted down where she was almost as if she’d been ordered to, and began emptying handfuls of money out of her coat on to the carpet. One hand and then the other came up and out, full of change. It was astounding, Penny thought, to see so much loose change in the one place at the same time. (p. 141)

Here the interruption of ‘Penny thought’ into her exclamation of amazement clearly marks it as hers alone: narrative irony is established because while the narrator knows that it is less astounding to see quantities of change in the pockets of a homeless person, Penny is unaware of Else’s context. This establishes distance between the narrator and Penny – leading the reader to approach her with a more questioning ear – and it also highlights the gulf of understanding between Else and Penny, the immense social imbalance between their subject positions.

Although there is no overt or intrusive narrating voice speaking over Penny’s, this is not necessary for an ironic attitude towards her to be expressed, since narrative irony is one of the

valuable effects of FID (or narrated monologue) which Cohn identifies: 'narrated monologues themselves tend to commit the narrator to attitudes of sympathy or irony. Precisely because they cast the language of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration, they amplify emotional notes, but also throw into ironic relief all false notes struck by a figural mind'.⁷⁴ It is just such 'false notes' which strike when, having deliberately kicked her computer onto the floor, Penny launches into a tirade of swearing: 'But she'd lost the words she'd been typing. She hadn't saved anything. They were completely gone. Damn. She would have to start again. Fucking damning bugging shagging fuck. She hit the machine with her hand, as if the machine had been insolent to her' (p. 134). There is an interplay of external and internal viewpoints here: during Penny's realization of her mistake, the focalization is increasingly her own, even lapsing into her own voice for the exaggerated string of expletives; but with the narrator's 'as if' the focalization shifts to external, establishing narrative irony between her violent act and its victim. The interplay of viewpoints makes room for different identifications: at first, the reader is invited to share her frustration and enjoy her comic overreaction; but as the narration distances itself so does the identification it invites. Needless to say, what Fuss describes as the 'mobile, elastic and volatile'⁷⁵ nature of identification means that for some, it will last longer, for others never develop in the first place. The internal–external interplay works effectively in another way too, to present the tension between the self Penny presents to the world, the one she presents to herself, and the one the narrator sees beneath the layers of pretence. Through distancing techniques, the falsity of Penny's 'perfect' vision of a unified selfhood is exposed, and she is 'opened up', as in the fleeting moment when she almost becomes charitable. Like the empty fatal lift shaft now covered by a thin panel of wood – 'the nothing that ran the length of this hotel like a spine' (p. 145) – beneath the story of Penny's self there is a void barely papered over.

⁷⁴ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 117.

⁷⁵ See p. 162 above.

The novel's penultimate section, 'future in the past', provides the second piece of first-person narration, the 'I' belonging to Clare Wilby. The section is presented as a fragment, an unfinished utterance conveying the sense of a narrating self suspended in time, frozen by grief. Every new line of thought in Clare's interior monologue,⁷⁶ including the opening one, begins '& since...', thus establishing the first clause of a sentence whose second clause never comes. This open-ended technique works with the title to represent in textual form Clare's sense of rupture, of Sara's life being cut off, her future now in the past:

say you were reading a book any book & you were halfway through it really into the story knowing all about the characters & all the stuff that's happening to them then you turn the next page over & halfway down the page it just goes blank it stops there just aren't any more words on it & you know for sure that when you picked this book up it wasn't like that (p. 190)

I would argue, though, that the repetition of '& since' with no ensuing clause in fact also opens up the potential space for such a clause; it constitutes a process by which Clare works through all the sources of her grief during her night in the hotel, coming to understand how Sara died:

& since the main thing is I counted I was there
 & since I have come home with really the most fucking amazing new shoes & also they gave me the breakfast & it was really good
 & since there is the five pound note
 & since I knew I did know already about the horrible thing about being crammed-in all upside down [...]
 & since she was fast since she was so incredibly fast I bet she'd be pleased I'm sure she'd be pleased how fast (p. 185)

Clare's final remarks – '& since wherever you are now I know you will be keeping us me & mum & dad safe' – confirm the sense that she has reconciled herself to her loss. Her monologue, then, is not frozen in time but a dynamic and cathartic process, moving out of the past and building towards that second future-facing clause, which, in my reading at least, might utter a final goodbye to her sister. The interior monologue, the form which can best accommodate the incoherencies and idiosyncracies of a narrator's mind, is used here to accord

⁷⁶ I use this term in the second of the two ways identified by Cohn: as a 'limit-case' of unmediated first-person narration, 'the silent self-communion of a fictional mind', rather than a 'technique for presenting a character's consciousness by direct quotation of his thoughts' (*Transparent Minds*, p. 15).

to a grieving teenage girl with no outlet for her grief, and possibly lacking the articulacy to express it aloud, a space for narrative healing. The authority of her 'I' also allows her narration to redress the ill-founded speculations of the other women about her own and her sister's stories; the narrative empathy established asks the reader to privilege her version over theirs.

The concluding section of *Hotel World* finally moves out of narrative time marked by the shadow of Sara's death into a renewed 'present', the next morning. 'Present' denotes the narrative tense, but in listing the town's ghosts, and revisiting some of its people's stories, it also echoes the message of this closing narrative: that people – and most significantly Sara – are 'present' as long as they are remembered, or imagined. This is *Trumpet*'s message too. On another level, in its relation to the imaginative act, this *presencing* of the dead by the living echoes the act of writing, and I would argue that this is one of the key functions of this final narrative section. As in *Trumpet*, the unnamed, but distinctly authorial, narrator here recalls the numerous occasions throughout the novel where a writing subject has sought to make herself known: in Else's lists, Lise's plotted future, the ironic treatment of Penny. In reading these movements of narratorial presence, questions of distance and engagement within the narrative situation as well as questions of authority all come into play.

'Present', then, is the only part of the novel without a character-narrator or a character-focalizer, made up instead of what is basically a list of ghostly and living selves unconnected except that many of them, though not all, populate the streets of the town where the novel is set. However, this is in itself a problematic description of the 'setting' of *Hotel World*, since the Global Hotel where events take place is one of a large chain whose features are rigidly standardized worldwide; as such the 'real' setting is deliberately ubiquitous. And it is in explaining this that the narrating voice is most clearly established as a writerly one:

Anywhere up or down the country, any town (for neatness' sake let's say the town where the heft and the scant of this book have been so tenuously anchored) the ghost of Dusty Springfield, popular singer of the nineteen sixties, soars, sure and broken, definite and tentative, through the open window of a terraced house on the corner of Short Street. (p. 229)

By referring to 'this book' rather than 'this story', the writer-narrator is situated outside the story world, in the 'real' world where the narrative is to be published and printed and bound. In this way, she fits the idea of 'Janus-faced' 'author-versions' developed by Ginsberg and Rimmon-Kenan. With 'for neatness' sake let's say...', Smith's author-version in the passage above at once declares her decision-making power, her textual author/ity, and declares it to be provisional and informal: the 'us' within 'let's' works to imply a decision shared by author and reader, and 'for neatness' sake' signals her need to justify such a seemingly authoritative choice as in fact somewhat arbitrary, and based on the authority of the text's internal logic rather than her own. How, though, does the extreme omniscience of this narrator-function, able to enter numerous textual lives at will, sit with the liberal, processual concept of author-versions or with a 'democratic' textual politics? As in *Trumpet*, it is a question of 'respecting the freedom and diversity of its members'.⁷⁷ In this sense, the range of characters covered in this final section, from young drunken lovers to cleaning ladies and driving instructors, fits in with the novel's distinctly 'democratic' aim to emphasize the endless plurality of lives and stories unfolding in any one space at any one time. The omniscience of the voice here establishes itself as a writerly voice: much like Jackie Kay's final image of a bird 'scatting in the wind', the 'miniature parody of rain' which closes *Hotel World* is both literary in reference and poetic in tone. By signalling her own status as writer, Smith is situating her own textual position, telling the story of her own voice, in a move which is continually asked of us all by theorists of situated knowledge.

The 'democratic' narrative community which Ali Smith so effectively constructs in this novel is one that does not idealistically erase differences or level out imbalances of power; it is a community deeply marked by hegemonic structures but which continually strives, as Chantal Mouffe's vision asks, for inclusivity by working through ways of understanding how these social dynamics operate. Smith uses the varying relations of autonomy and mediation, irony and empathy to accord or withhold authority in inverse proportion to a character's social standing.

⁷⁷ Ginsberg and Rimmon-Kenan, 'Is There a Life after Death?', p. 84.

Hotel World's foregrounded narrational differences invite readers to reflect upon the conflicting versions and at times antagonistic struggles of each narrator/focalizer; a *close* close reading of this text, I would suggest, also involves an engaged, participatory, responsive engagement – a negotiation, that is, of our own ethical responses. The homeless, the ill, the young, even the dead, are presented in ways which explore their multiple and diverse oppressions, while also exploring possibilities for struggling beyond them. The wielder of power, that more or less overt narrator, is one of the many connective devices crossing the segmentations of the social and narrative worlds, drawing that community together and exercising, via narrative irony and other distancing techniques, a mode of ethical judgement aimed at democratizing the narrative community for which it/she is responsible. This is a profoundly ethical book, then, and the challenges it poses ask of us a similarly ethical response.

In both *Trumpet* and *Hotel World*, a narratological reading has shown a network of narrative and social relations mapped via a segmental style of communal narration, the former recursively ordered, the latter serially. This segmentation, which invokes but does not equate to the fragmentation characteristic of some visions of postmodern Britain,⁷⁸ is clearly marked out via intrusive section headings but it is also permeable, as each story leaves its spectral traces within the next. While the narrative selves are not consciously engaged in conversation with each other, the text's communal narrative project and the reader's reception of the whole as more than the sum of its parts draw them into the kind of intersubjective positional relations Davies and Harré speak to. Reading Erna Brodber's *Myal* as another example of communal narration, however, will call for another narratological framework which can attend to the fluid movements and sometimes irreducible plurality between and within narrative voices. *Myal's* contextual and formal difference from Smith's and Kay's fictional communities, and therefore its significance for expanding the reach of my work, cannot be understated. Seemingly continuous third-person narration and a lack of self-conscious writerly strategies implies *Myal's*

⁷⁸ For example, the alienation of J.G. Ballard's suburban consumer societies or Martin Amis's cynical portraits of urban life.

greater conventionality. In fact, *Myal*'s distinct form of communal narration calls for a reorienting of critical and narratological paradigms.

***Myal*: a permeable narrative community**

Different rhymes for different times
 Different styles for different climes
 Someday them rogues in Whitehall
 Be forced to change their tune.⁷⁹

Myal is, as its final rhyme articulates, a tune-changing novel. It is a site of contestatory and transformative encounter between different world views and belief systems in existence in Jamaica in the post-Emancipation, pre-Independence period. Set in Grove Town, St. Thomas, Jamaica in the period between 1912 and 1920, it tells the story of a community's collective healing after two girls fall victim to different kinds of 'spirit thief': one a jealous local Obeah-man seeking to regain his virility by possessing Anita's teenage sexual potency; the other an ambitious white American seeking commercial success via a 'coon show' for which he must 'possess' Ella's stories of home (as well as her virginal, 'coloured' (read 'exotic') body). The evils of spirit thievery, be they African-derived or (neo)colonially imposed, are combatted by a diverse collective of myalists, or myal spirits, who exist both in corporeal human form, in which they work individually from different spiritual backgrounds (from Christian Methodist, to New Baptist, to the most African of Jamaican creolized religions, Kumina), and in an ancestral animal form, in which they commune via 'spirit telephone' to draw up strategies of resistance, and have done so for 600 years.

Once we are aware of its histories – one of the educational challenges Erna Brodber sets for her reader – *Myal*'s location in the Morant Bay area, famous for the 1865 slave rebellion, and its exploration of Myalist and Obeah spiritual practices subtly call up repressed evidence of a past both enslaved and rebellious and of the powerful enduring presence of African-derived

⁷⁹ Erna Brodber, *Myal* (London: New Beacon Books, 1988), p. 111. All page references will be to this edition and included in the body text.

religiosity within Jamaican society.⁸⁰ The folk, from different social and religious positionings, who narrate this novel make of it a *conversational* healing, echoing the collective myalist healing practices within the story. This is to think of *Myal*, in terms borrowed from June Roberts, as mapping ‘a unique Caribbean aesthetic of spirit-based social theory’.⁸¹ Though contingent in the literal sense that the novel *ends* on page 111, narrating community here is an active attempt at social healing which stretches beyond the last page. The move towards a ‘democracy of voice’ that I read in *Myal* will therefore not repeat the ‘radical’ democracy of Smith’s novel, but will be specific to Jamaica’s own socio-political and religious struggles: Brodber’s hopeful vision for Jamaican society resonates with Glissant’s ‘participatory’ democracy-in-process, defined not by colonial models or an elite ruling class but by ‘the radical nature of the change in mentality and its effect on social structure’ – by a coming-to-consciousness of the people.⁸²

Erna Brodber is a sociologist and historian *before* she is a novelist; as she told me in a recent interview, ‘the fiction comes when it *has* to come’ and when she can find no more empirical means of researching a particular social reality.⁸³ Brodber’s fiction is very much that of a sociologist, but not in the sense that Western frameworks would teach us to understand; far from the social realism classically associated with the anglophone Caribbean novel, her writing practice institutes what Shalini Puri has called an ‘other’ realism,⁸⁴ firmly rooted in local realities, but realities that comprise both the visible (material) and the invisible (spiritual)

⁸⁰ For a full account of the complexity and creolization of Afro-Jamaican religious practices, see Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). She argues they are at once ‘stigmatized as dangerous and pathological in Jamaican popular culture’ and, paradoxically, ‘consulted regularly for healing and crisis resolution’ (p. 12).

⁸¹ June E. Roberts, *Reading Erna Brodber: Uniting the Black Diaspora Through Folk Culture and Religion* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. ix.

⁸² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 255.

⁸³ This discussion took place at New Beacon Books, London, on 9 February 2007. This extract of dialogue is not included in the abbreviated published version (Emma Smith, ‘An Interview with Erna Brodber’, *Moving Worlds*, 7.2 (2007), 105–117).

⁸⁴ See chapter 5 of Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, a revised version of ‘An “Other” Realism: Erna Brodber’s *Myal*’, *Ariel*, 24.3 (1993), 95–115. The essays in Reiss, ed., *Sisyphus and Eldorado* offer a full exploration of the importance of Kamau Brathwaite’s ideas about anglophone social realism and hispanophone magic realism in Caribbean literatures. I underline that Brathwaite did not set the trends up as polar opposites, but precisely as *trends*, with exceptions (Wilson Harris being another notable one) and overlaps.

domains of experience. For Brodber, sociological realities necessarily encompass ‘impossible’ or ‘magical’ possibilities, as a strategy for survival: ‘For the enslaved it was necessary to be able to fly from the “here” into the “there” in order to preserve one’s humanity, to move from a world you hate but have to live in to a world which you create’.⁸⁵ In this way, and in many others as we will see, *Myal* engages with the idea, put forth by one of its characters, Reverend Simpson, that ‘there are ways and ways of knowing’ (p. 76). Just as ‘magical realism’ might be a *literary* survival strategy (where ‘literary’ denotes folklore and orature as well as the written word), so discursive plurality, the ‘speaking in tongues’ theorized by Mae Henderson and which *Myal*’s communal narration effects, is perhaps a *linguistic* one. ‘Listen to the voices of the people’ is the piece of advice, passed from Kamau Brathwaite to Brodber many years ago, which has most powerfully informed her literary practice; ‘so I’ve listened to the voices of the people,’ she says, ‘I’ve listened to my own voice’.⁸⁶ In her incisive analysis of *Myal*, Heather Smyth touches on the key issue for my reading: ‘The novel suggests that communal interpretation of an event can yield more valuable results than a single reading’.⁸⁷ Otherwise put, Smyth writes, ‘Brodber [...] demonstrate[s] creolization in process through narrative ethics of collectivity and an emphasis on partiality, dialogism, openness, and repetition’. My own detailed narrative analysis will develop a closer understanding of how such an ‘ethics of collectivity’ operates in the text by means of a democratic play of voice(s) and other structuring rhythms, including that of jazz. Through *Myal*’s complex and communally structured workings of voice, literary and sociological practice enter into dialogue, and situated, contextual narrative analysis plays a crucial role in reading the politics and poetics of the novel’s ‘social space’: the social relations articulated through communal form.

Unlike the segmental forms of the other two novels, *Myal*’s narration traces a continuous line of story, although it still shifts through multiple voices and positions in order to tell it; more

⁸⁵ Brodber, ‘Beyond a Boundary’, p. 20.

⁸⁶ Smith, ‘An Interview with Erna Brodber’, p. 113.

⁸⁷ Heather Smyth, “‘Roots Beyond Roots’: Heteroglossia and Feminist Creolization in *Myal* and *Crossing the Mangrove*’, *Small Axe*, 6.2 (2002), 1–25. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

so than in segmented narrative communities, 'voice' here is a permeable thing, subject to 'interference'. The complexity of *Myal*'s narrative form means that its critics tend not to neglect to pay at least some attention to the workings of style or to identify perhaps the most distinctive of the novel's features: its so-called 'collective' narrative voice. Shalini Puri describes this voice as 'deindividuated: it spans the linguistic Creole continuum, and functions as something like a collective community consciousness'.⁸⁸ Brian Richardson's recent work on modes of 'extreme narration' introduces the term 'permeable narrator', which he describes as: 'perhaps the most thoroughgoing negation of the humanistic concept of a narrator who is like a person, since it violates what is probably the most important aspect of personhood, which at least since Descartes has been conceived of as a mind. When that mind is contaminated by debris of another, the very possibility of a unitary self is exploded'.⁸⁹ Although Richardson focuses on postmodern texts, this definition speaks precisely to the challenges Brodber's novel poses for narratology's central paradigm of the narrator. *Myal* resists attempts to naturalize its 'narrator' as a single subjective centre or an individual higher authority; it asks that we work harder than that. We encounter instead an unusual novelistic framework in which the narrative mode is consistently heterodiegetic, without personalized narrating agents, but which embeds within its storytelling process the (not fully individuated) subjective *positionings* of a host of speakers.

My reading reconsiders what it means to call *Myal*'s a 'collective voice', because I would argue that 'collective' connotes a consensus that occludes the internal relations of difference and dissonance between the positions from which Grove Town's many and various ways of knowing are narrated. As I have argued throughout this chapter, reading the workings of narrative community involves close attention to how hierarchies or democracies are constituted

⁸⁸ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 148. Examples which only briefly mention form are: Joyce Walker-Johnson, 'Myal: Text and Context', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 5.1/2 (1991), 48–61 (p. 54); and Evelyn O'Callaghan, 'Review: *Myal* by Erna Brodber', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 4.1 (1990), 50–9 (p. 51). Puri's book and Kevin Hutchings' 'Fighting the Spirit Thieves: Dismantling Cultural Binarisms in Erna Brodber's *Myal*' (*World Literature Written in English*, 35.2 (1996), 103–121) both make important points about the effect on the reader, but still spend relatively little time on this point.

⁸⁹ Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 102.

in the *relations between* stories/selves/positions; and while *Myal*'s 'voice' is 'deindividuated' this is by no means to suggest that it is not structured by difference. The 'speaking in tongues' theorized by Mae Henderson develops within *Myal*'s continuous, third-person, but no less *communal* narration. Not segmented in terms of individuated narrating agents but interwoven and permeable, the shifts in narration flow in and out of different social and linguistic positionings. The indeterminate relations of fluidity and interference connecting these positionings might in fact disperse an individualist model of narrative even further than when voices are kept apart within the recursively or serially segmented relations I have described above. By locating distinct modes of voice and focalization in the novel within the framework of this permeable form of communal narration, I shift narrative analysis from the fragment or the utterance to the conversation, the relations of positionality that constitute it and the contextual frame – the norms of its 'community of practice' – within which it occurs. I am proposing that Brodber's innovative style enter, and recolour, the lens of narratological readings.

The elusive opening to *Myal*, evocative of Afro-Jamaican herbalism and a non-rationalist world view, as well as resonant with musicality and discord, exemplifies the whole: it is indicative of the discursive plurality that reaches us through complex movements between strategies of speech and thought representation and narrating/focalizing positions:

Mass Cyrus said that it was not worms and that no black boil had broken in her either. He spoke very quietly. If those people had only learnt to deal with quietude and silence, they would have seen the notes on his score if not the dulce melodia – sweetly please –, the pp for soft, the diminuendo poco a poco – turn it down please –, and the curlicues for rest that Mass Cyrus face had become.

'These new people,' his score was saying, 'these in-between colours people, these trained-minded people play the percussions so loud and raucous, the wee small babe could know they feared the tune. [...] This discord could shake a man out of his roots. [...]'

– Leave her here. An acre of land on a high hill. Bring the transfer paper with you when you come for her on Thursday, in six days time. –

The six days he wanted all to hear well. He wanted the woods and the trees, dry and green, growing and dying and the smallest stone bruise crawling in its many coloured fur to hear. They all knew no matter what their age or state that to get that grey mass out of that rigid, staring, silent female would take seven days and that she should be there until the end of the cure. (p. 1)

Immediately evident is the permeability of 'voice', the bleeding of one discursive mode into another, and the instability of perspective which make the narrative frame of this novel so interesting. The free indirect discourse in the first paragraph is determinedly ambiguous. The musical discourse perhaps first reads as a narrator's reprimand of 'those people' for not understanding Mass Cyrus; but the quoted thought that follows also employs musical discourse in a markedly more vernacular linguistic style. The two are connected, similarly located in terms of their knowledge and belief, although linguistically their positioning differs. Two discursive modes are thus neither wholly attributable to two distinct agents nor reducible to a single one. The clear and swift changes in mode within the above passage, from indirect narrated speech and thought to the direct mental and verbal language of a character and then to a statement of collective knowledge, evoke a movement less like the sweet, harmonious swing of Mass Cyrus's favoured 'dulce melodia' and more like the 'loud and raucous', discordant jazz rhythms that shake him. Mass Cyrus as a myal spirit takes the form of the trumpet-playing Percy the chick, and Perce blows a redemptive jazz that proves to be a healing force within his community (as well as resonating across the 'continent of black consciousness' via his echo with Satchmo). But, as in *Trumpet*, the solo improvisation belongs in conversation with others, which the novel's plural form effects.

The language of quietude, of harmony, is Mass Cyrus's, but the 'raucous', 'trained-minded' Brassingtons fail to translate its 'score'; for the reader with access to his thoughts, though, the translation is available. There is a tension here that is embedded throughout the novel's dialogic strategy of repeatedly changing register ('style-shifting'), a strategy that is constitutive of the novel's narrative instability. And this instability is what calls for ethical reading strategies, in that it requires Shalini Puri's idea of 'interpretive flexibility' so as to adapt to the diverse speakers/focalizers we encounter. The gap between Mass Cyrus's directly presented thoughts and the minimal direct speech which does not even attempt to translate them for 'those people' – 'Leave her here...' – is a gap which does not exist between Cyrus and the community that lives within his grove: there, no translation is necessary. As the following

paragraph shifts back into indirect presentation of Cyrus's thoughts, it is clear that he knows his lie about the six-day healing period will be understood as a lie, and translated into a warning, connoting discord and sending the members of his grove into distress. In fact, within these first few paragraphs, the same event is narrated four times: from a narrating position outside Cyrus but inside his 'way of knowing'; by Cyrus's internal language; by his spoken language; and again by the whole of his grove community. This establishes a pattern that characterizes the narrative dynamics of the novel: the idea of multiple versions, changing each other's tune, is central to its narrative community; and discursive plurality is continually employed to tell and retell from diverse but often unspecified or deindividuated positions from across Grove Town.

Although the fluid movements of FID in the opening of *Myal* are by no means uncommon in literary fiction, they play a part in constituting the novel's communal narrative form. But how does Brodber's consistently third-person narration come to work as an innovative, democratic textual model where the authority of the singular narrating agent is in fact constantly ruptured? Although the narrator-function is not consistent, it is consistently third-person, and would, in Genette's terms, be described as heterodiegetic. However, while pronominal markers identify it as such, frequent changes in register and language give the narration an 'openness' and 'partiality', to repeat Heather Smyth's terms, that problematize any straightforward positioning of the narrator-function outside the borders of the storyworld. There are times, I suggest, when a narrative 'we' is almost implied; when what narratology would describe as narratorial 'omniscience' needs to be reframed not as all-knowingness but as a question of *belonging*, of being an insider with regard to a particular community's ways of knowing. 'Omniscience' in this text is bounded by the limits of this knowledge; furthermore, narrative authority is destabilized as it is repositioned between different circumscribed groups and comes to be bounded, temporarily, by the limits of particular, partial 'ways of knowing'.

This is first and most clearly evident in Chapter Two, which begins with Ella O'Grady's public recital of Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden', focalized by Reverend Simpson. The stanzas of the poem reproduced at the start of the chapter initially read as a straight epigraph, in

Kipling's voice; but this is disrupted when we are told 'The words were the words of Kipling but the voice was that of Ella O'Grady aged 13' (p. 5). A third level of embedding then develops as the scene is revealed to be focalized by Simpson. As he 'murmur[s] along with her' through the final verse, a multi-layering of voice develops which at once reinterprets Kipling's words from the point of view of the colonized 'Other' and gestures to the novel's 'ethics of collectivity' as enacted through its fluidly communal narration. Simpson's resentment that Ella is granted the opportunity to recite because of her light colouring (an index of social status in the Caribbean context) is immediately contested by an apparently omniscient, authorial narrator-function positioned with Ella against Simpson:

The Reverend looked good at little Ella, sighed and said to himself [...]: 'No one else with that colour and that hair. You mean Holness couldn't have found another just as good? Seems we of this hue just cannot win!' No. He could have found no other. There was no one else in the school as sensitive as Ella O'Grady. No one else had reason to be. (p. 6)

In the following part of the chapter, relating the narrative of Ella's birth, parentage, and marginalization within Grove Town, the narrator clearly marks her/his standpoint as coming from within, her/his knowledge as defined by the 'partiality' of being identifiably *local*, rather than claiming omniscience: 'As is usual, this new officer came to town with no wife and needed a housekeeper. As is also usual, the housekeeper was before long in the family way. What was unusual, was for said housekeeper to refuse to move to Kingston's anonymity to be kept by her baby-father'. This is a voice of communal wisdom, but not a harmonizing one since, with access to the individual minds of the community, it encompasses dissonance and discord, so that the narration becomes structured by Smyth's 'poetics of difference'. It continues: 'Those who always knew, knew it shouldn't have end up that way. Mary should have did make the officer gentleman set her up and gone to Kingston with the stomach'. The shift into Jamaican Creole here reinforces that this is a *circumscribed* communal voice, specific to those 'who always knew', a group whose 'knowing' is authoritative but also undermined by its status as 'gossip'.

