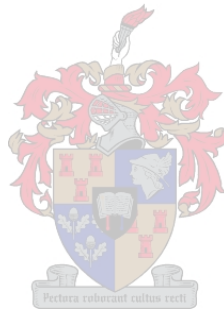# Language Limits: The dissolution of the lyric subject in experimental print and performance poetry

Annel Pieterse

Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English at the University of Stellenbosch.

Promotor: Dr Louise Green

Co-Promotor: Dr Dawid de Villiers

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

December 2012

Declaration

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

December 2012

Abstract

In this thesis, I undertake an extensive overview of a range of language activities that foreground the materiality of language, and that require an active reader oriented towards the text as a producer, rather than a consumer, of meaning. To this end, performance, as a function of both orality and print texts, forms an important focus for my argument. I am particularly interested in the effect that the disruption of language has on the position of the subject in language, especially in terms of the dialogic exchange between local and global subject positions. Poetry is a language activity that requires a particular attention to form and meaning, and that is licensed to activate and exploit the materiality of language. For this reason, I have focused on the work of a selection of North American poets, the Language poets. These poets are primarily concerned with the performative possibilities of language as it appears in print media. I juxtapose these language activities with those of a selection of contemporary South African poets whose work is marked by the influence of oral forms, and reveals telling interplays between media. All these poets are preoccupied with the ways in which the sign might be disrupted.

In my discussion of the work of the Language poets, I consider how examples of their print poetics present the reader with language fragments, arranged according to non-syntactic principles. Confronted by the lack of an individuated lyric subject around whom these fragments might cohere, the reader is obliged to make his/her own connections between words, sounds and phrases.

Similarly, in the work of the performance poets, I identify several aspects in the poetry that trouble a transparent transmission of *expression*, and instead require the poetry to be read as an interrogation of the *constitution* of the subject. Here, the "I" fleetingly occupies multiple, shifting subject positions, and the poetic interplay between media and language tends towards a continuous destabilising of the poetic self.

Poets and performers are, to some extent, licensed to experiment with language in ways that render it opaque. Because the language activities of poets and performers are generally accommodated within the order of symbolic or metaphoric language,

their experimentation with non-communicative excesses can be understood as part of their framework. However, in situations where "communicative" language is expected, the order of literal or forensic language cannot accommodate seemingly non-communicative excesses that appear to render the text opaque.

Ultimately, I am concerned with exploring the manner in which attention to the materiality of language might open up alternative understandings of language, subjectivity and representation in South African public discourse. My conclusion therefore considers the consequences when the issues opened up by the poetry – questions of self and subject, authority and representation – are translated into forensic frameworks and testimonial discourse.

Opsomming

My proefskrif bied 'n breedvoerige oorsig van 'n reeks taal-aktiwiteite wat die materialiteit van taal sigbaar maak. Hierdie taal-aktiwiteite skep tekste wat die leser/kyker noop om as vervaardiger, eerder as verbruiker, van betekenis in 'n aktiewe verhouding met die teks te tree. Die performatiewe funksie van beide gesproke sowel as gedrukte taal vorm dus die hooffokus van my argument.

Ek stel veral belang in die effek wat onderbrekings en versteurings in taal op die subjek van taal uitoefen, en hoe hierdie prosesse die die dialogiese verhouding tussen lokale en globale subjek-posisies beïnvloed. Poëtiese taal-aktiwiteite word gekenmerk deur 'n fokus op vorm en die verhouding tussen vorm en inhoud. Terwyl die meeste taalpraktyke taaldeursigtigheid vereis ter wille van direkte kommunikasie, het poëtiese taal tot 'n mate die vryheid om die materaliteit van taal te gebruik en te ontgin. Om hierdie rede fokus ek selektief op die werk van 'n groep Noord-Amerikaanse digters, die sogenaamde "Language poets". Hierdie digters is hoofsaaklik met die performatiewe moontlikhede van gedrukte taal bemoeid. Voorts word hierdie taal-aktiwiteite met 'n seleksie kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse digters se werk vergelyk, wat gekenmerk word deur die invloed van gesproke taalvorms wat met 'n verskeidenhed media in wisselwerking gestel word. Al hierdie digters is geïnteresseerd in die maniere waarop die inherente onstabiliteit van linguistiese aanduiers ontgin kan word.

In my bespreking van die werk van die Language poets ondersoek ek voorbeelde van hul gedrukte digkuns wat die leser voor taalfragmente te staan bring wat nie volgens die gewone reëls van sintaks georganiseer is nie. Die gebrek aan 'n geïndividualiseerde liriese subjek, waarom hierdie fragmente 'n samehangendheid sou kon kry, noop die leser om haar eie verbindings tussen woorde, klanke en frases te maak.

Op 'n soortgelyke wyse identifiseer ek verskeie aspekte wat die deursigtige versending van taaluitinge in die werk van sekere Suid-Afrikanse performance poets belemmer. Hierdie gedigte kan eerder gelees word as 'n interrogasie van die proses

waardeur die samestelling van die subjek in taal geskied. In hierdie gedigte bewoon die "ek" vlietend 'n verskeidenheid verskuiwende subjek-posisies. Die wisselwerking van verskillende media dra ook by tot die vermenigvuldiging van subjek-posisies, en loop uit op 'n performatiewe uitbeelding van die destabilisering van die digterlike "self."

Digters en performers is tot 'n mate vry om met die vertroebelingsmoontlikhede van taal te eksperimenteer. Omdat die taal-aktiwiteite van digters en performers gewoonlik binne die orde van simboliese of metaforiese taal val, kan hul eksperimentering met die nie-kommunikatiewe oormaat van taal binne hierdie raamwerk verstaan word. Hierdie oormaat kan egter nie binne die orde van letterlike of forensiese taal geakkommodeer word nie.

Ten slotte voer ek aan dat 'n fokus op die materialiteit van taal alternatiewe verstaansraamwerke moontlik maak, waardeur ons begrip van die verhouding tussen taal, subjektiwiteit en representasie in die Suid-Afrikaanse publieke diskoers verbreed kan word. In my slothoofstuk oorweeg ek wat gebeur as die kwessies wat deur die bogenoemde performatiewe taal-aktiwiteite opgeroep word – vrae rondom die self en die subjek, outoriteit en representasie – binne 'n forensiese raamwerk na die diskoers van getuienis oorgedra word.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my promotors, Dr Louise Green and Dr Dawid de Villiers, for their patience, support and expertise. I would also like to thank all the staff members and my fellow graduate students in the English Department at Stellenbosch for their academic and moral support. For financial support, I thank the National Research Foundation and the University of Stellenbosch English Department.

For their loyalty and love, I thank my family and friends. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Daniël, who always inspires me and keeps me grounded.

Contents

Preface

In this thesis, I contend that those textual elements often deemed excessive, or read as linguistic "deformations", might usefully be investigated if one views them as moments where the text registers and performs a material pressure. These deformations produce significant tensions that disrupt the seeming transparency of language. These disruptions serve to foreground and problematise the manner in which everyday, "functional" language use seems to assume a transparent medium. Following these nodes of deformation or excess, the reader/listener is drawn into an alternative approach to the text – one that demands recognition of the materially *embedded* existence of the text. Furthermore, these moments of tension in the text often reveal the operation of language as a symbolic order, through which particular subject positions might be articulated and performed. To this end, these deformations and excesses tend to reveal moments of ideological tension, and anxieties around notions of self, subject and authority.

This thesis investigates the notion of "performance," understood as a function of both oral and print texts. I consider a selection of examples from a loose collective of North American poets who take language as their *subject* and experiment with the performative possibilities of print as medium. I refer to these poets as "Language poets". Writing from a South African perspective, I wish to theorise the possibilities of a materially oriented poetics for representation in the postcolony. A selection of examples by South African "performance" poets offers a starting point for this process.

The use of the term "performance" in this thesis draws on visual artist and scholar Johanna Drucker's definition. Drucker notes that the idea of "performance" in poetry is conventionally associated with a real-time event, where a live or recorded reading "provides effective dimensions to a poetic work through the immediate experiences that constitute an event" (131). She then extends this notion of "performance" to include "visual performances" of poetic works in various forms, including sculpture and installation art. For Drucker, poetry in these visual modes has the same qualities of an enactment, of a staged event "in which the material means are an integral

9

feature of the work" (131). In this sense, performance includes "all of the elements that make the work an instantiation of a text, make it specific, unique, and dramatic because of the visual character through which the work comes into being" (131). Linked to the term "performance" is the term "text", which in this thesis is meant in the structuralist sense, as any object that can be "read". Another concept that is consistently used throughout this thesis is that of "poetic language". This refers to language that is not used simply in its communicative function, but is deployed instead for its sound value, and which exploits the ambivalences inherent in language, rather than trying to elide them.

This Preface serves as a brief overview of the process by which I developed an interest in theorising the materiality of language, and it allows me to introduce several of the issues around "deformed" language that I will engage with later in the thesis. South African writer Antjie Krog's significant post-1994 memoir, *A Change of Tongue* (2003), introduces the notion of performance as a function of both print and oral forms. I identify two examples of the manner in which she represents "deformed" language. In the first of these examples, Krog offers a representation of deformation in a print text, and in the second, she describes the incorporation of "deformations" in an oral performance. As a writer who works predominantly in print media, but who is attempting to redefine her "place" as an artist in the postcolony, Krog seems to be working through her own impasses in addressing these issues. I contend that a closer exploration of the implications of the praxes of the print-based Language poets from the North and the orally-oriented performance poets from the South presents a way of understanding Krog's attention to the materiality of language.

Krog is perhaps most well-known internationally for her account of the two years she spent covering the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in her acclaimed English-language memoir, *Country of My Skull* (2002). Already in that memoir, her first, Krog experiments with the performative dimensions of print as a medium through which to convey her experiences as a journalist at the TRC, and the book is effective in conveying the performative aspects of the TRC live

hearings.[1] Krog's experimentation with textual performance is further developed in her second memoir *A Change of Tongue* – a title that plays on "tongue" as language[2] as well as body. Along with her *Begging to be Black*, these three memoirs together comprise a trilogy of sorts, in which Krog, as a white Afrikaans woman, attempts to map her own experiences of belonging and unbelonging in South Africa, Africa, and in language.

Although she is an acclaimed Afrikaans poet, Krog writes in English[3] in an attempt to engage a wider South African audience and to understand the complexities of life in a South Africa no longer defined by the seemingly clear "black and white" narrative of state-sanctioned apartheid. However, often Krog's texts *perform* the manner in which the English language itself is disrupted as it is deployed in South Africa.

Krog's poetic ear is attuned both to the everyday, "transparent" function of language, and to those moments at which language becomes "strange". Often, her work grapples with the many complexities of language in a South African context. Her memoirs record her experience, as a white Afrikaans woman, of attempting to learn alternative frameworks through which she might understand South Africa. The texts in Krog's oeuvre record and track her sense of the incoherency in her everyday lived experience in South Africa. In an attempt to re-present these experiences, Krog's final manuscripts are often formally experimental and genre defying, marked by unexpected shifts in point of view and style.

Although all Krog's memoirs resist easy classification, *A Change of Tongue* is the text that most directly deals with her encounters at the limits of language. On one level, these are the limits of the South African "local" languages: Many South Africans literally do not understand each other because we have not yet learnt each other's languages, thus we have been slow in sharing each others' knowledge. Most South Africans speak English as a second language, and this has become the shared

---

[1] See Catherine Cole's article "Performance, Transitional Justice and the Law," in which she traces the performative conventions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

[2] Indeed, the word "language" derives from Old French, *langage*, based on the Latin *lingua* "tongue." (OED).

[3] See Krog's comments on writing in English in *A Change of Tongue* (270) and *Begging to be Black* (101).

language in South Africa.[4] However, as Krog notes, for most South Africans, the choice was long ago removed to tell their stories in a language other than English: "English has become the language that confirms and judges our existence and the quality and weight thereof" (*Begging* 101). On another level, *A Change of Tongue* explores the limits of literary convention. In South Africa, differing cultural perspectives and different language conventions result in diverse expectations and understandings of what constitutes a text, how it operates, and what the role of the listener/reader is in constituting meaning in the text.

A Change of Tongue is also the manuscript that ranges the most in form – from the autobiographical "I"; to dreamlike, lyrical, poetic insertions where the position and alignment of the speaker are unclear; to seemingly objective accounts of events in which "Antjie" is the protagonist, her experiences being relayed by a third-person narrative voice. As a commodity, a product, the text therefore resists particular categorisation: it is neither fact nor fiction, not just poetry, not just prose. Krog's style seems actively to push against genre convention and categorisation. In her (personal) effort to come to a better, wider understanding of what it means to be a South African in a country where "we all live an incoherency" (*Begging* 124), Krog's texts perform the interplay between the many different categories of language as manifested in discourse, ideology, forms and genres.

Two chapters in *A Change of Tongue* have specific bearing on my own preoccupations with the disruptions of language in South Africa: "Part 2: A Hard Drive", and "Part 5: A Journey". These two chapters reveal two aspects of "deformed" language in Krog's (South) African encounters. "A Hard Drive" foregrounds the deformations effected on a print text by the material disruptions of a malfunctioning computer hard drive. It might therefore be read as an example of the kind of disruptions one might encounter if one works specifically with language, as a writer/journalist/researcher/poet. "A Journey", on the other hand, charts the disruptions of language in oral performance. These two chapters also raise the question of audience, since they underscore the extent to which a linguistic act, be it oral or print, is always a performance *for* someone else.

---

[4] See Eric Louw's "Introduction: South Africa's multiple languages in a shifting media environment" (2011).

In Part 2, "A Hard Drive", Krog traces her attempts to recover information after her computer hard drive crashes and she loses several important documents. These include a piece on the Anglo-Boer War, written by her mother,[5] as well as a follow-up interview with Deborah Matshoba, who testified before the Human Rights Violations Committee at the Truth Commission hearings (*A Change of Tongue* 141). The technician working to repair the drive warns:

> If it's only the directory structure that has been destroyed, they will be able to take things off piecemeal. If the file partitions have been destroyed, *everything will appear in a great big stew*. And if everything has been corrupted down to ones and zeros, then the entire transformation will have to occur digit by digit. (*A Change of Tongue* 142-143, my emphasis)

This description creates a frame for the reader that emphasises the notion of categorisation and translation in the process of determining the meaning of a text. There is also an implied sense that the coherence of a text can be recovered as long as the "directory structure" remains intact. When the "file partitions" disappear, then the organisational structure appears to break down and so the possibility of making "sense" of this "great big stew" of language becomes a question of starting anew, with new "file partitions". Indeed, the technician's description reveals that the language itself might disappear, be "corrupted down" to ones and zeros. In this case, an act of recuperation would require a translation from numbers into letters, from one *medium* to another.

Krog re-produces the effect of the "long reams of fax paper covered with text" (*A Change of Tongue* 143) that she receives from the technicians. The first segment is

---

[5] Krog's mother is Afrikaans writer, Dot Serfontein, "respected writer of popular fiction, novels and essays" (Viljoen 194). Serfontein is also the author of *Keurskrif vir Kroonstad*, a history of Kroonstad which "is a strangely hybrid text, defying the rules of conventional historiography" (194). In *A Change of Tongue*, Serfontein's history of Kroonstad forms an important intertext, with Krog drawing on, responding to, and extending her mother's text within her own. Interestingly, Afrikaans author Ingrid Winterbach, in a 2009 interview with Margaret Lenta, states that she "can't think offhand of any Afrikaans novelist who would refuse translation, except Dot Serfontein, who belongs to an older generation and whose book [*Vrypas*] is an autobiography. She's the last of an old order" (Lenta 168).

from her mother's piece on the Anglo-Boer War. Krog's authorial voice states that this "piece on the Boer War breaks off and something else starts" (144). This "something else" is a fragment of an account of survivors of the Rwandan genocide. In turn, this piece is truncated and a long section on the Boer War follows. Apart from these abrupt truncations and beginnings, the text is also "disrupted" by non-lexical symbols. In order to give the reader an example of the effect of these disruptions, I reproduce the section in full below:

> He must be "agreeable" even – and especially – when confronted by incidents of racism. The moment he is "agreeable", however, he knows that they think he is subservient, docile, and acquiescent in his own oppression. This he desperately wants to avoid. On the other hand, if he is not "agreeable", he will be labelled problematic, angry, aggressive, dangerous and even racist, which again feeds into the stereotypical representations of the dominated, as part of the racist message.' □□□□āāā□□□āā

> āāāÉç0āāāāI was a pretty little thing in a tutu - the only daughter of a well-off family. We read, we talked politics. Then this was destroyed. My father was jailed and tortured. Our home became cold and needy. Me and my mother ... for me there was a real war against my mother. We were so clumsy with each other ... I felt so unloved by her. I was abused by stick, by mouth, by neglect ... āā.=

> □□□āāā□□□following message appears on the screen: 'In the works on psychopathology, there is agreement that "double bind" experiences of any kind are among the most psychologically disruptive a human being can ever be confronted with.'

> I think about South Africa and how scarred we all are, how fraught these fragile new relationships and partnerships must be. But the professor continues. (151)

Here, Krog's text "performs" her sense of the indiscrete "great big stew" of text, and the effect on language of the dissolving of "file partitions". However, these

14

deformations create interesting new juxtapositions and effects that often enhance the reader's experience of the texts in startling ways. In the terrible, traumatic loss of "her" memory (externalised on the computer hard drive) and her years of work, Krog seems to find an incidental use for the product resulting from event. There is no longer a clear framework to anchor the meaning of the content. The dissolving of file partitions – an incidental and unwelcome failure of her *technology* –brings about a "mash-up" of several different voices, styles, subjects and discourses. This "failure" leaves its physical traces on the text, in the form of the non-lexical symbols that erupt throughout the text and begin to engage the reader affectively.

These symbols signify the interference of the (fallible) technology itself in the processes of language and meaning making. The "interruptions" take on a strangely poetic quality when viewed in conjunction with the content of these text fragments, which circumscribe various situations in which communication is severely *laboured*, and where the constitution of the self in language is revealed as a precarious process. For example, in the first paragraph of the extract above, we find a description of a man trapped in the double-bind imposed on him by incidents of racism. The paragraph breaks off into the line of squares [□] and the lowercase a macron grapheme [/ā/], which marks a long vowel. These visual and aural disruptions to the text work to amplify the effect of the text. The pictorial squares visually present little boxes, resonating with the sense of being "boxed in" described in the paragraph. The repeated "/ā/" acts visually and aurally to simulate a vocal expression of frustration.

These symbols segue into the beginning of the next paragraph, and the visual effect reproduces the aural experience of tuning a radio: the second paragraph begins with the same "white noise" that ended the previous paragraph. Of course, the paragraphing itself facilitates a reading by marking a transition, and this underscores Krog's editing intervention, but the two paragraphs are also linked by the extra-lexical interruptions and these create continuity between one disparate fragment and the next. Indeed, the second paragraph – a section recounting the effects of the Rwandan genocide on the speaker – breaks off with the same anguished cry represented by the grapheme /ā/. This is followed by an equal sign [=], in effect "equating" this paragraph to the next, which begins again with a row of squares. Thus, although these fragments originated from two disparate texts, the non-lexical interruptions caused by

the malfunctioning hard-drive create powerful resonances and effects between the various fragments.

One must keep in mind that Krog, in reproducing these "deformed" fragments in her manuscript, is acting in an *editorial* capacity. She stages the disruptions in a particular way. Her editor's eye recognises the paratactic resonances created by the juxtaposition of these fragments. This recognition introduces the issue of editorial *choice* in bringing texts together with a particular agenda. It raises the question of authorial and editorial intention in the process of bringing together a manuscript. In the work of the Language poets, I identify a similar foregrounding of the extent to which editorialising and categorising are inherent aspects of language use. Krog's own agenda is concerned with processes of transformation and change, particularly in language.[6] In choosing to foreground these moments of deformation in language, she identifies them as sites of possible transformation.

The site of the breakdown of language therefore also becomes a site of the poetic. The *traces* left by the malfunction of the medium become additional layers, acting on the text/s already "in performance" on the page. The site of deformation is also a site of transformation. This might suggest one of the roles of the poet in society: to have the eye or ear tuned in to those moments of language rupture and deformation, and to record these moments as potential sites of language transformation.

Krog could easily have re-edited the recovered documents, eliding the traces of technical failure. However, she chooses to include a selection of these documents in their "deformed" state in a book about a "change of tongue": a translation, a transformation. She wants to perform the effect in print for the reader, to emphasise the latent possibilities introduced by the effects of the breakdown of the medium. To this end, these fragments also reveal the extent to which a failure of technology can reveal supposedly "invisible" processes of meaning making.

---

[6] Louise Viljoen notes that the "desire for transformed language is something which has engaged Krog in all of her guises as a writer" (189). Viljoen points to Krog's translation projects, particularly of South African indigenous verse, as attempts to introduce "a new tone of voice to her mother tongue" (189).

In Krog's account of the process, form has become *deformed*, and this deformation leads to a transformation, not necessarily of meaning, but of how meanings interact with one another. As a word's particular meaning is established in a particular situation by its relation to other words, so too does "meaning" in a text become clear in its relation to other texts.[7] These relations are determined by the kind of framework within which the text is situated. This framework tends to operate "invisibly", or transparently. However, because of the interruption occasioned by the malfunctioning of the hard drive, the framework is affected. It is shifted, it is partly obliterated, it no longer functions as it should, to keep things "separate". This occasions an abrupt encounter with the way in which meaning is made, and I would argue that this is what Krog is "performing" in her re-production of the "formless" text.

Within the logic of the organisation of *A Change of Tongue*, "A Hard Drive" comes before "A Journey". Therefore, this "performance" of the "deforming" of the frame precedes the protagonist's[8] (and by extension the reader's) encounter with the performance practices of North African griots, described as part of Antjie's journey in Part 5. Krog describes Antjie's encounter with alternative organising principles in language – principles predicated on an oral and performance culture, where the particular limitations and disruptions of the media are foregrounded as part of the performance. However, it becomes clear to Krog that this focus on the oral does not necessarily imply a rejection of the written text, but rather a challenge to the authority of the written text. Some of the issues that Krog's description raises include questions around the seeming transparency of the printed text: If writing itself is a medium, what are its limitations and disruptions? How do we move away from the privilege accorded the written text as the primary authority? How do we bring non-lexical

---

[7] All three of Krog's memoirs provide glossaries of words or concepts drawn from one or other of the many languages and cultures that constitute the South African socio-linguistic landscape. Although these glossaries are provided to accommodate the reader to whom the language might be foreign, they also serve to perform the extent to which the South African linguistic landscape constantly requires acts of translation. Additionally, the need for the glossary is a tangible example of the way in which text produces more text: a supplementary text is needed to clarify the primary text.

[8] Krog shifts between first-person and third-person narrative voice. In "A Hard Drive", she writes in the first person. In "A Journey", she writes in the third person, referring to the protagonist as "she". Thus I would like to draw a distinction between Krog the author and Antjie the protagonist.

signifiers into our critical frame, to allow for a more inclusive reading/listening, one that would open up the text and our understanding of its context?

In Part 5, we follow Krog's protagonist on "A Journey", which she makes as part of "La Caravane de la Poésie", a Poetry Caravan to Timbuktu, setting out from Dakar. Krog begins this account by musing on the construction of Timbuktu in both the Western and African imaginary. She points out that the older, Western dream of Timbuktu "is a yearning to plunder the purling splendour of a city whose wealth has always been described in tender detail by Western adventurers" (*A Change of Tongue* 287). In the Western narrative of Timbuktu, the space is cast as an Eldorado – an ideal space of great material wealth, ready to give up its treasures to an independent, enterprising adventurer.

The newer dream, "the African one", according to Krog, "holds that Timbuktu is a place of miracle and wisdom, the origin of all knowledge and civilisation" (288). It speaks of an African desire to "locate the origins of all civilisation in Timbuktu" (288), the site of origin of some of the oldest written manuscripts in the world. Thus the African narrative of Timbuktu sets up a different genre in which to "read" the space: this Timbuktu is also an ideal space, but the wealth to be found here is a wealth of knowledge, and the genre is that of an "origins" tale: civilisation originated in Timbuktu.

To claim Timbuktu as a dream for the whole of Africa does, however, suggest a totalising view of Africa, one that tends to romanticise[9] the space. Additionally, this "dream" of Timbuktu is one closely associated with South African ex-President Thabo Mbeki's notion of an African Renaissance. Mbeki claimed Timbuktu as an example to equal the advances made in European urban centres during the European Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries (Mbeki online). Mark Gevisser, Mbeki's

---

[9] In fact, the violent occupation of the north of Mali following the coup d'état in Bamako in March 2012 has analysts warning about the "Somalilisation" of the entire stretch of Sahara. According to Liesl Louw-Vaudran in the *Mail & Guardian*, the romantic image of the pastoral and nomadic Tuaregs, members of the Berber people of the western and central Sahara, "no longer corresponds to the reality on the ground. Today, vast chunks of the Sahara desert are home to a mix of drug traffickers, al-Qaeda-linked terrorists and Tuareg nationalists. There are no more small planes transporting American tourists to see the historic Timbuktu" (27).

autobiographer, describes the style that came to signify Mbeki's Renaissance in more wary terms, however, as

> an attempt to brand a confident new identity for empowerment with the imagined iconography, palette and texture of Africa […]; culture, indeed, no longer the weapon of struggle once so powerfully wielded by the Black Consciousness movement, but now the design for place-settings at the table of victory. (323)

Gevisser's description above points toward a cynical appropriation of African culture in service of global politics and capital.[10]

Krog's observation above therefore sets up Timbuktu within two totalising worldviews, establishing it as a shifting signifier – it is a place of overlapping meaning, of conflicting definition. The actual Timbuktu that "Antjie" – a white, Afrikaans, female South African – encounters, is different again. As she describes walking out into the heat and seeing the city for the first time, she references two quotes. The first is by one of the first whites to arrive in Timbuktu in the early 19th Century, René Caillié: "Everything was enveloped in a great sadness. I was amazed by the lack of energy, by the inertia that hung over the town … a jumble of badly built houses … ruled by a heavy silence" (*A Change of Tongue* 322). The second quote she takes from her West African guidebook, which claims that when Bob Geldof came to Timbuktu he asked, "Is that it?" (322). Both these quotes register the travelers' disappointment in the reality that they encounter.

By laying all these accounts of Timbuktu beside each other like this, Krog performs for the reader the kind of linguistic framework through which the first-time visitor to Timbuktu might encounter the city. We also see how these frameworks are textually constructed – the experience of the city is already mediated by the various texts in which it is described. Tellingly, none of these texts provides her with a language in which to convey her immediate experience. When she phones her husband, an

---

[10] In their study *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), socio-anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff address the corporate appropriation of "culture" in southern Africa.

architect, to tell him that she is "in Timbuktu", he asks her what the buildings look like, and

> [s]he sees immediately that, like so many whites before her, she is caught between the myth of Timbuktu and the reality. Acknowledge one and you betray the other. Just like Kroonstad, she wants to say, but built of mud and stone. Yet she realises that she does not even have the language to describe Timbuktu within a South African context. (323)

Antjie's difficulty in describing the city arises from the fact that she arrives there with insufficient language: the language that she has inherited traps her within particularly narrow paradigms. This lack, or insufficiency, is registered in the fact that she finds it impossible to describe the objective world – the buildings are simultaneously familiar, and beyond the limits of her language. There is nothing in her existing frameworks that can act as a sufficient medium for translation. She can find nothing in her South African experience through which she might describe her experience of Timbuktu. The material reality of the space is vastly in excess of the interpretive frameworks that she has available to her. When her husband insists on a description, she says

> Well, I'm standing *here* in a Muslim robe and a Pagad headscarf with camel-skin sandals on my feet. A waiter in a white jacket just put a Castle beer down in front of me for which he wants a shitload of money. When I got out of the Pajero in front of the hotel, I stepped in a pile of camel dung. I have seen nothing of Timbuktu because the place is hidden by a dust storm, just like Ventersburg in August. (323, original emphasis)

This description makes it clear that Antjie's only referent is herself, and thus evokes the place in relation to her own subject position: "*I'm* standing *here*". Krog emphasises Antjie's sense of locality visually, by italicising the adverb *here*. Antjie's description presents a *local* space, intersected by the markers of the global *modern*: She wears a Muslim robe, bought that day, and a "Pagad" headscarf (referring to the Western Cape Muslim vigilante organisation People against Gangsterism and Drugs). She is drinking a South African beer, a Castle, for which the waiter wants "a shitload of money" – the beer is a luxury item, its capital value determined, presumably, by

import costs, and the desire of tourists for this particular product. It also signifies the corporate penetration of SAB, the South African Breweries, into Africa. She was dropped off in front of the hotel in a Pajero, a sport utility vehicle made by the Japanese company Mitsubishi Motors, and incidentally named after the Pampas Cat that inhabits the Patagonian plateau.

So far, she might very well be describing a place in South Africa and, indeed, she likens it to "Ventersburg in August" – a reference that will only really carry meaning if one has visited that South African town in August. However, exiting the Pajero, she steps into a pile of camel dung. This experience situates her more particularly: she is in a place where there are camel droppings on the streets in front of the hotels. Stepping in the dung is an *embodied* experience: the camel dung would have a specific smell and consistency. It would be difficult to clean from one's shoes and clothes. She is unable to "translate" Timbuktu to herself and by extension to her interlocutor in South Africa. In trying to convey/communicate her experience, she has to constitute it through the interplay between her particular embodied experience of the city, and a "universally" available network of signifiers. There is no one, particular genre convention through which she can access "meaning" in the space.

Her sense of a breakdown of language really begins much earlier, as the Caravan progresses from Dakar to Timbuktu. When she starts to menstruate – a "universal" condition of most women's bodies – she has to manage the purchase of a pack of sanitary towels through gesture, since "[n]obody speaks English" (*A Change of Tongue* 290). Even when she draws a pad and a tampon for the shopkeeper, "he stares at her in total incomprehension" (290), and it is only when another customer "shouts something" that the shopkeeper "glares at her in a sudden fury" (290) and produces a very old pack of Kotex sanitary towels from beneath the counter. This exchange illustrates the prominence of the body in communicative exchange: despite the breakdown of language, communication still occurs between Antjie and the shopkeeper, through gesture. The other customer deduces Antjie's need from her gesture and conveys it to the shopkeeper in language. Antjie reads his response of "sudden fury" quite clearly in his body. The breakdown of language and the disruption of the body are nodes that point towards her particular material embeddedness in a foreign space, where she cannot speak any of the local languages,

and where "nobody speaks English". Her very body has to be translated for the shopkeeper, a "very old robed and bearded man" (290), by someone else. The "text" "tampon" or "pad" is not one that he is able to script onto her. As signifiers, they do not function here.

The question of how the signifier functions becomes progressively more apparent as Antjie's narrative continues. During poetry performances on the first evening, she "looks on nervously. She is not performing this evening, but how does a poet function here?" (291). The performance that she describes gives precedence to the extra-lexical elements of language. "It is not only the word, but the journey of the word. The trace of the word. The colour of that trace." (291) The performance foregrounds the process of the word, the physical trace that it brings with it, it "becomes a festival of colour and sound" (291) – visual and aural, rather than lexical – and she follows the lead of a Zimbabwean fellow poet, moving from person to person "his ears attuned to snatches of translation … those who can speak both French and English will start translating the moment an ear tilts towards their mouths" (291). The space described here is one vibrant with the processes of language, of sounds moving from one shape to the next, of mouths speaking – translating – into ears. The body is present and for Antjie, at least initially, the body, her own body, is also a *disruption*, seemingly impeding her ability to make herself mean something in this context.

Considering her own poems, written in Afrikaans, she wonders:

> How will they ever work here? What will work here? Does poetry have three tiers then: an elitist poetry, a kind of First World poetry, enjoyed by the well-known and well-heeled, the poetic aristocracy as it were; a middle-class poetry protecting its middle-class grievances of love, lineage and lime tree; and finally an oral, working-class poetry about struggle and liberation? Can the one talk to the other? But such questions are immaterial here, and that is the real nightmare. Whatever she has to say will be inaudible, because her language does not exist here. Only her body and her colour. She could talk utter nonsense, she could recite other people's poetry, and no one would be any the wiser. There is no one to translate her. (291)

She presumes here that what she has to say will be "inaudible", because her language does not exist in this place. "She could talk utter nonsense". However, in this community of poets, the lexical aspect of language is tangential to features such as sound and look. Thus, there is no sense of the poetry "belonging" to anyone, or any preoccupation with her "authorship" of the poems. Her "three tiers" also make no sense here because, once again, the poetry they describe, or circumscribe, is a poetry that privileges the lexical meanings of words, framing out other elements as extra-semantic. The "file partitions" between these tiers are dissolved within this particular praxis.

At a reading the next evening, she "sits crumpled up, unable to make any judgement, any analysis, any sounding that would allow her to put together a contribution. Since she cannot get a grip on the context, she is unable to decide what to do" (293). She feels "caught up in the wrong genre" (293), accustomed to "writing, not performing." (293) Furthermore, whereas earlier she had a sense that her body – her race, her sex – was impeding her sense of meaning, she now feels that "nobody cares what colour she is or who she identifies with" (293). She is confronted with a form of poetry which goes about very differently with language and which requires an alternative critical approach in order to use it, to activate it, in order to "learn this change of tongue" (294).

During this process, Antjie is introduced to the use of alternative organising principles in language – ones not predicated on lexical meaning. In a conversation with the Egyptian poet Zein el-Abedin Fouad, who writes in Arabic, she learns that there are particular patterns that one has to keep to when composing Arabic poetry. Words are organised according to systems of sounds. The words "are chosen firstly for their sound value, and only after that for their meaning" (295). Furthermore, Zein problematises the binary between "written" and "oral" poetry set up in her three tiers by pointing out that in Egypt they have had a written poetic tradition "from time immemorial. So it is not because we cannot write that we are orally inclined." (295) Indeed, the organising of the poems according to sound value is a technique that allows the poet easily to remember any Arabic poem (295). The sound forms act as an aid to memory, and are in this case as enduring as written forms.

Zein's description raises the issue of the assumed divide between oral poetry and written poetry, suggesting an intersection between the two. His statement undercuts the assumption that oral or performance poetry is somehow inferior to or less enduring than print poetry. These are issues with which Antjie has been grappling: her sense of the inadequacy of her own print poetry in this context, is predicated on her assumption that her poems do not lend themselves to performance. Zein's comment therefore reconfigures Antjie's understanding of the relation between print and oral performance, and the foregrounding and function of sound in these two modes.

At the poetry performance in Bamako, Antjie encounters yet another example of the varied ways in which the performance poets use sound. In this case, the sound technology is actively manipulated in order to create particular effects in the performance: "Tall young women perform with total control of the dynamics of dramatic microphone technique and the power of repetition" (302). The advantages and limitations of the medium of the microphone are brought under the control of the performer, and incorporated as part of the performance. Furthermore, these poets perform with a control of the power of repetition. Over and above the many functions and possibilities that repetition has as a strategy in oral performance, it is also a process which acts as a "space clearing gesture" (to borrow a phrase from Kwame Anthony Appiah), allowing the performing poet time to compose and improvise. Primarily, however, repetition allows for infinite variation in sound games with one particular word, thus marking moments of difference and similarity, not only within the performance but within language itself.

The powerful effects of repetition as well as tonal variation, can clearly be seen in her account of Zimbabwean poet Nhamo Khadani's performance:

> Nhamo Khadani starts to yell *Yes! Yes!* And then *Oui! Oui!* The audience follows him, echoing his cries. He leads them through all kinds of Yeses. Aggressive *Yes!Yes!;* uncertain *Yes?Yes?;* impatient *Yes!Yes*!; reluctant *Yes! Yes!*; innocent *Yes! Yes!* His head shakes a teary, negative *Yes! Yes!*; ecstatic *Yes! Yes!*; orgasmic *Yes! Yes!*; furious *Yes! Yes!*; murderous *Yes! Yes!*; caressing *Yes! Yes!*; encouraging *Yes? Yes?* The audience gets so worked up that they leap to their feet, the youths jump down from their perches against

24

the walls, the poor people listening outside come storming in. And from the centre, the tiny figure from Zimbabwe controls a crowd of people whom he indeed has no language to communicate with. (303)

Khadani begins his performance with a translation. He equates the exclamation "Yes" to the French "Oui" for his Franchophone African audience. In so doing he establishes parameters, which create a shared linguistic space. The denotative values shared by "Yes" and "Oui" are invoked, and it is in this shared understanding of "Yes=Oui" that the performance proceeds. The dialogic relation between performer and audience is actively and ritualistically established. Khadani then proceeds to perform the many, often opposing ways in which the word "Yes" signifies in different dialogic encounters. It does not matter that he has "no language to communicate with" the crowd of people, since his performance is gestural, rather than referential. He uses extra-lexical elements to differentiate between his repetitions of the word.

In Krog's print performance of this event, she has to recreate the effect for the reader in an act of translation. However, it is not language that she must translate, but the body itself. Khadani's actual performance would have consisted of repeated "Yesses". In print, 20 "Yesses" in a row would not necessarily alert the reader to the multiple significations of the word in different contexts. In reproducing this effect for the reader in writing, Krog is forced to use adjectives. In representing this list of "Yesses" differentiated by adjectives, Krog has interestingly adhered to quite a regular governing metre, which is more visible if one inserts line breaks:

> Aggressive *Yes!Yes!;*
> uncertain *Yes?Yes?;*
> impatient *Yes!Yes*!;
> reluctant *Yes! Yes!*;
> innocent *Yes! Yes!*
> His head shakes a teary, negative *Yes! Yes!*;
> ecstatic *Yes! Yes!*;
> orgasmic *Yes! Yes!*;
> furious *Yes! Yes!*;
> murderous *Yes! Yes!*;

25

> caressing *Yes! Yes!*;
>
> encouraging *Yes? Yes?*

These are mostly trisyllabic words. The predominant amphibrachic foot [unstressed stressed unstressed], is varied by switches to dactylic foot [stressed unstressed unstressed]. The regular metre creates a rhythm that drives the chant. The adjectives have been chosen not simply for their lexical value, but also for their sound value. In order to represent the effect of Khadani's body in his performance on stage, Krog must find ways to bring the body into her print performance of the event. She does this through foregrounding of sound patterning.

In the print performance, the "Yes" stays the same, it is the word that describes and modifies the "Yes" that must change. The "difference" introduced by Khadani's body in tone and gesture during his stage performance is therefore rendered in the print performance by the variation of the adjectives, which restrict the possible meanings that each utterance of "Yes" might have. In the same manner that Khadani's body narrows down and modifies the meaning of "Yes" in the oral performance, Krog's use of adjectives regulate meaning in the print performance.

After his performance, Khadani tells Antjie that he "was so frustrated by being from this continent [Africa] but having to *scratch at its edges* because [he] cannot speak French […] real poets always find the heart of human beings, from whatever language or culture" (303, my emphasis). This statement suggests that the site of the poetic is at the edges of language and culture, in the zone of "breakdown", where the limits of your own language and culture become apparent. Khadani's description of his experience reveals a frustration at the limits of his language, in that these limits force him to the "edges" of his own continent. His dislocation in language causes a sense of dislocation from place. By harnessing sound, Khadani finds "the heart", and can bring about a response from the bodies of his listeners. Within the simplistic "Yes=Oui" dialogic frame that Khadani sets up with his translation, he performs the manner in which the body gets drawn into modes of signification.

This harnessing and control of sound over meaning is again apparent in the account of the performance on day nine of the Caravan:

26

The griots are the first to perform. They use the microphones in a way that shows a remarkable grasp of the sound system; in fact, feedback is one of the modern griot's most important performance skills. A poet will shout into the microphone to cause distortion, then swing the instrument down in a swanky curl to change the distortion into a howl. Sometimes he will bring the microphone sharply down to the floor in quick successive movements, releasing piercing squeals into the air. Or he will roar into the microphone, first softly, then more and more loudly, then mingling his voice with the distortion as it sets in, letting it die out with the applause from the crowd. (306)

The howls and distortions on a sound system caused by the proximity of the body to the microphone, or the proximity of the microphone to the floor, or the volume at which a person speaks into the microphone, tend to be *unintended* sound effects or qualities, which are conventionally understood to disrupt a performance. However, these poets willfully induce the distortions. They control the *process* by which the distortions are created, incorporating the effects into their performance. This extends the range what might constitute poetic *effect*.

To draw the analogy back to the example of the malfunctioning hard drive from "Part 2": the noise and disruption of the sound system can be equated to the non-signifying symbols that mark the moments of disruption in the disparate texts on the hard drive. Analogously, the Bamako performance poets' deployment of the disruptions of the sound system is similar to a print poet incorporating symbols and graphemes as part of the print performance of a poem. The griots are exceptionally talented "form deformers"[11], who purposely induce the "malfunction" of their medium in order to play the human voice. In the process, the reader/listener is made aware of the functioning and limitations of the various media in which the poets work.