The 'knowledge' of how things 'should be' is read as even more contingent once challenged by Ella's mother's dissonant version, articulated in something closer to Standard English: 'Mary paid these tongues no mind. She kept carrying the baby to the bush with her [...]. Such a well behaved little girl!' (p. 7). The shift in focalization from the communal to Mary, as well as a subsequent observation that 'Still people's mouth would not leave them', temporarily locates narrative empathy with Mary as dissenting subject, rather than with the town's conventional wisdom. But after this display of narratorial empathy, the narrative voice which articulates 'The poor little pickney even had blue eyes which mercifully changed up to a more ordinary light brown as she grew' (p. 7) gradually shifts away again, so that the final part of Mary's story (including the description of her father as 'Bada D with his outlandish African self and his hoity hoity religion', p. 8) is related in Creole and with the clear slant of gossip. There is an implicit 'we' behind these utterances which seems to belong to one version of collective wisdom: they manifest a local 'truth' characteristic of the world-view of a considerable part of Grove Town's community, specifically of its relatively uneducated, black, working population. Although empathy may lie elsewhere and the sentiments here speak to a narrow view of social order, the novel's narrative democracy means that this communal focalizer still occupies a privileged discursive position: representational power is accorded to society's larger groups. Brodber's innovative use of novelistic discourse resists making clear-cut moral value judgements; rather, the frequent presence both of gossip and of the stilted established traditions of 'linguistic ritual' that mediate communication works to discursively construct how a community narrates *itself*, in all its difference, multiplicity and antagonism.⁹⁰

One of the most striking examples of a momentary shift into a specific but collective voice occurs when the telling of Ella's back-story shades from gossip, a discursive mode often gendered feminine, into a distinct kind of conventional wisdom about Ella, this time marked by a peculiarly masculine voice:

⁹⁰ A prime example of 'linguistic ritual' (p. 21) is the exchange between Maydene, the Methodist minister's wife, and Amy, the headmaster's wife, in which truths must be sought beneath the surface of the socially acceptable utterance (pp. 20–6).

And the skin so sensitive! It was a rebuke to the very elements. Two little ants just bite her and the hand swell up like somebody beat her. No pleasure to fight with. The skin would show every craab you give her and you woulda feel bad. When you fighting a girl, you must lick her down and hold on to the plaits where the mother separate each clump of hair from the other, and shake the head until you feel the scalp lift from the skull. You coulda do that with Ella? That chile hair have only two sections. (p. 9)

The use of a generalized 'you'— usually a means of inviting a reader to identify with the narrative perspective — here opens up an ethical potential for narrative irony, for ironic distance to be established between the reader and the violent narrator, without overt authorial judgement being cast. Rather than developing through a single portrayal or authoritative representation, the characterization and social positioning of Ella follows a democratic narrative style which echoes at the level of form the way in which an individual self only comes into being within the complex, intersubjective relations of community. Indeed, only after Ella's teachers and her fellow pupils add their descriptions to her multiperspectival portrait is Ella finally given the focalizing agency to tell her own story: 'When they brought out the maps and showed Europe, it rose from the paper in three dimensions, grew big, came right down to her seat and allowed her to walk on it, feel its snow [...]. She met people who looked like her' (p. 11). This central narrative figure is located, in this chapter where we meet her, in a complex network of community relations, structured above all by difference — by the racial characteristics written on her (light-skinned) body.

Myal's innovative narrative style does not trace the relations of racial or gendered or class difference alone, however, but rather it builds a narrative community within which the play of differences is cut across by relational connections. A third-person narrator-function with a higher degree of knowledge than any one individual, yet still grounded in and bounded by the community's own multiple ways of knowing, enables the narrative community to map some of the diversity so important to equitable social relations. In order to bring to the surface the variously repressed presences and potentialities for healing that exist within the local St. Thomas community, *Myal* requires a narrative frame open to multiple possibilities, multiple cosmologies; which, perhaps, allows everyone to speak their own truths. This is not a complete

flattening of narrative hierarchies, however; as in *Trumpet* and *Hotel World*, the politics of narration are employed to privilege certain narrators/focalizers, and so to comment on social hierarchies. Mass Levi, the Obeah spirit thief who targets Anita, is only the focalizing agent of one short section narrating his mental battle with the myalist Miss Gatha for the control/liberation of Anita's possessed body, which ends in his death on the privy. We encounter his panic faced with Miss Gatha's healing chant: 'Three times three times three. If she didn't change her style so much! If she would only keep one tune, he could follow her and hold her. But that woman was slippery' (p. 72). In every other instance, Mass Levi's character reaches us either through the perspective of his wife, Miss Iris, or of a communal 'they': 'Everyone knew the full extent of Mass Levi's power. They knew it by fame or they knew it by fact' (p. 31). By contrast, the other, subtler, more insidious thief, Ella's American husband and exploiter Selwyn, is accorded considerable focalizing agency:

He wanted to be in that room alone with her, to light a fire and have her take him into a tropical December and have her show him its jungle and tell him its strange tales. Selywn could get a nut to let itself out of a shell, but he could not get Mrs. Burns [Ella's guardian] to budge. No. [...] He could not get that hag to give up half an hour of her doll. [...] Then the nut took action. Ella engineered her escape for a few hours to his room. (p. 47)

But in Selwyn's case, as with *Trumpet's* Sophie Stones, access to his mental language means that we witness the extent of his exploitation and objectification of Ella (as a 'doll' or a 'nut') and considerable ironic distance opens up between his and Grove Town's ways of knowing.

What the examples of Ella's communally narrated history and the treatment of the spirit thieves show is that narratorial intervention, the use of irony and empathy which in both *Trumpet* and *Hotel World* is marked by pronouns and stylistically distinct narrative modes, is subtler and more fluid in *Myal*. The novel does cast judgement on the two spirit thieves through distancing strategies, but without entirely excluding them from its narrating community. Working towards a collective, even democratic, poetics means differences and dissonances are not suppressed but enmeshed within a workable community framework, within racially and spiritually hybrid relations that *hope* to be equitable.

As the preceding examples have begun to indicate, one of the most prominent differentiators and connectors is the positioning of different passages at different points on the 'linguistic Creole continuum':⁹¹ that is, the sound of a *voice*, its audibility. Although quoted dialogue is minimal and the internal focalization of mental language (including the spirit telephone conversations of the myalists) forms the basis of the narration, *Myal* is a novel which at the same time foregrounds the need for a revised approach to narrative 'voice'. 'Voice', it shows, cannot be understood as the originary centre of discourse, yet its importance to the workings of self and community mean it cannot be discarded as a concept. In the context of the postcolonial African diaspora, speech has had to overcome historical silencing of indigenous African languages and enduring social prejudice against creolized forms. Mimicry of authorized Western discourse historically offered a possibility for coming to voice, but the language of resistance has since often preferred to speak its own rhythm. Thus, as well as the musicality of jazz, blues, calypso and drums, speech and oral storytelling are also drawn into written discourse, disrupting and pluralizing the authorized forms of the written Word associated with colonial powers. For Glissant, this is a poetics 'nourished with the oral': 'The only way, to my mind, of maintaining a place for writing (if this can be done) – that is, to remove it from being an esoteric practice or a banal reserve of information – would be to nourish it with the oral'.⁹² In *Myal*, orality is vital to its 'speaking in tongues', as it interweaves gossip with the language of Kipling, of schoolbooks, sociology, religion, music and folklore. Such discursive plurality constitutes an important part of how Brodber narratively constructs Grove Town's racially, economically and linguistically diverse, but no less *local*, community.

Possibly the most extreme example of *Myal*'s linguistic style-shifting comes in the first paragraph of chapter fourteen, as the community reports upon the outcome of Mass Cyrus's

⁹¹ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 148.

⁹² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 101. The 'vernacular' is also the route to expressivity for Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s black American ('Trope of the Talking Book' in *The Signifying Monkey*, p. 131); as 'nation language' is for Edward Kamau Brathwaite's 'Caribbean Caribbean' person ('The History of the Voice', p. 7); and the 'Caribbean demotic' for Marlene Nourbese Philip's African in the Caribbean ('The Absence of Writing', p. 84).

herbal/myalist cure for Ella: ‘Cook say it was like twenty thousand dead bull frog, the scent that escape from the chile’s body. [...] Cook say she marvel that a body coulda hold so much stuff. Could stand pon it spy Cuba, Cook say. And she ask herself what that poor little chile coulda do anybody, fi mek dem do her so. Sorry fi her so till!’ (p. 94). Focalization then transfers to Reverend Brassington and this commentary is renarrated, with Creole giving way to Standard English: ‘What a stink it had been! And the flatulence. Like the sound of an everlasting foghorn’. Two versions, two voices, but cook’s – coming first – is louder so that colonial authority is, in this small way, momentarily disrupted. Such a discursive shift also speaks volumes about how Brodber’s lifetime of ‘listening to the voices of the people’ translates into a communal narrative style. Elsewhere, an organizing narratorial presence makes itself known by evaluative markers and knowledge beyond that held by the character, and usually ‘insider’ knowledge that situates the narrator within the community of which s/he speaks. Significantly, however, this narrator’s voice is not constant, it is style-shifting (to use a linguistic term) or shape-shifting (to use a Caribbean folkloric one), and not only in relation to characters within the story, as is the case in FID. Moving into various degrees of the Caribbean demotic, so as to speak from a particular social location, and elsewhere into a Standard English which is just as rooted in the specificity of, say, American (Selwyn’s) or anglo-Jamaican (William’s) society, *Myal* evokes a plurality of narrating ‘voices’, audible in their idiomatic and linguistic difference, yet distinguishable also by their perspectives on events and characters under narration. The question of relative positionality is important here, since for readers unfamiliar with Jamaican Creole, especially those from outside the Caribbean, the parts closer to the Standard English end of the continuum are less marked, with Creole parts being more ‘audible’; but ‘voice effects’ are not constant or universal and, for the Creole-speaking reader, Standard English may be far from ‘standard’. Voice is an identificatory issue that stresses the need for a contextual, positional approach to the textual ‘conversations’ of which *Myal* consists.

To relate this to a specific revision of narratological frameworks, I recall Fludernik’s persuasive scalar model of overt–covert narration. Where there is a narrator in Fludernik’s

model, it is always referred to in singular terms, but I would argue that the play of narration in *Myal* has shown up alternative possibilities. There is an overt narrating presence in this novel, but it constantly refuses the reader's attempts to naturalize it as an originary centre or self, because it keeps shifting the grounds of identification, demonstrating at different moments different ways of knowing and of speaking. The illusion of a single voice telling the reader a story is radically dispersed, but in a subtler and, I would argue, more challenging way than in the segmental form of *Trumpet* or *Hotel World*. Brodber's storyteller is many selves, groups and positions at once: the narration issues from more than one place, and bears the traces of St. Thomas's oral histories, its myths, its drums, its hymns. With varying degrees of overtness or audibility and varying speech styles, some identified with a character, others with an unspecified social group, *Myal* might almost be read, echoing Davies and Harré's work, as a community in conversation with itself. Narrative communication is at work, but it is founded on an understanding of orality as a communal, historically loaded force. Critical engagement with the challenge that this communality, this lack of a discursive 'centre', poses for narrative theory's underlying concept of voice will be essential, if narratological analysis is to respond to the hybrid fictions of what Brodber calls 'the continent of black consciousness',⁹³ and beyond.

By listening to the voices of the people, Erna Brodber creates in *Myal* a close, though racially and religiously diverse, local community where the relations of social and spiritual power are played out through communal narrative techniques. The 'difficulty' which readers often describe on encountering her work does not come from high intellectualism or deliberate formal experimentation, but from this fact that she has heard the voices of Jamaican people, of the spiritual world, even of the animals and trees in Cyrus's grove, and is writing them into a communal literary form where the relations of colonial social and spiritual power are played out. *Myal*'s 'difficulty' has been attributed to the local histories, religious practices and vernacular styles which act as 'critical warning signs to non-Jamaican readers' and constitute a

⁹³ I take Brodber's term for her conception of diaspora from her book of the same name, cf. note 26 above.

challenge to intercultural understanding; it has been read as a *demand* that readers educate themselves in Jamaican history and spirituality.⁹⁴ Shalini Puri most precisely articulates the challenges *Myal* poses to my own sense of readerly responsivity/reponsibility: she roots this novel's 'opacity' not in the *facts* readers do or do not know but in the 'participatory' – ethical – response it provokes (as both *Trumpet* and *Hotel World* do) through 'shifting points of view and partial perspectives'.⁹⁵ That is to say, rather than locating the non-Caribbean reader firmly outside the novel's remit, it is important to recognize that 'difficulty' is not necessarily a function of reading cross-culturally. On the contrary, Brodber's fiction (to her surprise) has been warmly received by readers and critics in academic and metropolitan locations, while she admits that people in Jamaica tend not to read it or if they do, often criticize its complexity ('I can't find my way through', she reports readers saying⁹⁶). After all, it is not Western readers she is aiming to educate in Caribbean histories and religious practices – it is those she names 'descendants of Africans enslaved in the New World' who always make up her primary intended audience. But *Myal*'s moving back and forth in time and voice, its deferring of answers as to what story is being told, its interweaving of multiple perspectives, multiple and conflicting knowledges stands in the way of a popular reception.

An appropriate conclusion for this study of the democratic dimensions of Erna Brodber's fiction, then, is to bring it up to date, to the publication in early 2007 of her fourth novel, *The Rainmaker's Mistake*. This novel, she admits, marks a determined attempt to make her fiction more accessible to the people around her by making sure that 'the *architecture* is easier to follow':⁹⁷ it is democratic in *intention*, then, as well as style. Far from turning to the safety of a singular narrative mode, however, Brodber still locates the conditions of possibility for her fictional practice in the 'voices of the people'. Although, unlike *Myal*, the multiple narrators of *The Rainmaker's Mistake* are segmented and individually identifiable, each speaking directly in

⁹⁴ Hutchings makes the intercultural argument ('Fighting the Spirit Thieves', p. 105); June Roberts sees the text as more demanding of an outsider (*Reading Erna Brodber*, p. xi).

⁹⁵ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 161.

⁹⁶ Smith, 'An Interview with Erna Brodber', p. 105

⁹⁷ Smith, 'An Interview with Erna Brodber', p. 105.

the first person, the voices of the newly emancipated ex-slaves are nevertheless intimately drawn together into a textual community as they work their way towards self-sufficiency. In her proposal for what the Caribbean cultural imaginary can be capable of, Shalini Puri captures what I think Brodber's fiction, twenty years ago and again today, most powerfully achieves:

Against deconstructions of 'the people' as a fabricated identity, I defend the idea of imagining 'the people' in democratic and egalitarian ways as a political *achievement* worth struggling for. [...] The Caribbean's cultural, economic, and geopolitical coordinates make it both urgent and difficult to imagine Caribbean community identity. How much more so to imagine it as a community of equals.⁹⁸

Through its dynamics of communal narration, its democracies of voice, Brodber's fiction asks its readers to participate in imagining, in envisioning, community healing, and demonstrates that this is always worth the 'struggle'.

Conclusion

As a novel that is itself about encounter, enacting collisions and convergences between different worlds and foregrounding the limits of knowledge, accessibility and belonging, my encounter with *Myal* has been a markedly anxious one, a site of cross-cultural friction. I have 'participated' in a heterogeneous critical practice, taking in theories of speech and thought representation, political hegemony, jazz, Jamaican religions and postcolonial discourse theory. But it seems to me that this work is vital if we are to ensure that Whitehall changes its tune, that a situated, contextual narratology can actually account for, and is in part shaped by, the many fictions which its corpus has long ignored.

The need for this chapter devoted to the diverse possibilities of communally narrated fictions came precisely from the *space between* the three novels' distinct strategies. With regard to the *how*, Jackie Kay and Ali Smith share more in common: both take a segmental approach to communal narration, where Brodber's is continuous and permeable to the point of conflating voices. I have read *Trumpet* as setting out a poetics based on relations of both tolerance and

⁹⁸ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 12. I would add that Brodber's vision is also informed by *spiritual* structures inseparable from questions of power and community in the St. Thomas of which she writes.

intimacy, and *Hotel World* as establishing a more overtly political 'democracy of voice'. Both novels deal in relations of difference which come of their grounding in a contingent, transient narrative community gathered around one person/one event. In *Myal*, on the other hand, Erna Brodber creates a material local community and plays out the relations of social and spiritual power through communal narrative techniques to such an extent that, under Brodber's sociological guidance, the divisions are reduced. The narrative vision of society in process in *Myal* is thus, as Heather Smyth observes, a 'syncretic' one, as its small but diverse community finds healing through collaboration. The contextual differences between early twentieth-century rural Jamaica and contemporary urban Britain are in every way apparent here, yet the need for a fuller understanding of how to (radically) democratize the worlds in which we live and write and read is common to all, as is the conviction that innovative literary practices can speak to this in substantive ways.

CHAPTER FOUR

**The Geopolitics of Form: Spatial Dynamics in Dionne Brand's
At the Full and Change of the Moon and Aritha van Herk's
*Places Far From Ellesmere***

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor' – a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.

Michel de Certeau¹

Mapping, like language, is creation more than representation, and so it is not illogical to think of fiction as cartography. The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories.

Aritha van Herk²

A slave's laugh, turned tornado, sweeps away the master's house; a dam bursts, flooding the land and creating in the process a divided world made up of islands, oceans and overseas metropolises. In this story, borrowed from the opening pages of Erna Brodber's novel, *The Rainmaker's Mistake*,³ a transformed, remapped landscape becomes a condition of possibility for postcolonial community-building in the Caribbean. Here, spatial structures – the house, the dam, the archipelago – are not the neutral background against which human experience unfolds but are instrumental to it, both as apparatus for colonial power and as agent of resistance. I begin my final chapter with this example because it shows the transformative properties of space acting upon the structure of narrative: that is, the history of slavery and emancipation in the Caribbean is written onto its geography, through the spatial organization of the story. Fundamental to this chapter's revisionary approach to narrative theory is the idea that stories might be 'spatial trajectories' as well as temporal plots, and that spatial dynamics thus join plot, narration and focalization as a primary site of interplay between politics and narrative form.

¹ Michel de Certeau, 'Spatial Stories', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Stephen Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 115–130 (p. 115).

² Aritha van Herk, 'Mapping as Metaphor: The Cartographer's Revision', in *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), pp. 54–68 (p. 58).

³ Erna Brodber, *The Rainmaker's Mistake* (London: New Beacon, 2007).

In examining the role of space in fiction, this final move of my thesis responds to Susan Stanford Friedman's recent call for narrative theory to incorporate a 'spatial poetics', and sets out to articulate productive directions that such a critical practice might take.⁴ Friedman argues that, while postmodern geographers and postcolonial theorists have brought space into the foreground of critical thinking, narrative theory continues to privilege the temporal dynamics of stories. In this way, she contends, narratology not only participates in what Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper call 'the ontological and epistemological hegemony of history over geography',⁵ but it also sidelines the contribution of one of its own major figures: that is, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotopic (temporal *and* spatial) nature of narrative. A primary assumption behind this chapter's spatial focus is that, as Friedman argues, 'a revisioning of space in narrative poetics can lead to a new understanding of how space and time interact as constitutive components of story [...]. It fosters comprehension of the dialogic interplay of location and action in the *topochrone* of the narrative'.⁶

Friedman's call for a spatial poetics provides three specific points of departure which speak to my broader project in this thesis, and which this chapter will extend and develop. Firstly, a spatial poetics necessarily entails a re-evaluation of certain narratological paradigms. As I will elaborate in the following section, analysing the spatial structures of narratives involves moving beyond a conception of story 'held in' by the *telos* of conventional plotting, extending my revisioning of narrative progression begun in Chapter One. I will argue that a spatial poetics further develops the practice of reading for relations, for echoes and non-segmentary structures which my previous chapters have engaged in. Drawing on insights offered by contemporary geographies as well as by certain existing narratological theories and by innovative fictional narratives themselves, my analysis will depend upon a reformulation of space and spatial

⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Spatial Poetics and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*', in James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, eds, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 192–205. 'Poetics' as Friedman uses it in this article refers to literary theory rather than practice.

⁵ Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper, 'The Space that Difference Makes: Some Notes on the Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics', in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 183–204 (p. 199).

⁶ Friedman, 'Spatial Poetics', p. 195.

relations (or 'spatiality', as the two together might be termed) as *dynamics*, exceeding the passive concept of 'setting' around which conventional models have been based.

Secondly, in line with the two-way 'theorypractice'⁷ that underpins my critical approach, the elaboration of a revised, expanded, contextualized approach to narrative space is a *responsive* move, motivated by the particular innovations of (ambiguously) non-hegemonic women's fictions. I concur with Friedman's analysis that 'Stories generated by intercultural encounters invite a strong shift in our reading strategies from a desire-centred, temporal paradigm that dominates much narrative theory to a more spatially oriented framework'.⁸ Reading 'intercultural' fiction, she suggests, 'fosters a focus on narrative kinesis of a different sort, on spatial movement, travel, and passage',⁹ and hence her analysis centres on the functions of border spaces and crossings. This is a compelling observation, and is borne out by the texts I read in this chapter, but distinct points of entry will emerge as I locate these stories in their specific contexts. Writing from Canada and the Caribbean archipelago is marked by distinctive spatial tropes related to their complex histories of settlement and diaspora, to Caribbean plantation economies and island topography, or to Canadian wilderness exploration or prairie landscapes; common to both are critiques of the forces of European colonization, often gendered masculine, which formed, violently, their modern landscapes. As this chapter will demonstrate, Dionne Brand's 1999 novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and Aritha van Herk's 1990 'geografictione', *Places Far From Ellesmere*, are especially challenging texts because they highlight the social relations at work within spatial structures and comment upon them through narrative dynamics that favour spatial organization over temporal progression.

This brings me to the third point of departure that Friedman's call for a 'spatial poetics' gestures towards: the notion that the play of spatiality is constitutive of a narrative's *geopolitics*. This is elucidated in her earlier work on transnational feminism, geography and literature:

⁷ Cf. Introduction, p. 4 above.

⁸ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 137. Here she analyses E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa*; in the later 'Spatial Poetics', she reads Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

⁹ Friedman, *Mappings*, p. 139.

Geopolitics invokes questions of power as they manifest in relation to space on the planet Earth. What I am proposing for academic feminism and more broadly identity studies is a specifically *spatial* axis. I mean by space in this context not a static or empty essence, but rather the spatial organization of human societies, the cultural meanings and institutions that are historically produced in and through specifically spatial locations.¹⁰

Just as Chapter Three related questions of ‘voice’ and narration to a ‘democratic’ politics of articulation, this chapter’s argues that analysing the dynamics of narrative space enables a closer reading of a text’s exploration of social power. This is to evoke what Soja calls the ‘socio-spatial dialectic’¹¹ or, in Doreen Massey’s words, the idea – central to her feminist geographical practice – that: ‘The spatial organization of society [...] is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics’.¹² The focus on narrative space here thus does not break with my previous emphasis on narrative (inter)-subjectivity; on the contrary, readings of space need to be relational and responsive to the interactions of self and place that shape our lives and stories. Following Massey’s notion that space is ‘one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world’,¹³ questions of spatial dynamics now need to be folded into readings of authority, narration and voice.

My critical practice in this chapter shares the assumption about the relationship between geography, textuality and politics which Sara Mills articulates, in *Gender and Colonial Space*:

It is by no means self-evident that representations of spatiality can simply be recovered from textual representations such as literature or travel writing. However, in a sense, what I am arguing is that cultural practices and representations constitute a way of working out and working through those norms which are seen to be self-evident within the society. [...] Representations of spatial relations should be seen as part of the process of making sense of colonial power relations and may in fact constitute a challenge to those power relations.¹⁴

¹⁰ Friedman, *Mappings*, p. 109.

¹¹ See chapter 3 of Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

¹² Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 4. Massey and Soja, among others, are indebted to the work of Henri Lefebvre; see p. 217 below.

¹³ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 251.

¹⁴ Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 22.

For Mills, in her analysis of how space is viewed and represented in various historical modes of colonial discourse (diaries, travel writing, household manuals), textual space is no transparent reflection of actual space, but its representations are themselves revelatory of narrative (geo)politics. This approach informs my own, though my emphasis is less on discourse analysis than on narrative analysis of the technical features of storytelling. In addition to Mills' attention to textual geopolitics, her conception of the reading practices involved is also instructive here. She contends that, 'with the analysis of spatial relations, [...] simplicity of reading is not possible, precisely because of the multiplicity of contextual factors which need to be considered'.¹⁵ This suggests two important points about developing a spatial poetics: first, that it will not inhere in the kind of clear, geometrical 'grid' characteristic of classical narratology; and second, that it is necessarily a contextualizing process. The spatial poetics I articulate here, then, is at once a responsive, situated critical practice and a rigorous (yet flexible) one.

The recent work of Friedman and Mills is developing an approach to textual analysis that holds some significance for my contextualized narrative poetics in that it attends to what Avtar Brah calls 'the politics of dis/location'¹⁶ and how this manifests through and impacts upon processes of writing and reading. To envision a geopolitical axis for narrative studies is to bring into focus and under scrutiny the spaces in which narrative selves – reader included – are located, those they cannot access, the borders they cross, journeys they take, as well as the spatial relations that connect and divide us. Not by coincidence, both Friedman and Mills are working with writing from colonial and postcolonial locations: a reading for space, as my analyses in this chapter will bear out, is brought to prominence by writing concerned with acts and legacies of colonization, as a process which is inherently spatial in its territorial claims, cartographical practices and transforming impact on colonized landscapes.