During this performance, Antjie notices a Berber and his horse on the edge of the crowd. "It is like a mirage"[12] (306), and "[i]f she wrote about it, she thinks, it would

---

[11] Thanks to Daniël Roux for this insight.

[12] Her use of the word "mirage" here resonates usefully with the notion of re-evaluating the linguistic frame within which we interpret sensory experience, since a mirage is a real optical phenomenon, caused by the refraction of light rays to form a false image at the observer's location. What you are *really* seeing is light refracted off a hot terrestrial surface. However,

seem like magical realism. Her soundchecks on reality are shifting" (306). We see here that Antjie is already thinking of performing this moment in writing – she already has an audience in mind, one that will read the experience within the framework of magical realism. Of course, the appearance of a Berber on a horse is, presumably, an unremarkable occurrence in the everyday lived reality of Timbuktu. It would be magical realism if he turned up in Ventersdorp, but here in Timbuktu he might he might very well be read as an example of the city performing its own cultural stereotype. By acknowledging the extent to which the moment of experience is already being cast as a performance in writing, for a particular audience, Krog emphasises the extent to which a particular framework determines the interpretation of an experience.

To Antjie, the presence of the Berber is a form of feedback, or echo, disrupting the transparent functioning of her medium. It is as though the Berber's presence in her frame has an anamorphic effect, causing shifts in her experience, in her "soundchecks on reality". This seems to imply that her expectations of the medium of language, through which she comes to "reality", are shifting. Her "soundchecks" begin to allow for traces of "medium malfunction".

Language is the medium through which we organise and externalise our perceptions of the world. In speech and writing, language is prone to certain distortions, caused by its own functions as well as material disruptions, often from the body of the language-user. Furthermore, as language is transmitted through other media (the computer or the sound system) – technology that allow the user to *amplify* his/her message – the language becomes prone to further material interruptions caused by the malfunction of the these technologies. These points of deformation are fruitful, however, since they dispel the illusion of transparent language. The user is confronted by the materiality of language, the "big stew", where meaning can only be recuperated through effective partitioning and segmentation. Additionally, there are forms of experience and knowledge which are not communicated referentially, but rather

---

most people *interpret* the image as a *reflection*, which leads to the assumption that they are seeing light reflected off a puddle of water, as opposed to light refracted. What the image *appears* to represent is determined by the interpretive faculties of the human mind. (A. Young online)

gesturally, where "meaning" is muted and extra-lexical elements of language are foregrounded and used to create a shared experience, a sense of shared form, as in the example of Nhamo Khadani's performance.

Krog's text explores and performs the kind of deformations and distortions in language that her protagonist experiences in her attempt to undergo a change of tongue. These deformations are encountered in print texts as well as in oral performances and, in both instances, they produce surprising and powerful effects. While the deformations in the print texts seem to produce incidental effects, these effects might be intentionally incorporated as part of a print performance, in the same way that the Bamako performance poets deploy the interruptions of the medium in their performances.

Krog's examples show us that the "deformation" of language is not necessarily an accidental or undesired event, or the result of madness or trauma. Poets like the Bamako performance poets purposely reproduce the effect of interference disrupting the seeming transparency of the medium. In doing so, they draw into question the way in which language is assumed to work to communicate meaning. In her reproduction of these various deformations in language, Krog's own print manuscript becomes a performance of these linguistic encounters.

In this Preface, I have provided an extensive analysis of portions of Krog's memoir, *A Change of Tongue*, which traces the processes by which people negotiate fundamental change and transformation. I have illustrated how Krog, as a writer and academic – a person who specialises in working with language – registers and represents the material pressures that she experiences as acting on language. Krog identifies the possibilities for representation that might be gained from paying closer attention to irruptions and deformations in language.

I wish to pursue this idea by looking at how orally-oriented South African poets such as Lesego Rampolokeng, Kgafela oa Magogodi, Jethro Louw and Jitsvinger, as well as visual artist Johan Fanozi Mkhize exploit and foreground the materiality of language to produce works that disrupt the dialogic relation between reader/viewer, text, and author. Similarly, the work of North American Language poets Robert

Grenier, Susan Howe, Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews is attentive to the potential of print for representing the disruptions in language that dispel the illusion of transparency. A study of these divergent poetic praxes, which address the same aspect of language, namely its materiality, offers ways of theorising the manner in which attention to apparently deformed language might play out in other language areas and what the implications of an attention to materiality might be for subjectivity and representation, particularly in the South African public discourse.

Introduction

Orality: Performance: Print

This thesis considers the effects of an artistic attention to the materiality of language in the work of selected North American Language Poets and South African performance/spoken word poets. To this end, performance, as a function of both orality and print texts, forms an important focus for my argument. I am particularly interested in the effect that the disruption of language has on the position of the subject in language, especially in terms of the dialogic exchange between local and global subject positions. Poetry is a language activity that requires a particular attention to form and meaning, and that is "licensed" to activate and exploit the materiality of language. For this reason, I have focused on the work of a selection of North American poets, the Language poets. These poets are primarily concerned with the performative possibilities of language as it appears in print media. I juxtapose these language activities with those of a selection of South African poets who are primarily orally-oriented, but whose work reveals telling interplays between media. All these poets are preoccupied with the ways in which the sign might be disrupted. Ultimately, I am concerned with exploring the manner in which attention to the materiality of language might open up alternative understandings of language, subjectivity and representation in South African public discourse.

In the Preface, I have briefly outlined the extent to which the opacity and deformation of language features in the post-1994 memoirs of prominent South African writer Antjie Krog. I have shown how Krog represents her sense of the distortion she experiences in language. To this end, Krog's own manuscripts become experimental performances of linguistic disruption and distortion. I return to Krog in the concluding chapter, where I consider the performative dimensions of a manuscript she produced in collaboration with two other South African academics. This manuscript, published in 2009 as the book, *There was this Goat*, deals with the authors' long-term engagement with a testimony from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings that they find linguistically opaque and difficult to access.

However, Krog's textual performances might be understood within the general culture of performance in South Africa. A close analysis of the work of a selection of contemporary South African "performance" poets in this thesis reveals a complex interplay between oral and print performances. To open up the idea of performance as a function of both print and oral texts, I have found it useful to consider the work of some of the poets associated with the North American "Language" movement.

North American Language poetry and South African performance/spoken word poetry might be considered very divergent. However, in this thesis I argue that they share a preoccupation with the materiality of language, and that their linguistic experiments address this preoccupation in different ways. The Language poets are primarily concerned with the operation of language within a series of discourses, calling attention to the poem as construction. This "performance" of the operation of language is primarily rendered in print.

In contrast to the Language poets, most of the South Africans position themselves as oral, spoken word performers. They are largely concerned with interrogating structures of power that entrench economic and political inequality in South Africa. This also involves an interrogation of language and its operations in a country with eleven official languages. Their poetry thus often performs linguistic variations, hybrids and deformations that reveal the implicit operation of discourse. In both cases, the poetry resists "conventional" analysis, requiring an approach that addresses the performative and otherwise extra-lexical, material elements of the text.

The theoretical, print-based poetics of Language poets such as Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Robert Grenier, Susan Howe, Bob Perlman, and Ron Silliman is discussed in chapters two and three. These poets play with the page as space, and with the idea of the poem as a visual and sound performance. The Language poets actively foreground the notion of the poem as product – a material object, arising from the interplay of various social, historical and ideological influences – in focusing attention on the processes by which we construct the world through language. There is no coherent position for a speaker in this poetry, and so questions of self and subject position in language are brought into stark relief. Taking into consideration that these poets were most active during the 1970s and 1980s, a time of expansion for

America signaling the advent of global capitalism and aggressive American foreign policy, the work of the language poets also addresses notions of national identity and the construction of an historical narrative at moments of global expansion.

The contemporary South African poets can similarly be seen to be concerned with questions of national identity and historical narrative at a time of rapid change and transformation in South Africa, marked by the end of apartheid, and the country's entry into global systems of capital, power and information. Poets like Kgafela oa Magogodi, Johan Fanozi Mkhize and Jitsvinger work in different media, including film, theatre, music, sculpture and street art. Lesego Rampolokeng often performs his poetry to experimental music accompaniment. However, Rampolokeng insists on his status as a print poet, as much as a performance poet. Jethro Louw actively uses social media platform Facebook as a space for his poems and observations on the status of the modern KhoiSan people in South Africa.

Much of the work of the South Africans must therefore be understood as multimedia linguistic performances, with a particular focus on the nature and status of "the oral" in a space like South Africa, intersected as it is by many languages and diverse cultural practices. In these poetic works, the material means are an integral feature of the work (Drucker 131). Additionally, although these poets retain the notion of the (relatively) coherent speaking subject, this position is often represented as a site of anxiety, severely strained and fleetingly occupied as the speaker moves through different languages and media.

Artists and writers looking for ways to represent the difficult negotiation of language and subject position in South Africa might very well find alternative representative strategies in those linguistic elements deemed extra-lexical. To this end, the linguistic experiments of the Language poets might offer a starting point from which to explore these possibilities. In a country with a robust contemporary oral tradition, it would be useful to find ways of translating the materiality of an embodied performance into print by following some of the practices of the Language poets.[13] This would require a

---

[13] Of course, folklorists, anthropologists and orality scholars have developed various models for transcription, many which include strategies for translating the materiality of the embodied performance into print, such as Jeffersonian transcription for audio material, and

re-thinking of the role of the reader, who would have to be brought into a relation with the print text that would be analogous to the relation between the audience and the performer.

One of the primary overlaps between the Language poets and the South African poets is the way in which the work of both groups is situated in relation to New Criticism, which dominated North American as well as South African literary scholarship for much of the mid-twentieth century. The Language poets[14] position their language project in resistance to the New Criticism of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, authors of the influential textbook *Understanding Poetry,* which insisted that the poem be self-contained, coherent and unified. The work of the South Africans, on the other hand, finds reception in an academic climate that has seen a shift since the 1980s.

Writing in 1980, South African literary scholar Gareth Cornwell noted that the Western literary tradition "assumes a rift between the writer and society" as a sort of precondition of producing "good" or "high" art (187). He pointed out that the Western critic is invested in maintaining this rift. The Western-trained critic is therefore likely to continue his/her affirmation of "the essential autonomy of literary art", maintaining the argument that "literary creation is governed by its own intrinsic laws" (188). This argument, according to Cornwell, "rests on a rather doubtful set of premises, most notably on the concept of the literary work as a self-contained and self-sustaining system" (188). Cornwell concludes that, although New Criticism retains a lingering

Goodwinian transcription for visual material (see Evers online). However, these transcriptions are primarily for analytic use, and associated with the forensic discourses of qualitative empirical social sciences, where the transcriptions are intended to aid in the transparency and accessibility of the researcher's records. The kind of language activities engaged by the Language poets, on the other hand, are more preoccupied with performing the defamiliarising of language in print.

[14] The work of the Language poets is marked by a willingness to allow theory and poetry to infiltrate one another. As Michael Greer notes, Language poetry is not a focused aesthetic "movement" or style, but "a contradictory, multiple set of assumptions and writing practices. That is, the unity of 'language poetry' as a discursive formation cannot be easily isolated at a textual level" (342). According to Greer, "[t]he poetics of 'language poetry' call upon various modes of reading, but refuse, generally, to establish priorities among them" (342). "Because of its implication in many theoretical domains and discourses, and because of its insistence on poetics as an enactment (rather than the description) of a certain discursive strategy" (342), Greer argues that Language poetry cannot be represented by a series of statements of position or theoretical framing (342). See also p. 98-99 of this thesis.

influence, readers no longer accept uncritically the notion of the autonomy of the literary work (188).

Similarly, Nick Visser, a South African scholar known for his commitment to the Marxist problematic of reading the literary text in relation to the processes of its production and reception (Johnson 2), noted that in the early 1980s a shift in literary perspective in South African academia became apparent. The perspective that seemed to be "moving most strongly towards reorientating literary studies in [South Africa] [...] comprises sociology of literature generally and Marxist literary criticism in particular" (Visser 8). This comment indicates the kind of theoretical influences that could be seen in the South African academy in the 1980s. The fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989, and the end of apartheid and South Africa's entry into global financial and political power structures would certainly have signalled an 'anxiety' for Marxism, especially as many in the South African academy began to embrace poststructuralist and postcolonial theory in the 1990s. This shift perhaps reflected a sudden sense of fragmentation, plurality, emergent potentialities and unusual temporalities, as the clear binaries instituted by apartheid were ostensibly no longer officially sanctioned.

Despite these shifts in literary perspective and the growing influence of cultural studies, oral and performance poetry are still not accorded much critical attention in the university curriculum.[15] Duncan Brown points out that discussions of oral or performance poetry in South Africa often tend to "rely on aesthetic criteria which are inappropriate to many forms of traditional and modern poetry, both local and international" ("Black Consciousness" 9), and he notes the particular influence of New Criticism in academic assumptions about what constitutes "good" poetry.

Whereas the South African poetry under consideration here is predominantly oral, or marked by a strong intersection between orality and print, Language poetry is specifically defined by its break with speech-based poetics. Walter Kalaidjian, well

---

[15] See Deborah Seddon's overview of orature in the South African literary canon (2008). Seddon's description of the situation in South Africa emphasises the material conditions and structural limitations that complicate the process of setting up and teaching oral and performance poetry in undergraduate courses at South African universities.

known for his work in American Modernist studies, notes that the Language poets "challenge the cult of personality dominating the various brands of the 1960s 'poetry of revolt' and call attention to the ways in which expressive lyricism is discursively and institutionally mediated" (324). He goes on to quote one of the leading theorists and practitioners of the Language project, Charles Bernstein: "a poem exists in a matrix of social and historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an individual text than any personal qualities of the life or voice of the author" (324). Language poetry therefore proceeds from the outright rejection of the "authority" of voice and the coherence of the speaking self.

Although most of the South African examples might be considered examples of a "speech-based" poetics, – "voice" as an expression of the experience of the autonomous "self" – many of these poets often make a clear break with the preoccupations of the conventional lyric poem. For Language writers, this is a conscious resistance to neo-confessional poetry and the notion of a unified speaker, while in the case of the South African poets, the communal concerns raised in the poetry, and the regular use of oral devices such as ideophones, repetition and parallelism (Emmett 180), make for a poetry generally too "insurgent", to be contained within the conventional lyric.

Jeremy Cronin, South African poet and political activist, addresses the notion of "insurgent" poetry in a 1988 paper calling for closer academic attention to contemporary Black poetry in South Africa. Cronin insists that this poetry must be contextualised "within the rolling wave of semi-insurrectionary uprisings, mass stayaways, political strikes, consumer boycotts" (12), large political funerals and confrontations with police that marked the rising tide of anti-apartheid mobilization.

Cronin's paper offers a tentative beginning for the project of extending academic interest in performance poetry. He presents a descriptive sample of "insurgent" poetry performances within their various contexts. Cronin's examples consistently underscore the material embeddedness of this poetry, with its emphasis on sound, and the resulting "thickening of language" (Cronin 14). He also notes that often these sound plays give the English "a pronounced, indeed, an exaggerated African texture" (14). This comment suggests a conscious deformation of the English language in this

poetry, which can also be seen in the work of poets like Magogodi, Rampolokeng and Jethro Louw.

Print-oriented Language poetry challenges the notion of the poem as self-contained, and attempts to emphasise the material nature of language by foregrounding sound and look, as well as by "performing" the way in which language evolves and changes depending on context. It thus requires an analytical frame that acknowledges the poem as open and multivalent, a process of performance, rather than a self-contained product. Similarly, the South African poetry draws heavily on a history of orality, and meaning in the poem is constituted through the flow of various forms of language and gesture within a particular context of performance.

To treat a print text as a performance calls into question the authority and stability of the print text as product. Charles Bernstein suggests that the discrepant printings, what he calls "textual performances" of a poem, make for a "plurality of versions, none of which can claim sole authority" ("Introduction" 8). Bernstein calls these "multifoliate versions *performances* of the poem" ("Introduction" 8, original emphasis). For Bernstein, the "poem understood as a performative event and not merely as a textual entity refuses the originality of the written document in favor of 'the plural event' of the work" ("Introduction" 9). Performances are multivalent, emphasising the materiality of the poem as well as the performer, while at the same time denying the unitary presence of the poem (Bernstein, "Introduction" 9). I would furthermore argue that poetic projects that take the form of unusual print texts, or multimodal print texts, might be regarded as print performances. Poetic projects that are recorded audio/visually are also a type of performance. My use of the term "performance" is therefore not limited to what would usually be understood by the term "performance poetry", but extends also to how various seemingly "opaque" or inaccessible print texts might be understood as performances.

An example from Jeremy Cronin's paper on insurgent poetry goes some way towards illustrating the extent to which a print text might be said to "perform" its own construction. Cronin describes a dossier of over 300 pages, prepared by the apartheid South African state prosecutor in a treason trial against United Democratic Front and trade union leaders in the mid-1980s. The bulk of the indictment consists of "long

quotations from the proceedings of political rallies" (12), presumably taped by police informers and then transcribed. In addition to this, the dossier contains

> quotations and translations of songs sung and slogans chanted. There is also evidence on the wording on banners, T-shirts, buttons, pamphlets, and flyers. Among this mass of forensic detail, as part of the allegedly treasonable material, there are a few poems, also taped and lovingly transcribed from the same events. (12)

Cronin points out that the prosecutor's dossier is, ironically, a more accurate anthology of these poems than one would commonly find in an academic appraisal. By including the poetry alongside songs, chants, slogans, funeral orations, political speeches and graffiti, the prosecutor's dossier in effect performs more effectively than the conventional academic anthology the context of the presentation and reception of the poetry (Cronin 12). In this "ideal" anthology of performance poetry, the poems are placed alongside, and seen to operate in relation to, other texts. The social and materially embedded status of these poems is foregrounded in the dossier. The dossier can thus be seen as a kind of performance in its own right, and one that foregrounds the processes by which meaning is produced within a series of discourses.

In this sense, I would argue, Cronin's "ideal" anthology of performance poetry would in fact look very similar to some of the linguistic projects of the Language poets, such as Robert Grenier's "Sentences", a box of 500 index cards containing a short phrase or sentence, intended to be read paralinguistically with the other cards in the box. Initially asserted as a kind of resistance, or alternative to the speech-based poetics of the preceding generation, the New American Poets, Language Writing is particularly preoccupied with "textual resistance" (Kalaidjian 323), the experimental potential of language as *written*, and the performative potential of the page.

Walter Kalaidjian's informative synthesis of the moment and praxis of Language writing is comprehensive, and worth quoting in full:

> Dating from the early 1970s and fully blown with the 1978 publication of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine, a new group of American poets [...] have

theorized textual practices resistant to the discursive norms of affirmative bourgeois culture. Retrieving the avant-garde project of building, in [Ron] Silliman's key term, a genuinely alternative *network* of literary exchange, the Language poets lean toward group production of little magazines, small presses, and alternative anthologies. Like their precursors in the historical avant-gardes, the Language writers have sought also to close the gap dividing poetry and the world, while preserving the vital dialectic between political and cultural change. Although their verse is lodged against the self-centered poetics of personal sensibility of the 1960s and 1970s, such textual resistance to speech-based poetics is underwritten by a cultural critique of the linguistic protocols and verbal habits reproduced throughout American consumer society. First and foremost, the oppositional aesthetics [of the Language writers] [...] rest on a Marxist analysis of reification [...] In our postindustrial era, they claim, the normalizing of linguistic representation coincides with the triumph of reification. (323)

The Language writers are considered "postmodern,"[16] both in terms of periodisation (they are the "natural" successors of the New American Poets, whose work is situated in the historical period following World War II) and formal execution. Their poetry is characterised by an "experimental approach to composition" (Hoover, "Introduction" xxv), in that it decentres authority in favour of pluralism, encouraging a many-sided point of view. Instead of conceiving of the writing project as a means towards a final product, the Language writers favour compositional *process*, focusing more on method and intuition and thus muting the "intent" of the author. Thus, Language writing opposes the centrist values of "unity, significance, linearity, expressiveness, and a heightened [...] portrayal of the bourgeois self and its concerns" (Hoover, "Introduction" xxvii).[17]

---

[16] Again, the reader should recall that the Language poets are considered as working with the notion of a *convergence* of various theoretical approaches, a *multiple* set of assumptions and writing practices.

[17] Compare this to Nick Visser's point, discussing the history of practical criticism in South Africa, that "devotees" of practical criticism "have failed to recognise that the [initial] democratising effect [of practical criticism] was severely circumscribed in scope and has led to the substitution of an élite of class background; that what appeared to be the democratization of literary studies was merely its bourgeoisification" (6).

Language writing was for the poets, interested as they were in philosophy and poststructuralist theory, an "intellectual experiment," rather than a desire to innovate, according to Marjorie Perloff ("After Language Poetry" online). An "essentially Marxist poetics" (online), Language poetry is political, focusing on issues of ideology and class. Poets such as Ron Silliman, in his essay "Disappearance of the Word", called for the recognition of poetry as "the philosophy of practice in language" (131). This praxis stands in stark contrast to that of mainstream poetry in the U.S.

Perloff claims that, at a moment when U.S. poetry "was wedded to a kind of neo-confessionalist, neo-realist poetic discourse" ("After Language Poetry" online), the theory underpinning Language poetry was a reminder that "poetry is a *making"* (online) from its root in the Greek "poien": to create. It is "a construction, using language, rhythm, sound and visual image" (online). Furthermore, Language writing showed again that the subject was constructed, that the poet should not be thought of as speaking in her/his "natural voice" (online), and importantly that poetic discourse "belonged to the same universe as philosophical and political discourse" ("After Language Poetry" online). This purpose, or application of Language writing, positioned as it is on the "event horizon" of "globalisation", seems to me to make it well situated as a starting point for a discussion of the possibilities for a poetics attempting to deal with the impact of "globalisation", in both the South African and the North American cases.

Speculating on the political possibilities that globalisation opens up for poetics, Imre Szeman suggests that one must ask why capitalism needs the rhetoric of "globalization" at this time (156). Szeman notes that "the ideological project named globalization demands other [critical] responses that address directly its rhetorical and fictional character, and in particular, the ideological attempt to seal off the future through the assertion that the present cannot be gainsaid" (156). He goes on to suggest that one critical response would be to call attention to the constant employment of rhetoric and metaphor in "the struggle over the public's perception of the significance and meaning of the actions of businesses and governments, peoples, and publics in shaping the present for the future, and, indeed, in shaping what constitutes 'possibility' itself" (Szeman 156). Another possible object for poetic inquiry could be "the tropes and turns of language used explicitly to shape public perception" (156).

The poetries addressed in this thesis are positioned in significant ways in relation to the question of modernity. The Language writers are considered "postmodern" in their approaches, and much of their work is characterised by a preoccupation with the process of modernity as it manifests in language, and with "subverting the linguistic habits fostered under commodity culture" (Kalaidjian 324). These "linguistic habits" refer to the "normalizing of linguistic representation", which coincides with the "triumph of reification" in a postindustrial era (324). Furthermore, these poets are situated in North America, putatively the definitive example of the "modern", at a moment (1970s and 1980s) when theories of globalization were emerging that, according to Simon Gikandi, privileged "culture rather than political economy" (633), undermining the Eurocentric narrative of modernization (633). Many of these poets are thus preoccupied with the manner in which "this new global habitat [...] is a densely coded linguistic terrain", which "entails a certain surrender of self to the discursive perspective of the postmodern condition" (Kalaidjian 326). The work of the Language poets offers a way of exploring the effects of a global "consciousness" on language and the notion of the subject.

The work of the South African poets similarly registers and interrogates the manner in which a "global consciousness" impacts on notions of national identity and the subject. Drawing on a rich oral history, these poets actively exploit and subvert the association of the oral with pre-modern, "primal" poetic traditions. Indeed, many of the examples reveal that "the oral" is often deployed to disrupt the normalising effects of linguistic representation. Even while performing their "oral", ethnic identity for an international audience, these poets emphasise and problematise their own location within a global consciousness. They are seen to be talking back, critically, to the very Eurocentric discourse of modernization that would see them relegated to the narrow confines prescribed by the conventional "orality"/"literacy" divide. Performance becomes a means of not only exploring effects of the bifurcation "developed/developing", but also of suspending or abrogating this binary.

Thus, the South Africa described in and through this poetry is a site that exhibits extreme contradictions. Writing in 1990, Fredric Jameson noted that

the axis of otherness now designates the relationship between a generalized imperial subject (most often the US, but frequently enough also Britain, France and Japan, not to speak of those new kinds of metropolitan centers which are South Africa or Israel) with its various other colonies. (*Modernist Papers* 155)

Jameson identifies South Africa as metropolitan, westernised, and modern. However, in his 2007 biography of President Thabo Mbeki, Mark Gevisser notes that Mbeki came to revise the ANC's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy, "replacing it in 2003 with an understanding of how South Africa actually consisted of 'two economies', one modern and booming, and the other – in which most South Africans languished – increasingly underdeveloped and marginalised" (695). This suggests that the South Africa described by Jameson is not unproblematically "modern," and also that government continues to adhere to a notion of modernity as developmental.

The South African poets might therefore be seen to be responding to these contradictory material conditions during a period of what is described as "rapid globalization." Their relationship to "modernity" and "modernism" is registered in how they use language and multimedia in their poetry. In their critical interrogation of perceptions of Africa in the West, and of the South African government's neo-liberal economic policies and nation-building rhetoric, they also challenge notions of modernity in the content of their work.

A further dimension of my study, also related to issues of globalisation, is the recent proliferation of communication technologies. Many of my examples are taken from recordings that are available on the Internet, and I argue that this points to what Imre Szeman terms "the massive changes [...] clustered around the economic and social impact of new communications technologies and the almost unfettered reign of capital across the earth [...] that have radically redefined contemporary experience" (149). As scholars, we need to find ways of "reading" and analysing the impact of new communications technologies (such as cellphone cameras), and of the internet as a publishing platform, particularly in a country where many texts are being produced in the transient space of the embodied performance, and where entry into/access to more

established publishing forums is often limited by the fact that one is not "connected" to the right people, or not inserted in the right channels.

Broadly speaking, one could describe this thesis as an effort to understand the valencies of linguistic "performance" visible in the work of the Language poets and the South African poets. More specifically, I am interested in how these texts "perform" the extent to which the poets/authors are embedded in a "global culture," but also in a particular ethnicity/locality. I am also curious as to the manner in which these poets experiment with language, consciousness and the imaginative process, and how this "translates" into print and oral performances. In order better to understand the positioning of these poetries, it is necessary to investigate more closely the relationship between the terms "modernity/modernism," "postmodernity/ postmodernism," "postcoloniality/postcolonialism," and "globalization." A 1984 article by Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," provides a useful way for understanding these terms. As an article that would have been addressing a similar historical moment to the work of the Language writers, it offers an illuminating definition of terms describing the "modern."

Modernism and Modernity

Anderson offers an insightful summation of Marshall Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), in which he defines "modernity" as "a mode of vital experience," shared by men and women across the globe:

> To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. (Anderson 97)

"Modernization" is the term for the socio-economic processes propelled by the capitalist world market (97), which is constantly fluctuating and expanding. "Modernism" then, in Anderson's summary of Berman, is the name given to the variety of visions and ideas that "aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is

changing them" (Berman qtd. in Anderson 97). Linking the concepts of modernism and modernization is the historical experience of modernity itself, which is essentially developmental (97). For Berman, development refers to both economic development and self-development (98), the combination of which causes "a dramatic tension within the individuals who undergo development in both senses" (98).

Anderson points out that it is the momentum of unlimited self-development that assures the "world-historical continuity of modernism" (109), but it is also this momentum that "appears to undermine in advance any prospect of moral or institutional stabilization under communism" (109). Following Marx, Anderson notes that the self is "not *prior to*, but *constituted by* its relations with others" (110, original emphasis). The development of the self could therefore never be an "*unlimited dynamic*" (111, original emphasis), since the coexistence of others is always a limit, "without which *development itself could not occur*" (111, original emphasis).

The impasse of modernity can therefore be located in the notion of self and the modern imperative of self-development. It is exactly this question of the "self" and its construction in discourse that reveals some of the most interesting aspects of the texts under discussion in this thesis. The "self" that the Language poets were deconstructing was the modern self, striving for unlimited self-development. The "self" that the South African poets interrogate is one that is constantly shifting between subject positions both local and global. Anderson concludes that the imperial status quo of consumer capitalism is maintained by the seeming lack of a possible alternative (112). Contemporary society is caught in the crisis, described by Gramsci, of consisting "precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears" (Gramsci qtd. in Anderson 112). That which was modern soon becomes obsolete, and the term "post-modernism", according to Anderson, suggests "one void chasing another in a serial regression of self-congratulatory chronology" (112).

More recent theories of modernity seem to concur that it can no longer be understood as a *telos*. As James Ferguson notes, the narrative of modernity that "encoded a set of political promises (in the context of decolonization and national independence)"

44

(185), has been called into question. These promises suggested that "[i]f you are dissatisfied with your conditions, just wait; your society is moving forward and moving upward" (Ferguson 185-186). The promise of a modern future utopia might be understood within the concept of the *eschaton* – a new world, or a new world order.[18]

Theorists like Susan Stanford (2006), who are critical of a teleological notion of modernity, propose instead the possibility of multiple modernities, which "create multiple modernisms" (427). Stanford notes that "colonialism is constitutive of Western modernity" (427), and she warns Western theorists not to "close the curtain on modernism before the creative agencies in the colonies and newly emergent nations have their chance to perform" (427).

Arguing that the nationalist and liberation movements of postcolonial countries are central to "the story of their modernities" (427), Stanford emphasises that these newly emergent nations are engaging their creative forces in "producing the modernisms that accompany their own particular modernities" (427). She concludes that it is a logical error to call these postliberation arts "postmodern", as often tends to happen. For Stanford, multiple modernities create multiple modernisms, which require a respatialising, and therefore a reperiodising of modernism (427).

However, James Ferguson points out that by abandoning an understanding of modernity as a *telos*, one "de-developmentalises" the question of rank (186). When this happens, the "stark status differentiations of the global social system sit raw and naked, no longer softened by the promises of 'not yet'" (186). The promises of modernization therefore increasingly appear as broken promises, "and the mapped-out pathways leading from the Third World to the First turn out to have been bricked up" (187). Once the idea of a temporal sequence is removed, one's location in the hierarchy "no longer indexes a 'stage of advancement.' Instead, it marks simply a

---

[18] Commenting on the treatment of time in the South African film *Jerusalema*, Dawid de Villiers suggests that the film explores the extent to which the "revolution", which is itself a phenomenon of modernity, has propelled South Africa into post-modernity (13). Post-1994 South Africa might thus be seen to be in the "eternal present of the *eschaton*" (De Villiers 12), a futureless world.

rank in a global political economic order" (Ferguson 189). Thus, the de-temporalization of modernity yields a terrain of "alternative modernities", of "hybrids and bricolage, of creative invention and emergent new possibilities" (189). However, this de-temporalization also results in a modernity that is now no longer promised as a *telos*, but has "come to be simply a status – a standard of living to which some have rights by birth and from which others are simply but unequivocally excluded" (189).

Ferguson's point above may be read usefully alongside Africanist Tejumola Olaniyan's response to the criticism leveled at postmodernism and postcolonialism in African studies. As an example of a critical African response to postmodernism's decentering of the subject, Olaniyan recounts a joke, told to him by his African-American teacher:

> [T]he non-Western peoples have long been attacking the master's exclusive and exclusionary privileged mansion …; when finally they succeed in smashing down the doors – to subjectivity, to self-representation – the master, potbellied with satiation, came out, teeth-picking and belching, to claim that there was never anything of value in the mansion of the subject anyway. So, why are you guys trying to get in? (638)

This joke illustrates one African perspective of postmodernism, which is here presented as a hypocritical discourse, "preemptively fashioned to salvage what remains of the fast fading cultural authority of the Western Story" (Olaniyan 638). However, as Olaniyan argues, postmodernism's deconstruction of the subject and the attendant reservations regarding "self-authorizing programs of knowledge or action" (639) might be liberating for the African Humanities.

By debunking the West as universal norm, and in so doing promoting a notion of multiple histories, postmodernism has enabled a widening of the field, such as, for example, the "acceptance of oral tradition in the construction of African history" by the conservative history establishment (Olaniyan 640). Additionally, Olaniyan points to the oppressive effects of the hegemonic discourse of African nationalism, and suggests that a postmodern suspicion of truth claims allows for a "critical self-consciousness" of the passions evoked by nationalist rhetoric. Olaniyan also notes

that the "metaphysics of postmodernism" are "quite close to those of many African cultures" (641), in that postmodernism strives for a "metaphysic of egalitarianism", a norm already entrenched in the mostly polytheistic African cultures (641). He concludes by suggesting that there is "a historically informed, socially conscious" version of postmodernism, and it is from this practice of postmodernism "that the best of postcolonialism, in spite of ideological difference of particular articulations, has borrowed" (644).

In placing these observations by Stanford, Ferguson and Olaniyan in juxtaposition, it becomes clear that the concepts "modernity"/ "modernism" and "postmodernity"/ "postmodernism" are highly contested. Stanford argues for the notion of multiple modernities, which would produce multiple modernisms. Ferguson, in turn, is critical of the discourse of "alternative modernities", arguing that its application to impoverished regions of the globe "risks becoming a way of avoiding talking about the non-serialized, de-temporalized political economic statuses of our time, and thus, evading the question of a rapidly worsening global inequality and its consequences" (192). Olaniyan catalogues the critiques by African scholars against postmodernism, but argues for a historically informed, socially conscious postmodernism that might usefully apply to the African humanities.

The relations between the concepts modernism, modernity and postmodernism are important to my comparison between the Language poets and the South African poets. Both groups seem to be responding to an historical moment of rapid and visible modernisation, and to the modernist visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation (Berman in Anderson 97). These poets address the impasse of modernity that arises from the idea of the self and the modern imperative of self-development by performing a decentring of the subject – a characteristic of postmodern cultural practice. In the work of the South African poets in particular, this decentring is often linked to an awareness of the subject's localised identity within a globalised culture.

A prose poem, "Hanging Participle", by Ana Kente, which appeared in volume 15 of *Chimurenga*[19] magazine (2010), is a good example of the effect on notions of self and subjectivity attendant on the shift from modernity as *telos* to modernity as status. Moreover, a close analysis of this poem allows me to illustrate the manner in which I conceptualise the relationship between "modernity," "postmodernity," "postcolonialism" and "globalization" in this thesis. Volume 15 of the magazine takes as its theme: "The Curriculum Is Everything." Proceeding from the question "What would the curriculum be – if it was designed by the people who dropped out of school so that they could breathe?" (*Chimurenga* online), this issue of *Chimurenga* proposes alternatives to prevailing pedagogies. *Chimurenga 15* is presented as a school textbook, but it "simultaneously mimics the structure while gutting it ... Through a classification system that is both linear and thematic, the textbook offers multiple entry points into a curriculum that focuses on the un-teachable and values un-learning as much as its opposite" (*Chimurenga* online).

This volume of *Chimurenga* can be described as a writerly text, one that forces the reader to work harder in reading and organising the content. Its structure is reminiscent of Barthes' *S/Z*, in that each section is multiply "tagged," allowing one to trace various paths through the text, reading one section several times, each time in a new regrouping with other sections, thus foregrounding different aspects in a particular piece every time the organisation changes. In this way, the text performs the manner in which meaning is assigned to a particular text in relation to the other texts around it. It is a form of hyperlinking between texts, using a logic that has been very successful in electronic communications and knowledge sharing.

There is no biographical information available for the writer of "Hanging Participle" – according to the editors "Ana Kente" is a pen name. The poem, which might best be described as a prose poem, is therefore explicitly positioned as existing by itself, not attendant on the contextualisation that knowledge of the author would provide. I reproduce it here in full:

---

[19] *Chimurenga* (the word means "struggle for freedom") is a "Pan-African publication of culture, art and politics based in Cape Town" (*Chimurenga* online). It was founded by Cameroonian Ntone Edjabe, co-editor of the *African Cities Reader*. The 2010 and 2011 issues of *Chimurenga* were characterised by formally innovative design and organisation of content.

I am becoming. I have the proof. Documents, photos, evidence.
Raise the right and you are an American. They give you a
passport. Your new identity. You are Tri-lingual. Name how
many: one. two. three. Stripes are there on the U.S. flag? And
you learn the Preamble, Bill of Rights, First Ten Amendments.
The right to bare arms and show some leg. It makes no
difference. You learn you are not one of them, they treat you
with indifference. Papers in order but the words give you
away. Every pause. They ask your identity. They comment on
your inability to speak clearly. They want to know your station.
Ask to check the baggage. You open your mouth half way. They
check each article. Question you on foreign articles, past
participles, hanging-
They say you need to learn. To say   said

                                                  saying.

If only you would speak more slowly!!! Take on their
punctuation. Learn the demarcations. To have the same sound,
the same name. The sounds that move one at a time.
rule,ExceptionE ' r-t , stops and starts again roo hll but
exceptions. Stop. Start. Starts. Contractions. N oise.
Sembla.naoef noise. . " Broken speechO. ne to onei, a iirne. l r -,
Crackedt ongue..Broketno 'ngue. 'Pidgeon.S emblanceo f
Sp'eech. \ Eflortless. It should be eff ortless. Effort lf,ss fu the
closeri t is the closeltro it. Swallows.I nhales.S tutter.$
ta 1 ts,,Stopbse fore)' starts. ! ; I About to. Th'en slops. Exhale :
swallowed-

The poem raises some of the key points in my discussion. Positioning American
nationalism[20] as the standard of a global nationalism, the version of modernity that

---

[20] Minxin Pei, while codirector of the China Program at the Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace, in 2003 published an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine in which he
briefly outlined the "Paradoxes of American Nationalism." Pei notes that, although

you *want* to inhabit, the poem invokes the relationship between (Imperial) America and the "rest", focusing particularly on the dominance of the English language in the successful performance of a self as global subject.

The poem opens with the statement, "I am becoming." In so doing, it draws on the conventions usually associated with the lyric "I," a position that implies an autonomous, identifiable, coherent self as speaker. However, this stability of self is immediately undermined by the fact that the "I" here is "becoming," it is evolving through a process of change. This process of "becoming" is then described as forensic – it can be verified: "I have the proof. Documents, photos, evidence."

Despite this forensic proof of self, however, the poem registers a sudden, unnerving shift from being addressed by an "I" to being addressed as "you",[21] thereby simultaneously engaging and distancing the reader. French linguist, Emile Benveniste, discussing the nature of pronouns and the construction of subjectivity in discourse, notes that the instance of "I" refers to something exclusively linguistic, namely to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and designates the speaker (226). By introducing the situation of address, "you" is by extension defined as "the individual spoken to in the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *you*" (Benveniste 218). For Benveniste,

---

"nationalism is a dirty word in the United States, viewed with disdain and associated with Old World parochialism and imagined supremacy" (31), America is nonetheless a very nationalistic country. Pei suggests that American nationalism is driven by civic voluntarism, rather than state coercion (34), and the expressions of American nationalism are therefore so commonplace that they are "virtually imperceptible, except to outsiders" (34). Pei lists the achievements of science and technology, military strength, economic wealth and "unrivaled global political influence" (32) as factors that generate national pride in the United States. Additionally, Pei suggests that American nationalism is triumphant and forward looking, as opposed to other nationalisms which he notes are often aggrieved, looking to their past as a golden moment, to be recuperated. This dynamism, according to Pei, "imbues American nationalism with a missionary spirit and a short collective memory" (34). Pei's overview of American nationalism reveals a nationalist sensibility based on political beliefs and characterized by the tenets of a developmental modernity. Pei presents the American sense of nationalism as being closely tied in to a perception of America as a modern, advanced state embracing universal principles.

[21] See Carol Clarkson's article "Locating Identity in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*" (2005): "The novel is written in the second person, which has the disorienting effect of simultaneously distancing, but engaging the reader in the implied community signalled by the 'our' of the novel's title" (451). Mpe's text offers an example of the kind of shifts in subject position, and the reorientation demanded of the reader, that one also encounters in the work of the South African performance poets.

[c]onsciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person* … Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. (225)

For the speaker in the poem to make the shift from "I" to "you" implies a move from a first-person actor to a second-person "receiver," the addressee of the speaker's utterance. The speaker in the poem, the "I," seems to be in the process of applying for American citizenship. S/he is "becoming," they "have the proof" of their American citizenship, they've "raise[d] the right [hand]" (but also, perhaps, the "right" to belonging), they "are an American," they've got the (paper) "evidence," they've been given their new passport, their "new identity."