¹⁵ Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Adrienne Rich's influential concept of the 'politics of location' identifies the relations between bodies in space and the political significations of these relationships ('Notes Toward a Politics of Location' (1984), in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 210–31). Avtar Brah's revision of Rich's theory as a 'politics of dis/location' is even more appropriate here, since it aims to avoid the fixity or essentialism which 'location' might connote and to represent more fully 'the contradictions of and between location and dislocation that are a regular feature of diasporic positioning' (*Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 204).

Postcolonial and narratological critical approaches, however, have rarely converged, so that on the one hand readings of postcolonial texts tend not to draw upon the descriptive precision which narratological frameworks can provide, and on the other hand narratology still has a long way to go in responding to the specific challenges of storytelling from diverse postcolonial locations. Gerald Prince's recent essay 'On a Postcolonial Narratology' sets out some starting points which speak to my argument here since, in response to postcolonial theory's extensive vocabulary of (dis)location and (un)belonging, migrants and journey-(wo)men, he posits a specifically spatial axis for narratological enquiry:

Given the boundaries, crossings, transfers, dispersions, marginalizations, decks and holds, fields and jungles created by or related to colonialism, [narratologists] might pay particular attention to the extent of multitopicality [...] as well as to the degree of heterotopicality, to the kinds of mixtures and inconsistencies, of gaps, breaches, and cracks within spaces or between them, to the nature of frames and limits, and to spatial alignments along such semantic axes as natural or artificial, familiar or strange, independent or colonized, [...] and so on and so forth.¹⁷

The connection Prince draws between postcolonialism and innovative, revisionary conceptions of spatiality is a suggestive one. However, I would underline that while I do to some extent draw narratological and postcolonialist reading practices into dialogue, I do not intend to articulate anything so broad as a 'postcolonial' approach to narratology, nor to suggest that, if such a practice could be defined, it might inhere in a spatial poetics. Rather, I engage with the spatial dynamics of stories from Canada and the Caribbean diaspora, in the context of their distinct histories of colonization, settlement and im/migration, so as to demonstrate that a spatial poetics, as a component of a contextual narrative theory, offers an enlightening critical path for reading fiction in general, and women's fictions of postcolonial experience in particular.¹⁸

Proceeding from the theoretical intersections between narrativity, geographies, postcolonial and transnational feminist theory set out in this introduction, the following section

¹⁷ Gerald Prince, 'On a Postcolonial Narratology', in Phelan and Rabinowitz, eds, *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, pp. 372–81 (p. 375).

¹⁸ As well as Brodber's *The Rainmaker's Mistake*, other examples that call for a specifically spatial poetics include Hiromi Goto's transformation of the Albertan prairies into rice paddies in *The Kappa Child* (Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2001); Nalo Hopkinson's Caribbean feminist sci-fi, *Midnight Robber* (New York: Warner Aspect, 2000); or the communal, collage-like picaresques of Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (London: Penguin, 2005) and Janice Galloway's *Foreign Parts* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

outlines an analytical framework for narrative spatiality and locates my interventions in relation to existing narratological approaches. The latter two sections of the chapter then go on to test this framework against Brand and van Herk's texts. My argument for a revised and contextualized approach to narrative space will, of course, be most powerfully made by these stories that transform conventional conceptions of its forms and functions, manipulating the narration of space in order to produce their geopolitical representations of the world.

Spatializing Narrative Theory

One of the enduring legacies of structuralist narratology has been the definition of narrative as plot, as the telling of a series of events or actions.¹⁹ In Gérard Genette's influential account, narrative is understood to consist of narration and description together; but since the former 'stresses the temporal, dynamic aspect of the narrative' while the latter 'seems to suspend the course of time and to contribute to spreading the narrative in space', it is thus time and not space that constitutes the 'actions or events' driving narrative forward.²⁰ Genette's seminal *Narrative Discourse* later develops a full and complex model of narrative time yet sets aside the study of narrative place,²¹ and this sidelining is echoed within much narrative theory of the past thirty years. Gerald Prince's definition of narrative as 'the representation of *at least two* real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence' is typical;²² and the power of narrativity's temporal dominant is furthered by influential studies including Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, which envisions a directly 'reciprocal' relationship between temporality and

¹⁹ See, for example, Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' (1966), in *Image – Music – Text*, Stephen Heath, trans. (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 79–124; or Claude Bremond, 'The Logic of Narrative Possibilities' (1966), extracted in Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa, eds, *Narratology* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 61–75 (p. 63).

²⁰ Gérard Genette, 'Frontiers of Narrative' (1966), in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 127–44 (p. 136). For a revised theory of the narration/description relationship, proposing a 'foregrounded' narrative role for some description and demonstrating how innovative fiction can collapse this binary distinction, see José Manuel Lopes, *Foregrounded Description in Prose Fiction: Five Cross-Literary Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

²¹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (1972; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 215–16.

²² Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), p. 4.

narrativity, and Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*.²³ In going on to question this hegemony of plot and temporality, I do not dispute the validity or vitality of these forces in the constitution of narrative, but rather participate in a critical move to decentre their position as *the* universal foundations of narrative; to show, in Friedman's words, that 'space and time interact as constitutive components of story'. One function of my textual analyses later in the chapter is to defend this argument by demonstrating how both texts transform the function of space in narrative: how spatial relations become a structuring device, how places shift from the background into the foreground, as participants in and makers of story.

My engagement with this paradigm shift is a response both to innovative modes of storytelling, which my readings will explore, and to the retheorization of space within contemporary geographies, which has fed into the widespread 'spatial turn' in critical theory of the last two decades.²⁴ Soja's postmodern dethroning of the 'hegemony of history over geography' is an important basis for my argument that narratology needs to refocus its readings onto the spatiality of stories. Contemporary geographies can also provide insights that shift the ground beneath narratology's longstanding definition of 'setting' as fixed, static, background description. Conceiving spatiality as a potential force for connection and cohesion with a dynamic, *narrative* role rests upon such a redefinition of space itself.

The origins of what might be read as a far-reaching geographical 'renaissance' are invariably traced back to Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's seminal book, *The Production of Space* (1974). Lefebvre theorizes that '*(Social) space is a (social) product*',²⁵ the structure of which is not geometrical or fixed, but diverse, dynamic and interpenetrating: 'reminiscent of

²³ Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative Time', in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 165–86 (p. 165); Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

²⁴ The 'spatial turn' in literary theory can be seen from Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Glenn Hooper, ed., *Landscape and Empire, 1770–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth, eds, *Space & Place: The Geographies of Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University Press, 1997). Postmodernist writing has also innovated with narrative spatiality (Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) is based on 'worlds'), although with different motivations and manifestations.

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (1974; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 26 (his emphasis). Note that it was not translated into English until 1991.

flaky *mille-feuille* pastry'.²⁶ His work, I would argue, has thoroughgoing consequences for narrative theory's treatment of space:

Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere 'frame', after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure.²⁷

This articulation of the mutually constitutive relationship between space and experience, between spatial and social relations, later theorized by Soja as the 'socio-spatial dialectic', explicitly rejects fixed conceptions of space which have long allowed narrative theory to relegate it to the background of story. While I would repeat Mills' caveat that 'it is by no means self-evident that representations of spatiality can simply be recovered from textual representations', I suggest that Lefebvre's ideas, and especially their adaptation to feminist ends by Doreen Massey and others, provide the beginnings of a model for how the analysis of a narrative's spatial organization needs to be closely connected with its social, cultural, (geo)political and ethical purposes. The challenge to static, neutral, passive conceptions of space and place, combined with Massey's notion of 'power geometry'²⁸ – the relation of geography to power/powerlessness; who has mobility and at whose expense – provide an instructive basis for my own examination of the geopolitics of narrative dynamics.

The 'spatial turn' has not been absent from narrative theory, but neither has it accommodated, as I aim to, the full implications of these reconceptualizations of space as dynamic, relational and experiential. Mieke Bal's 1980s work is rare in contending that: 'it is practically impossible to consider events apart from the actors who cause them, from the places where they occur, or from the things or individuals who experience the consequences'.²⁹ In *Narratology* she posits, briefly but instructively, several of the arguments that my work aims to elaborate: that the function of space, the position(s) from which it is perceived, and its

²⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 86.

²⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 93–4.

²⁸ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 149.

²⁹ Mieke Bal, 'Description as Narration' (1981/2), in her *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, David Jobling, ed. (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1991), pp. 109–45 (p. 114).

relationship to time are all important aspects of narrative's workings, and that space is an element not only of description (the *narrated*) but of narration (the *narrating*) itself.³⁰ Ruth Ronen's 'Space in Fiction' develops a detailed model using the concept of 'frames', of which 'setting' is only the most immediate kind, with inaccessible or imagined frames and, importantly, the relations in between also being accounted for.³¹ However, what Ronen calls 'spatial constructs' are still construed as backdrop to 'events and states in the story';³² and her schema is based upon three hierarchically arranged levels of space: actual, distant and hypothetical. While useful for the realist European novels on which she bases her analysis, Ronen's practice seems to employ the kind of 'narratological grid' that, following Andrew Gibson, I have repeatedly questioned in this thesis.

For innovative fictional narratives that replace the hierarchical distinction between physical and imagined space with an experiential narrative topography which is actively constitutive of story, a more flexible, fluid and relational approach is required. The notion that there is no fixed world to be represented and no fixed position from which to represent it, accompanied by a postmodernist vocabulary of plurality and heterogeneity, of 'interference' and 'seepage',³³ is enabling in this regard. However, the weight that many postcolonial writers accord to spatial relations, as indicators and vehicles of oppression, problematizes the postmodernist hypothesis that 'space opens up as a variable and finally indeterminate feature of any given narrative world',³⁴ and asks rather that we at least attempt to determine its forms, functions and potential socio-political implications, as plural, fluid or intersecting as they may be.

A revised framework for theorizing narrative spatiality, I propose, needs to balance precision with the recognition that the spatial organization of a story is often neither simple nor

³⁰ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Christine van Boheemen, trans. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 93–9. Chatman's work on film in chapter 3 of *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) also takes into account story-space, but makes little account of its significance in written narrative.

³¹ Ruth Ronen, 'Space in Fiction', *Poetics Today*, 7.3 (1986), 421–38.

³² Ronen, 'Space in Fiction', p. 423.

³³ Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 55, p. 216.

³⁴ Gibson, *Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, p. 12.

easily penetrable, but rather unfolds through relations, echoes and dis/connections. My approach begins with a macrostructural analysis: charting the global spatial structure – the ‘map’ – of a text. This will examine the geo/topographical *range*, the *order* in which places appear and with what *frequency*, as well as what kinds of *relations* exist between different locations (these relations might be produced by physical or syntactic proximity, by discursive or metaphoric echo, by affective affiliation; they might be created or disrupted by character movement, narratorial description, or by the reader’s imagination). Already this builds a picture of spatial patterns that demonstrates, firstly, how these patterns interact with or contribute to the overall story structure, and secondly, what kind of geopolitical relations the story might be engaging with. By also looking at the *transitions* between places (whether the narrative cuts from one to another or uses its paths and means of movement to push the story on), and their *stability* (whether places themselves transform or remain constant), my analysis moves further towards a model that recognizes spatial dynamics as an energetic force for narrativity. This, as we will see, is especially important for reading those fictions of travel, migration or dis/placement which both Dionne Brand and Aritha van Herk write.

At a microstructural level, analysis centres on *how* spaces are narrated: are they in the background or, as is the case in the texts I am looking at here, are they foregrounded? Are they passive or active participants? (Both Brand and van Herk invest places with the activity and agency of characters so that, as Bal theorizes, ‘space [...] becomes an “acting place” rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space’.³⁵) How are spaces discursively constructed; and, as Ronen asks, with what modality (factual, unreliable, imagined or a composite of versions³⁶)? This last question intersects with another, particularly important, subject of analysis regarding *perspectival positioning*: what is the relationship between place and its narrator(s) and/or focalizer(s) (and, indeed, its narratee/ reader)? Space, as both Lefebvre’s theory and Brodber’s plantation story

³⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 95–6.

³⁶ Ronen cites ‘factuality’ (from authoritative/factual to subjective/unreliable/imagined) as one axis for analysing the narration of space (‘Space in Fiction’, pp. 428–9).

tell us, is not an empty container to be filled by human experience. On the contrary, I have argued that its relationship both to individual experience and to social relations is dialectical, that place cannot be understood in isolation from its perception and its perceiver(s). Analysis of positioning considers the choice of narrative person, the level of authority and knowledge, and whether a place is singly or multiply narrated: how does the text introduce and develop its spaces, and hence how is the reader positioned in relation to them (are we immersed in the landscape through an intimate perspective and abundance of detail, or kept at a distance by an external perspective and bare details)?

To summarize, this broad framework is designed to analyse the part spatiality plays in producing particular experiences, and the part experiences play in the production of space; to show how Soja's socio-spatial dialectic might translate for a spatial poetics. How spaces produce stories, and how the spaces themselves are discursively produced (by whom; how many times; as fixed or mutable, clearly identified or indeterminate or echoic; and so on), are important aspects of my readings. Massey tells us that places are not stable, bounded things, but rather are 'necessarily the location of the intersection of disparate trajectories';³⁷ focusing on the interpenetrations, connections, movements between places, my approach to reading space is thus always relational. For Sara Mills, 'it is necessary to see spatial relations as constructed in the process of interaction, and they are predicated upon ways of knowing and seeing. In viewing a landscape a spatial relation is constructed for the viewer in relation to the landscape which is viewed and the people who inhabit the area'.³⁸ Here Mills not only reiterates the importance of perspectival positioning in terms that are suggestive for my spatial poetics, but she also articulates the potential geopolitical significance of a mode of analysis that can account for the 'power geometry' at work in the relative positionings of places and people.

A spatial poetics, I suggest, might begin to illuminate the 'politics of dis/location' at work within narrative transactions. To take this further requires a shift in focus from the written

³⁷ Doreen Massey, 'Geographies of Responsibility', *Geografiska Annaler*, 86B.1 (2004), 5–18 (p. 6).

³⁸ Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p. 170.

production of space towards the impact of spatial dynamics on processes of reading. Indeed, the field within which the study of narrative space is currently strongest is precisely that field concerned with narrative processing: that is, cognitive poetics. A cognitive approach considers how a narrative's 'storyworld' is (re)constructed by readers; thus, Marie-Laure Ryan studies how different readers build up 'cognitive maps' of the storyworld, and David Herman suggests that we pay attention not only to what Brooks would describe as the *temporality* of desire, but also to those 'paths' and 'landmarks' that enable us 'to chart the spatial trajectories along which the narrated events unfold'.³⁹ Herman sees narrative space as a powerful force that positions the reader in relation to the story, and this intersects with my aim to read spatial dynamics for the geopolitical dynamics they might represent. That is, the cognitive approach makes room for *contextual* questions of how readers might map narrative space differently depending on their own location, experience and level of engagement and/or identification in relation to a story's spaces; questions, suggested by Mills above, which my readings will gesture towards.

Although a cognitive methodology is beyond the scope of my analytical practice in this chapter, I suggest that 'cognitive mapping' might exceed simple charting of a text's topography and in relation to my own readings I will consider how encountering the spaces of a text can establish relations of un/familiarity, dis/identification, dis/location. These relations are of course variable and dependent on the context of reading, and they form part of how a narrative can elicit an ethical response by engaging readers in a participatory, reflexive transaction. Thinking about spatial relations beyond the covers of the book, a reader-oriented component of a spatial poetics could illuminate the ethico-political forces at work through the politics of dis/location mediating between story and reader. To repeat Mills' words, this is part of the process of 'not accepting the dominant reading of a text and inserting a positionality for reading otherwise'.⁴⁰

³⁹ David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 279; and Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Narrative Space', in David Herman, ed., *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2003), pp. 214–42.

⁴⁰ Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p. 20. Cf. my Introduction, p. 9.

From these theoretical beginnings, I have brought together ideas of spatiality as an alternative or additional source of narrative sequencing; of the dynamism and relationality of narrative spaces; of the dialectic between spatial and social relations; and of readers' processes of 'mapping'. I suggest that a point of coincidence between these lines of thought lies in the concept of the 'experiential'. One of the ideas with which I began this dissertation was Monika Fludernik's redefinition of narrative in terms of 'experientiality', where 'existence takes priority over action parameters, rather than treating consciousness as an incidental side effect of human action'.⁴¹ If narrative 'can be produced also by the mimetically motivated evocation of human consciousness and of its (sometimes chaotic) experience of being in the world',⁴² and if, as Doreen Massey observes, space is 'one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world',⁴³ then the spatial dimension cannot be divorced from the realm of 'events' and a spatial poetics becomes a necessary component of narratological analysis. While my analytical approach articulated here could be widely applied, I contend that this necessity is never more evident than in narratives written by or about those whose experience of the world is one in which territory, ownership, accessibility, mobility are contested, as the politics of gender/ colonization/ nationality/ ethnicity/ social mobility manifest themselves through spatial relations. In order to demonstrate its explanatory potential, then, the rest of this chapter will apply this spatial poetics to two fictional texts intently concerned with geography and geopolitical relations, but written from wholly different formal and ethico-political standpoints.

The texts

Rinaldo Walcott has observed that Dionne Brand's writing is concerned 'with mapping a black Canadian poetics of space – "a tough geography" as she puts it'.⁴⁴ *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Brand's second novel, certainly exemplifies her 'tough geography', although Canadian

⁴¹ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 27.

⁴² Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology*, p. 30.

⁴³ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 251.

⁴⁴ Rinaldo Walcott, "'A Tough Geography": Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada', in Cynthia Sugars, ed., *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), pp. 277–88 (p. 280).

urban multiculturalism is peripheral to the focus on Trinidad and its broad diaspora. The novel's ten loosely connected chapters tell the stories of seven generations of a family, the descendants of Bola, free daughter of the 'queen of rebels', Marie Ursule (p. 5), who have been scattered from Culebra Bay in Trinidad out across the Caribbean diaspora, to New York, Toronto, Amsterdam.⁴⁵ Writing the repeated displacements of migratory families and communities, *Full and Change* explores a multitude of im/possible places and journeys for black women and men, some enslaved, some at 'home', some adrift in the diaspora, but all connected via their female ancestor who has found 'belonging' of sorts in her Trinidadian 'harbour' (p. 296). The island is a presence constantly reiterated, emphasizing a dialectic between place and displacement, between the local and the scattered, in the meaning of diaspora.

Aritha van Herk's writing has also long been a writing of place, fascinated by Canadian geographies and immigrant experiences, as well as by women's experiences of travel, which she sees as potential means of mapping alternative geographies of self. Made up of four 'explorations on site', each centring on one of the places where van Herk has felt 'at home', *Places Far From Ellesmere* is an autobiography of sorts (taking in the rural Edberg of her childhood; her university years in Edmonton; her long-term residence in Calgary; and her memorable trip to Ellesmere Island in the far North where she rereads *Anna Karenin* and reimagines Anna and Ellesmere through each other). But autobiography, geography, travel writing, fiction (the 'Northern', the 'prairie novel') and literary criticism combine to produce an original hybrid form that van Herk calls 'geografictione', with a Brossardian final 'e' gesturing to its feminist textual politics.⁴⁶ *Ellesmere* also writes back against dominant representations of those archetypal Canadian spaces: the prairies, with their heavily male-dominated literary

⁴⁵ The Caribbean diaspora refers to the movements of people after their initial dispersal from Africa, so it is one part of the wider African or black diaspora. Brand's vision does not look back to Africa, which remains an invisible, unreachable and often elided site.

⁴⁶ See Matthew Manera, 'The Act of Being Read: Fictional Process in *Places Far From Ellesmere*', *Canadian Literature/Littérature Canadienne*, 146 (1995), 87–94 (p. 87); Shirley Neuman, 'Writing the Reader, Writing the Self in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 60 (1996), 215–234 (p. 221).

tradition, and the North, that 'infinite myth and place'.⁴⁷ Indeed, with its places more developed than its characters, van Herk's text is perhaps better described as an auto(bio)graphy of place or a geography of self. As a metafictional reflection on the processes of writing/reading space, it draws deliberate attention to theoretical concepts of spatiality, and as such will be particularly instructive for developing a spatial poetics.

Both texts re-envision postcolonial geographies in feminist and 'deterritorialized'⁴⁸ terms: Brand's imaginative remapping of Trinidad and its surrounding seascape and van Herk's re-exploration of Ellesmere Island's Arctic landscape contest particular colonial cartographical practices and their associations with ideals of progress through the exploration, appropriation and control of territories. These geopolitical concerns, my readings will show, are closely embedded within the texts' narrative strategies. Specifically, their primacy of space – or more specifically of migratory movements – translates at a formal level into anti-*telos*: into exploratory, constantly moving pathways that resist stasis and belonging; into organizing structures that are perhaps best captured by the writers' own terms. Brand's favoured trope of 'drifting', which appears throughout *Full and Change*, echoes with van Herk's 'restlessness', although given their disparate racial histories the two terms are far from synonymous. Such a foregrounded politics of space has provoked numerous critical responses: Marlene Goldman and Ellen Quigley have applied Deleuzian concepts of deterritorialization and nomadology to both *Ellesmere* and *Full and Change*; attention has been paid to their use of cartographical imagery; Brand's novel is often read as a feminized re-envisioning of Paul Gilroy's model of the Black Atlantic or James Clifford's work on roots/routes; while van Herk's has repeatedly been studied as a feminist representation of the Canadian North, a 'Northern'.⁴⁹ Although

⁴⁷ See Aritha van Herk, 'Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape', in *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), pp. 139–51. In 'Judith and The Tent Peg: A Retrospective', she discusses her attempt in her earlier novels to write the North differently from the abundance of (again masculine) exploration narratives (in *A Frozen Tongue*, pp. 275–83 (p. 282)).

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ On cartography, see Marlene Goldman, *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) and Graham Huggan, *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction* (Toronto: University of

certain of these key issues in Caribbean and Canadian postcolonialisms will inevitably surface in the course of my own readings, rather than exploring them at a thematic level as others have persuasively done, I analyse how each text also enacts its geopolitics at a formal level, attentive to those instances where narrative analysis reveals its own insights.

In these textual summaries, I have drawn certain connections in between; in what follows, however, their dissonances are more prominent. Already apparent is the divergent emphasis, in Brand's text, on the multiple, drifting displacements of a diasporic family and, in van Herk's, on the travels of the individual picará, the 'restless Western [Canadian] woman'.⁵⁰ Here, I am deliberately echoing the semantic tension that Caren Kaplan identifies between these two differently weighted terms, displacement and travel. Comparing James Clifford's use of 'travel' to her own preference for 'displacement', Kaplan explains that this tension is a function of the two being 'signs of different critical registers and varied historicized instances',⁵¹ one relating to the privilege of choice, the other to the forced movements of socio-economic necessity. Analysing a narrative's play of places and journeys, stasis and movement, is therefore one of the areas where a contextual practice is particularly necessary in understanding potentially divergent significations of 'mobility' or 'home'. The marked formal and ethico-political differences between the texts lead me not to a comparative practice, but rather to examine the distinct challenges they pose and to consider how my analytical framework might apply to each.

Toronto Press, 1994). On Brand, see Johanna X. K. Garvey's incisive "'The Place She Miss": Exile, Memory, and Resistance in Dionne Brand's Fiction', *Callaloo*, 26.2 (2003), 486–503; Marlene Goldman, 'Mapping the Door of No Return: Deterritorialization and the Work of Dionne Brand', *Canadian Literature/Littérature Canadienne*, 182 (2004), 13–28; Ellen Quigley, 'Picking the Deadlock of Legitimacy: Dionne Brand's "Noise Like the World Cracking"', *Canadian Literature*, 186 (2005), 48–67. On van Herk, see Joanna C. Surgeoner, 'A Feminist Literary Cartography of the Canadian North: Women, Writing and Place in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 14.6 (2007), 641–58; Asta Mott, 'Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*: The Wild and Adventurous North?', *Canadian Literature/Littérature Canadienne*, 157 (1998), 99–111.

⁵⁰ I refer to a quote in the title of an interview with van Herk of the same name: Cherry Clayton, 'Restless Western Women', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 35.1 (2000), 163–78. Examples include the travelling underwear saleswoman of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986) and the international courier of *Restlessness* (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1998).

⁵¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 11; Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 3.

My analysis begins with Dionne Brand's novel because it allows me to articulate clearly how a narrative can be structured according to spatial connections, and how this sequencing can help to shape a geopolitical project, namely Brand's remapping of the Caribbean diaspora through the transgenerational experiences of one family. My reading focuses first on *Full and Change*'s macrostructural 'map', before going on to analyse its internal spatial dynamics, where elaborate stories of places changing across the centuries almost constitute secondary plot lines. Examining the many border spaces and lines of connectivity that transgress the segmentations dividing the diaspora enables a discussion of the distinct kinds of narrative space which might prove useful for reading other fictions, especially fictions of migration. In the last part of this chapter my reading of *Places Far From Ellesmere* will apply a similar framework but will illuminate very different spatial techniques. *Ellesmere* is explicitly self-reflexive about the processes of writing and reading space, and I will read how its complex discursive constructions and perspectival play speak both to a feminist geopolitics and to a revisioning of the role of space in narrative. Together, the two texts pose a substantive challenge to narrative analysis, and to readers, to take account of spatial relations as an index of social and geopolitical ones; in turn, they help a reconsideration of the way narrative space is modelled.