However, it is in the exact moment that s/he "becomes" an American that the position of the speaker changes from first person to second person. This suggests that the act of becoming an American subject entails a discrepancy in self – there is who you are, and then there is what they see you as being. This overtly dramatises the ambiguity of becoming an American subject. A sense of self-consciousness enters, and this seems to underpin the shift from "I" to "you". When a speaker refers to him- or herself as "you", s/he is in effect occupying the positions of both subject and addressee in the moment of utterance. This has important implications for notions of location, since the referents "I" and "you" can only be interpreted in the moment of use. If the same person occupies both positions at the same time, a sense of doubling and dislocation is introduced. The distance between self and other is collapsed, which would potentially have grave consequences for the individual's consciousness of self, since the contrast is removed. At the same time, however, this "doubling" of the self is also indicative of the distance introduced between the "self" that emerges from a particular locality, with particular speech habits and gestures, and the "self" as an American citizen.

The fact that the distinction between subject and addressee collapses in the moment where the speaker enters into an "American" identity is furthermore significant because it foregrounds the process whereby the nation has become, as Gikandi notes,

"both the form that structures modern identities and the sign of their displacement and alienation" (635). This description of an individual's entry into American citizenship, into the American nation, suggests a global individual, one who can remake him/herself if only s/he follows the correct procedures, has the right papers, can repeat the correct information.

Most nationalisms are generally associated with a shared cultural or ethnic identity. American nationalism, however, is based not on race or ethnicity, but on a sense of shared, universal values (Pei 34). Because there is "no American race, only an American creed" (George W. Bush qtd. in Pei 34), it is possible to become an American by following the correct procedures and rituals. This raises the question of nationhood as it currently stands within the notion of a "global culture". Simon Gikandi argues that, in transnationality, the nation has become "an absent structure", an "apparatus" which still holds "enormous symbolic power", but which is also "the mechanism that produces what [Homi] Bhabha calls 'a continual slippage of categories'" (635). He goes on to list these categories as "sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference'" (Gikandi 635). The nation therefore becomes "both the form that structures modern identities and the sign of their displacement and alienation" (635).

This move is clear in the second point that I wish to raise, namely the relationship between nationhood and language, which is more fully explored in chapters four and five. The example of "Hanging Participle" emphasises the powerful link between language and nationality. It is through language that citizenship is granted: a foreigner applying for citizenship may have the right papers, "but the words give you away". As the *lingua franca* of the global polity, English is presented as the "global" language, the language of modernity. It no longer belongs to the English (Ndebele 89), and therefore no longer signifies a particular "Englishness," or English national identity. However, in "Hanging Participle," English is the language of the new (American) imperial master. The "foreign" linguistic "baggage" that the speaker carries in the form of accent and grammar marks him/her as an outsider, resulting in him/her being subjected to linguistic policing.

The poem equates this policing of language with the policing of body, in the form of the baggage search that travelers are subjected to when entering a foreign country: "They comment on your inability to speak clearly. They want to know your station. Ask to check the baggage. You open your mouth half way. They check each article. Question you on foreign articles." In this particular moment, or context, some articles become "foreign", and the speaker is considered suspect because of his/her speech, which calls his/her "station" into question. This results in a baggage check for any "foreign" articles that s/he might be carrying. The intimate particularity of an individual's speech is laid bare and forensically probed in the service of state security, just as their intimate belongings are exposed to scrutiny and classification. It is at this moment that the self is divided.

It is not simply the "foreign articles" of baggage that "you" bring into the country that mark "you" as "not one of them", but also the "foreign articles" of speech, the differences in demarcations, in sound:

"They say you need to learn. To say   said

                                                              saying."

This line is the fulcrum of the poem, both typographically and formally. Typographically, the arrangement of the simple past tense "said" and the present participle "saying" on their own on the right hand side of the page draws attention to these words, sets them apart and also brings about a clear divide between the two stanzas/paragraphs of the poem. Formally, this divide marks the beginning of the breakdown of language, performed in the second paragraph. Furthermore, this arrangement draws attention to aspect markers, to the notion of tense in language, the way in which time is indicated grammatically. Conjugations of the irregular verb "to say" can present difficulties for those studying English as a second language. Not only does the speaker not "say" whatever it is s/he needs to "say" in the "right" way, but s/he is also in the wrong "time" in language. His/her "foreign articles" mark him/her as being from another place, as well as in another time.

Ferguson explains that the developmental narrative of modernity and modernization that followed World War II understood the world as "a collection of national

societies" and allowed inequalities to be read as "the result of the fact that some nations were farther along than others on a track to a unitary 'modernity' ... The effect of this powerful narrative was to transform a *spatialized* global hierarchy into a *temporalized* (putative) historical sequence" (177-178).

Once the idea of a temporal sequence is removed, a sense of possible advancement is lost, and the subject is confined to a rank ("station") in the global political economic order. The possible subject positions that the speaker in "Hanging Participle" might occupy as a "global" citizen are thus severely limited. From the point of view of the gatekeepers of modernity, "they" who *have already* "arrived," "they" who are *already* "developed," the speaker is relegated to a position in time that is *behind* in terms of development. The de-temporalization suggested by the term "globalization," forever traps the speaker within that position, characterised by *lack.*

"Hanging Participle" performs in an interesting way this moment of alienation, and the manner in which this alienation is registered on the body, in the tongue. The title itself suggests a slippage, an ambiguity caused by a "dangling" modifier that does not explicitly attach to a particular subject or object. As the speaker moves from the position of one who "is becoming" a subject of the American empire, to one who learns that s/he will "never be one of them" because s/he does not "sound" right, the language becomes deformed, as the subject loses his/her promised position in a global symbolic that holds out the (empty) promise of inclusivity in a "successful" polity.

Furthermore, although the boundaries of "nation" are supposedly more fluid or open under global capitalism, the poem seems to suggest that, paradoxically, the moment a "[t]ri-lingual" speaker attempts to claim his/her status as global citizen s/he is excluded on the basis of how s/he sounds. For the speaker in "Hanging Participle," it is no good "simply" to take on a new identity, to have the proof, to "raise the right." Ultimately, you need to "[t]ake on their punctuation. Learn the demarcations. To have the same sound, the same name." Implicit in this description is the notion of a unitary language – one shared language that functionally serves for commerce and communicative purposes, where all speakers have "the same sound" for a referent, the "same name". A language, then, that does not allow for slippages, misunderstandings and irruptions of the body.

This is a moment of disjuncture: the supposed cultural heterogeneity, represented in what Arjun Appadurai calls "global *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*" (qtd. in Gikandi 628), is revealed as its opposite, namely cultural homogeneity. The moment of disjuncture is preceded in the poem by the recognition that it is on the basis of language that you are included or excluded from power. Disjuncture is marked by the deformation of the language, which is now no longer grammatically, syntactically, or semantically correct. The eloquent, cosmopolitan, global citizen of the first paragraph is deformed into a stuttering, broken speaker. There is no longer an identifiable subject around which the fragments might be made to cohere.

It thus becomes the *reader's* responsibility to work to make meaning apparent. The fragments of "sense" that can be made from this deformed language allude to the idea that there are exceptions to every "roo hll".[22] The rules of individual languages help users to negotiate the stream of signification, to structure sounds and their meanings in ways that allow other users to make meaning. In other words, the rules of a language facilitate communication in that language. When the sounds (or graphemes) that the user produces can no longer be organised according to the accepted rules, they becomes excess, noise rendering the text incoherent.

In the poem, the speaker's "Broken:speechO" recognises its own status as "N oise". It is not speech but the semblance of speech, a pidgin language: "'Pidgeon.S emblanceo f sp'eech. \". Through these fragments, we have glimpses of broken and cracked tongues ("Crackedt ongue..Broketno 'ngue"). What "should be eff ortless," namely speech, becomes, laboured, interrupted by the "Stop. Start. Starts. Contractions." and the "Swallows.I nhales.S tutter.$" of the body. The poem ends with the speaker "About to", but then caught again in the repetition of "Exhale : swallowed-"

The hyphen on this last "swallowed" implies something that is to follow, an extension of the idea, but the reader, like the speaker, is left in this moment of stutter, of

---

[22] However, the difficulty in negotiating the exceptions to the rules is also apparent in the idea of American exceptionalism: "[t]he United States regularly undermines global institutions in the name of defending American sovereignty", according to Minxin Pei (36). Pei cites the U.S. government's rejection of multilateral agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as examples of U.S. national interests that seem at odds with the "universalistic rhetoric and ideals Americans espouse" (36).

hesitation, of repetition. In this way, I would argue, the poem performs a "sounding," in print, of the status of the "global" subject in an "alternative" modernity.

Postmodern and Postcolonial

The sense of sudden suspension, of being locked in a repetitive stutter has an interesting implication if one considers the terms "postmodern" and "postcolonial" as marking a type of repetition. The addition of the prefix "post" *seems* to designate that which comes *after* a particular event. The term "post-apartheid," for example, designates the particular period after the end of apartheid. It encourages the inference that apartheid has ended, that South Africa is now temporally located "after apartheid". However, a close look at spatial organisation and movement of people in South Africa quickly reveals that a palpable sense of "separateness" still organises the day-to-day interaction of South Africans. To claim that South Africa is "post" apartheid is to elide this fact.

The prefix "post" is a modifier, and conjoining it with another word creates the impression that a new time has come, a time that is different from that which preceded it. However, the prefix "post" suspends this event that is supposedly in the past, setting this past moment before one and presenting it as determinative. It forces the language user constantly to look back to a particular moment, an "Event", which then comes to define the present moment. A term like "post-Vietnam" sets up the Vietnam War as the Event, which appears as a disjuncture between one period and another. The "post" here marks this moment as a kind of watershed, separating two periods from each other. This creates a false sense of the possibility to start anew, of a tabula rasa. At the same time, in using it we are forced to conceptualise our own moment in relation to the Vietnam war, to look for ways in which our moment is somehow different from this moment of "Vietnam".

However, it is not just the prefix "post" which gets repeated *between* these terms, a repetition that I would argue is syntagmatic, since it establishes a time-awareness and marks a difference between one moment and another. The words that are modified by the prefix "post" are also a form of repetition. This form of repetition can be termed paradigmatic, because a plethora of meaning is subsumed under the modified word,

and this word can be substituted for other words. Take the word "postmodernity" as an example: the word obviously repeats the word "modernity", despite ostensibly signifying a period different from this modernity. The word "modernity" becomes a metonym, a quick reference for a very complex and multivalent phenomenon, which has not affected everyone similarly. This metonymic function is problematic, since it subsumes/assumes particular modes of modernity, as well as attitudes towards this phenomenon, which are implied whenever the term is used. To speak of "postmodernity" is to take everything subsumed under the metonym of "modernity" and to suggest that these things are all frozen into one moment, a moment that has passed, after which things are now supposedly different. In the term "post-colonial", to use another example, the "post" elides completely all history before the colonial period, and thus reduces the significant history of the "post colonial" country to the 150-odd years of colonisation.

In a 1992 article, cultural studies theorist Ella Shohat interrogates the term "post-colonial" semantically. She critically situates it geographically, historically and institutionally in order to consider questions at stake: "Which perspectives are being advanced in the 'post-colonial'? For what purposes? And with what slippages?" (Shohat 100). Shohat's critique of the term "post-colonial" raises some key issues with the manner in which the language of "post" is being used to screen out continuing social, political and economic inequalities and neo-colonial hegemony. She notes that the term "postcoloniality", like the terms "post-structuralism", "post-modernism", "post-marxism" and "post-feminism", "marks a contemporary situation, condition or epoch" (Shohat 101), and that all these terms share the notion of "a movement beyond" (101).

However, while these other "posts" refer to "the supercession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic and political theories" (Shohat 101), the term "post-colonial" implies "both going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history, that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles" (101). This aligns "post-colonial" with another set of "posts": "post-war", "post-cold war", "post-independence" – which all evoke an entry into a new period, and "a closure of a certain historical event or age, officially stamped with dates"

(Shohat 101). The prefix "post" can thus be seen to operate at two levels: it signifies a moment in *time*, but it also signifies a particular *status*.

Shohat goes on to show that the term "post-colonial" is furthermore imbued with an ambiguous spatio-temporality (101): spatially problematic, since its users can collapse "very different national-racial formations" (101) as equally "post-colonial"; and temporally problematic, since the lack of historical specificity in the "post", leads to "a collapsing of diverse chronologies" (103), which equate countries that gained independence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with those that only gained independence in the mid to late twentieth century (103). The "post", because it signifies "after", implies the end of colonialism, thus glossing over the fact that "global hegemony, even in the post-cold war era, persists in forms other than overt colonial rule" (105).

Shohat's analysis provides a way of thinking through what one might call the "language of 'post'" under global capitalism. The "stutter", and repetition of "post" currently in use allows for the collapse of spatio-temporal differences, thereby eliding ongoing global inequalities, exploitation and aggressive foreign policy.

Globalization

Globalization is an effect of modernity. Imre Szeman notes that globalization is characterised as "an amorphous term for the present, an analytically suggestive and yet confusing concept that binds epistemology and ontology together, as a term that is potentially all things to all people and can be bent to multiple purposes" (150). This definition or characterisation does seem to position "globalization" as the successor to the term "postmodernism", which "was intended to do similar kinds of work" (Szeman 150), although the two terms are of course not grammatically equal. Globalization rather than postmodernism would now seem to carry out the "periodizing task" of "naming the contemporary moment" (150), albeit it with more attention to "the material realities, struggles, and conflicts of contemporary reality on a world-wide scale" (150).

Szeman points out, however, that there are in fact instructive differences between the two terms, "especially with respect to the situation of criticism and poetics at the present time" (150). "Postmodernism" was a term that initially denoted a particular aesthetic category, used to describe styles of architecture, literary strategies and artistic movements (150). It later came to be used as a description of "the general epistemic or ontological condition of Western societies" (Szeman 150). Critics of postmodernism found the term inadequate as an aesthetic descriptor, since they considered postmodern forms to be simply more modernist forms (Szeman 2007: 150). Furthermore, critics such as Kwame Anthony Appiah have queried postmodernism's "overreaching ambition at global applicability (was the 'post' in 'postmodernism' really the same as the one in 'postcolonialism'?)" (Szeman 151).

The term "globalization", by contrast, has little to do with aesthetics or even culture. As Szeman notes, it is "meaningless" to insist on a global aesthetic style (151). So, while postmodernism "comes to our attention through various formal innovations that prompt us to consider symptomatically what is going on in the world to generate these forms, globalization seems to invert this relationship" (151). It does so by emphasizing the manner in which relations of politics and power are restructured.

Additionally, the move of economic production from the national to the transnational level is foregrounded in the concept of globalization, as well as the "lightspeed operations of finance capital" (Szeman 151) and "the social impacts of the explosive spread of information technologies" (151). The "category of representation", so central to the debates and discussions of postmodernism, thus seems to become suspended with globalization (151). The "contemporary reality" which globalization names is "meant to be immediately legible in the forces and relationships that are always already understood to be primary to it and to fundamentally constitute it" (151). Thus, the comparison between postmodernism and globalization highlights the lack of a formal relationship between contemporary cultural production and the dominant named by globalization.

Globalization appears to explain itself, and so there is little reason to look to culture to make sense of this dominant, which "seems to have transformed culture on the one hand into a mere entertainment whose significance lies only in its exchangeability, or

on the other, into a set of archaic cultural practices" (152) that are impotent to describe or explain contemporary reality.

Noting the anxieties about the decline of culture that this analysis suggests, Szeman points out that there is another crucial difference between globalization and postmodernism, which is that postmodernism "was never a public concept in the way that globalization has turned out to be" (152). According to Szeman, the postmodern was mostly confined to universities, making no more than a "tentative leap" into the public domain as a way of understanding the design of a new building, or "in sweeping dismissals of the perceived decadence of the contemporary humanities" (152).

Globalization, by contrast, describes "a politics that extends far beyond the establishment of artistic categories to the determination of the shape of the present and the future – including the role played by culture in this future" (153). Szeman furthermore points out that, while the academic debates around globalization do point to the unstable relationship between the "realities the term points to and its heuristic role in grappling with these realities" (153), there does seem to be public consensus that the word names a process that is "economic at its core. Globalization is in this sense about accelerated trade and finance on a global scale, with everything else measured in reference to this" (153).

The public discourse on globalization insists on "the basic, immutable objectivity of these economic processes" (Szeman 153) and understands these processes as now lying "at the core of human experience, whether one likes it or not" (153). In this way, the discourse of globalization transforms "contingent social relations" into "immutable facts of history" (Szeman 153), much in the same way that "[o]ld-style political economy reified capitalism by insisting that existing social relations would extend indefinitely and unalterably into the future based on their origins in the very nature of things" (153). Globalization thus becomes a master narrative, and all other concepts, ideas and practices become redefined in relation to it (Szeman 157).

Importantly, however, the narrative of "good" capital has been necessitated by the globalization of production, since the social realities of this production can no longer

60

be hidden away, as Fredric Jameson describes, in those "colonies over the water whose own life experience of the world […] remains unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of imperial power," (*Modernist Papers* 157). The "complex, dispersed modes of contemporary production" (Szeman 157) have in fact "drawn ever more attention to the social relations embedded in commodities" (157). Hence, "the commodity today can no longer be depended on to buttress capitalism by shielding from view the social relations that create it" (157). The narrative of globalization responds to this by claiming the inevitability of these social relations and providing a future-oriented utopic vision of a global community in which "the traumas of the present will be resolved in the fluid shuttling of freely traded goods around the world" (Szeman 157). This suggests that the narrative of globalisation is teleological, since the concept of interminable globalisation seems unsustainable and illogical.

The poetries addressed in this thesis address the effects on language of this "shuttling of freely traded goods" as well as the "shuttling" of people around the world, and the effect of these movements on language. The Language poets address the moment that is the advent of this process of globalization and global capital, while the South African poetry is situated in the moment of global flux, and produced in a space which is marked by the co-existence of two divergent worlds, the so-called developed and the under-developed.

Both Language poetry and the South African poetry register disruptions of the subject in language under global capitalism. The following chapter, "Language Limits", which establishes my theoretical framework, outlines the language theories and attendant theories of self that have influenced my understanding of the possible function of the poetics under discussion in this thesis. Following several of the Language poets, I adopt Wittgenstein's concept of the "language game" which suggests that all language activities are related to one another in many different ways. The language activities by which we constitute a self therefore overlap with the language activities we call "poetry," and we might fruitfully look at poetry to understand this constitution of self in language. I also draw on Bakhtin's concepts of the unitary language, heteroglossia, and the dialogic in order account for aspects of the poetry that emphasise the poem as dialogic construction and the self as contested and multiply furcated site of the utterance. Lacan's theory of "private language" and

the subject allows me to theorise the self in language as constituted through a dialogic process. Lacan is also very useful in considering the implications of those elements of language that might be considered "redundant" for communication.

Chapter two, "They do not know what a syllable is", provides an overview of the social and theoretical context of the Language poets, and their poetics. In Chapter three, "Nothing's discrete", I illustrate, through close analysis, the extent to which Language poetry foregrounds the materiality of language and its processes, as well as the poem as material object, inserted in the flows of production.

Chapter four, "BUTISITA RT", establishes the importance of understanding the work of South African poets such as Rampolokeng and oa Magogodi in relation to the influence of the Soweto Poets of the 1970s, and the attendant influence of Black Consciousness on the poetics of these performance poets. In chapter five, "Am I a tourist or a terrorist", I explore through close analysis the many ways in which a text might be understood to "perform" in South Africa, as well as the extent to which the poets can be seen to purposely perform their ethnic identity, only in order to subvert the expectations that this performance might elicit from their (global) audiences. I also consider the manner in which the South African poets incorporate and play with deformations and disruptions in language as a constitutive part of their performance.

In my concluding chapter, "Sharing the 'I' in South Africa", I consider what the wider implications of a study of "deformed" or disrupted language might mean in South Africa, a society that celebrates its multilingualism whenever it engages in a nation-building project such as the hosting of the 1995 Rugby World Cup or the 2010 Soccer World Cup, [23] but which continues to struggle with the successful and equal advancement of all languages, with English remaining the South African *lingua franca*.

---

[23] In an article which traces the extent to which the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 2010 Soccer World Cup prompted an identity realignment, acted as a spur in the development of South African English, and promoted South African national identity (267), Brenda Spencer notes the extent to which linguistic creativity around the 2010 Soccer World Cup imported vocabulary from African languages into South African English (275). Spencer illustrates how these imports served to construct an image of South Africa as multilingual and inclusive of all the different cultural groups.