Narrating Diaspora Space: *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

Writing *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Brand explains, demanded that she work out:

how to write passages. How to write what looks like journeys across water, across mind, space, and how people are always able to adapt, to fit, to figure out how to do this hustle which life has presented us with. And it's always a hustle, because it always takes place, it seems to me, always on the edges of another life. Of other people's lives.⁵²

The novel's spaces, we will see, are mapped, delimited, territorialized by the impacts and legacies of colonization; they are marked by memory of the violence of slavery, a memory which 'loop[s] and repeat[s]' (p. 9) into a recursive present, since 'nothing dies with finality

⁵² Rinaldo Walcott and Leslie Sanders, 'At the Full and Change of CanLit: An Interview with Dionne Brand', *Canadian Woman Studies=Les Cahiers de la femme*, 20.2 (2000), 22–6 (p. 23).

along this archipelago' (p. 37). The late nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrations of Marie Ursule's free descendants, in this light, come to resonate with echoes of the violence of the transatlantic movements of the slave trade, marked, as Brand suggests, by struggle and displacement. In exploring characters' difficult passages across land and water, as well as their imagined or remembered journeys, Brand interrogates the politics of spatial relations as they manifest for people in the Caribbean diaspora. My analysis of how mobility and constant displacements constitute not the content but the *formal* structure of the text will therefore bring narrative's spatial dynamics into dialogue with its geopolitics.

While the notions of journeys, adaptability and edges that Brand invokes above certainly function as displacing forces, do they not also share a liminal status which invests them with possibilities for connection? My reading will explore how Brand's story of a diasporic family, at once connected by a shared maternal line leading back to Trinidad and scattered by a spiralling legacy of struggle and unbelonging, deploys spatial dynamics to stage a complex tension between locality and distance, place and movement. Its pervasive in-between or border spaces, I will argue, enact a dialectic that is vital to its geopolitics: between violence, division, suffering and survival, connection, perhaps even hope. Brand's idea of 'the edges of another life. Of other people's lives' can be read to signify not only the thin line that marginalizes or divides us from other people, but also, vitally, the potentially constructive, intimate sites of encounter between self and others. In the 'blue airmail letter' of Chapter Eight, sent by Bola's great-granddaughter from Toronto to her (dead) mother in Trinidad, Eula writes: 'I would like one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace. [...] I want a village and a seashore and a rock out in the ocean and the certainty that when the moon is in full the sea will rise and for that whole time I will be watching what all of my ancestry have watched for, for all ages' (p. 247). While for Eula this ancestral 'home' constitutes an impossible aspiration, it in fact echoes what the structure of the text achieves: lines of relation between the generations and places of the diaspora, with the village of Culebra Bay and the ocean as vital connective forces. Applying a spatial poetics will show how such

energies are produced at the level of narrativity, through connections and echoes running between dispersed places. Yet while gesturing towards the hopeful, my reading remains sharply aware of its fragility within this text that constantly reveals how easily things fall apart.

For Johanna Garvey, *Full and Change* ‘offers a counter vision of diaspora’,⁵³ in that: ‘Brand writes of the diaspora as displacement, loss, exile, yet she incorporates into her works the power of memory and the urgency of resistance, especially through the mapping of space to locate diaspora identifications’.⁵⁴ While ‘diaspora identifications’ is a perceptive description of the novel’s connective logic, Garvey’s notion of ‘counter vision’ proceeds from a singular understanding of diaspora as primarily a process of dispersal; yet I conceive diaspora to already encompass an internal dialectic between fragmentation and reconnection. A concept which helps to articulate this dual dynamic, and which proves particularly helpful for my reading of the narrative space of *Full and Change*, is Avtar Brah’s ‘diaspora space’. Responding to the ubiquity of diaspora studies and its often loose definitions, Brah proposes ‘diaspora space’ as a means of exploring the intersections between the distinctly defined, though interrelated, theoretical paradigms of diaspora, border-crossing and the politics of dis/location:

The concepts of diaspora, borders and multi-axial locationality together offer a conceptual grid for historicised analyses of contemporary trans/national movements of people, information, cultures, commodities and capital. [...] The three concepts are immanent. I wish to propose the concept of *diaspora space* as the site of this immanence.⁵⁵

She adds: ‘*diaspora space*, as distinct from diaspora, foregrounds what I have called the “*entanglement of the genealogies of dispersal*” with those of “*staying put*”. Here, politics of location, of being situated and positioned, derive from a simultaneity of diasporisation and rootedness.’⁵⁶ The complex spatial dynamics of Brand’s novel translate conceptual transgressions of ideas both of nation-space and of ‘home’ into a narrative form that itself

⁵³ Garvey, “‘The Place She Miss’”, p. 499.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 486.

⁵⁵ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 208. ‘Multi-axial locationality’ is Brah’s alternative term for her own ‘politics of dis/location’; admittedly a less than elegant term, it in fact usefully speaks to a more fluid idea of multiple axes of identity and difference (cf. note 16, p. 214 above).

⁵⁶ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 242.

travels, drifts, crosses or occupies borders. Its network of trajectories maps out the coordinates of a particular vision of Caribbean diaspora, scattering from Trinidad to Curaçao, Venezuela, the U.S., Canada and Western Europe, yet at once it brings into relation the disparate life stories and dis/locations of Bola's descendants. Narrative space, that is, works like diaspora space.

The paratextual presence of a family tree on the book's opening pages is a prominent indicator of the intently *spatial* dynamics to come, because unlike a conventional family tree, which observes routine chronology and privileges dates over locations, Brand's version locates Bola's family in time *and* space (see Appendix II). It marks a life not only with a date of birth but also by mobile trajectories of migration – 'the one who ran to the Rupununi', was 'taken to the Main' or 'to Bonaire in a handbasket' – and it thus resembles, as Garvey suggests, a Deleuzian rhizome⁵⁷ or, more appropriately perhaps, a genealogical 'map'.⁵⁸ While charting the many trajectories the family will drift along, the diagram also intimates that their scattering is not irreversible: its winding, rhizomatic shape allows the lifelines to interconnect across space–time, as in the marriage between second cousins, Cordelia and Emmanuel, who are unaware of their shared bloodline. If, as Gérard Genette contends, the paratext's privileged place gives it particular influence over the reader, then Brand's family tree can be seen to participate in forming a reader's 'cognitive map' of the narrative geographies that will structure the story to come.⁵⁹ Marlene Goldman captures something important about the novel's workings when she suggests: 'Furnished with Brand's fluid textual maps, readers are [...] encouraged, in the literal and figurative sense, to remember and re-map complicated transnational diasporic communities – communities whose broken histories and transnational connections repeatedly challenge the

⁵⁷ Garvey, "The Place She Miss", pp. 494–5. Deleuze and Guattari's instructions for rhizomatic thought, which read 'Run lines, never plot a point! [...] Make maps, not photos or drawings' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 24), certainly speak to the resistance of fixity and originary myths in Brand's writing.

⁵⁸ The descriptions on this 'tree' echo those that expand upon or replace place names in Faulkner's famous map of Yoknapatawpha County, printed in the 1936 New York Modern Library edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*.

⁵⁹ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (1987; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). A paratext is a privileged 'zone of transaction' which can exert 'an influence on the public [...] at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)' (pp. 1–2). Maps (used in *Ellesmere*) and family trees are examples of 'documentary paratexts' excluded from Genette's study (p. 404) because not commonly used in fiction, which seems to support their marked significance for the reception of these two novels.

bounded, progressivist narratives of nation-states.’⁶⁰ As I read it, the at once fragmented and interlinked outline of the genealogical ‘map’ sets up just such an awareness that reading will not involve tracing chronology or *telos*, but will entail a more active process of drawing connections between people and places. Provoking a more participatory and dynamic reading process – a reading-for-relations – brings narrative’s spatial structures into the foreground, asking that we move towards a more ‘topochronic’ conception of narrativity, and in so doing it underlines the constitutive importance of spatial relations to the experiences of individuals and communities being narrated.

Macrostructural movements: (no) return?⁶¹

‘Centuries are forgetful places’ (p. 18), the narrator of *Full and Change* tells us, where ancestral lines are easily broken. And Eula laments, ‘We are a tragedy, Mama. A whole broken-up tragedy, standing in the middle of the world cracking. [...] I felt as if we had been scattered out with a violent randomness’ (p. 258). Indeed, a formal outline of the novel identifies a segmented, fragmentary structure consisting of ten chapters, each focused on different character(s) in different historical and geographical locations. These cover separate stories about Bola’s family and, while the transition between the first two is one of close relation (a direct line from Marie Ursule’s rebellious suicide pact to her daughter Bola’s escape and childbearing years in Culebra Bay), the rest are less cohesively linked. The characters, although all descendants of Bola, often do not know of each other, and the links between stories can be as tentative as one character glimpsing the next through a doorway. Indeed, Brand’s text might almost be read as ten self-contained stories, and could feasibly be described as a ‘novel in stories’,⁶² with as much emphasis placed on its scattered component parts as on its narrative cohesion. However, although loss and displacement and the many forms of pain they carry are defining experiences for Brand’s characters, my analysis of the text’s spatial macrostructure

⁶⁰ Goldman, ‘Mapping the Door’, p. 27.

⁶¹ This refers to the title of Brand’s memoir, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2001).

⁶² Cf. Chapter Three, note 10 above.

reveals how it puts into play a logic of connectivity that works against the centrifugal forces of their many migrations, reinforcing at a formal level the lines between Marie Ursule's descendants drawn in the family tree. It has implications for narrative theory, too, since here narrativity is dependent upon spatial as well as temporal organization.

Franco Moretti's 'distant reading'⁶³ approach to literary theory finds that drawing actual maps of some novels can '[reveal] the direct, almost tangible relationship between social conflict and literary form'.⁶⁴ For Moretti, this mapping is most useful not to identify fixed or bounded sites of action, but rather to illuminate the dynamic, constantly changing '*relations* that the map had revealed among them'.⁶⁵ While my thesis almost always privileges close reading practices over 'distant' ones, I suggest that to begin 'at a distance' by constructing a 'map' of narrative space can provide a productive basis for a spatial poetics. In the case of *Full and Change*, it casts new light on the geopolitics, the socio-spatial encounters, at work through form. As I outlined above, this 'mapping' consists in analysing the spatial range, order, and dynamism of the narrative. The 'novel-in-stories' structure I have mentioned, however, creates a kind of double narrativity at the level of novel and of individual chapter, which means that although I begin with an overall macrostructural 'mapping', this will then be nuanced and complicated by the internal dynamics of the chapters.

Charting macrostructural spatial dynamics begins with the primary spaces where the narrative present, the time of the narrating, unfolds. This initial attention to 'settings' will on the one hand inevitably reduce the complex spatial movements arising from the multiple embedded stories of long and complex past journeys taken by generations of the family (for example, Chapter Three narrates Private Sones' grandfather's voyage from India, followed by Sones' own past travels from Trinidad to England, Palestine and back). Such a reading will partially and temporarily mask the fact that every 'setting' is in fact a mobile and contingent story of

⁶³ In 'distant reading', 'the reality of the text undergoes a process of deliberate reduction and abstraction' in the service of global conclusions about literary history. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 1.

⁶⁴ Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 64.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 55.

place, conditioned by its circumstances of narration, and I will go on to consider these more complex spatial ideas in the following section. On the other hand, however, *Full and Change* is an effective example of how, even when considered at its most skeletal level, narrative spatiality is a dynamic force that can be constitutive both of story and of textual (geo)politics.

A basic narrative 'map' of its ten chapters would chart the following locations:

1. Mon Chagrin plantation via the 'crablands' to Culebra Bay – the far end of the island and of the archipelago (1824);
2. Culebra Bay (Emancipation, 1833, into the 1880s);
3. Culebra Bay (1920s to 1950s);
4. Neighbouring town of Abyssinia (1953);
5. Traversing Florida, then rest of the U.S.A (1980s?);
6. Amsterdam (1980s);
7. Amsterdam to Brugge (1980s to early '90s);
8. Toronto to Terre Bouillante, Trinidad (late 1990s);
9. Terre Bouillante (late 1990s);
10. Culebra Bay (c.1870s).

Altogether, *Full and Change's* spatial range marks out the geographical coordinates of one particular transatlantic configuration of Caribbean diaspora, and Culebra Bay, the small place that Mama Bola calls her 'harbour', is arguably its 'centre'. Internally, Culebra is the most frequently narrated space, both the text's first destination, as Kamena and Bola travel there after Marie Ursule's rebellion, and its final destination. In between, while temporality advances towards the present until the very last short chapter, the spatial order, by contrast, is *cyclical*: a movement north and east as far as Amsterdam and then gradually back towards Culebra. While for each of the chapters and characters there is determinedly 'no return' to origins, and while Culebra is not 'home' in any easy sense, this narrative order means that for the reader there is a return to the island, a remembering of the space, and of the bloodline, connecting Bola's family. Furthermore, a map of the novel's cyclical trajectory has many lines transecting it, links cutting across geographical distances as Culebra is repeatedly remembered or imagined by those who have left or only heard tell of Mama Bola's beach. The final scene enacts such reconnection by deliberately returning us to before Bola's family scatters: 'She loved them, these children strung out across the beach. [...] Straying along the sand, waiting for her but doing their own business'

(p. 295). This combination of the liminal space of the beach, the liminal condition of waiting, and the image of the children at once 'strung out' and strung together by Bola's maternal thread seems to me to capture a snapshot of the text's dialectical, 'drifting' vision of diaspora space. These spatial dynamics – I use this term deliberately for its kinetic qualities – tell a slightly different story than the stress on loss and displacement within the content of individual chapters. Formally, then, through the recursive presence of Culebra Bay, diaspora is mapped not only as scattering, but also along potential lines of connectivity.

Reading the internal patterns of the chapters further exemplifies how Brand's novel refuses any association of 'setting' with stasis or fixity, instead 'writing passages'. Each section is the story of at least one journey: some unfold during the time of the narrating (like Priest's journeys across America in Chapter Five), but each story embeds imagined or remembered journeys through analeptical leaps that enable the characters' diverse displacements to be told. Chapter One, for example, has embedded within it a micro-narrative of the Carib people's long history, thus commencing Brand's portrait of Trinidad's diaspora with a gesture to its own complex layers of settlement: 'their six-thousand-year-old trek over the Andes was close to ending here in Trinidad after four hundred years of war with the invaders' (p. 2). The first chapter's other, interwoven micro-narratives tell of other arrivals: Marie Ursule's journeys in the hands of her owners; the journeys of those who held her, the Ursuline nuns 'running out of islands' (p. 11) and de Lambert 'retreating down the archipelago' (p. 12); and the story of her lover Kamena stumbling upon the maroon camp, Terre Bouillante, 'like entering his own blood' (p. 30). From Chapter Three onwards, once Bola's descendants have lost each other in the diaspora, their remembered or imagined journeys allow them to intersect with one another. Distance and forgetting are cross-cut by moments when ancestral lines reconnect: although they are not necessarily aware of it, within each character's story a lost relation appears.

As well as the family tree/map, another notable device connecting the chapters is the use of moments of overlap, where each chapter announces the next through the appearance of the next character in the current storyworld. So, Cordelia asks Sones for directions in his chapter (p. 89);

her own ends as she is glimpsed by a 'boy priest' through a doorway (p. 128); then after Priest's chapter, the focalization passes to Adrian, the distant cousin he had discovered in an INS detention camp; and between Eula's 'Blue Airmail Letter' and young Bola's section, mother and daughter (while never revealed to each other) are connected by the letter itself that passes between them and by the shared sound of a mot-mot singing (p. 255, p. 272). The tragedies Brand's characters experience are, I would suggest, on the one hand bleaker for their repetition across the history and geography of this family. On the other hand, however, the structure's overall cyclical movement and constant imagined trajectories back to the island evoke at least some sense of place for the family, and work in a small way against the extent of their losses. What I have begun to elaborate, here, is how the cyclical, overlapping macrostructural dynamics of narrative space participate in developing this novel's central tension between historical rupture and the 'single line of ancestry'.

A strong argument for the geopolitical significance of the analysis of narrative form, and specifically narrative spatiality, is made by looking at the wider context of this novel's production, which complicates the macrostructural reading I have just suggested. In an early complete draft,⁶⁶ Brand plots her story along a different spatial trajectory, still beginning in Trinidad with Marie Ursule and Bola, but reserving the tragic story of the slaves' suicide pact until the penultimate section of the novel. The descendants' stories follow in similar order, except that Adrian and Maya's Amsterdam chapters come *after* those of Eula (Toronto) and young Bola (Terre Bouillante), so that instead of a gradual return to the island we encounter a progressive movement away from Trinidad to North America to Europe. The 'return' comes only in the form of an historical account of a tragic moment in the island's history, not in a return to contemporary Trinidadian lives. Heightening the desolation of the spatial movement of this early draft is a final section, absent from the published version, entitled 'Marooned', which describes the many violent maroonings of Caribbean peoples in such a way that it creates a

⁶⁶ Manuscript dated December 1997, in Box 5 of the Dionne Brand fonds at Library and Archives Canada, consulted April 2006.

profoundly pessimistic textual vision of the Caribbean diaspora. Further, the brief, often anonymous encounters linking the characters, which operate as a cohesive device between chapters, are absent from this version. The changes between this early draft and the final one effect a significant shift in tone that speaks to a conscious decision to invest with some potential for reconnection an otherwise tragic family saga.⁶⁷ The story does not change, but its plotting – or rather its mapping – does, and the effect on the storyworld presented is considerable.

I am, however, hesitant about relating this changing strategy to a shift in (or softening of) Brand's politics, because the manuscripts highlight the extent to which a published novel is the product of more than one imagination. The comments of Brand's reader and friend, Kwame Dawes, and her editor, Diane Martin, in particular help to explain how these changes came about. To begin with the poisoning, to move back and forth across the generations, and then to return to the idea of multiple generations at the end, are all suggestions by these readers. It is Martin who expresses concern that the early draft almost separates into short stories, and therefore calls for the introduction of more explicit connectors between stories. The family tree, another potent connective device, is not evident until later versions. Clearly, a significant part of the structural change during this novel's development is the result of editorial arguments for readability, narrativity and novelistic coherence. What interests me is the fact that the changes revolve around *spatial* issues.⁶⁸ This both lends an added dimension to Brand's exploration of diasporic relations, and supports my argument that space can be constitutive of story. That the resulting novel is skilfully and innovatively brought together is testament to Brand's art; but that it is also a little less brutal, its desolation somewhat tamed through its reordering, still begs a question about the role played here by the stringencies of mainstream publishing.

However we interpret it, the very terms of this debate speak to my central arguments in this chapter. If the ordering of narrative geographies and the choice between the earlier trajectory,

⁶⁷ In the July 1998 manuscript (archives, Box 9), the poisoning has moved to the beginning and 'Marooned' has gone, leaving the young Bola's tragic, haunted life in contemporary Terre Bouillante to conclude the book. By November 1998, the final 'At the Full and Change of the Moon' section has appeared, returning the reader to the elder Bola, back on the beach looking towards her children's futures.

⁶⁸ This is the case with Dawes' suggestion, clearly adopted, that the landscapes could become more like characters (notes dated 5 October 1998, in archives, Box 22).

ending with the suicide pact, and the latter one, ending with Bola's children on the beach, are significant decisions in the processes of construction of this novel, then we can see how the order of and connections between a narrative's spaces can be essential to its narrativity. Finding that the novel's drafts progressively became more infused with ideas of spatiality and cartography also suggests their constitutive importance not only for Brand, but for many other fictions of movement, travel, migration. Finally, the bleak violence and despair of the earlier drafts – still powerfully evident, but no longer a determining trajectory – shift in the published version towards a more finely balanced examination of the possibilities, even hopes, of life's 'hustle', and this actively affirms my sense that, so often, politics and poetics are intricately interwoven. Focusing on spatial dynamics offers a fuller understanding of the tensions between the tragic and the hopeful in Brand's vision of diaspora.

Spatial relations

Thus far, I have discussed the novel's places as if clearly demarcated, unambiguous, physical entities, in order to demonstrate the usefulness of a 'distant' mapping of narrative space for a reading of textual geopolitics. However, this 'map' must be interwoven with the text's other layers of spatial representation since, as the theorists invoked in my introduction to this chapter suggest, space and place are not subject to neat, accessible, bounded representations; instead, spatial relations and a reading-for-relations are crucial to understanding *how* stories come to be constructed around space. In *Full and Change*, the segmentations between spaces are continually being traversed, interrupted, blurred. Writing in search of a mode of being/becoming not predicated upon fixed identities or originary belongings, I argue, requires a vocabulary attentive to dispersals, movements and non-fixity, not only for more thematic criticism but also for formal analysis. In the rest of this section, I consider three prominent, overlapping ways in which Brand's discursive constructions of place exceed the clear boundary lines of cartography; in which writing space, to repeat Sara Mills' words, defies 'simplicity of reading'. These are: border spaces, echoes, and the play of perspectival positioning.

Microstructure part I: border spaces

Besides the idea of diasporic connections and dis/locations which I have considered up to this point, another useful aspect of Brand's formulation of diaspora space for analysing *Full and Change* is its emphasis on borders, a means of exploring the im/possibilities of belonging and the difficult journeys and crossings that map out diaspora space. For Susan Friedman, borders are vital to how 'space and time interact as constitutive components of story' because of the transgressions of stable notions of place that they perform: 'Isn't it borders that make movement through space/time interesting, suspenseful, agonistic, reconciliatory?'⁶⁹ A spatial analysis of *Full and Change* further develops this argument for the inclusion of border spaces within revisionary thinking about narrative spatiality, because the crossing, and inhabiting, of borders is one of Brand's particularly innovative uses of narrative space. Surveying the narrative space of the novel reveals a remarkable frequency of liminal locations: the swamp, the maroon camp, the ruined plantation, Culebra's beach and its 'outskirts', the INS detention camp, Maya's window frame. The string of departures, of people running away, is cut through by the many borderlands: by the oceans, beaches and highways which are journeyed across; by the letters, memories and vehicles which traverse them.

The play of border spaces is important to my argument in this chapter because it encompasses two challenges to how we read narrative space. Firstly, borders defy the fixity of spatial boundaries, showing, as Brand's narrator tells us, that 'maps are such subjective things, borders move all the time. There are encroachments and retreats' (p. 52). As such, they exemplify the instability and inherent dynamism of place, posing both a geopolitical challenge to the hegemony of official cartographies and a narratological challenge to backgrounded conceptions of 'setting'. Secondly, Brand uses borders as generators of narrativity, as functional connective devices drawing stories together and moving them forward, demonstrating the agency of spatial relations in the narrative process. Border spaces might therefore themselves be defined as complex maps of passage between past and present, here and elsewhere.

⁶⁹ Friedman, 'Spatial Poetics', pp. 195–6.

A mapping of the novel's locations and landmarks reveals that a high proportion can only be described in these liminal terms, as places in-between or in the process of becoming. Chapter Three, 'Tamarindus Indica', begins:

Tamarindus indica. He sat under this tree every day. A tree perhaps brought here from Africa in the seventeenth century. Probably brought here by his great-great-grandmother, as a seed in the pocket of her coarse dress. [...] How the tree came to stand in his path he really did not know. And if it had been his great-great-grandmother, she would have brought a silk cotton tree [...]. His great-great-grandmother, however, had not passed down into memory but he had heard that silk cotton blew all the way here from Africa and that is how he thought of any ancestry before Marie Ursule, who was his great-grandmother. (p. 73)

This passage is marked by the interplay of factual and possible modalities: the strong physical presence of the tree is undermined by the highly uncertain path it had taken to get there. Like Bola's rock out to sea, Sones' tree is liminal: he seems paralysed beneath it while the world moves around him, but the apparent fixity of his chosen place in the world is undermined both by the tree's status as a sign of cultural crossings and by the internal narrative dynamics of his story, which trace his Indian grandfather's indenture narrative and his own wartime journeys to Palestine. The *tamarindus indica* is not a background setting, but a narrative landmark operating as the means by which Sones' own ancestry is physically made present in Caribbean soil.

Every other story in the novel is constituted outside the boundaries of clearly definable 'place'. The fifth 'Priest' chapter, in which Priest and Adrian have escaped from a Florida INS camp, determinedly resists the strictures of 'setting': 'The dark was like the dark of morning anywhere. [...] He liked this time of day, like him it was indeterminate. [...] The road wasn't a road yet. There was no place really to hide except in the morning itself' (p. 129). This initial placelessness is not only constituted by its focalizer, Priest, but as road and man are narrated together into being, it actively constitutes his 'indeterminate', drifting character, deploying a careful dialectic between self and place. Even once the location has come into focus, instability persists because the chapter is entirely narrated as they drive the roads of America, so that 'setting' is in permanent motion. Within Priest's and Adrian's chapters we encounter the INS camp where they meet, a border space on the fringes of nation, attempting to contain and

remove that which is 'alien'; but this displacing impulse is counteracted by a dynamic of reconnection, since it is there that the distant cousins discover each other.

Later, framed in an Amsterdam window, 'A place to look in and look out. A simple transparent place' (p. 208), Adrian's sister Maya claims this border space as home: 'She made her own tableaux where she was happy. [...] She decided she would do whatever she wanted in her tableau' (p. 209). Maya's life as an immigrant prostitute temporarily cedes to one of autonomy in this self-made space, until violence shatters it and she flees into the arms of a rich client who provides a 'home' that is no liberation but a new enslavement. Even the 'Blue Airmail Letter' that Eula sends from Toronto to her dead mother back in Terre Bouillante (and which Eula's daughter, the younger Bola, receives) represents in narrative form the journey 'home' that Eula's words are making, a border which her body cannot cross. Border spaces are thus important spatial devices for enacting narrative change, or, to adapt Brand's own trope, narrative *drift*. Brand's borders are not necessarily transitions between two defined places; rather, they offer alternative kinds of (non)place, alternative possibilities for belonging and becoming, in which displacement remains, but might be livable.