Returning to Antjie Krog in the conclusion, I offer an example of the wider applications of an attention to "deformed" or "opaque" language, by considering her collaboration with two other South African academics in their investigation into the seemingly incoherent testimony of Mrs Notrose Nobomvu Konile. While foregrounding what they perceive as the acute precarity of Mrs Konile's position as a subject in language in the "new" South Africa, the final manuscript of this investigation, published in 2009 under the title *There was this Goat*, in itself performs the authors' own negotiation of subjectivity in language within the particular South African context. The manuscript gestures towards the ways in which non-lexical elements of language are vitally important to an intercultural South African encounter. When "read" as a performance, the manuscript reveals at the structural level the preoccupations with subject position and representation inherent in a collaborative interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, multilingual project in South Africa.

Chapter One

Language Limits

I have shown in the Introduction how I position the work of the Language poets and the South African poets as responding to questions of modernity and processes of globalisation in their respective contexts. I have suggested that both poetries reveal a fragmentation or a dislocation of the speaker, thus foregrounding ways in which notions of self and subject are constructed within language at this "global" moment. A "deformation" of language – the material interruption of the medium – is apparent in both poetries, an aesthetic that I argue not only serves to "perform" the poets' sense of the *materiality* of language, but also radically alters the distance between poet-performer and reader/audience, thus causing a collapse of what Canadian poet and scholar Steve McCaffery (1991) calls the "functional separation that derives from a traditional transit model of communication" (166).

In this chapter I wish to outline briefly my primary theoretical approaches in addressing the significance of these deformations in the poetry. Three primary issues arise from an encounter with these poetic experiments, namely: the delimiting function of language, particularly as it establishes frameworks for analysis — in other words, the (pre)formation of expectations about a particular text;[24] the representation of the putatively "global" subject, inserted in a network of global travel, trade and communication; and the *de*formative and *per*formative effect that disruptions of media could have on content.

In addressing these issues, I draw on key concepts by theorists Ludwig Wittgenstein, Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan. These theorists have provided a useful framework for my study, not least because they all address, in their various ways, the construction of the frame in any dialogic encounter. I also draw on the work of Media theorist, N. Katherine Hayles, adopting her concept of "intermediation" in order to discuss the interplay of various media that we encounter in some of the poetry under discussion, especially that of the South African poets. Hayles is also preoccupied with

---

[24] Here I would like to assert again that the term "text" in this thesis is used to refer not just to print or written language but to *cultural* texts, to the artefacts of culture, including speech acts and acts of "performance."

the kind of textuality that a "dispersed, fragmented and heterogeneous view of the subject might imply" (106), and her work therefore provides a useful vocabulary when discussing the relation between the fragmented subject and the opaque, deformed text.

Wittgenstein's concept of the language game proposes an overlap between various language activities, and I would like to use this idea to suggest that the poetries I am discussing perform these "overlaps", exploring and revealing the intersection between the construction of meaning in language and the construction of self. In the following chapters, I address what might be considered a "Wittgensteinian poetics," to quote Marjorie Perloff (*Wittgenstein's Ladder* 181-188), in the sense that the poets in my selection, especially the Language poets, are particularly preoccupied with the "bedrock of grammatical structure" (187).

Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the dialogic construction of the utterance as a relationship between speaker and addressee is key to the manner in which the idea of "performance" is adopted in this thesis. Bakhtin suggests that the utterance is always constructed towards a respondent, one who will hear and respond, and in responding, constitute the speaker as a subject in discourse. Furthermore, in order to address the manner in which language politics and the interplay of languages in a multilingual space might manifest as disruptions in language, I also adopt Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and a unitary language.

Finally, in order to theorise the manner in which my selection of poets approach issues of the construction of the subject in language, I draw on the work of Jacques Lacan. Since much of the poetry under discussion appears opaque and unintelligible, Lacan's notion of the "private language" of an individual provides an analytical tool, which emphasises the extent to which communication relies on socially agreed upon conventions. The observable evidence of private language reveals the interplay between the individual and the "symbolic order" – the pre-existent linguistic order through which the subject is constructed in relation to meaning. Also useful in Lacan is his insistence on those elements of language considered to be redundant to communication. For Lacan, these putative "redundancies" are in fact the very elements of language that account for resonance in speech, which is the activation of

language.

All these theorists consider the construction of meaning in communication to be a social act, embedded in material culture. The construction of meaning and, by extension, of the subject, cannot be disentangled from the social context in which meaning is produced. This is important in understanding the poetry under analysis, since this poetry often sets out explicitly to foreground the materiality of language, as well as the manner in which it is activated and constructs the subject in a particular material context. Keeping in mind Imre Szeman's notion of a global poetics, discussed in the Introduction, this focus on the material might be read as a resistance to the linguistic promise of something beyond language that has become central to capitalism.

Exploring the association between capitalism and reference in language, Steve McCaffery takes Marx's notion of commodity fetishism – the "occultation of the human relations embedded in the labour process" ("Intraview" 189) – as the central point for his argument. He suggests that reference "is a strategy of promise and postponement; it's the thing that language never is, never can be, but to which language is always moving" (189). For McCaffery, this "linguistic promise that the signified gives of something beyond language" (189) has come to be central to capitalism "and derived from an earlier theologicolinguistic confidence trick of 'the other life'" (189). McCaffery posits that, to "demystify the fetish" and to reveal the human relationships that underpin the "labour process of language" (189) will involve

> the humanization of the linguistic Sign by means of a centering of language within itself; a structural reappraisal of the functional roles of author and reader, performer and performance; the general diminishment of reference in communication and the promotion of forms based upon object-presence: the pleasure of the graphic or phonic imprint, for instance, their value as sheer linguistic stimuli. (189)

Here, the reader is required to be a producer, and the need to produce is brought on by instituting an opacity in language ("From the Notebooks" 161). Seemingly "opaque" texts disrupt the communicative function of language, refusing the reader an easy,

66

transparent access to "content", and might therefore be understood as an example of "private language". Indeed, Marjorie Perloff, one of the leading American critics of contemporary poetry, suggests that poetry is an "ostensibly private language" (*Radical Artifice* 3), thus drawing a link between the inaccessible language of "self" and poetry as a language activity.

The overlap between the language activities we call poetry and the language activities by which we construct the self is also registered by Lacanian scholar Anika Lemaire, who points out that the patient in psychoanalysis "plays with words just like the poet" (44). Lemaire notes that the important difference between the language of the patient in psychoanalysis and the language of the poet is that "the assimilations, comparisons or operations which [the patient] effects between signifiers are sometimes new and strictly private" (44). This "private language" of the individual is a kind of idiolect,[25] and its existence reminds us that language extends beyond a socially agreed upon, communicative function. The signifier is revealed as transient, multivalent and arbitrary.

The multivalent nature of the sign can be compared to the process whereby dreams displace and condense the signifier. Psychoanalysis suggests that manifest content is determined by latent dream material (Lemaire 44). Each detail of the manifest content is derived from several details borrowed from a "common store" of latent ideas (44). Lemaire describes the relationship between the latent and the manifest as web-like: "diverging threads" lead from each manifest detail to a store of latent ideas, but alongside these exist other threads, which go from the latent to the manifest "in such a way that a single latent idea is represented by several details in the manifest" (44). The final image is one of "a complex network of criss-cross threads" that forms between the manifest and the latent (44).

Similarly, poetry, through its processes of displacement and condensation, metaphor and metonymy, exploits and explores the many connections that run between one signifier and the referents that attach to it, as well as from a particular concept to the many signs that might signify it. This image of criss-crossing threads suggests sites of

---

[25] A term borrowed from Derek Attridge, who uses it in his book, *The Singularity of Literature*.

intersection, of a possible entanglement. The image of an "entanglement"[26] is one that persistently recurs throughout the theories on which I draw: it is present here in Lemaire's reading of Lacan; Wittgenstein suggests that we are entangled in our own rules of language, and that the entanglement itself should be the very object of study; for Bakhtin a concrete utterance is always entangled with the object at which it is directed, shot through with the multitude of concrete worlds, "bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" that are created by social life and the uninterrupted processes of "historical becoming" ("Discourse in the Novel" 288). Finally, for Hayles, subjectivity and reality itself are increasingly entangled with communication media (86).

Additionally, the notion of "entanglement" is also associated with theories of modernity. Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn identifies two types of entanglements. Firstly, he mentions the constitutive entanglement of modernity and tradition, "coming out of the infinitely variable incompleteness of every modern rupture with the past, and out of the plasticity of most traditions" (295). Modernity is thus conceived as an ongoing process, shot through with remnants and traces of the past and older traditions. Secondly, Therborn points to the geo-historical entanglements "of the very different but significantly interacting and mutually influencing socio-political roads to and through modernity" (295). The cultural and institutional entanglement of global modernities and the implications of this entanglement for the language of self are registered both in the content and the form of the poetries under discussion in this thesis.

Terry Eagleton, in his *How to Read a Poem*, suggests that in poetry, "form and content are inseparable in this sense – that literary criticism typically involves ... grasping the semantic (meaning) in terms of the non-semantic (sound, rhythm, structure, typography and so on.)" (67). Poetic language generally tends to draw more attention to itself as language, since it "exploits the resources of language more intensively than most of our everyday speech" (67). In everyday speech, the word tends to become a

---

[26] This image of "entanglement" recurs in all the theoretical approaches outlined here, as well as in the work of South African scholar Sarah Nuttall, where it is used to describe the inextricable relationship between races ("Literary City" 207), between "surface and underneath" ("Stylizing the Self" 91), the modern and the African (Mbembe, "Aesthetics of Superfluity" 39).

seemingly transparent transmitter of meaning. As Eagleton points out, "[o]rdinary language, like history for Nietzsche or the ego for Freud, operates by a kind of salutary amnesia or repression" (68). He goes on to suggest that poetry and everyday speech are both language organised so as to "generate certain effects" (89), but where everyday utterances usually "skim over the flavour and texture of words in order to achieve their ends", poetry has as one of its aims the "exploration of words in themselves" (89). So how is the poetry under discussion different from poetry in general?

The Language poets take language itself as their subject. While the poetry is concerned with the materiality of language, insofar as it is preoccupied with form, it works to deform discourses, or to foreground the deformation of discourse, so as to make apparent the process of repression or amnesia at work in everyday speech. Thus the poems work to disclose the manner in which linguistic expression operates, in order to explore issues of social meaning.[27] The South African poets are perhaps not as overtly and theoretically engaged in language experimentation, but language and the colonisation of one language by another are perennial preoccupations in South Africa, and these find their way into the poetry, registering at semantic and lexical levels, but also at non-semantic levels. The examples that I refer to in the following chapters are preoccupied with the everyday use of language, but at the same time the poems and the interplay of their modes of dissemination work to foreground the deformation of language as it moves through various spaces and media. It is necessary, then, to look more closely at the concept of language itself, before proceeding with an overview of the particular theoretical approaches that provide a vocabulary for my analysis.

In his *Ecrits* of 1966, Lacan urged psychoanalysts to bring the "psychoanalytic experience back to speech and language as its grounding" (85). Speech (or any other form of address to an other) activates language, and places the speaker in a position where he or she awaits the response of the one who has been addressed. Lacan suggests that speech, in its symbolising function, moves towards a "transformation of the subject to whom it is addressed by means of the link that it establishes with the

---

[27] See Geoff Ward's summary of the Language movement in his article "Language Poetry and the American Avant-garde".

one who emits it – in other words, by introducing the effect of a signifier" (91). Lacan calls for a return to the structure of communication in language, noting that the notion of "language as a sign" is mistaken, "a source [in psychoanalysis] of confusions in discourse and of malpractices in speech" (91).

Lacan points out that if we conceive of the communication of language as a "signal by which the sender informs the receiver of something by means of a code" (91), then *all* signs emanating from the individual should be granted credence. In fact, these signs seem more "natural" than language, so are more likely to be granted preference as a mode of expression by analysts. Lacan holds this notion of "language as a sign" to be inadequate, for he shows that, while bees communicate through a complex "code, or system of signalling" (92), this system is

> distinguished from language precisely by the fixed correlation of its signs to the reality that they signify. For in a language, signs take on their value from their relations to each other in the lexical distribution of semantemes as much as in the positional, or even flectional, use of morphemes, in sharp contrast to the fixity of the coding used by bees. (92)

In other words, language, for Lacan, is characterised by the shifting meanings that pertain to the sign, and that are constituted by the sign's relation to other signs. Meaning in language is only established through the relation of signs to each other, as opposed to the "code" of the bees, where each sign has a fixed and immutable meaning. Lacan goes on to note that the message transmitted by the bee moves the entire socius to action, but is never retransmitted by it. "This means that the message remains fixed in its function as a relay of the action, from which no subject detaches it as a symbol of communication itself" (Lacan 93). For Lacan, this is not language, because in language the message could be detached from its original function by any one of the social subjects, and made to mean something else.

So, to think of "language as a sign" is misleading, for if language were a sign, it would operate in the way that the communication between bees takes place, and this process does not allow the message to be taken up, to be retransmitted by others. It is in this process of retransmission that language is revealed to be in excess of the sign,

because it is through retransmission that slippages in meaning occur. If language were a sign, meaning would always be fixed, and misunderstandings would be impossible.

Slippages occur at the material level of language: in mispronunciations, or illegible graphemes. Additionally, the material way in which words are used in daily life changes over time, so that a glance through the dictionary should be enough to alert the user of language to the fact that meaning can in no way be considered to be "fixed" or static. Indeed, for Lacan, "it can be observed that the more the function of language becomes neutralized as it moves closer to information, the more language is imputed to be laden with redundancies" (94). These redundancies might be phonetic material, as in Lacan's example below, but may also be physical and visual aspects of a text. One might argue, then, that there are language activities that strive to reduce the possibility of "redundancies" as much as possible, but then there are those activities that exploit or accentuate these "redundancies," such as poetry. For Lacan, "what is redundant as far as information is concerned is precisely that which does duty as resonance in speech" (94).

Lacan identifies speech as the activation of language. It is addressed towards the other, who must respond, either to confirm or to reject the speaker. In Bakhtin, we will see that the speaker is the site at which various discourses converge. Slippages and disruption occur in the dialogic moment and are due not only to the mutability of language itself, but also to the material irruptions and interruptions of the body of the language-using individual. When we speak or write, we transfer by way of a material medium (the body) the language that structures our perceptions in consciousness. In the process of transfer from consciousness to speech or writing – in its *mediation* – a part of the whole is lost in service of clear communication. The language of the individual speaker is modified in keeping with the agreed upon rules that govern communication. Those elements of language deemed to be in excess of the communicative function are excluded from the communicative act.

Lacan uses the example of the long-distance telephone to illustrate the way in which "superfluous" tones are compressed, and therefore "superfluous" information is lost, in order to facilitate long-distance telephonic communication (94). So the redundancies of speech that Lacan refers to are the interferences of the body on the

language that is being activated. For Lacan, the subject in language can be located at the site of speech – the self is that which is constituted by these redundancies, that which cannot be mediated. The redundancies of language are those elements that reveal the embodied/embedded activation of language. Poetry, as a language activity that manipulates and magnifies these "redundancies," affords the possibility of tracing the constitution of the speaking self.

The idea of self is closely linked to the question of voice. Voice is the particular sound produced in a person's larynx and uttered through the mouth, in the form of speech or song. However, in written form, "voice" also refers to the particular "sound" of an imagined speaking subject. This "voice" is activated in print through the use of particular literary devices – it is constituted in the form. "Voice" thus tends to be regarded as constituted by and representing the unified "self", imbued with the authority and coherence of a self-present speaker.

Drawing on Régis Durand, Steve McCaffery, writing in 1999, notes the volatility of voice "as a cultural and psychoanalytic concept positioned between reality and representation, and functioning as both a metaphorical support of pure time and a physical production" ("Voice in Extremis" 162). This highlights the difficulty in defining "voice", since it is both the body *and* the authority of the self-present subject, constituted socially through the symbolic order.

McCaffery furthermore identified two scenarios for the voice in poetry apparent in the twentieth century ("Voice in Extremis" 163). He defines the first as "a primal identity, culturally empowered to define the property of person" (163). McCaffery describes this phenomenological voice as self-evident, serving as the "unquestionable guarantee of presence – when heard and understood through its communication of intelligible sounds this voice is named conscience" (163). The second scenario, "renegade and heterological" (163), requires the voice's primary drive to be *away* from presence (163). "This second is a thanatic voice triply destined to lines of flight and escape, to the expenditure of pulsional intensities, and to its own dispersal in sounds between the body and language" (McCaffery, "Voice in Extremis" 163). McCaffery traces aspects of this second scenario as the "adventure" of voice through the twentieth century.

Providing an overview of the various avant-garde poetries that have attempted to free voice from language, McCaffery states that language, "be it sonorized, pulverized, deracinated, plasticized, lacerated or transrationalized … still resists an ultimate demolition. Voice, as a consequence, remains subordinated to the dictates of a graphism" ("Voice in Extremis" 165). McCaffery concludes that voice can never "escape a minimum signification" ("Voice in Extremis" 171), because, following Durand, "[t]here is no such thing as a neutral voice, a voice without desire, a voice that does not desire me" (Durand qtd. in McCaffery, 171). This description evokes again Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic construction of the utterance.

Kathleen Crown notes in a 2003 paper that recent investigations of poetic sound tend to focus "primarily on the tension between sounds and meaning" (221). Consequently, these studies suggest that sounds do not necessarily have to "mean" anything, that it is "precisely their antidiscursive quality that can provide the foundation for meaning in poetry" (Crown 221). Crown chooses to extend this idea by considering the "sonorous excess found in some recent poetry not only in terms of semantics but in terms of its access to knowledges that have been subjugated or relegated to the realm of the unconscious" (221). Here again, the vocabulary of psychoanalysis is useful: these excesses are excesses related to the material – to sound via the body. They are markers of a repressed knowledge, alternative referents that are excluded, through the function of ideology, from the symbolic order and thus seek to be known in other ways. Crown goes on to note that sound is often used by avant-garde theorists as a disruption or explosion of the speaking voice, thereby to separate "voice" from the "human intentionality residing in a speaking body," since "voice" is seen as "irredeemably mired in humanism's illusions of a monologic, self-present lyric speaker" (222).

As has been noted, the Language poets are particularly suspicious of the link between "voice" and the monologic, self-present lyric speaker. An example from the work of Language writer Bob Perelman illustrates how one might go about performing the conflation of voice and self. In his poem "Things", we read:

> Reification won't get you out of the parking lot.
> Nor will mastery of the definition of sounds

> in the throat, the bottomless pit, out of which
>
> these things which we, transparent, self-refuting
>
> hold to be self-evident. (500)

The poem clearly echoes and invokes the American Declaration of Independence:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (Declaration of Independence, online)

This invocation suggests a critique of the universalistic rhetoric of the Declaration, a rhetoric that underpins the American national identity (see Pei). Attendant on this point is the privilege that this rhetoric accords the self-developing individual. The poem suggests that in the pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness, "you" have instead ended up trapped in the capitalist dystopia of the parking lot, which conjures images of urban sprawl – the malls and office parks of a consumer-driven economy.

Against the background of this critique of the language of national identity, Perelman explores the processes by which language under capitalism is reified, keeping "you" in this parking lot, the limbo of capitalist modes of production and consumption. In "Hanging Participle", discussed in the Introduction, we saw how the speaker's subject position in language is eroded as it becomes apparent that she has not mastered the sounds in the throat satisfactorily. Here, Perelman foregrounds the process by which the subject as "transparent" and "self-refuting" – in other words, a subject that is present to itself but denies its own presence in the process of producing meaning – is constituted as a "we", thus pointing towards the cultural and social matrix from which the "definition of sounds" is produced.

Perelman is suggesting that, even were you to master these definitions of sounds, you would still be stuck in the parking lot, since these "definitions" are already socially determined. Assigning a particular value to these sounds, and thereby excluding a multitude of other potential values, appears to reduce the material object to a limited meaning. However, the object is always more than the meaning assigned to it in a

particular context. It is the potential of the excluded meaning that constantly threatens to disrupt or destabilise the sign.

Ron Silliman, also associated with the Language movement, suggests that when a language moves through a capitalist state of development, we can trace "an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word" ("Disappearance" 125). This "transformation" coincides with a corresponding increase in the descriptive and narrative capacities of the word, which Silliman identifies as "preconditions of the invention of 'realism', the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought" (125). Like McCaffery, Silliman concludes that these developments are tied to the nature of reference in language, "which under capitalism is transformed (deformed) into referentiality" (125). Thus, mastery of definitions of sounds will not get you out of the parking lot either, since under capitalism the "tangibility", the materiality of the word, is replaced instead by an idea of the word – a rarefaction of the word, so to speak.