The most expansive border space in the text, which is central to its construction of diaspora space, is the deep and broad space of the sea. From its first appearance, the Venezuelan Main is a space of imagined freedom, a 'deterritorialized' space which Bola spends her days watching, looking beyond the borders and confines of the island: 'After Bola saw the sea, walking into a house was like walking into a wall, a barrier to the open, because this is what Marie Ursule had seen in her child's eyes, the sea, and a journey to be made that melts the body' (p. 44). Defined by its fluidity, by its difficult to map surface, this constantly moving 'border space' becomes a defining presence within the text; it permeates every chapter with a diasporic logic of dis/location. But *Full and Change* inscribes the sea not as an idealized, shared, deterritorialized space; rather, like land, it is a potentially violent place that is constantly mapped and policed by territorial claims and filled with the memory – and the bodies – of millions of African slaves

drowned during the Middle Passage.⁷⁰ This memory persists in the novel through the present-day Venezuelan Main: for Adrian, who is raped and beaten during his time as a trafficker, ‘everything passed through the waters off the Main, and he was going to pass also, taking anything they wanted him to take, their coke, their crack, their ganja, their sperm if they wanted’ (p. 185). For Cordelia, too, the passage from Venezuela to Culebra is full of risk. However, Cordelia’s voyage also enables her escape from an abusive family, signifying, as the sea does for Bola too, the possibility of ‘another life’.

Borders embed a dual dynamic: they at once separate and connect. This dialectic is a potent example of the specificity of Caribbean island relations which Elizabeth DeLoughrey, drawing on Kamau Brathwaite’s ‘tidalectics’, describes: ‘Drawing on land/sea cartography, tidalectics foreground historical trajectories of dispersal and destabilize island isolation by highlighting waves of migrant landfalls into the Caribbean. This dynamic model is an important counter-narrative to discourses of filial rootedness’.⁷¹ She explains, ‘Geologically and symbolically speaking, the earth’s surface cannot represent its deep history; the island poet must plumb the subterranean and the subaquatic layers of human and planetary change. These depths reflect shared experience across time and space in Kamau Brathwaite’s assertion that “the unity is submarine”’.⁷² As a form of ‘narrative tidalectic’, the sea on the one hand physically distances people at different points in the diaspora, but on the other hand brings them together. Most importantly for my argument, it draws actual narrative connections between stories:

For a while he thought he could breathe water – it was running in his veins and he wasn’t in the boat but deep in the ocean where he had come from in the first place. ‘Bato, bayena!’ his great-grandmother fluted like a trumpet fish when her father came to visit her mother in Culebra Bay. One day [...] he would take [his daughter] home and come off the water – this endless water with no destination.
(p. 187)

⁷⁰ Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey’s recent work aims, among other things, to re-envision the ocean not as empty space but as equally overwritten by colonial and cartographical practices, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), pp. 40–1.

⁷¹ DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, p. 51.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 17.

Here, having been attacked out on the Venezuelan Main, Adrian's story is transformed into the story of four generations ago, the story of his own family's origins and an echo back to Bola's string of children on her beach at Culebra. Immersed under water which bears the weight of his family's history, his self is momentarily transformed and his story replaced with that of his ancestors, as narrative space becomes the agent for the novel's recursive forces of memory.

Microstructure part II: echoes

More subtle than the repeated reappearance of Culebra Bay, Terre Bouillante or the Venezuelan Main or the predication of the next protagonist within the setting of the previous one, is a device perhaps best described as a (spatial) echo. The notion of echoes introduced in Chapter One again captures how one space reappears within or through another and collapses the boundaries in between. The segmentations between the places of the diaspora are cut across by the presence of spatial echoes that forge diasporic connections. The family's repeated stories echo not only down the generations, but also across the spaces of the diaspora: from Culebra to Toronto, Amsterdam and back to Terre Bouillante.

I have mentioned Culebra Bay's insistent connective presence across the novel, and in part this is achieved through the use of narrative echoes. Culebra is first constructed as the product of Marie Ursule's prophetic imagination: before she plays her part in the slaves' mass suicide, she imagines it into being as a potential sanctuary for Bola and Kamena far from the plantation. It is a place heavy with colonial history, haunted by 'the ghosts of two Ursuline nuns who had once owned her' and 'rumoured to have leprosy, [...] though she knew it was only the nuns' old craft' (p. 7). Culebra is thus both a substantial location, albeit 'a useless piece of rock, which the sea salt took inch by inch' (p. 11), and a site of haunting which must be imagined back into life. This location is the written manifestation of the layering of multiple historical realities. It captures how Caribbean space is traversed by the dead as well as the living:

There are the vain directions of walls, climbing only to fall down in pebbled ennui. [...] This place is imagined over and over again. Each fragment belonging to a certain mind – a reverie, a version – each fragment held carelessly or closely. Which is why it still exists. Nothing happened here. Nothing extraordinary for its time. Two nuns held slaves like any priest or explorer or settler in the New

World. It is the others, the ones they held, who keep the memory [...]. It is they who keep these details alive and raw like yesterday. (pp. 42–3)

Physical space, here, is an enduring, if crumbling, memorial to the once quotidian trauma of enslavement; rather than dying with its keeper, memory here is manifested in actual space, a place that will become a point of origin for Bola's many children and a central narrative location. Marie Ursule's imagined version then transfers to her daughter, who finds Culebra complete with the nuns' crumbling, dusty figures: 'The Ursulines, in 1824, long dead, are airing and waiting in the resurrected doorway of their estate at Culebra Bay for Bola [...]. They are a story Marie Ursule once told Bola' (p. 44). Ghosts and memories, recurrent in Brand's text, are ways of creating a dual temporality, an echo of the past in the present, where a single place comes to hold two moments at once. As we will see in the following section, they also trouble the mimetically-derived boundary between physical and imagined space that pervades much narrative theory. The narration of Culebra continues to confuse this boundary as it is echoed across the space–time of the diaspora in Toronto and Terre Bouillante.

There is the echo of its 'pebbled ennui' within Eula's account of Toronto's 'rubbled [...] glitter' late in the novel: 'I am living in a city at the end of the world, Mama. It is rubble. It is where everyone has been swept up, all of it, all of us are debris, things that a land cleaning itself spits up. [...] It is as if some pustule erupted from the ground and it is this city. It is bloated and dry at the same time, crumbling with newness, rubbled in glitter' (p. 238). Another related echo then sounds in the penultimate chapter, which centres on young Bola (Eula's daughter brought up by Eula's mother as her own). Here, the dust-filled house in Terre Bouillante where Bola stays is haunted by the persistent memory of her dead (grand)mother; holed up with a spectral figure in a crumbling forgotten building, suspended between past and present, young Bola becomes the shadow of her ancestral namesake. This echoic play of narrative space is an example of the interplay of form and (geo)politics, showing how this novel carefully remaps colonial sites by according place-making power to 'the others, the ones they held, who keep the memory'. Through this remembrance, the enslaved past can act upon and echo within the

present. The memories of those who have left the village, or who have only heard about it in family legend, remain bearers of its stories, and the contours of Culebra can therefore appear within and reshape their experiences of other places.

At the end of 'Priest', a different spatial echo is produced between the two Western diasporic locations of the U.S. and Amsterdam. The U.S. is described as a pulsing bleeding body through which Priest deals drugs: 'This was the heart of the world, [Priest] thought, palpable and brutal, sucking in blood and pumping it out callously without thought, just instinct, that was its only mission and he was like a vein in it [...]. So he took the trip on the bus or the train gouging whichever artery of America, his hands on the weed or cocaine' (pp. 173–4). The following chapter, 'A Soft Man', transports us to Amsterdam, where 'the street looked to [Adrian] like blood gone vermillion from air. [...] It stank because blood was really flesh, and blood left stale was rotting flesh' (p. 179). The highways and streets of both Amsterdam and the U.S. carry not lifeblood but disease and suffering, and this echo physically connects, yet differentiates, the fates of Bola's descendants on different continents. Such places emphasize movement; the disjunctive neocolonial power relations that mediate between immigrant and place of arrival make the places s/he inhabits effectively uninhabitable, especially for the profoundly displaced characters of Priest and Adrian (so that they become like parasites in the 'fat' bodies of these Western locations, 'grooving a sore through the belly of America' (p. 172)). But these bloody, embodied formulations of space are also *produced* by the perceiving agent: Priest and Adrian's imaginings of place are made brutal by the violence of their experiences. Where Priest can thrive in such an environment, however, Adrian is made desolate by it, finally gouging out his own eyes so as 'never [...] to see the world again' (p. 205). This might be described as an intensely *affective* narrative topography,⁷³ since

⁷³ Nigel Thrift's work on 'affective geographies' is interesting here, for his exploration of how cities are formed out of the emotional responses of those who live in/move through them. Describing a visual representation of a city as a sea of faces and hands by video artist Bill Viola, Thrift suggests: 'these are the building blocks of modern urbanism just as much as brick and stone. In other words, Viola provides an affective geography of the city, understood as a chronicle of faces and hands and tears' ('Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect', *Geografiska Annaler*, 86B.1 (2004), 57–78 (p. 74)). This echoes with literary and filmic practices of 'psycho geography' which I mention later (see Steve Pile, "The Problem of

conceiving it in these terms highlights the inseparable, mutually constitutive relationship between place and perceiver/experiencer.

These examples show the extent to which imagined or discursive echoes across narrative space can exert a stronger connective function than physical encounters: the text's spatial structure, and thus potentially a reader's 'cognitive map', is altered when disparate spatio-temporal locations are written as overlapping. The places of this text, that is, are not fixed points on a map of the world; rather, their discursive constructions seep into one another, so that the relations in between chart an interconnective diaspora space of narrative.

Microstructure part III: perspectival positioning and the politics of dis/location

Fundamental to how these echoes work is the concept of narrative space not as a fixed backdrop, but as a process and a product of the mind/s of its narrator/s or focalizer/s. This returns us to Fludernik's redefinition of narrativity as 'experientiality', in that space in narrative is always a question of perspective, of individual or collective *experience*. If no 'setting' can be separated from the lives experiencing it, 'lived' space and 'imagined' space are not distinct, as narratological models of space often suggest, but are intimately intertwined in experiential geographies.⁷⁴ That is, an experiential conception of narrative which privileges consciousness over event encompasses both the physical and the imaginative. This is to move towards an understanding of narrative space that more closely resembles Lefebvre's concept of the flaky, *mille-feuille* structure of social space. Deliberately troubling any separation between lived and imagined spaces, the final part of my analysis will examine how *Full and Change* disperses the singular authority of established modes of spatial representation – maps, borders, travel writing, exploration narratives and so on – so that what we encounter instead are multiple accounts of the worlds inhabited by this Caribbean diasporic community.

London", or, how to explore the moods of the city', in Neil Leach, ed., *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Reading and Experiencing the Modern Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 203–16).

⁷⁴ Daniel Punday's chapter on space in *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) goes furthest in this direction, arguing that 'spaces will be relevant to a narrative not just when they can be actually entered or seen, but also when they can be imagined' (p. 124).

This multiplicity is achieved in part through the novel's narrational mode. The narration is predominantly heterodiegetic, with the exception of the eighth and ninth chapters, the former being, as its title suggests, Eula's 'Blue Airmail Letter' sent from Toronto to Trinidad, and the latter, 'Bola', being narrated by Eula's estranged daughter Bola, one of the youngest on the family tree. In the rest of the novel, focalization shifts back and forth between characters and narratorial omniscience, providing extensive access to the history and geography of the diaspora and exploring a spatio-temporal breadth difficult to achieve through character narration alone. Within this flexible narrational mode, each chapter privileges a different focalizer – often more than one – and each of these constructs places differently. On the one hand, then, the fluidity of free indirect discourse available within the heterodiegetic mode, as we saw in my previous chapter, accommodates plural perspectives. On the other hand, despite changes in temporality, place, character and focalization, the heterodiegetic mode acts as an undercurrent of connection which, like the other cohesive factors in the novel, in some sense gathers the fragmented diasporic family together, weaving their versions of place into complex, irreducible relation.

Brand's experiential, *mille-feuille* construction of narrative space, both in terms of its perspectival plurality and its seepage between lived and imagined places, is perhaps best exemplified by a more detailed reading of Culebra Bay. At the far end of the island of Trinidad, where Bola's children are all conceived and born, Brand's fictionalized location is in some sense the novel's pivotal place: the setting for much of the first four stories, circled back to in the final chapter, and repeatedly imagined or remembered in the sections in between. Culebra is not a point of origin because Brand carefully weaves a nomadic past for Bola's mother, routed rather than rooted; and this means that, as Brand theorizes in her memoir *A Map to the Door of No Return*, there is 'no return' to African beginnings.⁷⁵ According to Mama Bola, 'Culebra was not large enough to be anybody's harbour but hers. [...] Some things that go out come back again and other things never return. Her children might get to see a thousand glistening harbours, [...] but she would stay here in Culebra, blowing her shell and watching the Main

⁷⁵ Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*.

appear and disappear' (p. 296). Culebra is, however, a site from which many lives and journeys are launched and is returned to repeatedly; for many of the characters it is the only 'origin' they know. My reading focuses on how its complex, dynamic characterization within the text exemplifies Brand's relational model of spatiality. While later in the novel Culebra is important as the place of Sones' isolation under his *tamarindus indica*, of Cordelia and Emmanuel's meeting, of Eula's fantasies of belonging, I focus on its more complex development within the opening two chapters.

We saw in the previous section how the physical desolation of Culebra Bay is actively transformed into a living place by Marie Ursule's re-imagining; how her prophecy actively *produces* the 'vain directions of walls, climbing only to fall down in pebbled ennui' which then launch the rest of the story. Culebra has been a desolate place, then an estate on slavery's economic map, then abandoned to leprosy and struck from the colonial map, before Marie Ursule re-imagines it as a refuge. Bola and Kamena's arrival at Culebra is first in its process of transformation. Their discovery of this refuge is not the relief of freedom, since it bears the weight of their encounter with the nuns' crumbling ghosts, but as Marie Ursule predicts it will be 'their way out and their long destination' (p. 16). But Bola reclaims it to 'make a generation' and, once Emancipation allows freemen and -women to traverse their island, it expands into a village. In the first two chapters, Brand carefully constructs this genealogy of place that recognizes the layers of experience which make it up. Changing through time, impacted by and impacting on the lives of others, this place is not only the ground for others' experiences, but also itself is given the depth, back-story and, vitally, agency to change and develop which usually define a human character, and which trouble perceptions of the static, empty status of space in fiction. There is a fully developed narrative place here, but one that is defined by its undefinability, its constant transformation. In this displacement of realistic convention, the distinction between lived space and imagined space is not hierarchical nor one of modality, because the spaces Marie Ursule imagines are as factual and substantive as those Kamena and Bola travel through. In terms of narrative perspective, Marie Ursule's focalization of Culebra in

this early chapter is *formative*, not observational. This is a conception of narrative space as experiential, encompassing both the physical and the imagined.

In the novel's second chapter, the perspective at first shifts from within this ghostly Culebra to without, to the external position of the Lieutenant-Governor of Trinidad as he declares Emancipation. Significantly, this remains unknown to Bola and Kamena on their 'Maroonage of two' (p. 51) since Culebra has been 'marked off' his official map. Governor Hill's words, in the form of his letter to '*the slave population of the Island*' (p. 49), are followed by moments where the focalization is his: 'Culebra at any rate is dead land now. At least there will be no petitions from there about [...] compensation for slavery's end. All that remains there are some sea birds and some dust and some contagion' (p. 53). But these moments are interspersed by heterodiegetic narration which contests, from an omniscient viewpoint, such 'knowledge': 'It isn't leprosy at all, it is the stroke of a pen designating a certain place on a map as a repository of all the mind's doubts and worries and malevolence. Maps are such subjective things, borders move all the time. [...] A map, like the one on Hill's desk, can only describe the will of estate owners and governors' (p. 52). This colonial mapping of the island is of course a failed mapping because, while struck off Hill's map, Culebra begins to reverse its crumbling, to become a site of habitation and fruition for all who 'wandered there' (p. 64). Its fruition is personified in Bola's lust 'for anything she saw, any bird, any passage of air, any cut of landscape in a look [...]. And lust for her own flesh. [...] And lust for the men who drifted down to her from the village' (p. 67). And its transformation is made powerfully evident through the multiple versions which undermine Hill's: the rest of the chapter interweaves heterodiegetic narration – telling a physical story of Culebra, the people who 'drifted' and 'wandered' there, until 'the village of Culebra Bay fully arrived' (p. 66) – with Kamena's and Bola's different constructions of place, as Kamena repeatedly leaves in search of Terre Bouillante while Bola re-imagines it as her 'harbour'.

In contrast to the Governor's mismapping, we encounter Kamena's 'own cartography, that of longings and muddled sight', in which he describes for Bola the seascape surrounding them:

“The currents near this island is very strong and uncertain [...]. At the full and change of the moon the sea will rise four feet perpendicular [...].” (p. 53). As Bola too explores, Culebra’s borders become her own: ‘Every year, as the outskirts came nearer and nearer into view as more than magic, [...] the gauze and webbing of Marie Ursule’s spell fell away. [...] Turning into her own self, the outskirts witching into the world’ (p. 59). And, drawing on Kamena’s, she undertakes her own mapping of the sea: ‘The sea’s billowing mountains and crinkling ridges became as well known to her as any territory is known by its travellers’ (p. 62). This is an intently experiential geography; and, like the rest of the novel, it illustrates how individual lives and familial and social relations are written within and through the places they inhabit and imagine, the human and the spatial positioned in mutually transformative relation.

From ‘diaspora space’ to ‘geografictione’

As a narrative remapping of island history, *Full and Change* interrogates geopolitical relations, or, to reiterate Friedman’s words, questions of power at work in ‘the spatial organization of human societies’. Eschewing fixed places and the segmentations of official mapping, Brand’s novel shapes itself around the many secret places outside the colonial economy, places which tell a different story of colonial Trinidad than the equally subjective maps of authorized colonial cartography. Citing maps as examples of ‘produced space’, Lefebvre asks: ‘How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents?’⁷⁶ I have suggested that Brand’s fictional diaspora space is constructed of contingent, dissonant *stories*, both of place and of journeys, arrivals, encounters. The structural energy of *Full and Change* partly issues from the (physical and imagined) movements, liminalities and echoes between places: such passages act as dis/connective forces of both separation and relation. The close reading of the relations, the kinds of spaces, the interplay of lives and imagined space that I have undertaken here, as an example of a spatial poetics in practice, has enabled a fuller understanding of this text’s constant

⁷⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 85.

motion – formal, perspectival, and spatio-temporal – and thus of how, at every level, it resists static conceptions of belonging.

While the specific context of Brand's story has meant that Brah's 'diaspora space' has provided a useful critical vocabulary, beneath this lines of enquiry with much broader applications have developed. My analytical focus on range, order and frequency has shown how spatial patterning is constitutive both of narrativity and of textual (geo)politics; and reading the narration of spaces and the interferences, echoes and relational connections in between has enabled me to reconceptualize narrative space as dialectically related to the affective responses of its experiencers. Moving to *Places Far From Ellesmere*, this framework for a spatial poetics, inflected with ideas about the dynamism and relationality of space, will again prove productive, but its application will necessarily trace different directions in response to the texts' divergent positioning and form. Notably, where Brand's multi-perspectival 'diaspora space' highlights relational socio-spatial structures, Aritha van Herk's (auto(bio)graphical) 'geografictione' focuses on an individual experience, albeit deploying a discursive plurality that constantly exceeds the bounds of a single perspective. Moving through macro- and microstructural analysis, my reading of *Ellesmere* concludes with a metacritical reflection on its challenge to the reader to reflect upon her/his own role as reader of place – a challenge which, if taken up, might foster a closer awareness of how the politics of dis/location are played out through stories.

Geographies of self: *Places Far From Ellesmere*

Where Dionne Brand's multiplicity of stories echoes back to the communal narration and reading-for-relations of my previous chapter, Aritha van Herk's 'geografictione' brings my rethinking of narrative space full circle to invoke the play of feminist auto(bio)graphical fiction with which I started in Chapter One. As with much of van Herk's writing, *Places Far From Ellesmere* operates in the 'fictocritical' dimension, where fiction and critical theory are in

constant and productive dialogue.⁷⁷ For France Théoret, 'theoretical fiction, writing in the feminine, the language of women is forging a different relationship to the referent, to the real'.⁷⁸ Here, writing the stories of the four sites where she has felt 'at home' – Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere Island – through the lens of her own (and Anna Karenina's) gendered experiences, van Herk creates what is, in Joanna Surgeoner's words, a "doubled" text: 'a representation of place that is also an interrogation of the processes of representation'.⁷⁹ As she reflects on her own capacity to narrate place, to 'cup your hands to enclose this soft jumble of houses and streets' (p. 34), *Ellesmere* becomes a metafictional examination of the relationship between narrative, self and space. What makes *Ellesmere* so provocative for a spatial poetics is that, rather than centring on feminist reading/writing communities as my first chapter showed Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard's theoretical fictions do, van Herk's self-theorizing practice centres specifically on 'the relationship between the mapping of place and the plotting of fiction', as Goldman puts it.⁸⁰ But I would add to Goldman's formulation a third, auto(bio)graphical impulse, so vital to this text. Like *Baroque at Dawn* and *Ana Historic*, *Ellesmere* is negotiating how to write and read the self; yet, to a far greater extent than either of these novels,⁸¹ *Ellesmere* envisions the writing/reading of self as inseparable from the writing/reading of place. More specifically, as the paratextual map on the book's front cover indicates (see Appendix III), she examines the relationship between woman and space.⁸² as we will see, in the final section entitled 'Ellesmere: woman as island' the 'body' of Ellesmere

⁷⁷ One of van Herk's major innovations is in the field of fictocriticism, an experimental genre-blending mode of writing developed predominantly by feminists in Australia and Canada. This is closely related, though not synonymous, with Brossard's 'fiction-theory' or Marlatt's 'fictionalysis' which I discussed in Chapter One.

⁷⁸ France Théoret, 'Writing in the Feminine: Voicing Consensus, Practicing Difference', in Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli, eds, *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Edmonton: Longspoon/NeWest Press, 1986), pp. 361–6 (p. 364).

⁷⁹ Surgeoner, 'A Feminist Literary Cartography', p. 642.

⁸⁰ Goldman, *Paths of Desire*, p. 157.

⁸¹ The Vancouver location of *Ana Historic* and its changes between the colonial and contemporary eras, in addition to specific examples of Marlatt's playing with the gendered discursive constructions of space (e.g. the masculine forestry manuals compared to Annie's childhood experience in the woods), are examples of the importance of spatial relations; but this is less persistent than in *Ellesmere*, and is not a dominant structuring force. Similar could be said of the postmodern city, ocean and virtual reality spaces of *Baroque at Dawn*.

⁸² This paratextual map, not unlike Brand's family 'tree', works to establish the primacy of the spatial in the story to come. Surgeoner performs an insightful reading of the diagram as a 'collage' that tears up and fragments space, an example of 'cartographic intertextuality' which 'disrupts cartographic conventions just as her text disrupts literary conventions' ('A Feminist Literary Cartography', p. 651).

Island overlaps with van Herk's own and with her feminist re-imagining of Anna Karenina. In the process, *Ellesmere* constitutes a unique literary experiment in a thoroughly spatial poetics, a limit case which asks especially challenging questions of narrative theory's spatial frameworks.

Indeed, this text pushes against the constraints of narrative as it is conventionally conceived. Each section employs a discursive plurality that cuts between quotations from colonial records or *Anna Karenin*; clear, sometimes humorous childhood recollections; and labyrinthine representations of place. As an example of the latter, the 'Calgary' chapter concludes with:

The fossils of lost centuries embedded in walls, an architect's drawing of place. Brachiopods shine through their sealed surface, erypsids genuflect. You too are sheathed in prehistoric stone, the gravestones of Jericho before the walls tumble down.

Shout Calgary, this growing graveyard.

(p. 74)

Much of the text is written with this remarkable lexical and syntactic complexity which resists overt connections and sees meaning-making work more like poetry than narrative – 'exploding one-way sense', to borrow Brossard's words.⁸³ Typographically, too, as later examples will make clear, the conventional flow of narrative discourse is disrupted by an abundance of white space on the page, gaps between paragraphs, and unusually frequent use of colons. Ostensibly, given these stylistic strategies and its deliberately uneasy generic positioning, *Ellesmere* exceeds the limits of narrativity. However, as my macrostructural analysis will show, the text's autobiographical thread and the sense that, as 'places far from Ellesmere', the first three sites are construed in relation to the fourth (Ellesmere itself) mean that narrativity *is* established along an *experiential* trajectory that moves the story, and the reader, on. However, Peter Brooks' model of narrative driven by 'the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages'⁸⁴ is not applicable here, since if there is a drive towards an ending, then it is determinedly spatial. A course through the text leads not to a resolution or the conclusion of a certain period of the

⁸³ Cf. Chapter One, p. 48.

⁸⁴ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. xiii.

protagonist's life, but rather towards a *destination*. Denoted by the paratextual presence of 'N' compass points on all subtitle pages, this is a journey north.

Macrostructural movements part I: auto(geo)graphy

Vital to the narrative innovation of *Places Far From Ellesmere* is its status as a 'semi-fictional autobiography',⁸⁵ but one in which the interplay of self and fiction is expanded to include place. Engaged not only in self-narration but also in 'self-geography' (p. 37), *Ellesmere* self-consciously explores how the postmodern geographical notion of the socio-spatial dialectic intersects with the workings of narrative discourse. Echoing my use of auto(bio)graphy in Chapter One, *Ellesmere* might be conceived as an 'auto(geo)graphy', since the life story it narrates is charted rather than plotted. In fact, it is not only the 'geo' that could be bracketed in this formulation, the 'auto' is also in question, because rather than being narrated by a conventional autobiographical 'I' this text addresses its protagonist, 'van Herk', as 'you'. As I will argue towards the end of this chapter, however, the 'you' is not entirely successful at decentring the 'voice' of the text, so that 'van Herk' is still likely to be read as auto(bio)graphical subject. Charting what might be called the auto(geo)graphical trajectory of this text will illuminate the constitutive role that space plays in narrative, when both are conceived in experiential terms. As the story moves from childhood home through the city locations of adult life and the northern space of travel and exploration, it examines closely the extent to which we are formed by the topographical and socio-spatial structures of the places we encounter.

This text refuses to privilege the experiencing self over place in favour of a far more reciprocal relationship. The first section, 'Edberg, coppice of desire and return', is the most consistently autobiographical. Reconstructing the details of childhood life, it intertwines spatial, social, and personal aspects of experience:

This is your self-geography, the way you were discovered/uncovered in Edberg's reading of your fiction.

⁸⁵ Mott, 'The Wild and Adventurous North?', p. 104.

And how to unearth the place in the person? These six square blocks: this village barely villaging itself on this brief hillside of parkland, suggesting only other places: the church spire pointing to heaven: the crossroad pointing north and south and east and west (everywhere but here): the hall pointing below. In the basement of the person rests the village of Edberg, refusing to be dislodged, a continuous grounding. (p. 37)

As this extract conveys, the Edberg section is at once a narrative genealogy of place and an autobiography of a departed citizen told via sites of encounter, via the places that were permitted and forbidden to her, and via the entrances and exits she has made there. It establishes her family's immigrant history in the context of Edberg's own development, and narrates her development as a girl in a town with strict moral 'allowances' – 'What you weren't. Allowed. : to go uptown at noon. Either to the store, the post office, the café, someone's house. All potential trouble' (p. 24). It marks her departure for a more permissive university town and finally, in a retrospective mode, relates her sense of distance from and even betrayal of this place and the script it might have written for her had she stayed: 'Edberg: [...] A fiction of geography/geography of fiction [...]. Invented: textual: un/read: the hieroglyphic secrets of the past. Come home. Enough's enough. Come home' (p. 40).

'Edmonton, long division', by contrast, consists of an almost entirely textual mapping of the city: 'While others divide and swyve, hunt life partners [...], you read, entext yourself a city of pages' (p. 53). Edmonton's character is constructed through written representations rather than an experiential autobiographical account. Its history, cartography and geology come through historical accounts of colonial beginnings, such as the 1882 Hudson's Bay Company advertisement of land for sale (p. 44). 'Van Herk's engagement with this place is textually mediated because the autobiographical story here is a story of reading, of an obsession with books that will turn out to be lifelong, precursor to her un/reading of *Anna Karenin* in the final section. Throughout this text, and especially in the later 'Ellesmere' section, the reading of books and the reading of places are not separate acts but unfold together, seeping into one another in the mind of the reader; spaces and stories constituting each other. In these six years in

Edmonton, major rites of passage seem barely incidental: 'without ever having put down your book, you are degreed, married, authored, even public and published, and out of there' (p. 53).

The third 'exploration on site', 'Calgary, this growing graveyard', departs almost entirely from the autobiographical thread, except that the city is described as a good potential burial site, which, we will see, is one of the conditions for defining a 'home' in this text. Despite its status as van Herk's permanent residence, Calgary is distanced from the experiencer: its funereal, commercial, demographic and physical dimensions are explored via a segmented narrative form that replicates the four 'quadrants' of the city's urban geography. The dialectic between self and space, which in the Edberg section was finely balanced, here tips heavily towards the spatial.

Finally, set against these three 'places far from Ellesmere', 'Ellesmere, woman as island' has a clearly contrastive function: it is entered as an *escape*, 'awayness so thoroughly truant you have cut all connexion to all places far from Ellesmere' (p. 77). A major break with previous sections takes place for two reasons: firstly, the account of the visit to Ellesmere is interwoven with her feminist fictocritical un/reading of Anna Karenina's fate within/against/through this alternative northern space; secondly, in contrast to the many layers of human settlement and development that build up the spaces of populated Canada, Ellesmere's spatial identity is stripped almost bare. As a place which, except for its naming after the Earl of Ellesmere, has been little subject to *man-made* geographical incursions (though the French etymology of Ellesmere [*elles/mère*] contradicts this masculine origin giving the name a determinedly feminine enduring resonance), Ellesmere becomes for van Herk a 'deterritorialized space in which traditional practices of representation can be resisted'.⁸⁶ In what is by no means an unproblematic gendering and potentially neo-colonizing move, as I will discuss later, this island desert on the edges of the nation-state is represented as a 'tabula rasa' (p. 77). As such, it enables the release and exploration of the female self – Aritha's and Anna's – whose possibilities have been limited in the developed places she has called 'home': 'You are closer to Russia than to home: reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory,

⁸⁶ Goldman, *Paths of Desire*, p. 216.

the text a new body of self, the self a new reading of place' (p. 113). Despite occupying just two weeks of van Herk's life, Ellesmere occupies half of the book, radically disrupting expectations of the *telos* and centrality of self within autobiographical storytelling, and entering rather into a trans-generic mode that evokes travel writing, novelistic discourse and literary criticism.

Ellesmere's thoroughgoing resistance of autobiographical convention is therefore evident both through the emphasis on the places themselves, which become more fully developed characters than 'van Herk' herself, and through the disruption of temporal structures. There is an overall framework of temporal progression, in that the text begins in childhood and moves to adulthood, but this is problematized by the dominant position and size of the Ellesmere section. A temporal conception of narrativity would read Calgary as her final destination, but such chronology is replaced with a structural energy driven by the desire to find a place not overwritten by male-authored layers of representation, a place where she might feel 'at home' ('home' being an inherently mobile concept here, if not as contested as it is for Dionne Brand). The experience of reading *Ellesmere* also evidences this lack of temporal narrativity: within each section places are constructed through multiple discourses from across history in no chronological order; there is a fluidity to the ordering of experiences that traces spatial or associative patterns of connectivity instead of temporal ones (see, for example, my discussion of 'Training' on p. 259). Van Herk rewrites the temporality of conventional autobiographical discourse: precise chronological indicators to moments in her life (dates, ages, years passing by) are frequently elided, so that time is not progressive but fluid and often indefinite.

Analysis of the macrostructural movements of the text thus requires a fundamental revisioning of narrativity, defined not solely along temporal lines but as constituted also through spatial dynamics. These spatial dynamics, as my brief overview of the text's movements has suggested, are not independent or relegated to the background. On the contrary, place and the experiencing autobiographical subject are mutually constitutive. The spatial *range* of the text, from rural to urban Alberta and then to the barely populated North, is both defined by and defining of van Herk's own life line. Its *order*, especially the final positioning of Ellesmere,

actively constitutes a story in which self-discovery unfolds in dialectical relationship to the journeys and places experienced. Van Herk's feminist auto(geo)graphy privileges the spatiality of experience over its temporality, and in so doing she articulates a conception of self-narration which is non-teleological and closely concerned with exploring the politics of location. In the process, we will see, it opens up alternative possibilities for experiential representations of space beyond the authority of masculine and colonial paradigms.

Macrostructural movements part II: reading for relation

Having suggested that the narrative 'line' in this text traces a spatial direction rather than a strictly autobiographical one, in this section I consider the way in which the relations between spaces work as a force for cohesion. I examine the play of repetition and connectivity which this text achieves through a) the insistent presence of Ellesmere, and b) the repeated echoes of two prominent spatial tropes: trains and graveyards. As with *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, a practice of reading for relation is invited that proceeds along explicitly spatial lines.

In my reading of Brand's novel, Culebra Bay provided some narrative cohesion through its repeating presence, and in van Herk's text Ellesmere Island plays a not dissimilar narrative function on our journey towards North, although evoking a greater sense of anticipation through its delayed appearance. Besides the book's title, which identifies the first three places in terms of their distance, and difference, from Ellesmere, the island's presence is announced throughout, often in terms of its connection to *Anna Karenin* and its Russian setting (their shared northern backdrop is a significant connective logic between Ellesmere and Anna). In David Herman's terms, Ellesmere acts as a 'landmark' that guides the reader along a certain 'spatial trajectory'.⁸⁷ It is announced towards the end of the first section: 'between the coffee mugs [the farmers] sigh to each other over another vanishment, speak of you gone into the maw of larger and larger cities, children taking strange trips to the north pole, trying to find Russia, and where will it all end? With murder? With a woman in a novel getting off a train in Edberg, her red bag in hand, seeking to fulfil a fiction?' (pp. 33–4). A bracketed '(far from Ellesmere)' appears in 'Calgary'

⁸⁷ Herman, *Story Logic*, p. 279.

(p. 72); and metaphors with Arctic or Russian reference further this pervasive sense of Ellesmere's impending presence (p. 39; p. 51; p. 73). It is in 'Edmonton' that this logic of dis/connection is made most evident:⁸⁸

And Russia is looming, luring, lurking, Anna's quick step on the platforms of desire reaches all the way to Edmonton. [...] How to get from this place farther, how to reach the reaches of the world, and maybe Russia. Are seductions to Arctic islands possible? Do they read themselves a future, a presence on a map?
(pp. 48–9)

The lure, the seduction of the North is retrospectively re-imagined within an auto(bio)graphical moment before it had exerted its pull on van Herk, and thus a distinctly spatial *telos* is hinted at.

Other connective lines through the text, which have a stronger auto(bio)graphical significance, are instituted by the recurrent presence throughout of both trains and graveyards. I have argued that in *Full and Change* the prevalence of 'border spaces' – beach, ocean, highway, ruins, prison, window frame – constantly unsettle the notion of location or destination and are thus vital to a sense of narrative 'drift'. Reading *Ellesmere's* repeating spaces highlights a different kind of spatial relation, which is again constitutive of story but which is also intently self-reflexive. Trains and graveyards are tropes that overlap the spatial, the autobiographical and the narrative: they are physical spatial entities which at once mark particular moments in a life story and operate as literal engines for narrative change. As well as providing cohesive echoes across the four sections, they also have an important role in the text's overt interconnection of, in Goldman's words, 'the mapping of place and the plotting of fiction': they function as spatial 'translations' of narrative elements.

The trains which appear in each section are loaded with historical, symbolic and autobiographical significance: they demarcate the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) which first connected up Western Canadian space in the 1880s; the tracks are hard steel (masculine) lines cutting across and circumscribing the land, significantly absent from the freer (feminized) space of Ellesmere; they are a literal engine of 'restlessness', of movements between habitations. Trains also provide a significant intertextual connection to Tolstoy's novel, where they promise

⁸⁸ See also p. 22 and p. 72 of *Ellesmere*.

Anna freedom but finally are the means of her death. Trains play an important part in the imagined geography of Ellesmere, physically absent but made present there by their pervasive presence in Anna's life: 'the island only waiting finally to float into a georafictione, like Anna waiting so long backstage on the yet-to-arrive, the interminably delayed train. No trains on Ellesmere' (p. 87). Since, 'you know that he [Tolstoy] uses trains to displace her' (p. 133), this absence opens up the possibility of un/reading an alternative script for Anna: 'This river, the Snow Goose, would be an ideal death, better than the violence of trains, Anna' (p. 100).

Most important for my argument here is the function of trains as agents of narrative change. Early in the text, the second sub-section of 'Edberg' is called 'Training', a socio-spatial pun linking her personal development with physical journeying. Here, childhood memories are arranged not temporally or even by the free play of imaginative or linguistic association (as we saw in *Ana Historic*); rather, they are organized around the various social roles trains held, notably 'Giving Edberg self-importance: a schedule, a reminder' (pp. 15–16). This train is also the realization of her passage into adulthood, invested with a socio-spatial dynamic: 'Taking the train was a statement: an entrance or an exit on the stage of Edberg. You picked up your first boy on that dayliner (going to Edmonton to visit your brother – were you even fourteen?). It was easy' (pp. 18–19). As well as this first independent journey from Edberg to Edmonton being by train, in the 'Edmonton' section she describes the CPR, planned in 1882 to terminate there but eventually running through to Calgary (pp. 44–5), and this route, of course, is then retraced by the next narrative move to Calgary – where, again, the railway is a life force: 'this is a CPR town, would've died otherwise' (p. 59). Trains are settings literally set in motion: even more than the sea in Brand's text, they provide the physical means of moving from one place to the next, one story to the next. They illustrate precisely how spatial trajectories can and do determine narrativity along experiential lines.

Graveyards, too, although not inherently dynamic, are invested with story-making power as part of the overlapping acts of mapping space/plotting fiction. They are important to a georafictione of self because they are, of course, intimately connected with both death and

endings: a means of representing the unnarratable end of one's own autobiography. Here, they appear in each section as part of a narrative strand focused on the (unresolved) search for a final resting place. In Calgary, this is particularly prominent: its first quadrant, 'Stones', engages both with the city's actual cemeteries, some of which she describes, and with their symbolic weight as a means of conceptualizing exits, means of departure, and the alternative option – staying. She writes: 'A city is counted for the people who die there and who stay, are buried. There aren't enough graveyards here, people go away to die: their bones go elsewhere. Calgary a silent freight train carrying away long rows of boxcars neatly stacked with coffins' (pp. 58–9). Finding a potential burial site involves finding a 'home'; Calgary's lack of cemeteries appears to favour restlessness over belonging, yet 'You dare to be buried here' (p. 62). In the final pages, the text's travels end and its penultimate reflection (the final move being a lament for Anna) draws the four sites back together through their comparative potential as burial site: 'All possible sites of repose, every one wishes you under/rited there, as ash or flesh, every one offers the pleasure of potential burial, a site where your own grit can join the grit of landscape' (p. 141). By resisting a choice, along with the image of 'your ashes [...] scattered to the high winds', this georafictione comes to an end with another act of resistance to the fixity of man-made geographies. Van Herk's graveyard trope, then, is *more* than a trope: it is narrative closure effected at the level of narrative spatiality; it is where self, story and place conclude together.

Macrostructurally, we have seen that the status of narrative space determinedly exceeds mere 'setting' for character action; instead, spaces become structural forces and agents of narrative change. Once again, the notion of spatial *dynamics* emphasizes this transformative role, and speaks to *Ellesmere's* particular innovation in explicitly contesting the backgrounding of space in the production and processing of narrative.⁸⁹ Having considered how van Herk self-

⁸⁹ Marie-Laure Ryan's study of the 'cognitive maps' readers make of narratives argues that mental maps can be important in helping give a story coherence, but shows that actual readers tend to construct an initial map which is hard to shift, highly subjective, and usually focused on character relations because, 'whereas space functions as a background, characters stand in the foreground of narrative interest; and whereas space mainly consists of permanent features, characters are evolving bodies and minds who continually add events to their personal history' ('Cognitive Maps', p. 237). Van Herk's text clearly problematizes any such hierarchy of narrative agency, challenging readers to take complex, dynamic, constantly changing *tours* of its spaces.

reflexively uses spatial relations as a structuring device, my analysis will go on to explore the significant innovations within her microstructural strategies of narrating the places themselves.

Microstructure part I: places as characters?

We have seen that, following Henri Lefebvre, theorists of space have taken issue with its frequent conception as static background to human stories and temporally arranged events. A prominent way in which *Places Far From Ellesmere* turns any such space/time, place/inhabitant hierarchy on its head is by pushing further the idea, which I introduced in my reading of Brand's Culebra Bay, that places are accorded the agency and centrality of characters.

Reflecting on the processes of composing her 'geografictione', van Herk comments:

I wanted to write a novel that looked at the three places where I had lived for the longest periods in my life: Edmonton and Edberg and Calgary. I had some characters, but they were very rudimentary, almost voiceless compared to the settings. [...] Ultimately, my going away to Ellesmere with the eponymous Anna Karenina [...] made me realize that the places within my narrative were themselves the characters [...]. When I let the places become the speaking voices, which made the book a fiction of geography, everything changed, and I was free to examine voice, character, history, narrative, and criticism.⁹⁰

Van Herk implies that places' role as characters might even extend to their being accorded *narratorial* agency. Deploying the second-person mode, with no single identified 'I'-narrator, could certainly be read as a strategy to disperse narrative authority; yet, as I will discuss later, the attempt to transform places into 'speaking voices' is arguably a failed one. Nonetheless, *Ellesmere*'s experimental, ludic approach to narrating space makes it highly instructive for this chapter. The opening 'Edberg' section and the closing 'Ellesmere' section most fully capture the extent of van Herk's revisionary practice and will therefore be the focus of my analysis.

Narrating the landscape of her childhood, van Herk asks: 'Is this a place from which to launch a world, a river, or even a short story? Can it launch itself?' (p. 33). In much of this 'geografictione', she is concerned to accord places this self-determination. As the site of her growing-up, Edberg tells a story of change, and the place transforms as she – and we – read it:

⁹⁰ Cited in Dawne McCance, 'Crossings: An Interview with Aritha van Herk', *Mosaic*, 36.1 (2003), 1–19. Exact pagination unknown (consulted via Literature Online).

So the dust that *lays itself down* on the main street of Edberg is doggish, *watchful* rather than serene. An *uneasy* village, *knowing* it will never be a town, every new building balanced by another burned down or hauled away, every old building *tottering into decline* [...]. Positioned *poor relation* to Camrose, Camrose *swallowing* the farmers' equipment and grocery money, even their children's schooling. (pp. 14–15, my emphasis)

Adjectives and active verb forms invest Edberg with the embodied (*lays, tottering*) and emotional (*uneasy, knowing*) agency usually reserved for human or anthropomorphic characters. More precisely, the semantics of this passage rewrite the recent history of a town in the form of an intimate family story: the shrinking, impoverished village transformed into aging poor relation. The geography of the Canadian prairies thus becomes a genealogy, and in this particular configuration of a socio-spatial relation, Edberg is pushed into its marginalized, 'uneasy' position by repeated abandonments. The final section, 'Remainders', relates the village's decline, once the train – its agent of change – has ceased to operate. A three-page list returns to the major sites of the Edberg of childhood and records many such endings:

The stationmaster's house: abandoned: moved or burnt? Gone.

The creamery: crumbled and mouldered and then burnt too, the same creamery where your brother put the 'wait in the car' in neutral and it started down the hill. [...]

The barbershop: the pool hall: together: a faint turning of coloured pole: an echo of cues [...]. (p. 30)

To a degree, however, 'the site persists, re/news its presences'. The dynamic verbs of the end of the list ('replaced', 'altered', 'modernized', 'moved') gesture to new facilities for its now aging and shrinking population (p. 32), and an Edberg also on its way to 'a retirement home for villages, washed up, settled out' (p. 33). In this way, this list, although apparently descriptive, in fact functions rather more like narrative, as a story of change whose agents are *places*.

This is a kinetic, energetic version of narrative space, invested with narrativity. The play of place as character set up in this opening section is fully realized in 'Ellesmere, woman as island', where Anna and island are read through each other, the parallels between place and literary character being the structuring force of most of the section's sixty-five pages. Not only is *Anna Karenin* a text to be un/read in the (non-masculine) North, a text for the long white

nights, but the narrative itself works along overt parallels between text and place, from the title ‘woman [Anna] as island [Ellesmere]’ to the historical frame which saw Tolstoy writing Anna while Ellesmere was being explored: ‘The nineteenth-century island: the nineteenth-century novel’ (p. 97). Once ‘van Herk’ has set up camp and begins reading, extended passages of feminist literary criticism not only alternate with but seep into experiences of Ellesmere. Text and place are being read through each other, their representations not mimetic or separable but mutually constitutive: central to van Herk’s poetics in this text is the idea that space is produced through stories and that stories are produced through the spaces they traverse.

Arriving on the island, the reader immediately encounters imagined northern geographies shaped like Anna: ‘Ellesmere will appear like a languid body below you, [...] like Anna waiting so long backstage [at the start of *Anna Karenin*]’ (p. 87). Van Herk’s use of ‘languid body’ – a passive, feminized representation of landscape – is perhaps a deliberate, self-reflexively gendered reading of place through fiction and vice versa. This is, after all, what van Herk’s ‘geografictione’ (in the feminine) sets out to achieve: a dialectic of writing self/writing place. The Ellesmere section, however, certainly risks evoking a static vision of space as *tabula rasa* for self-discovery, one that is problematically affiliated both with feminine passivity and, as I will consider later, with the idea of pre-colonial history as untouched. That is, the equation of ‘empty’ island with woman’s body freed of patriarchal constructions comes close to reproducing a problematic Woman=Nature discourse in which space is static, passive, thus gendered feminine and the backdrop for the civilizing forces of progress, gendered masculine.⁹¹ The exploration narrative unfolding in this Arctic space, however, is one of female agency, in which geographical space enables alternative constructions of the female self, notably Anna Karenina’s, but van Herk’s too. The island’s lack of railways, graveyards, buildings, section lines, and its freedom from colonial and masculine territorializing and civilizing structures, establishes its difference from the three other exploration sites. In this sense, the *tabula rasa* of

⁹¹ Doreen Massey critiques such genderings in *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 257. See also DeLoughrey’s work on the gendering of diaspora discourses in *Routes and Roots*.

Ellesmere is not erasure, it is the construction of a place where patriarchal representations can be exceeded or left behind. As Surgeoner persuasively contends, 'on Ellesmere, "expressive women" refuse to be domestic and wild Arctic flowers reign over "southern glasshouse blooms"; going North makes it possible to read and write as a woman: to act'.⁹²

The example of Ellesmere Island's 'puzzle-ice' speaks most strongly to this dialectic of space and identity:

The puzzle pieces are scattered farther, stirred apart on the blue board of the lake by a huge finger of sun [...]. Lake Hazen a carelessly broken jigsaw abandoned after a lazy Sunday dinner. There are huge sheets of ice left, almost square, and hundreds of tiny pieces orbiting in endless float.

This ice picture: enigmatic, fascinating, a portrait of Anna herself. [...] It is always Anna you see, off to one side, perched on the edge of a stony tussock with her red bag in her hand. Just as you always, from a rise, see the lake, can watch it transfigure itself under its ever-changing cloak of ice. (pp. 111–12)

This mini-narrative about the changing 'puzzle-ice' is thus inseparable from, and not subordinated to, the retelling of Anna's story; the shifting movements, mysteries, and coming-into-being of self and place are brought into relation as they are read through one another. Throughout, place and character are literally acting reciprocally upon one another: 'A sudden yellow dotting of Arctic poppies' is immediately followed by 'And Anna, there you see her, herself in brilliant yellow [...]. She floats serenely over the tundra, her tiny feet poised, her hands together. The yellow poppies bend as she passes' (p. 106). Similarly, the image of Anna as a 'shadowed woman' comes about in the context of the 'shadow hills around us' (p. 109); later, Karenin's unattractive ears are suggested as justification for Anna's transgression, then make way for: 'The ears of Ellesmere lie beautifully folded, flat back against the head of the island. They curl in quiet listening' (p. 124); and reading a moth fluttering in Tolstoy's novel provokes a question of whether 'an entire novel [is] contrived to show [Anna] as a moth caught and crushed in an iron grip', before the next paragraph begins: 'The insects on Ellesmere are small and torpid' (p. 128). It is through the story of how 'you are caught between Anna and Ellesmere' (p. 130), then, that the autobiographical narrative of a woman whose life revolves

⁹² Surgeoner, 'A Feminist Literary Cartography', p. 651.

around reading and travel can be written. Rather than attempting to engage in the apparently objective discipline of travel writing to commit her memorable northern explorations into print, by foregrounding Tolstoy's novel, van Herk employs a fictocritical approach to spatial experience. Each reading is driven forward by the other; un/reading place and un/reading self are combined in the generation of georafictione.

Microstructure part II: discursive formations

The other significant innovation which feeds into the dynamic role of space in the construction of van Herk's story is its discursive plurality, its layered representations of place.⁹³ Across the differences in the modes of exploration of the four sites, a multiplicity of perspectives and discourses operates that disrupts any single reading of place. Reading does not transport us through a series of fixed locations, but rather involves us in the complex processes of imagining places into being, or rather becoming. Her narration of spaces unfolds like the 'discursive formation' defined in the epigraph she cites from Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: not 'an ideal, continuous, smooth text that runs beneath the multiplicity of contradictions, and resolves them in the calm unity of coherent thought', but rather 'a space of multiple dissensions' (p. 9). There seems to be an echo here between Foucault's notion of the multiple, dissenting structure of discourse and Lefebvre's notion of the '*mille feuille*' structure of space, and together the two speak to the georafictional innovation of van Herk's text. *Ellesmere*'s opening section offers an important example of how van Herk multiplies points of entry into textual space which thus becomes multiply layered, or 'archaeological':⁹⁴

Glacial Lake Edmonton's overflow origins the Battle River, that lingering thread twisting itself through the compulsion of willow and poplar: a high, wild bank bearing the north wind. The Battle River [...] where the rodeo still cries its fences: the gravel pit where the high school kids still go to drink and neck (serious stuff, no stopping at the belt, no hands-off territory of bra and panties): a bridge and fishing: the swallows eager hiving. The Battle River draining the south end of Dried Meat Hill where the Indians dried the sun into their buffalo

⁹³ Gabriele Helms's Bakhtinian study of dialogism in Canadian literature takes *Ellesmere* as a prominent example of novelistic polyphony: see chapter 4 of *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁹⁴ Van Herk suggests such an 'archaeological' conception of place, exposing its 'layers and levels' of meaning, in Marcienne Rocard, 'Unreading the World of Aritha van Herk: An Interview', *Études Canadiennes/Canadian Studies*, 38 (1995), 85–93 (p. 90).

meat. The Battle River endlessly escorting Edberg, pressed alongside, a loop silvering seasons.

Good people should stay here: at home. Invent Edberg as home, invent a home for it. (p. 33)

Here, the town's complex origins become the determiners of a spatial story in which the imprint of human histories, both First Nations and settler, is only one of many geological, seasonal, animal layers of activity. This is not the 'segmented' space of colonial mapping; in re-imagining the Albertan landscape, van Herk works to articulate composite and non-hierarchical modes of re-presenting space.

The layering of versions in both the Edmonton and Calgary sections is similarly complex. Edmonton is composed of: geographical description; extracts from nineteenth-century documents about its colonial shops, hotels, the local Masonic ball; reflections on the city's origins as 'a fort(ress) set up to trade/skin Indians. The Hudson's Bay Company holding its own centuries later' (p. 43); and personal details about 'How to start a life in Edmonton' ('buy a frying pan, a kettle, a teapot', p. 45). Intercutting one another, these make for a mode of narrating space which resolutely does not mask a 'smooth, continuous text'. Similarly, Calgary is narrated in four different 'quadrants', echoing the city's physical geography, and each imagines the city differently: as her potential burial site ('Stones'); an ever-evolving list of businesses ('Solvency'); site of a long nomadic history ('Denizen'); and labyrinth of urban planning ('Outskirts of outskirts'). Evident from these examples is that their discursive plurality is not clearly separable from the plurality of perspectives; the constantly shifting perspectives in this text are equally dynamic and unstable. The 'grid' of narrative analysis must therefore admit considerable interference between these two elements. The play of discourses and perspectives, we will see, speaks to van Herk's upturning of the politics of spatial relations, resisting reified conceptions of place and working instead towards a feminist rewriting/unreading of Canadian space. This is to return to my idea that the boundary lines of mapping are constantly exceeded in this text, that the act of representation can only proceed through 'multiple dissensions', that place cannot be pinned down but comes in the form of many and various stories. As she writes

of Edberg, 'You cup your hand to hold it in, breathe deep. [...] You look away: it moves, un/reads itself again, a sly alternation leaving you puzzled and groping for reassurance. You check with other originals [...]. Impossible: their versions negate yours' (p. 37).