In Perelman's poem, then, the self-refuting, transparent "we", in holding the definition of sounds (and rights) to be "self-evident", prevent "you" from ever leaving the parking lot. The point that creates the center of this situation both semantically and typographically (in the sense that it is the third line of six) is the throat, "the bottomless pit".[28] It is situated in the middle of the stanza, between reification and the transparent, self-refuting subject. It is flanked to the left by "sounds" which are "in" it and to the right by "things"[29] that come out of it, "things" that the transparent, self-refuting we "hold to be self-evident". Note, also, the repetition of the comma placement in lines three and four:

> in the throat, the bottomless pit, out of which
> these things which we, transparent, self-refuting

---

[28] An image evoking Munch's "The Scream", where the very silence necessitated by the medium of the canvas underscores, performs, the scream of the subject, with the mouth and throat a vortex or "bottomless pit" at the center of the painting.

[29] Silliman notes that "[t]he world of natural and self-created objects is decidedly different from the world of things […] A thing is at once both the end product of a labor process and a commodity of general social consumption. A thing is a schizoid object ... A world which is made up of such dual projections can only be resolved when the forces of production control both the means of production and consumption" ("Disappearance" 125).

This repetition creates a secondary center in line four, with the word "transparent", flanked by "we" and "self-refuting". A relationship is thus created, through this process of mirroring, between the central phrases/words in each line, namely "the bottomless pit" and "transparent". Furthermore, the repetition of the comma placement emphasises the order of the words in line four, thereby foregrounding the word "transparent". This word, from the Latin *transparere* – "shine through" – is the "second center" in this stanza. Consider the various connotations associated with the word "transparent". *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* ("The world's most trusted dictionaries") suggests the following:

1 allowing light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly seen.

2 obvious or evident.

3 open to public scrutiny.

4 Physics transmitting heat or other radiation without distortion.

5 Computing (of a process) functioning without the user being aware of its presence.

Several of these connotations come to bear on the function of the word "transparent" in the poem. The comma placement creates a shifting center, a dynamic between "the bottomless pit" and "transparent". The material process by which we make sounds functions "without the user being aware of its presence". Furthermore, the process of assigning meaning to this "bottomless pit" and the sounds that come from it is taken to be obvious and self-evident.

Perelman is pointing out that these sounds which are in the throat are turned into things that come out of it by the processes of meaning making, which rely on social construction and agreement and result in the illusion of a unified speaking subject. The body – as throat, as sounds in the throat – is a site on which "we" map the meaning of "these things" that come out of it. By imposing "text" on the body, by turning objects into "things,"[30] we attempt to hide the bottomless pit itself, in which and out of which sounds (and tics or gestures) constantly come that resist or disrupt

---

[30] In another poem by Perelman, "Let's Say", from the same collection: "A page is being beaten/back across the face of 'things.'/Inside me there's a little book of no color, its pages riffling/as I breathe, a moving point, torn out" (499).

meaning – that signify something other than intended. Our attempts to "master" the definition of these sounds are fruitless, since the "pit" is "bottomless."

Bruce Andrews, setting out a poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, notes that the language in the texts of the Language poets "*calls you out.* It is more presentational or theatrical, less given to auratic or cinematic absorption" ("Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" online). He points to the "smoothness of editing" that is needed to sustain the illusion of a centered subject, and notes that "[w]ords gain **force** by dispelling the illusion that Language is at *my* disposal (and that certifies me as a legitimate disposer, as a safe subject)" ("Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" online, original bold and italics). In other words, if we are to "escape" the parking lot an effacement of "self" needs to take place. As Andrews notes:

> Any fixed rendition of the self is put in danger.
> Empowering of the language works as a self-disempowering.
>
> The subject suppressed (as a control tower) to pluralize the meaning.
> ("Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" online)

Attempts, like those of the Language poets, to place language itself centrally, to "empower" language, necessitates a disempowering of "self", since the illusion of a centered subject can no longer be sustained in this work. In order to pluralise meaning, the subject, as a "control tower" which "guides" meaning in a seemingly objective fashion needs to be suppressed.

This awareness of the subject "as a control tower" is apparent in a short poem by South African poet Lesego Rampolokeng:

> to the thought control tower
>
> please
> let me out
>
> i'm trapped

77

> inside
>
> your head
>
> (*The Bavino Sermons* n. pag.)

Rampolokeng's poem performs the dilemma of the subject in its Möbius-strip logic. The "i" addressing "you" seems to hail the reader, activating a dialogic relationship between the reader and the speaker. However, by the end of the poem, the speaker is "trapped inside your head". This move emphasises the relationship between reader and text, especially since, for a reader reading silently, "i" really am inside "your" head. The speaker's earlier plea to the "thought control tower" to "let [him] out" now becomes an appeal to the reader not to impose his/her own constraints on the text.

Apart from the speaker/reader relationship, the play of "i" and "you" in the poem might also be read as the speaker addressing himself. In this case, the poem performs the experience of the seemingly self-conscious "I", trapped in the body ("head"), and yearning to transcend the constraints of the "thought control tower". Yet another reading of the "i" trapped in the head of the "you" suggests the extent to which the self is socially constituted, and cannot "turn back upon itself as a distinct individuality, thus allowing inter-human communication" (Lemaire 53).

Rampolokeng's poem thus performs the manner in which the subject is constituted in discourse, *and* a sense of "self" that seems in excess of, and bound or limited by the body. The apparently self-present lyric voice is doubled and split, speaking back to itself while at the same time the constitutive relationship between text and reader is foregrounded.

For Lacan, the function of language "is not to inform but to evoke" (94), to set up the relation between the "I" and the "you", and in this, his work reads productively alongside Bakhtin's. Lacan holds that, in speech, we seek the response of the other. However, in order to identify myself in language, I have to lose myself in it "like an object" (Lacan 94), one that is "in the process of becoming" (94). This sense of being like an object in the process of becoming is brought about by the fact that, once language has been activated, we are inserted into a temporal flow in which we wait for a response from the one to whom we have directed our address. It is from this

position that

> I call the person to whom I am speaking by whatever name I choose to give
> him, I intimate to him the subjective function that he will take on again in
> order to reply to me, even if it is to repudiate this function. (Lacan 95)

This implies that the function of language is not to inform another, but to evoke
another, to constitute oneself as a subject by addressing oneself to an other, be they
physically present or imagined. The function of the reply is not "simply to be received
by the subject as acceptance or rejection of his discourse, but really to recognize him
or to abolish him as subject" (Lacan 95). Thus, language is the site of subjectivity, the
matrix in which we are socially constructed. It is the process by and through which
we constitute ourselves in relation to others.

Citing Noam Chomsky, Anika Lemaire outlines the process through which the self is
constituted in language:

> animals and small children live in a world of 'states' and not in a world of
> 'objects', in a world, that is, without order or coherence. Language alone
> allows the order of the world to be instituted, and then allows acts of reflexion
> and of consciousness upon the world and upon sense impressions to be carried
> out. (51)

This suggests that language firstly allows us to demarcate, to delimit the flow of
sensory impressions, to name and identify them, to give them distinct contours.
Having achieved this, we are now able to objectify these sensory experiences, to
reflect on our relationship to them. Thus, it is the limit itself that enables the
experience in the first place.

Language allows us to name the world, to position ourselves in relation to that which
is "not I". It is through language that societies construct and reproduce their cultures
and attitudes. Language and ideology produce fixed relations of predication for/in the
subject (Ellis and Coward 7). Thus, language not only seems to describe my world, it
also describes my position in the world, and through its rules and grammars (its

79

"limitations") places me in a particular relation to the world: subject or object; active or passive; noun or verb; tragedy or comedy.

For media and cultural studies scholars Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Lacan's theory

> provides the foundation of a materialist theory of the subject in the social process, a subject constructed as always already included by those social processes, but never simply reducible to being a support. Lacan's subject is therefore this new subject of dialectical materialism: a subject in process. (93)

In order to gain access to the subject in process, Lacan places emphasis on the determinacy of the signifier – language – in the construction of the individual as subject (Coward and Ellis 93). This emphasis on language allows for a conception of the "subject produced in relation to social relations by the fixing of its signifying chain to produce certain signifieds" (Coward and Ellis 93).

For Lacan, language is not reducible to ideology. Symbolic relations "are the positions necessitated by predication, i.e. a subject different from and able to differentiate within a predictable outside" (Coward and Ellis 93). Thus, while language is not reducible to ideology, the symbolic relations that it predicates "are always manifested within ideological formations" (93). A foregrounding of the non-lexical elements of language are a possible way of illuminating the symbolic relations predicated by ideological formations. In his 1970s lectures, Lacan formulated the concept of *lalangue,* which Slavoj Žižek describes as designating the "remainder" of the symbolic order, evidence that language "'ran amok' and started to speak by itself, bypassing the domination of meaning … as well the violent inscriptions of 'pathological' power relations" (108). Our desire to relegate the disruptions of lalangue to the realm of "noise" or interference points toward a privileging of a particular function of language – the semantic function. This privilege is itself ideologically predetermined.[31]

---

[31] Using psychoanalytic theory in conjunction with the notion of a contextual frame begs the question of whether these two theoretical approaches can indeed be married. I would argue that the "frame" is predicated on the ideological positioning of the individual who is

We use language to describe the earth[32] "in order to make a world of it", as Charles Bernstein notes ("Introduction" 20), to organise it in a particular way and to fill it with meaning. Furthermore, in this process of "naming" the world, the individual becomes aware of himself as a distinct entity, and language is the precondition for this act of "becoming aware" (Lemaire 54). "Naming" allows the individual to keep his distance and autonomy from "the world of real things which he posits 'in themselves' as being different from the concepts which convey their meaning and different from the words or symbols which actualize concepts in the social relation of communication" (Lemaire 54). At the same time, however, language is also the "vehicle of a social given, a culture, prohibitions and laws" (Lemaire 54). The individual enters this symbolic order with its multiple dimensions, and is marked and shaped by this order, without being aware of it (Lemaire 54).

Language is thus conceived as a system, the symbolic order into which entry must be gained for the individual to acquire her or his individuality or status as member of a society. However, "entry into the symbolic establishes a distance with regard to the lived real and organizes the web of the unconscious in everyone" (Lemaire 55). The individual, then, does not stand independently of the system, using it as he or she "intends", but is in fact constituted by the system itself and therefore being spoken by language as much as speaking it.

This system of language, however, should not be thought of as monolithic, or unitary. In his *Philosophical Investigations,* Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests that the process by which we learn and establish the rules of language is analogous to the way in which a game proceeds (66), and in his concept of the language-game he draws an analogy

participating in or perceiving the event, that the "frame" is constituted by the particular symbolic relations at play in any given moment. Therefore, a shift in the position or shape of our frame requires an awareness of how ideological positions influence the relations between signifiers within the symbolic order.

[32] By "earth", I mean the physical, material globe on which we live, while "world" refers to the way in which humans socially construct an understanding of the earth. Media scholars Rickert and Salvo (2006) use the term "worlding" to describe the "complexly interrelated matrix of community and identity formation, transformative technologies and the practices it gives rise to" (299). They conclude that "worlding" carries a double sense: "It is the aesthetic realm that a visual-musical work invites us to both enter and immerse ourselves in, and it is the constellation of production pathways and inputs — people, communities, technologies, and networks — that are simultaneously evoked with each aesthetic world. These two senses of world are tightly imbricated if not inseparable" (313).

between language and games. Wittgenstein addresses the question: What is the essence of a language game, and hence of language? (65) He rejects the idea of "producing something common to all that we call language" (65), proposing instead that those activities that we call "language" are "*related* to one another in many different ways" (65, original emphasis). It is because of these relationships that we can call all these activities "language" (65). For this reason it is possible to argue that the language activities by which we constitute a self overlap with the activities that we call poetry.

Wittgenstein compares the notion of relational language activities to the "proceedings we call games" (66), using the term "game" as his particular example. He notes that as we comparatively pass from board-games to card-games to ball-games in their "multifarious relationships" (66), we find correspondences between groups, but "many common features drop out and others appear" (66). Thus, our understanding of the word "game" constantly changes as we move conceptually from one group of games to the next.

The result is a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein 66). However, as with games, in language we "lay down rules, a technique for a game", and then, "when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed" (Wittgenstein 125). The fact that things do not turn out as we had intended implies that we are "entangled in our own rules" (Wittgenstein 125), and this "entanglement in our own rules is what we want to understand" (125), since it reveals our particular relation to language, our expectation that meaning can or should be stable. When a contradiction in language becomes apparent, we might say: "That's not the way I meant it". We activate language according to our understanding of the rules, but language has a way of slipping out of those rules, taking on a life of its own.

What is the connection, then, between language operating beyond the rules or technique laid down, and Lacan's redundancies in language? Both these examples show up the prevailing expectation that language be as transparent as possible, so as to limit ambiguity and misunderstanding. Rules and limitations are techniques for

structuring language in a particular way, identifying and excluding those aspects of language deemed "redundant".

This suggests that such "redundancies" are identifiable only in relation to "functionality", and that any aspect of linguistic performance could be constituted as "redundant". In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I consider the TRC testimony of Mrs Konile, an example that illustrates the extent to which those elements of her "linguistic performance", deemed "redundant" by the translators and transcribers of her testimony, were vital to understanding her testimony. In the case of Mrs Konile, the "rules of language" laid down by the TRC are clearly shown to play an active part in making Mrs Konile more, not less, incoherent. It is only in recuperating the elements of Mrs Konile's testimony that had been deemed "redundant" that the text begins to open up for the authors, albeit at the cost of their own sense of subjectivity.

In particular kinds of performances, distortion would be something to avoid, since it might signal disfunctionality. Other performances, such as Krog's example of the Bamako poets in the Preface, incorporate that very dysfunctionality, working it into the texture of the performance. Sometimes, features of language that have previously been functional may become redundant. However, all those elements considered redundant were not necessarily once functional. This suggests that there is no utopic linguistic situation where meaning is fixed and stable.

The poetries in the following chapters foreground the manner in which certain functions of language become "redundant" as language is limited to the function of information. The poetry also performs the extent to which we are entangled with our own rules. The texts do not conform to standard practices of reading or engagement with the text, demanding instead a material engagement, that is, an engagement with the materiality of language, as well as the mode of dissemination.

Hayles notes that, to think of textuality as instantiated rather than dematerialized, dispersed rather than unitary, raises the problem of what might then be defined as a text (103). She suggests that one way of thinking about texts as embodied entities "without falling into the chaos of infinite difference," is to think of the materiality of an embodied text as "the interaction of its physical characteristics with its signifying

strategies" (103). Hayles imagines these embodied texts spread out along "a spectrum of similarity and difference" (104), allowing clusters to emerge – an image once again evocative of Wittgenstein's language-games:

> Texts that differed only slightly would occupy adjacent points (say, different editions that closely matched each other in physical characteristics), whereas outlying members of the cluster might include texts in different media (Braille rather than print, an electronic version of a print text, a film version of a novel, etc.). These clusters could usefully be considered to constitute a 'work,' without implying that 'work' is a single convergent object. (Hayles 105)

In other words, Hayles proposes that we do away with the notion of an "original" version of a particular text, and think instead of a work in terms of all its variations and how they might be seen to "perform" the work in their different ways.

However, something that we need to keep in mind with the game analogy is that not all games are equal. Not everyone plays equally well according to the rules. The nature and rules of the game often actively exclude certain people from playing. Additionally, select games are accorded a particular "aura", they are used to perform certain key functions, such as we see in the examples of South African rugby, soccer and cricket. These games are infused with an epic aura, invested with the task of nation building, their players accorded heroic status in the national imaginary. This extends to the idea of literary practice. Certain literary forms are imbued with a particular aura, are made to perform as "national literature". As with games, in literary practice there are gatekeepers, those who police the game. Consequently, not everyone is considered good enough to play a particular literary game, and not all games are considered equally important.

Wittgenstein proposes that when investigating meaning, a philosopher (and, I would argue, the poet and the scholar of poetics) must consider the variety of uses to which a "symbol", "word" or "sentence" (23) is put. By introducing the concept of the language-game in order to address the "countless different kinds of use" (23) for words or propositions, an unfixed "multiplicity" (23) of "types of language, new language-games" (23), Wittgenstein, brings into "prominence the fact that the

speaking of language is part of an activity" (23). Language-games are thus materially embodied/embedded, and through the concept of the language-game, we can foreground the multiplicity of language, as well as its socially constructed nature (a point which links, conceptually, with Bakhtin's theory of the construction of the utterance).

In a very extensive list of examples of language-games, Wittgenstein includes

>Giving orders, and obeying them—
>
>Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—
>
>Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—
>
>Reporting an event—
>
>Speculating about an event—
>
>Forming and testing a hypothesis—
>
>Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams—
>
>Making up a story; and reading it—
>
>Play-acting—
>
>Singing catches—
>
>Guessing riddles—
>
>Making a joke; telling it—
>
>Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—
>
>Translating from one language into another—
>
>Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (23)

This is an incredibly divergent list, and for Wittgenstein we "remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike. Something new (spontaneous, 'specific') is always a language-game" (Wittgenstein 224). In a sense, the poetry that forms the focus of my investigation is made up of different language-games. It provides a large field, in which several games are at once juxtaposed to each other, and the poetry operates at the point at which the boundaries of these games overlap.

Poetic language allows one to consider the particular weight of a word, and to see the traces of the various games. Furthermore, where narrative structures itself around some form of plot resolution, thereby settling anxieties that are produced around

discourse, the poetry under analysis often works specifically to expose and exploit these anxieties. It alerts the reader/listener to this particular element of language, and the effect is to present the reader with the challenge to read/hear differently, to take up the rules of the poem and to play the game. However, in the work of the Language poets in particular, these are often a series of interrupted games.

Additionally, the concept of the language-game also helps us to think about the manner in which "poetry" itself is defined. For Bakhtin, the language of lyric poetry excludes "extraliterary social dialects", which he takes to be the exclusive province of prose fiction (Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder* 183). However, as Perloff notes, recent poetic experiments like those of the Language poets do accommodate these extraliterary dialects (*Wittgenstein's Laddre* 183). The notion of a "separate" language for poetry has thus become increasingly problematic. The concept of the language-game allows for a more flexible understanding of how different language activities relate to each other and overlap. In the work of the Language poets we find the writers taking language itself as the object of their formal innovations/investigations. This poetry, as well as that of the South African performance poets, incorporates extraliterary social dialects as part of its performance of the operations of language.

I would therefore like to argue that the "poetic" language encountered in the work discussed in the following chapters is always already a performance of the multivalency of the signifier, already attuned to the materiality of sound and typography in language. As with the concept "game", it might therefore be useful to think of "poetry" as a concept that may be both "blurred" at the edges, an "uncircumscribed" concept (Wittgenstein 68), or defined by "rigid limits". That is, we may use the word "poetry" for a "rigidly limited concept, but [we] can also use it so that the extension of the concept is not closed by a frontier" (68). We cannot give the boundary, we can only draw one (68).

This suggests that, while the idea of the limit is inherent to language, it is through our particular use of language that the limits of our world are determined. It is by imposing/employing a particular form that we demarcate the limit of a word, proposition or statement. However, this form is only available to us through language. Form is the boundary, the limit, through which the meaning of the content is narrowed

down and determined. The language-game teaches us the rules of form, it offers us new forms. Through discursive markers we are able to recognise a particular genre or style, and know how to interpret its content.

The relation between poetry and the language-game has been theorised by Marjorie Perloff, who examines what she calls "Wittgensteinian experiments" in the "articulation of a poetics of everyday life" (*Wittgenstein's Ladder* 22), looking particularly at how contemporary North American poetic experiments are analogous to language-games (20). Perloff notes that "[i]n the poetic composition of the 1980s and '90s [Wittgenstein's 'philsophical remarks'] have increasingly provided poets with lyric paradigms" (200), and suggests that, in the poetry of such practitioners as Ron Silliman, Rosmarie Waldrop and Lyn Hejinian, associated with the Language movement, "the Wittgensteinian poetic ... becomes increasingly overt, even as it also becomes the occasion for parody and play" (200).

While Wittgenstein's work informs some of the poetic experiments under analysis, it also allows a useful way of theorising those that are not directly informed by his work. For Wittgenstein, what we should endeavour to understand is our "entanglement with our own rules". I wish to approach these poems as language-games, a term that is meant to bring into prominence the fact that speaking language is part of an activity.