Microstructure part III: perspectival positioning

Like Lefebvre's flaky pastry, then, places are narrated through multiple dissensions or 'declensions' of experience; and central to this is the dialectical notion that a place is repeatedly imagined into being by the many experiencers who encounter it, while that place impacts upon and reshapes these experiences.⁹⁵ The dynamic perspectival play we saw in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is more radically pluralized in *Ellesmere*, where each of the four sites are approached from a variety of constantly moving perspectives, physical, textual and imaginative. Asking who narrates place, how (factually or imaginatively), and from where (i.e., what is the relationship between narrator, place, character and, potentially, reader?) are productive questions through which a spatial poetics might begin to account for the geopolitics at work through the spatial energies of narratives.

An important part of van Herk's engagement with questions of the politics of dis/location is her use of narrative perspective to disrupt hierarchies which give the human power over the landscape. Elsewhere, she has contested Canada's prairie writing tradition for its flat, empty, ready to be conquered representations (preferring its 'hidden and sinuating folds'⁹⁶), observing of its male proponents: 'They are afraid to enter the landscape. They describe it instead. To get inside a landscape, one needs to give up vantage, give up the advantage of scene or vision and enter it.'⁹⁷ In experiencing landscape, she argues: 'Position dictates point of view and position's influence has been neglected'.⁹⁸ *Places Far From Ellesmere* can be read as her determined

⁹⁵ As I mention in note 72 above, this chimes with the literary 'psychogeography' explored by British male writers of cities inspired by avant-garde architectural theory (Iain Sinclair's London writing is the best known example, e.g. *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London: Granta, 1997); Will Self's Saturday column in *The Independent* also takes this title; and Manzu Islam's *Burrow* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2004) explores alternative immigrant mappings of London). Yet van Herk's determinedly feminist approach, and her engagement with non-urban Canadian spaces, sets it apart as a distinct undertaking.

⁹⁶ Aritha van Herk, 'Prairie as Flat as...', in *A Frozen Tongue*, pp. 127–38 (p. 127).

⁹⁷ Van Herk, 'Women Writers and the Prairie', p. 141.

⁹⁸ Van Herk, 'Women Writers and the Prairie', p. 139.

attempt to redress this balance: in its representations of both Alberta and the North, her writing is concerned to recognize that perception is produced by the locality and the bodily *experience* of position. A constant play of perspectives and discursive modes replaces an external, static, hierarchical viewpoint over a passive landscape. Her mode of writing space is thus diametrically opposed to what Mary Louise Pratt calls the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ model of travel writing, with its (masculinist and colonial) ideology of mastery and control.⁹⁹

Like much of the text, the opening paragraphs construct place through complex intersections between geology, history, landscape, demographics and human experience. Having first established Edberg’s status as ‘home’, the narrative perspective draws the reader slowly towards the site, using multiple points of entry into its landscape. The fourth paragraph is particularly interesting perspectively:

Under the long-painted houri eye of the prairie sky, past the whispered vigilance of cat-tail sloughs, the fence post boundaries marking their rusty decades, and the old model-A settling into a pyre of scrap in a corner of the bush (home). There might have been a trail passed here, that cart trail through this region partly wooded and with scattered trees and coppice (J.B. Tyrrell, 1887) once, a trail that angled across the sections and quarter-sections without the ninety-degree angles of the survey crews (their muscled arms, their chains, their principles of scrutiny), a trail that led between communities [...]. (pp. 13–14)

The authority of the ‘grid’ of colonial cartography is disrupted both by the agency of place – ‘whispering’, ‘marking’, ‘settling’ – and by a modality of possibility, as historical research is deployed to open up alternative geographical spaces: the trail that ‘might have been’. This possible trail also suggests a logic of connectivity, of passing by/angling across/leading between, that transgresses the strict, masculinized section lines of the segmented landscape. There is no omniscient representation of place here, but an archaeology of different versions and histories. And vitally, this narrating position is not static but mobile; it ‘gives up vantage’, sweeping the reader down from an elevated view, ‘the houri eye of the prairie sky’, into the bounded space of ‘(home)’.

⁹⁹ See part three of Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

'Van Herk's arrival in Ellesmere in the final section marks a similar dynamic, although here the risk of writing from a distorted, distant point of view is higher since this is an unfamiliar and little visited Arctic setting which her visit allowed her to (re)explore. Arriving by plane, the island's positioning is first mapped in terms of a masculine colonial cartography:

And then Hazen plateau and Lake Hazen, the ice in the lake blotted with darker moments, past Henrietta Nesmith (who the hell was she? somebody's mother) Glacier [...], down, down in bright sunlight here in the middle of the night past [...] the ragged drift of a Canadian flag and Hazen camp (abandoned), down, Johns Island (who the hell was he?) a thin pencil in the lake, down to a short bumpy landing on the old strip by the shore. (p. 90)

Visible here is this text's refusal of singular overarching, 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' perspectives: it begins from a distance, from far above, but soon immerses us in the landscape; furthermore, the parentheses function to contest the authority of tour-guide discourse and the presumptions of colonial naming practices, clearly marking the viewer's resistant and questioning perspective in relation to established topographical representations. From here on, much of the section is narrated from the ground, continually attentive to the relative positioning of the human subject in the landscape:

Along the river toward Gilman Graben and Glacier Pass you climb, climb. [...] Visibility: the Abbé Glacier shining turquoise. And always Lake Hazen, every mood of its water and ice daily broken into greater open [...]. Invisible but felt, back-packing mammals moving with upright slowness across the shale against the red-rich mountainside, your grey-green tent a tiny hump shouldering boundless space. (p. 125)

The focalization begins with the climber before reversing to watch her, in a movement which posits person and place as characters in the same story reciprocally constituting one another. Perhaps more powerfully than anywhere else in the text, the form of this final section effects geopolitical moves through spatial positioning. This instance of focalization from the perspective of the landscape – the glacier or the lake, perhaps – might be one argument against accusations that van Herk has stripped Ellesmere down to the backdrop for her own, restless enquiries into writing/reading the self.

'Reader and Anna and Ellesmere': the narrative 'you' and a lesson in reading space

Although there is much evidence of *Places Far From Ellesmere's* places being invested with the agency of experiencing and sometimes focalizing characters, to suggest, as van Herk does in the passage I quoted earlier, that 'the places become the speaking voices', that the 'narrators' of the text are its four 'exploration sites', in fact belies the complexity of its narrative situation. The prominent narrative strategy that is vital to how spatial positioning works, and that will lead me to think about how *Ellesmere* acts upon reading practices, is its use of second-person narration, consistently referring to the protagonist – who I have referred to as 'van Herk' since she uses this name (p. 22) – not as 'I' but as 'you'. Places are denoted in the third person and thus are not given the status of speaking 'I's';¹⁰⁰ furthermore, because internal focalization is predominantly located with the 'you', places rarely have clear focalizing agency. Even in the many paragraphs consisting solely of geographical or historical discourse, where the 'you' is absent, internal focalization is likely to persist via the reader's cognitive processes of narrativization, which tend towards human identifications, especially in life writing.

Processing the challenging form and intellectual content of *Ellesmere*, we have seen, requires considerable work on the part of the reader. Indeed, van Herk explains: 'My attitude was this: if you, reader, can't enter this georafictione with me, then you have to leave yourself outside the door'.¹⁰¹ As we saw in Chapter Two, inviting the reader in, at least momentarily, makes the second person an effective engaging strategy. This is most explicit when the 'you' is sickened by Tolstoy's reading of Anna, and hopeful that her own readers will engage more responsibly with the (spatial) stories of her life:

You shudder to think of being read by such a man, of your life/places drawn into such static circumscription. You know you are a character in a larger novel, a novel of geography and passion, reading yourself as you are being read by a comprehensive reader. How would this reading read your places, your self

¹⁰⁰ There is a possible exception in the call 'Enough's enough. Come home' in the Edberg section (p. 40), which could feasibly be attributed to the town addressing its former resident, hoping to reverse its own decline.

¹⁰¹ McCance, 'Crossings: An Interview with Aritha Van Herk', n.p. Interestingly, van Herk also comments in this interview that some of the most insightful readings of *Ellesmere* have come from non-Canadian readers who have not formed their own geographies, who read the textual places as they are represented.

written between habitations, the braille of fingers on each locational inflection?
(p. 118)

Specifically important for my argument here is that van Herk's text also underlines the extent to which second-person narration can exert a specifically *spatial* function by aligning the reader's positioning with that of the 'you'. The heightened identification which the 'you' calls for is vital to the (geo)politics of form, because in drawing the reader more closely into the geographical spaces being explored, settings are transformed from static backdrop into experiential sites of self- and/or community-building.¹⁰² In particular, when it comes to Ellesmere Island, a place so rarely visited that few readers are likely to have experienced it, the 'you' deliberately opens up a play of identification. The first line, which states that 'Anna Karenina should have escaped to Ellesmere' (p. 77), is soon echoed in 'You are at Ellesmere. You have escaped to Ellesmere', so that an imagined spatial connection is drawn between Anna and Aritha. Although not physically 'at Ellesmere', we too have reached it in our reading at least, so that this statement might reach outwards; the 'freedom' of the island is offered to us, as is the opening up of self that accompanies it: 'Ellesmere is absence [...]. You are only a body, here in this Arctic desert, this fecund island. Lungs, fingers, a stomach, legs and feet.'¹⁰³

This potential invitation to share the traveller's experience, however, bears with it her claim to knowledge of, and even a kind of belonging in, the 'tabula rasa' of Ellesmere. This

¹⁰² This case for the interconnection of geography, affect and the narrative 'you' is powerfully made by Jamaica Kincaid's portrait of Antigua, *A Small Place* (New York: Plume, 1988). This indictment of colonial and neocolonial impacts on the island through slavery and ongoing capitalist exploitation employs direct address, the 'you' overtly denoting a generalized white Western tourist:

As your plane descends to land, you might say, What a beautiful island Antigua is – more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen, [...] they were much too green, much too lush with vegetation, which indicated to you, the tourist, that they got quite a bit of rainfall, and rain is the very thing that you, just now, do not want, for you are thinking of the hard and cold and dark and long days you spent working in North America (or, worse, Europe), earning some money so you could stay in this place (Antigua) where the sun always shines [...]; and since you are on your holiday, since you are a tourist, the thought of what it might be like for someone who had to live day in, day out in a place that suffers constantly from drought [...] (while at the same time surrounded by a sea and an ocean [...]), must never cross your mind.
(pp. 3–4)

The 'you', not only a stranger in the Antiguan landscape but also explicitly aligned with the (neo)colonizing powers, is determinedly othered both in the physical space of the island and in relation to the black Antiguan narratorial 'I'. This strategy is designed to provoke an affective response – guilt, regret, sadness, empathy, anger – as well as an intellectual one. As a White westerner, the book asks me to rethink the role of my own individual ethics of travel within larger geopolitical inequalities.

¹⁰³ As such, its affective function is opposed to the aggression with which Kincaid wields the 'you'.

aspect of van Herk's text has been met with considerable unease and widely critiqued for reproducing colonizing discourses and perpetuating the erasure of the Inuit within the tradition of Canadian wilderness representations.¹⁰⁴ As I theorized in Chapter Two, what Irene Kacandes calls 'the appellative force of *you*' invites the reader to identify.¹⁰⁵ But these critical readers have responded *negatively* to van Herk's call to share the 'you's positioning; unintended an effect as this may be, a failure of identification has taken place and has initiated this resistant counter-reading. Nevertheless, in this case the 'you' still elicits an ethical response in that it insists upon reading 'other' landscapes with greater care. Evident through van Herk's possibly flawed un/reading of Ellesmere Island is that the relations of positionality between narrative agents, reader included, can be established through narrative techniques of perspective, narration, and relative spatial location. These techniques are therefore an important aspect of a text's geopolitics – its organization of selves and places in hierarchical or anti-hierarchical relations. But it is also important to note the lengths to which van Herk's writing goes to avoid the traps and limitations of any single reading. That is to say, her refusal of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' perspective calls for a similarly non-hierarchical, participatory (or *ethical*) practice of reading, in which we think about how and from where we perceive or construct spaces. The 'you' might invite complicity, but surely its dialogic nature also opens up a space for dissent – a space which van Herk's critics have occupied.

Places Far From Ellesmere offers a clear example of how reading space might be a situated process in which a reader's own dis/locations are significant. The metafictional prominence of van Herk's own reading practices within the text works as a further outward gesture inviting the actual reader into a self-reflexive reading process. As Joanna Surgeoner observes, 'whether the subject is text, self or place, van Herk is first and foremost a reader. It is this insistence on the importance of reading that brings together literature and geography, as a

¹⁰⁴ For criticisms, see Goldman, *Paths of Desire*, p. 217; Mott, 'The Wild and Adventurous North?', p. 107; Neuman, 'Writing the Reader', p. 225; Quigley, 'Rustling Race', p. 56. Surgeoner persuasively counters that 'Ellesmere is not tabula rasa – an erased text – but an unreadable text'; and that 'The North is, therefore, not about the freedom of the writing subject to inscribe a blank or effaced page but about the freedom of the written subject, the female subject, to escape inscription' (in 'A Feminist Literary Cartography', p. 655).

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter Two, p. 107 above.

feminist cartography organised around the act of reading implies that place itself is a text that is written and read'.¹⁰⁶ I argued above that on Ellesmere Island constant parallels are drawn between the writing/reading of fiction and the writing/reading of place. But of course the nineteenth-century novel and the nineteenth-century island are brought together less through their innate historical commonality than through their coincidence within van Herk's own original un/reading. This is to suggest that van Herk's main points of engagement with *Anna Karenin* are determined by her own sense of self and, crucially, by the physical location in which she reads. Her reading is actively transformed in the light of Ellesmere, which opens the possibility of a different fate, with neither trains nor authorial misogyny: 'Remove her to the land of light. On Ellesmere, the light shines with a blue haze that Anna remembers from happy days before her life was subject to the determinations of men' (p. 121). That is to say, *Ellesmere* offers a lesson in *contextual* reading. It insists upon the impossibility of fixed representations and the importance of positioning to the power relations that mediate between people and places; and it asks that we too take up the challenge of un/reading. Just as the second-person mode is important to van Herk's resistant feminist un/reading, so it opens up a space for those other potential resistant responses from her own readers. Or, in Sara Mills' words, *Ellesmere* invites us to '[insert] a positionality for reading otherwise'.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Studying the narration of place in these two fictions of 'drifting' and 'restlessness' has articulated a narratological practice that looks beyond the limits of a Euro-American realist corpus, and has shown spatial analysis to be a significant site where politics and poetics converge. We have seen that revisionary approaches to writing and reading space can illuminate geopolitical questions of how selves and communities are relationally located; and its foregrounded functions also gesture towards a rethinking of human agency over the world in which we live, recognizing that we are acted upon by our geographies as much as we impact

¹⁰⁶ Surgeoner, 'A Feminist Literary Cartography', p. 651.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. p. 223 above.

upon them, and thus moving away from territorializing practices of representation.¹⁰⁸ The socio-spatial dialectic means that reading practices cannot be ‘simple’; they must engage with the multiple constructions of place and its complex relations to character and story. Rather than setting out a schema for the study of narrative space, I have therefore formulated a problematic: how space can be constitutive of narrativity and thus solicit a bottom-up rethinking of narrative dynamics. Responding to this has required engaging with a further set of questions: What kinds of space are in play in a narrative, and how are they discursively constructed? How are they arranged and what connective devices are set up in between? What are the relations of spatial positioning through which stories are narrated and received? And how might reading for space illuminate the geopolitical dimensions of a story?

To conclude with a word on this last question, I invoke another: in a recent essay Doreen Massey asks, ‘What is, in a relational imagination and in light of the relational construction of identity, the geography of our social and political responsibility?’¹⁰⁹ If understanding the politics of form is an instructive part of how we process narratives, and if geopolitics constitutes an important dimension of textual politics, then isn’t the study of *narrative* geographies part of our responsibility as *readers*? We have seen, as Mills argues, that the complexity of space makes its close reading inevitably also contextual; and once we add to this the idea that responsible reading has a geographical dimension, a spatial poetics comes to occupy a necessary place within the contextualized narratological practice this thesis has developed.

¹⁰⁸ This is to interact, of course, with the ‘spatial turn’ in critical theory which I acknowledged above, and notably with the rise of such theoretical trajectories as ecocriticism and psychogeography.

¹⁰⁹ Massey, ‘Geographies of Responsibility’, p. 6.

CONCLUSION

Towards a Situated Narratological Criticism

While we do not change reality merely by interpreting it differently, those stories that work with language to indicate the muted contradictions of everyday life, the diffuse agencies of multiply oppressed people, and the values and social relationships that ruling logics efface can nonetheless intervene in the processes that determine what gets recognized – and responded to – as real, significant, and possible.

Shari Stone-Mediatore¹

This thesis has strategically focused upon fictional texts which, ambiguously located in relation to hegemonic systems and modes of representation, endeavour to intervene in processes of representation and reception by rethinking not only which stories are told, but *how*. Responding fully to these interventions has required a critical practice which can closely and precisely describe how they operate textually, but which also accounts for the fact that reading itself is not transparent, objective, nor free of the values – individual and ideological – that each reader brings. Narratologies offer productive analytical processes that enable literary criticism to engage with the complex and varied mechanics of narrative form, yet they also bear the traces of their formalist origins. In revisioning those processes, moving towards a situated, contextualized narratological criticism, my thesis has set out to facilitate *closer* close readings of the interplay of poetics and politics in narrative fiction.

Drawing upon a range of narrative theories, from Dorrit Cohn's 1978 work on the representation of consciousness to Brian Richardson's 2006 study of 'extreme' voice techniques,² I have evidenced the pertinence and vitality of some models as well as blind spots or underdeveloped areas within others. My endeavour to fill in such blind spots has not proceeded from narrative theory alone; it has also explored how new problematics for the analysis of formal strategies are introduced by poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonialist and

¹ Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 9.

² Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

Mushrooms. But these texts led me to take issue with narratologists' privileging of the *narrative* 'you' – the 'you' as major protagonist – over other uses that have more determinedly communicative impulses and that ask different questions of narrative theory. Kacandes' spectrum of second-person modes provided the most productive springboard for my articulation of a transactional, ethical conception of narrative, which I argued becomes a vital aspect of the workings of story as soon as 'you' enters the frame. I drew upon Robyn Warhol's work on direct address and non-narratological accounts of its rhetorical importance by Lorraine Code and Himani Bannerji, as well as models of narrative ethics by Gibson and Adam Newton, in order to formulate my own close reading of how the second person enacts a powerful dialectic between text and reader: a push and pull of narrative.

The question of the significance of pronominal strategies for both form and politics continued within Chapter Three. Speech and thought representation is one of the most commonly modelled areas of narrative analysis, but here I posited that it remains excessively singular and individualist in focus. On the one hand, I drew upon contemporary theories of voice which acknowledge that the individual agentive narrator's 'voice' is a humanist fiction. On the other hand, although Cohn's influential model of fictional consciousness was shown to have enduring value for identifying many different modes of narration, I argued that narratology has still to account for the presence of multiple narrating and/or focalizing agents within the space of one narrative text. Narratological models depend upon breaking the narrative down into separate component parts for analysis, yet my readings of Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*, Ali Smith's *Hotel World* and Erna Brodber's *Myal* necessitated an approach alert to the many elements working across the lines of separation. The relational positioning of narrative selves therefore became a vital aspect of textual dynamics. Informed by theories of intersubjectivity, democracy and sociolinguistics, my notion of narrative communities moved towards a fuller and more productive account of multiple narration, and indicated a range of different internal relations, from the segmented to the permeable.

other revisionings of language, narrative, selfhood, ethics and the relations in between. Above all, it has been based on examples of contemporary writing practices. Reading non-canonical fiction by women in Britain, Canada and the Caribbean, I have identified four prominent sites of innovation that have notable implications for existing narrative theories: metafictional strategies, second-person and multi-personed narration, and the exploration of spatial dynamics.

My critical rethinking of narratological processes began, in Chapter One, by exposing the ways in which teleological and hierarchical concepts of plot, narrative levels and frames are insufficient to account for the metafictional structures of Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. Productive alternative approaches were found in postmodernist narrative theories: Gibson's anti-hierarchical conception of narratives as sites of multiplicity and seepage made up of mobile, migrating elements; McHale's vocabulary of *mise en abyme* and strange loops; and Richardson's plural account of narrative progression. While these texts necessitate a language of radical innovation which postmodernist narratologists offer, I argued that their feminist practices call for greater specificity, both technical and contextual, within the critical vocabulary: reading them both required and enabled narratological approaches to be expanded from the outside. Structurally, their innovative connective patterns necessitate an alternative approach, and I proposed echoes and folds/unfolding as two effective descriptive terms, the first of which would prove of further use in Chapter Four. Metafiction also required rethinking in light of its overlaps with auto(bio)graphical discourse as well as to take into account Canadian feminist practices of 'writing in the feminine' and 'fiction-theory'. Similarly, reading the dispersal of narrative authority involved an insistence not on the fragmentation of self or story, but on collectivity, 'connivance' and the creative energy these produce.

In Chapter Two, it was the classical narratological binary of first-/third-person narration that proved inadequate in light of the increasing prominence of fiction in the second person. Here Monika Fludernik and Irene Kacandes provided the most fitting approaches to the kinds of innovations in play in *Ana Historic*, Ali Smith's short stories and Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of*

My final chapter, taking its cue from Susan Stanford Friedman's recent work on spatial poetics, contested both the primacy of temporal or plot-based ordering devices within classical narratology and common assumptions about the static, background status of 'setting'. Expanding upon existing approaches to narrative space, I developed an analytical framework responsive to the spatial movements of Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Designed to provide insight into the workings of narratives of (post)colonial and transcultural experience, I based this framework both on overall macrostructural dynamics and on complex microstructural representations of space and place. Where the former show how spatial connections might drive narrativity – charting a narrative 'map', as it were – the latter show how contemporary writing practices require a poetics that does not reduce space to 'setting'. Here, the contributions of on the one hand postmodernist and feminist geographies and on the other transcultural feminist ideas about the politics of (dis)location open up new directions for narrative analysis that have still to be fully explored.

Brian Richardson, in his study of 'extreme narration', posits the need 'not for a different poetics but for an additional one; that is, for an anti-mimetic poetics that supplements existing mimetic theories'.³ Whilst I have acknowledged the validity of classical narratological models for realist fiction, I would nonetheless assert that the fictions I have engaged with raise questions with more thoroughgoing consequences for narratology's founding assumptions about plot, levels, time, space and the narrator's 'voice': questions about narrative (inter)subjectivity, about the ethics of responding to narratives, about readers' roles in meaning-making. I have repeatedly drawn on Gibson's 'postmodernist theory of narrative' as an instance of a rigorous, bottom-up deconstruction of these founding assumptions in favour of a more flexible, open-ended analytical framework. The fictions studied in this thesis problematize the fixed lines and segmentations of classical narratological typologies and 'grids', since their internal multiplicities are better described through spectrums, scales or ranges, as in Kacandes' account of second-person narration or my own approach to communal narration and to spatial dynamics.

³ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*, p. 138.

Where Gibson's work employs a determinedly postmodernist theoretical approach, however, mine has drawn on a more heterogeneous range of theories in order to respond to the formal and ethico-political complexities played out in writing ambiguously located in relation to cultural, social and (geo)political hegemonies. Indeed, negotiating some of the often difficult intersections between postmodernisms, (transcultural) feminisms and postcolonial and black critical discourses has led me to a particular (re)conception of narrative's workings characterized by an emphasis on narrative intersubjectivity and experientiality. My interventions into existing narratological paradigms have been informed by non-unitary, interdependent, permeable theoretical models of self, voice and place: Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity, Avtar Brah's diaspora space, Lorraine Code's feminist epistemology, Andrew Gibson's postmodernist narrative ethics, Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy, Doreen Massey's feminist geography and Jeanne Perreault's autography. These and others have fed into Chapter One's collaborative auto(bio)graphy and, later, Aritha van Herk's auto(bio)graphies of place; into the dialogic second-person modes in Chapters Two and Four; and into the structures of community in both Chapter Three and my reading of Dionne Brand's novel.

Narrative intersubjectivity has emerged as a particularly productive descriptive framework for innovative contemporary writing practices not only because it emphasizes relations (of location, privilege, authority) between selves within the text, but also because it gestures outwards to the reader and to a conception of narrative as ethical encounter. It is a site where connotations of dissolution and fragmentation present within certain poststructuralist theoretical moves can be reconceived: where the dispersal of authority, the decentring of individual voice, the non-unity and non-transparency of the self and its storied articulations, are reframed in terms of collectivity, energy and productive multiplicity. The dialectic of harmony and dissonance that arises out of theoretical negotiations is particularly important since it has recurred throughout this thesis, playing an operative role in the narrative dynamics of the texts themselves. It is evident, for example, in the play of fragmentation and energy in Brossard's

poetics, the push and pull of intimacy and distance in Goto's, the interaction of the individual and the communal in *Myal* or *Hotel World*, and in the dual logic of scattering and reconnection structuring Brand's diaspora space. Whereas Gibson's postmodernist critique comes close to undermining the narratological discipline, this interplay of harmony and dissonance is one of the ways in which my project has worked towards a more constructive, enabling reevaluation of narratological practices responsive to the energies of contemporary women's fiction.

The insights gained through a close and mutually responsive dialogue between narrative forms and critical theories, narratological and otherwise, bears witness to the efficacy of 'theorypractice' as a critical strategy. As I have asserted throughout, narratological change is made most pressing by the plurality of (ambiguously) non-hegemonic stories – stories which, to borrow from Shari Stone-Mediatore's epigraph above, engage with the 'muted contradictions of everyday life, the diffuse agencies of multiply oppressed people'. Not only is it the case that the more narratives enter the corpus, and the more culturally, socially and geographically diverse that corpus becomes, the more difficult it will be to make claims about the universal properties of *all* narrative, but this plurality and diversity of stories also interrogates the methodological and ethical validity of undertaking such a universalizing task. It is one important reason why narratological criticism ought not to exclude contextual factors but to incorporate them into its analytical processes, to engage in a situated reading practice. The other primary justification for my contextualizing approach stems from that other extratextual element long excluded from narratologists' remit: the context of reception; the complex processes of reading.

Narratology, with its roots in a structuralist 'science of narrative', has long been established as a mode of analysis that divorces text from extratextual factors. The descriptive and analytic precision that this textual focus can produce is one of its considerable virtues, as my close readings have demonstrated. Nevertheless, the idea that because such descriptions treat the text in isolation they are somehow more transparent, objective, even 'scientific', than other modes of criticism is not easily sustained in the wake of poststructuralism and theories of situated knowledge that decentre the claims to authority of Western empirical thought.

Applying the theory of situated knowledge to the cultural field of rhetoric and storytelling, Lynette Hunter conveys its implications for criticism: 'Situated textuality asks: Could you do poetics differently if you did not erase people outside conventional representations? and if so, How could you do it differently?'⁴ How other stories ask for an other poetics is one of the problematics that this thesis has addressed. I have posited that the elements we look for in a narrative and the corpus of narratives we draw upon are themselves 'value laden'⁵ – ideologically and contextually shaped. Firstly, then, wherever possible I have insisted upon the specificity, the situatedness of my own responses as critical reader; and secondly, my method has been inductive, responsive to actual narrative practices. Reading fiction by transcultural writers, for example, flagged up the primacy of space as an ordering device. Focusing on women's writing in the second person stressed the need to reconsider the importance of communication as a dimension of the narrative transaction; it also, especially in Goto's 'colour full' writing, explicitly drew the reader's own subjective positioning into that transaction.

Adding new stories to narratology's existing range has thus introduced different questions, or at least a different lens through which to consider them. There remain, however, many more excluded stories to be accounted for, and questions as to which stories get read, how and by whom are still to be further explored. Stone-Mediatore's recent work on 'marginal experience narratives' is one example of a project that re-reads narrative theory in the light of new stories from outside hegemonic orders: she examines 'how dominant narrative paradigms, including dominant ways of categorizing "actors," "actions," and "events," tend to efface, misconstrue, and ultimately thwart the struggles of people who are already the most marginalized in social and cultural life'.⁶ Working in the field of literary fiction, and focusing on published, university-educated writers, is of course several stages removed from actual social politics; yet, in Hunter's words, verbal arts are "'small p' political', a means to 'articulate ourselves into being, into

⁴ Lynette Hunter, *Literary Value/Cultural Power: Verbal Arts in the Twenty-First Century*, Sarah Poulton, ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 142.

⁵ Linda J. Nicholson, 'Introduction', in Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–16 (p. 3).

⁶ Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders*, p. 135.

recognition and into value'.⁷ My contextualized narratological criticism has illuminated how, by designing innovative formal structures, these women writers decentre hegemonic modes of representation. Literary critical acts are equally bound up with cultural power, so that engaging with plural perspectives and worldviews is crucial in order to hear non-ruling ways of knowing and telling.

Although I have concurred with Brian Richardson's assertion that literary forms have 'no inherent ideological valence',⁸ there are certain narrative genres, plots and modes which tend to be associated with discursive, narrative, representational power, and which resistant strategies often work to counter. I have insisted, therefore, that considerable ethico-political force is carried by narrative forms that are, to repeat Brossard's words, 'ludic (playing with words), experimental (trying to understand processes of writing), and exploratory (searching)'.⁹ Exposing 'patriarchal' discursive structures was a key concern of early feminist narratology, and is keenly evident in the practices of 'writing in the feminine' in Chapter One, while throughout the rest of this thesis questions of gender have conversed with racial, cultural, geopolitical and historical axes of analysis. I have explored how texts contest at a formal level the authority of the individual voice (e.g. *Ana Historic*), and how they use narrative strategies to explore the reader's power over and responsibility towards the text (e.g. *Chorus of Mushrooms*), the social positioning of subjects that affects whose stories get told and how (e.g. *Trumpet*), and the relationship between people and the places they inhabit (e.g. *Places Far From Ellesmere*). Narrative's typically hierarchical structures have also been subject to revision: the embedding or framing of one voice or story within another; the authority of an all-knowing narrator over her/his characters; the primacy of characters over places. *Baroque at Dawn*, for example, radically collapses such hierarchies, preferring 'baroque' folds, whereas *Hotel World* re-orders

⁷ Hunter, *Literary Value/Cultural Power*, p. 131.

⁸ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*, p. 59.

⁹ Nicole Brossard, 'Poetic Politics', in Charles Bernstein, ed., *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy* (New York: Roof Books, 1990), pp. 73–86 (p. 77).

them, using narrative authority to reverse social power relations. These and other texts establish diverse versions of what I have called narrative democracies.

Accounting for these complex, multi-layered, sometimes resistant textual modes has required close narrative analysis and responsive, flexible critical processes, processes that acknowledge at once the limitations of individual readings and their constitutive role in narrative transactions. In each chapter, the specificity and contingency of the potential pathways different readers might take through these complex fictional narratives has become evident, and has underlined the need to reevaluate the text-centred focus of many narrative theories, classical and post-classical. As cognitive and psychological research into narrative processing has begun to show, questions of reception – the location of readers, their levels of participation and modes of response – test many existing narratological models.¹⁰ For Catherine Emmott, narrative should be theorized ‘not just as a sequence of events but as events in context’, a context that is not ready-made but reader-produced, shaped by the many memories, personal experiences and expectations readers bring.¹¹ This, she makes clear, is not to give in to a ‘chaos of interpretations’¹² because text-specific and contextual factors mutually inform and constrain one another. My thesis has not been reader-centred, however; rather than researching how people *do* read, I have focused on developing a specific set of critical reading practices that meet some of the fulsome challenges of contemporary fictions. To this end, my project has at times deliberately drawn text-oriented and reader-oriented approaches together in recognition of the fact that, as Stone-Mediatore puts it, ‘the subjective engagement with a text’s meaning and objective analysis of the text’s structure are joint processes’.¹³ This dialectic between text and

¹⁰ In addition to David Herman’s cognitive narratology and Adam Zachary Newton’s narrative ethics mentioned in previous chapters, see Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Catherine Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension: A Discourse Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Richard J. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension*, p. 18.

¹² Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension*, p. 70.

¹³ Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders*, p. 39. The notion that writing and reading are dialectically constituted, rather than one controlling the other, is also explored by Patrocínio Schweickart in her influential

reader is often self-consciously foregrounded: the collaboration between writers and readers (and translators) is the subject of *Baroque* and *Ana Historic*, and the real reader's involvement is called powerfully into play by *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Places Far From Ellesmere*. An important aspect of a situated, contextualized critical practice has been to reflect upon my own reading processes and, as we saw in *Baroque* and *Full and Change*, to take account of the shaping influence of other readers – editors and translators – upon the published text. This is to recognize that stories are brought into being only through reading, and that every reading is value laden.

Andrew Gibson asks:

What would a narrative ethics look like if it turned away from an established model of narrative that always structures the latter in terms of a distancing of an observing subject from its object? [...] What if, instead, I start to imagine narrative in the mode of *excedance* as a movement outwards, a relation, an engagement or composition with an exteriority in which interior, exterior and the boundary between them do not 'stay the same', but are ceaselessly renegotiated?¹⁴

Each of the texts I have read here resist simplicity of reading: the sense of vertigo and déjà-vu faced with *Baroque*'s echoic explosions of one-way sense; the push and pull of identification in *Chorus*; the style-shifting in *Myal*; the reading-for-relation called upon by *Full and Change*; or the discursive plurality of *Ellesmere*. Each chapter has explored these energetic innovations in fictional form, and the complex, variable, *closer* reading practices that their 'excedance' requires. In their light, I have begun to negotiate an ethics of narratological reading which pays attention to the reader's positioning and understands reading as participatory, responsive and responsible work, yet which also acknowledges that responsibility is not easy nor stable nor clearly defined, since, as Judith Butler puts it, 'We must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of

1986 essay, 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading', in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds, *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 31–62.

¹⁴ Andrew Gibson, *Politics, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 49.

becoming human.’¹⁵ The multiple identifications opened up or closed down as we read stories can be strategically foregrounded through narration, as we have seen in the use of second-person or communal modes. Identification, in *Chorus of Mushrooms* or *Hotel World* for example, is not only a question of engaging with a storyworld; it is also an ethical process which can call upon us to reflect upon how social relations position us in the world, and how they both enable and constrain our encounters with others.

In these and many other ways, narrative form plays its part in literature’s (small ‘p’) politics. If, as Patrocínio Schweickart suggests, ‘literature acts on the world by acting on its readers’,¹⁶ and if textual politics only come to ethical fruition through sensitive close readings, then narratological criticism of the kind I have practised in this thesis is a necessary and effective critical mode, especially for those texts in which form is a site of oppositional or exploratory or ludic practice. Although it inevitably makes its own inclusions and exclusions and is far from value-free, as a strategy of reading narratology is a vital complement to more socially, historically or politically oriented modes of criticism. It can expose, in precise terms, not only narrative’s internal workings but also the relations of power and positioning enacted as stories are made and processed, as they act upon the world.

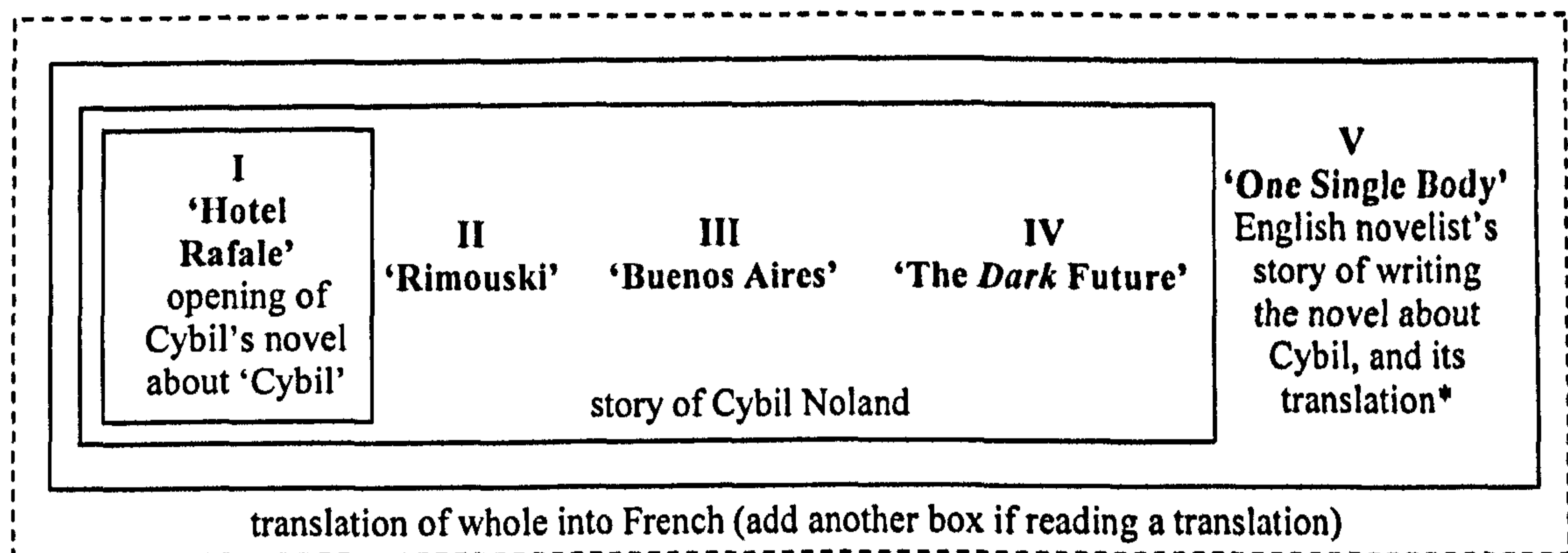
¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 136.

¹⁶ Schweickart, ‘Reading Ourselves’, p. 39.

APPENDIX I

Baroque at Dawn: Structural outline

DIAGRAM:



* There is a possible alternative reading here: the *author's* notes in 'One Single Body' may refer not to everything that has gone before, but specifically to the first 'Hotel Rafale' section alone, that is, Cybil's embedded novel. In this case, the unnamed writer of 'One Single Body' would also be Cybil, who would have shifted from the sometimes 'she', sometimes 'you', sometimes 'I' of the middle sections to being the consistent 'I' of the final one. This reading is tidy and I do not think it can be completely disproved, but where the writer is an 'English novelist', Cybil is set up as anglo-Canadian (for example, her childhood at Lake Echo (p. 48)). Also, the translator in 'One Single Body' expresses the difficulty of translating the 'holographic haze' surrounding bronze (p. 209), yet the Buenos Aires cemetery visit in 'Hotel Rafale' (p. 27) makes no mention of a 'bronze haze' whereas in 'Rimouski' (p. 56) it does; hence my impression is that she is translating the first four parts as a whole.

PLOT SUMMARY:

'Hotel Rafale' pp. 1–39

(no chapters; asterisks mark frequent changes of scene or moment)

'Cybil Noland' in hotel room with young stranger, an Argentinean musician, La Sixtine. Evenings listening to tangos; a walk through city 'armed to its teeth'; La Sixtine's life story. Sexual encounters inspire 'Cybil' to think more deeply about history, philosophy, the constellations, rather than 'speed of passing images' of the 'volatile present'. 'Cybil' also reflects back on a woman writer she once imagined – the Hyde Park woman.

'Rimouski' pp. 41–86

(one day per chapter)

- 1 Cybil Noland's first day in Rimouski, a week before meeting oceanographer Occident DesRives. 'Hotel Rafale' is revealed to be the opening of Cybil's novel, which she has just been re-reading. Recalls meeting English 'Nicole Brossard' at an autobiography conference.
- 2 Relates details of letters written between Cybil and Occident.
- 3 Combination of memories and Cybil's walk through Rimouski, to the cemetery.
- 4 Fourth morning in Rimouski. Cybil visits another cemetery with a friend.
- 5 'Everything is muddling' in Cybil's thoughts: reality and her novel, herself and 'Cybil'.
- 6 Cybil tells her character, La Sixtine, a story about her own childhood and her love of books.
- 7 Lunch with Occident and Irène Mage, digital photographer. Cybil and Irène go from car, to bar, to hotel room, talking about writing and visual art. Moment of desire, then: 'Curtain'.

'Buenos Aires' pp. 87–121

- 1 Arrival in Buenos Aires hotel.
- 2 Back-story of Cybil's intervening year, travelling, writing.
- 3 Back-story continues. Cybil reunited with Irène at exhibition in Montréal. Her trip to England to see philosopher friend (another cemetery visit). While in London, Lay stays in Hyde Park hotel (echo of 'Cybil's imagined 'Hyde Park woman').
- 4 Back-story continues. Cybil back in Montréal, learning Spanish.
- 5 Back to Buenos Aires present. Another cemetery visit.
- 6 Cybil, Occident and Irène dine with two of the sailors they will be sailing with. Cybil is uncomfortable with them, thinks about violence (compares one sailor to a shark).
- 7 Cybil walking through Buenos Aires at night, listening to tangos.
- 8 Daytime walk through the city. She reads of the evening's Book Fair where 'Brossard' and her Argentinean translator will be.
- 9 Book Fair. 'Brossard' and her translator (via 'a nice complicity', p. 118) discuss writing. Evening: Cybil and Irène increasingly intimate.

'The Dark Future' pp. 123–96

The *Symbol*. Boarding ship, introduction to the various sailors.

The Library. First morning: Cybil and Irène confined to ship's library to do research.

Sibyls and *Ignudi*. Dinner; philosophical discussion; Cybil, Irène and Occident silenced by dominant voices of male guests.

Parks. Next day in library. Cybil and Irène discuss parks they have visited (Hyde Park).

Etchings. Cybil is inspired by engravings on library walls, but cannot write.

The Character. She writes all night, fiction and reality blurring (confusion between her lover, Irène, and her character, La Sixtine).

The Shark. The priest's discourse about the baroque; Doctor Lemieux's discourse about dissection, as he dissects a shark on deck.

Porno. Screening of pornography in ship's library. Then Cybil and Irène make love.

The Brothers Demers. Introduction to three sailors developing virtual reality diving simulation. Chapter becomes dramatic script as the Demers explain VR to Cybil.

Virtual Reality. Blank page, except for 'virtualreality' running across as header and footer.

Following page narrates Cybil's experience of VR; her 'double time feeling' which further blurs reality and fiction: editing her novel she is back in Hyde Park, listening to a strange woman reading from Lewis Carroll. Later, Cybil enters the Demers' VR version of their mother's room, where the mother is giving birth on Brossard's real birthday; Cybil then enters the mother's body as she gives birth to child (i.e. Brossard herself).

An Occidental Night. Last night on board. Dialogue between the three women again in dramatic script format. Occident tells her story, then dies at dawn.

Hotel Carrasco. Shift into first-person mode. Cybil working on Occident's book project in Montevideo, haunted by memories of Occident and Irène.

'One Single Body For Comparison' pp. 197–256

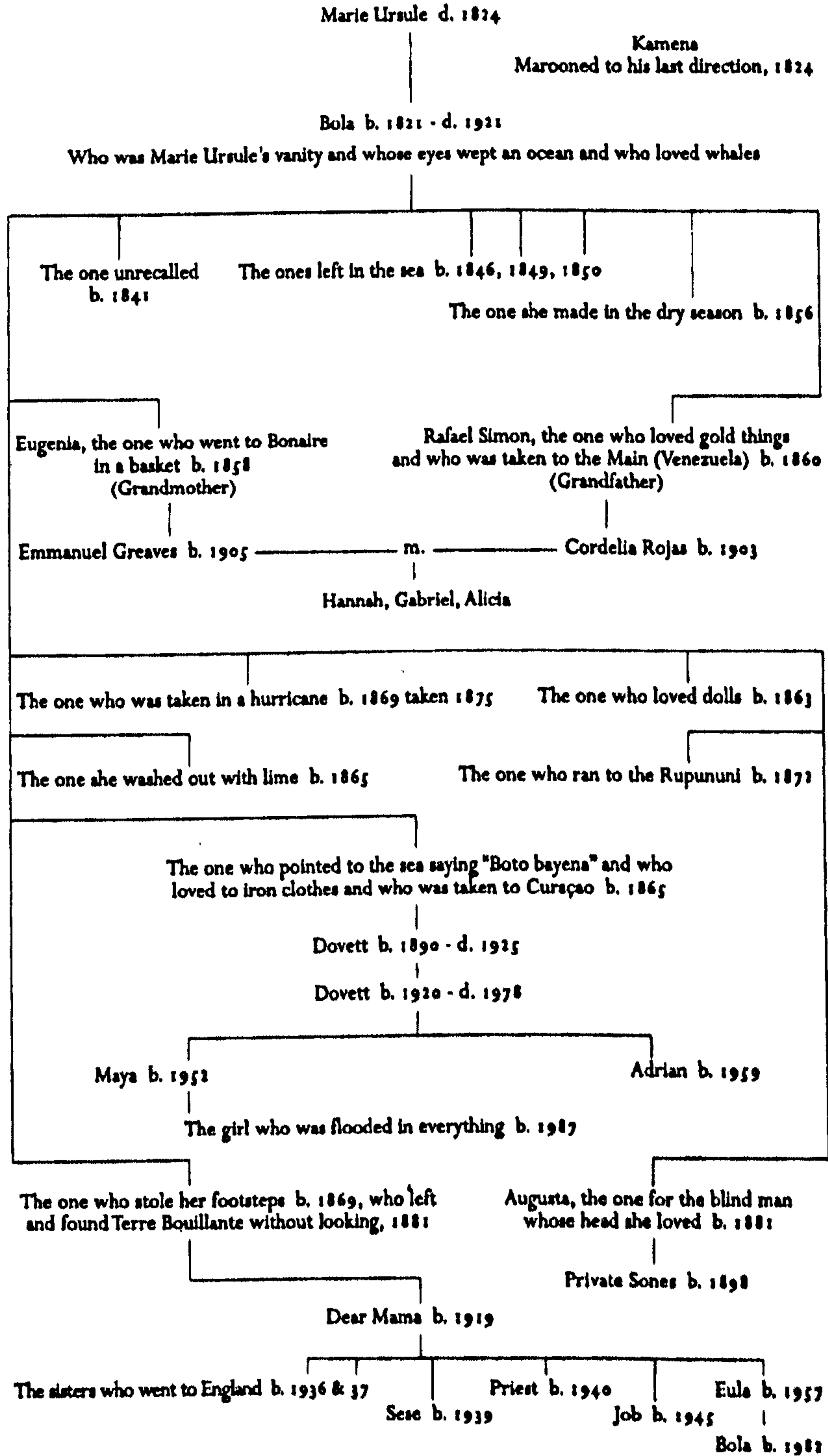
(56 short segments of prose, one per page, each taking up no more than half a page.)

Narrated in present tense from Montréal by unnamed English novelist whose studio is in Hyde Park (clear echoes with other Hyde Park figures within text). Some segments are reflections on writing, life, desire etc. Others trace process of publication of novelist's book, including radio interviews, photography sessions etc. Running in parallel is the developing relationship between anglophone narrator and her Québécoise translator/lover, and their many conversations about language.

[Patricia Claxton (translator), 'Afterword' pp. 259–62]

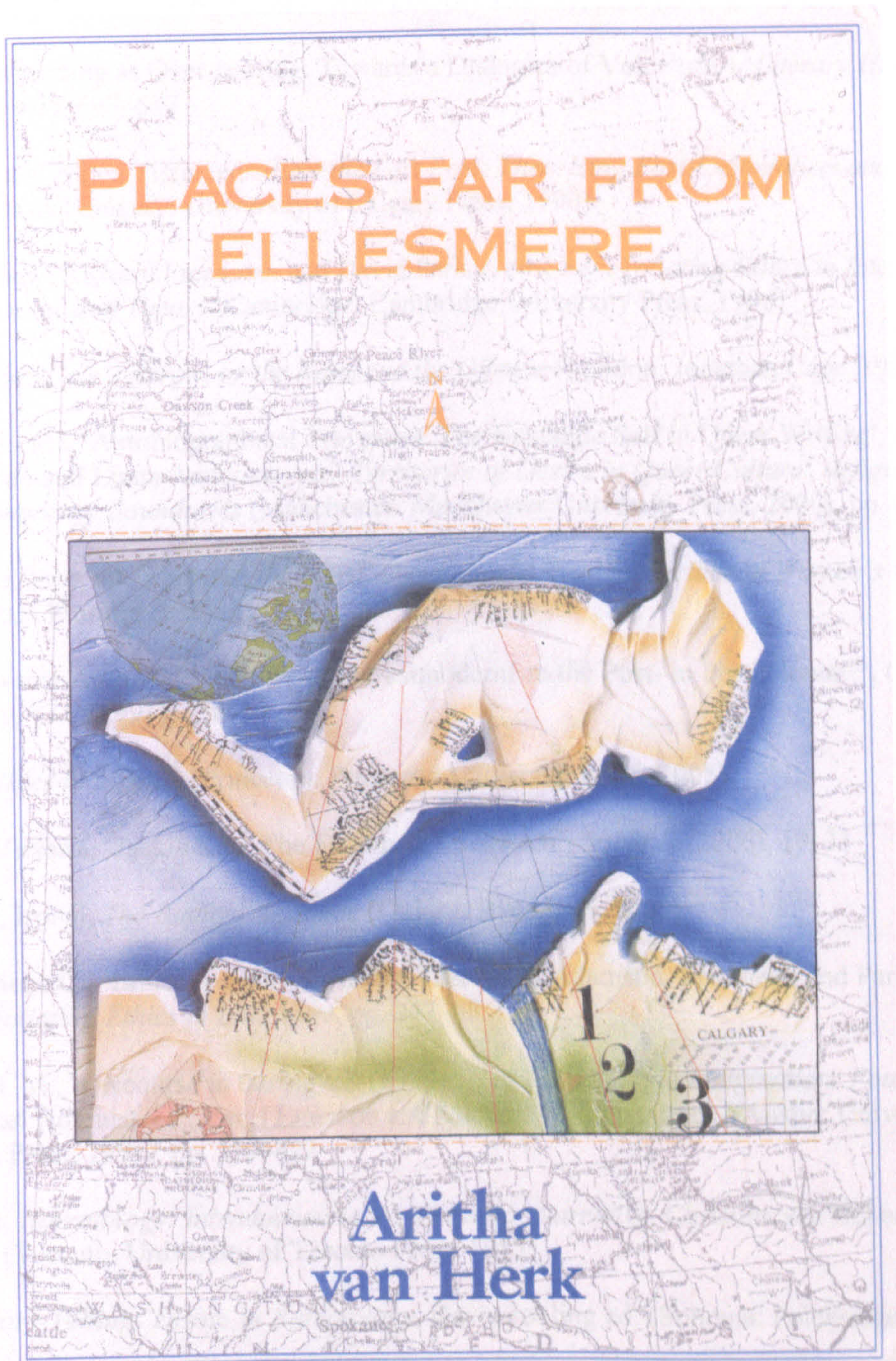
APPENDIX II

At the Full and Change of the Moon: Family tree



From Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (New York: Grove Press, 1999).

APPENDIX III

Places Far From Ellesmere: Front cover image

Front cover of Aritha van Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere: A Geografictione: Explorations on Site* (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990).

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