This notion of an activity or performance in turn brings into focus the dialogic structure of social relations, for what is a performance if not something directed at an (imagined) Other? I argue that the poetic experiments of the Language poets and the South African poets all foreground this notion of (per)forming an utterance for an other. Thus, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the construction of the utterance provides a way of understanding those elements of the poems in performance on the page or the stage that foreground and emphasise the dialogic nature of the act of reading or listening to these poems. Where Wittgenstein imagines that we are entangled in the rules we have laid down for language, Bakhtin suggests that every utterance is entangled and shot through with a myriad of other discourses, points of view, shared thoughts and alien judgments. The self, the site of the utterance, is the site of entanglement – and it is this site of entanglement that, according to Wittgenstein,

should be the site of linguistic investigation.

In Bakhtin's work, "language is not something static" ("Literary Stylistics" 114), "given once and for all with strictly determined grammatical 'rules' and 'exceptions' ... it is in constant flux, its development following that of social life" (114). Furthermore, the social diversity of speech types, or heteroglossia, is often sharply opposed to official, or accepted literary language ("The Heteroglot Novel" 115). For Bakhtin, all languages of heteroglossia are "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own meanings and values" (115). Indeed, "[a]t any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word" ("Social Heteroglossia" 75), but also into socio-ideological languages, and from this point of view, "literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages — and in its turn is also stratified into languages" (75). Literary language, in other words, is yet another language-game, made up of many different language-games.

Bakhtin points to what he calls a "unitary language" as "a system of linguistic norms" that are "generative forces of linguistic life", creating within the "heteroglot national language[33] the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia" ("Social Heteroglossia" 74). This unitary language should not be taken "as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 74). Again, this notion of the delimiting function of the unitary

---

[33] Here I would like to underscore the point that South Africa has 11 official languages. While English might be seen as the lingua franca, imposing its specific limits on realities of heteroglossia in the country, its status is not officially secured. In addition to this, South Africans are very suspicious of linguistic hegemony. The apartheid government's attempt to create one national language by imposing Afrikaans as the language of instruction for black South Africans lead to the uprisings in the 1970s, which inform the chapter on SA poetry. The South African language policy entrenched in the 1996 Constitution, acknowledges the heteroglot nature of South African society, and this seems to trouble the creation of a stable linguistic nucleus for an officially recognised literary language. Perhaps the ongoing anxieties and debates around the current status and future of South African literature might be understood within this framework.

language which will ensure a "maximum of mutual understanding" evokes Lacan's notion that particular elements of language increasingly become "redundant" as the function of language moves closer to information. This "unitary language" acts as a "centripetal" force of language, of "linguistic unification and centralization" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 74), and is seen to act as a force for overcoming the "centrifugal" forces of heteroglossia.

As I've suggested, the work of the Language poets as well as the South African poets often strains against the limitations of the "unifying" quality of poetic language as described by Bakhtin. These poets explicitly orient their work in relation to the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia. These linguistic experiments attempt different ways of revealing and exploiting the many striations of the "heteroglot national language".

The language-games that these poets engage in often foreground the manner in which the centrifugal forces of language are in constant tension with the centripetal forces of language. It is in the "concrete utterance" of the speaking subject that these forces are brought to bear, according to Bakhtin. Any concrete discourse, or utterance, "is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 76), weaving in and out of, merging, recoiling and intersecting with "complex interrelationships" (76), all of which may "crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile" (76).

Bakhtin posits expressive and referential factors, which establish the *intent* of the author, as the factors that stratify and differentiate the common literary language, rather than the linguistic markers of generic language ("Discourse in the Novel" 292). These linguistic markers are considered to be "the sclerotic deposits of an intentional process, of signs left behind on the path of the real living project of an intention, of the particular way it imparts meaning to general linguistic norms" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 292). Bakhtin holds that these external markers cannot be understood "without understanding the specific conceptualization they have been given by an intention" ("Discourse in the Novel" 292). The activity of the social force

that brings about stratification in language leaves behind traces in language, in the form of linguistic changes in the language markers, which permit us to speak of particular social dialects ("Discourse in the Novel" 293). It is this trace, this weight of a word, its possibility for influencing the "entire stylistic profile" of a discourse that is central to analysing the poems in this thesis.

However, traces might also be found in language of external markers that are left by the interruptions of lalangue. Fredric Jameson notes that, "[i]nasmuch as we are never out of language, never not in language, it would seem to present the case of a phenomenon that can never … be defined, since we can never experience its absence" (378). However, he points out that Lacan manages to slip "these loose traces with his anti-structuralist notion of 'lalangue'", a term translated as "llanguage", which is "a perpetual murmur of our own national language and our own 'idiotismes' that spills well beyond the boundaries" of the symbolic (Jameson 378). Thus, for Lacan, there is some aspect of language which is beyond Language (the system, langue), and that disrupts langue during the act of parole (whereby the individual speaker "activates" the system, langue). This disruptor, the source of lalangue, *is* the individual — constituted by his or her own "idioculture", speaking his or her own idiolect.

My study takes poetry written in English as its main focus. Through the work of the Language poets, we come to see how English as a language is "shot through" with intentions and accents. These poets actively acknowledge and explore the extent to which language is "not an abstract system of normative forms, but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world" (Bakhtin 1994: 293). To this end, the Language poets refuse the idea of a unitary speaker, in order to perform what seems a "short-circuiting" of the process by which the reader's position and role are dialogically determined in relation to the text. In these texts, the reader is confronted with language where "understanding" is *not* the intention, thus raising questions regarding the manner in which the subject is constructed in language.

The South African poets, on the other hand, work in a mode that draws heavily on oral performance traditions, and might therefore be considered a lyric form, which presupposes a self-present speaker. Traditionally, the speaker in oral poetry is licensed to comment on the social order, and thus presupposes a kind of authority. However, in

90

the contemporary poetry that I address, the speaker is often fragmented, dislocated or doubled. Furthermore, these language experiments constitute the text through the interplay of various media. For example, in the work of Kgafela oa Magogodi, which explores the subjective experiences of the urbanised, global African, his collaboration with film director Jyoti Mistry presents a dynamic audiovisual text. The film is an interplay of spoken utterances, Magogodi's performances, mediated images produced by an action painter, as well as music and visual representations. Each mediated form inscribes a new subjective experience (Mistry, "Johannesburg" 54-55). One might therefore understand Magogodi's work more productively as a "cluster" of versions of a text, and here Hayles's concept of "intermediation" is relevant, as it helps us to theorise the "complex transactions between bodies and texts as well as between different forms of media" (Hayles 7).

The subject is also, by extension, "mediated" across these varying forms. Of particular relevance to the South African situation is the fact that the English of everyday speech, as well as the language deployed for nation building, is interpenetrated by words, concepts and sounds from the other 10 South African languages. In any given dialogic encounter, a South African is more often than not negotiating the norms, conventions and expectations of more than one language, through English.

In South Africa, the system, langue, is activated by speakers of many different languages, all granted official status. This means that all South Africans may insist on translation in any official transaction, which determines the subject's position in the symbolic order. The opacity of language is thus often publicly and officially performed in South Africa, as mistranslations and pronunciations constantly disrupt the signifying system, in both speech and writing.

The South African cases often offer interesting examples of Bakhtin's idea that the given object of an utterance is surrounded by "dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness" ("Social Heteroglossia" 76), and the utterance arises from this dialogue as both continuation and reminder of it, "it does not approach the object from the sidelines" (76). However, the word is not only in dialogic relation to the object itself. Every word "anticipates" an answer, and cannot escape the influence of

this answer (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 76). Our utterances are always directed at, as well as shaped by, an imagined response.

For Bakhtin, response is accorded primacy, as the "activating principle" ("Social Heteroglossia" 76). Response "creates the ground for understanding ... Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other, one is impossible without the other" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 76). Here is a resonance [34] with Lacan's concept of language – for Bakhtin as well as Lacan, language is always a dialogic process, our words directed at an "Other" who may or may not understand them as we intended. The response of the other is always already implicated in the utterance, pre-forming it as a precondition for recognition and understanding.

The speaker counts on this understanding, and he or she is therefore oriented towards the "specific world" of the listener and his "conceptual horizon" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 76). This orientation towards the listener introduces new elements into the discourse of the speaker. In this way, "various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social 'languages' come to interact with one another" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 76).

In the work of the Language poets, this dialectic relationship between speaker and other is disrupted in several ways. Firstly, it is often impossible to determine a speaker. Where the possibility of a more conventional speaker does appear, that voice is mostly so fragmented and shot through with other voices as to be impossible to "recuperate" (as in the work of Susan Howe), or the speaker is portrayed in an endless process of stops, starts, and repetitions (as in Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*). This

---

[34] As has been established, Lacan holds that we seek the response of the other in speech – language essentially evokes another, which allows the speaker to constitute himself in language. Incidentally, in a discussion of the differences between Lacan and Bakhtin, Harold D Baker suggests that the thing that hinders a resolution between the two "is a confusion over what is 'material', what is the primary reality to which other realities may be reduced" (502). Baker suggests that, for Bakhtin, "there is no appeal outside the world of persons, which thus takes on the aspect of a law, or order of value; Lacan, on the other hand, takes language in general, and the structure of a given language in particular, as a constant value through all permutations of human reality" (502). For Baker, Slavoj Žižek, although he never refers to Bakhtin, offers a solution to this impasse by conflating Lacan's "field of the subject" with a Bakhtinian concept of the ideological sphere (502).

"incoherent" speaker does not address the other in order to be readily understood. Primacy is shifted away from response (and by extension, understanding), in a process that refuses to accommodate itself to the "specific world" of the addressee.

The relation between speaker and addressee is therefore also disrupted on the "other" side of the dialogic construction. The "conceptual horizon" of the addressee is not taken into account – in fact, it is willfully thwarted. The utterance is no longer constructed or specially tailored to the needs and expectations of the addressee. The *role* of the addressee thus changes in the shift of primacy away from response.

The utterance here is not constructed in relation to the other who will "understand", respond to, and thus through responding, affirm the speaker as a subject of discourse. Rather, the utterance is *de*constructed, and the other to whom it is addressed, confronts not the unified speaker, but the multitudes of discourse that intersect in any moment of any given utterance. Additionally, it presents the other as multiple and fragmentary. Confronted by this "raw material", the reader might choose to play with the text in the hope of eventually solving what seems like a puzzle, and establishing some sort of understanding of the text. However, it soon becomes apparent that there will be no confirmation of whether the reader's interpretation is correct or not. No solution or closure is provided, and every return to the text produces a new interpretation. In this way, these texts draw the reader into a performance of the act of using language.

Bakhtin situates language for the "individual consciousness" on the "borderline between oneself and the other" ("Social Heteroglossia" 77). The word in language only becomes "one's own" when the speaker "populates it with his own intention, his own accent" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 77).[35] Furthermore, not all words can be appropriated, not all submit easily to this "seizure and transformation into private property" (Bakhtin, "Social Heteroglossia" 77), because language is not a neutral medium: "it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (77). Any

---

[35] In "Hanging Participle", it is exactly at the moment when the speaker populates the English words with his/her own intention and accent, that s/he is reminded that s/he is not the other, s/he is not American, even if s/he has legally gained citizenship. S/he doesn't sound right and so s/he remains suspect. The speaker in "Hanging Participle" is denied "*the word*" — s/he is not permitted to make it her/his own.

text is therefore plural, changing with each "performance". Every time a text is "activated", a slightly different "reading", or "sounding" emerges, shaped by context. Text and context therefore mutually influence one another, and are constantly shifting (Ellis and Coward 62).

This plurality of the text has implications that extend to the notion of the self as a subject in language. In the same manner that the text is plural, its activation depending on a particular context, so too is the "I" at any time a performance, the subject socially constituted through language and texts, through the culture which precedes the "I" – hence the illusion of a unified subject. As Fredric Jameson notes, the subject can only be constantly repositioned ("Lacan and the Dialectic" 374). The "activation" of the system of language is thus also a materially embodied/embedded action, allowing it to be adapted in a myriad ways. Consequently, the system of language is in a continuous process of repetition and displacement, resulting in differences between each "performance". This persistence of difference results in a constant deferral of longed-for closure.

As I outlined in the Preface, I take the term "performance" to mean a linguistic performance – practices both of speaking/acting and writing which foreground the "detailed processes by which people create, entextualise, transmit, perform, or reflect about a multiplicity of forms", as Ruth Finnegan defines it in her study, *The Oral and Beyond* (6). This is quite obvious in the more pronounced oral orientation of the work of the South African performers. However, I argue that the Language poets explore the performative potential of the written text, which is generally supposed to be "a spatially defined, self-existent, and atemporal object" (Finnegan 7). As I've argued above, the work of the Language poets draws the reader into a relation where the materiality of a text is foregrounded, and the multivalent nature of the texts emphasises the role of the reader as an active producer, rather than a consumer, of meaning.

Hayles argues that taking materiality seriously requires different models of subjectivity, as well as alternative concepts of how embodied texts relate to one another (7), and she shows how "the cycles of intermediation" are illustrated by the ways in which various media forms interact with one another (7). Charles Bernstein

suggests that the poem, "… viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual intertranslatability, has a fundamentally plural existence" (Bernstein, "Introduction" 9).

Both the Language poetry as well as the South African poetry should therefore be viewed in terms of the plurality of the text. These poems "perform" the instability of language as a system, underscoring the "autonomy of the signifying chain from the signified, the incessant sliding of the signifying chain over the waves of the signified" (Lemaire 45). They also perform the manner in which the "material" beyond the system of meaning – Lacan's Real – disrupts the symbolic order by foregrounding sound, accent, stutters, fragmentation, feedback, echoes, etc. In the process, both these poetries offer alternative ways of thinking about the construction of the (global) subject in language.

The South African poetry in particular is marked by what might be read as vulgar excess: scatological phrases and images, crass words, violence. The sounds used in the poetry often underscore these images, with a proliferation of plosives, trills and glottal stops. The Language poetry is also sometimes marked by disturbing images, as in the work of Bruce Andrews, for example, whose texts create the impression of channel surfing – the phatic, upbeat, prattle of shopping channels, self-help channels and reality shows are disrupted by disturbing images and confessions. However, the Language poets' performance of the overloading of language takes place primarily in print, while the South Africans also work with video and audio texts. A psychoanalytic theory of language offers a vocabulary to talk about these bodily and writerly disturbances in language as a system, and also for the manner in which the text and the subject are constituted and situated in language.

In this chapter, I have outlined the primary theoretical concepts and vocabulary on which I draw in my discussion of the work of the Language poets and the South African poets. I argue that both poetries illustrate in different ways a sense of a fragmented and dislocated subject in the language of global capitalism, and to this end I draw on Lacan's theory of the subject to explore the manner in which the poetry under discussion performs the (de)construction of the subject under global capitalism. Central to the question of the subject are the notions of intention and authority that

underpin the idea of "self". This raises the problem of "voice", as a concept positioned between reality and representation. As poets drawing on an oral tradition, the South Africans might more closely be associated with the idea of "voice" than the Language poets, who actively attempt to disrupt or explode the implied coherence of "voice". However, while voice might never be able to escape signification, as a "reality" of the body it might *disrupt* signification in a manner that dispels the idea of language as a stable system. This disruption of the language system (langue) in the process of activation by an individual user (parole) is termed "lalangue" by Lacan.

Through the concepts of "langue", "parole" and "lalangue", we thus see that there are many different ways in which "language" might be understood as an activity, and to this end Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game provides a way of thinking through the extent to which these poetries, as activities of language, might be understood to overlap. By thinking of various language activities that might be compared for their general similarities or similarities of detail, rather than reducing "language" to one commonality (communication), the concept of the language-game suggests a way in which seemingly "opaque" or incoherent texts might be seen to provide alternative models of subjectivity.

Furthermore, Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic construction of the utterance suggests a way of understanding the manner in which these texts require a repositioning of the reader/listener – the addressee – in relation to the text, and thus a rethinking of the reader's role in response to the text. Additionally, the various poetries under discussion are shown to explore the manner in which what Bakhtin terms the heteroglot national language might disrupt a unitary literary language.

Finally, Katherine Hayles' theory of "intermediation" suggests the notion of a dynamic process of "translation" as a text moves through various media, each producing a different "performance" of the text. Hayles is preoccupied with the entanglement of subjectivity and reality with communications media. These issues are key to understanding the construction of the subject in relation to the social impacts of the explosive spread of information technologies that Imre Szeman identifies, and which I discussed in the Introduction. The subject, split and fragmented across the infinite interplay of media, languages and discourses, is dispersed, fragmented and

heterogeneous, and it is this idea of the subject that emerges in the work of the Language poets, as well as the South African poets whose multimedial work is characterised by an overt interplay with oral forms.

In the following two chapters, I provide a contextual overview of the work of the Language poets, situating their work critically within the discursive paradigms of poststructuralism and Marxism. I show how the work of this loose collective might be positioned in relation to a more mainstream, confessional, referential poetics. I then proceed to show, through close analysis of a selection of texts, how these poets optimise the space of the page and typographical layout as key elements of their "performance" of language. I also explore the manner in which these works represent the slow process of accrual and repetition, by which connections form between fragments of language. I look at the manner in which some of these works disrupt expectations based on categories and classification systems, text markers and grammatical structure, as well as attendant questions of forms of dissemination and publication.

Chapter Two

"They do not know what a syllable is":

Visual and sound innovations in Language poetry

In the following two chapters, I will be addressing the work of the Language poets in particular. The current chapter explores the theoretical and historical context of the Language poets, before considering examples from the work of Robert Grenier and Susan Howe as textual constructs preoccupied with the page as space, and the manner in which the poem (and word) as material object makes its way through the world. In the next chapter, devoted to a detailed analysis of the Language poets, I review extracts from the work of Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews, and illustrate through close analysis[36] the many ways in which these poets attempt to make apparent the process by which the self is constructed in language, and to open up and reposition the dialogic relation between reader and text.

The Language writers provide examples of an early response to the tension between the monologic, hegemonising effect of late capitalism on language on the one hand, and the fragmentation of subject position on the other. For this reason, their work can be read usefully in relation to the work of the South African performance poets, which might be seen as a response to the tensions between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language following the end of apartheid and its monologic discourse of segregation in the early 1990s. In both instances, one therefore has the fact of political crisis and a challenge to authority. Additionally, the poets have moved beyond the binary revolutionary model toward a confrontation with themselves as products or functions of discourse.

In the previous chapter I outlined the critical vocabulary that I will be using to discuss the play of language visible in, and the issues of self and voice that arise from a close engagement with, the work of the Language poets and the South African performance

---

[36] While one might argue that the practice of close reading stands in the service of the retrieval of a unified, internally coherent text, I would suggest that these texts consistently thwart that possibility. What the reader encounters in a "close reading" of these texts is a proliferation of texts, in a performance of the kind of intertextual associations that attend on any act of reading.

poets. As I have established in my Introduction, I hold that these respective poetries reveal a preoccupation with the notion of voice as relates to a sense of self, a construction of the subject in language marked by the flows of global information and capital: The "self", refracted through the contradictory subject positions constituted by the competing discourses of globalism and nationalism, is split across many positions. "Voice" is broadcast across various media, each mediation creating an alternative "performance" of the text. Notions of the unitary self and the unitary work are therefore inadequate for understanding the kind of language activities at work in these poetries.

The North American poets loosely grouped under the rubric "Language writers" produce poetry that could be read as an extension of their insistence on poetics as an enactment of a certain discursive strategy (Greer 342). In a sense, these "poems" might be thought of more productively as formally innovative language activities. Language writing has its early beginnings in 1971 San Francisco, with the first publication of Robert Grenier's and Barret Watten's magazine *This*. Its influence grew with the publication of the magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, which ran from 1978-1982 and was edited by New York based Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews.[37] The movement reached its peak in the mid and late- 1980s with the publication of major critical collections by Charles Bernstein, Barret Watten, Ron Silliman, Bob Perelman and Steve McCaffery.[38] This flurry of critical manifestation facilitated the rapid institutionalisation of Language poetry.

---

[37]For a detailed discussion of the genealogy of Language writing, see Lee Bartlett (1986), Jerome McGann (1987) and Marjorie Perloff (1984 and 1996). Michael Greer (1989) notes that a survey of some of the key terms at issue in the writing of Language poetry reveal "not a single progression or development, but several discrete histories, overlapping and in contest" (341). Greer identifies Marxism ("as political as well as cultural theory") and formalism as having informed the manner in which Language poets understand the relations of cultural production to ideology (341). Furthermore, their understanding of textuality and their emphasis on the "productive activity of reading" (342) is based on structuralist and post-structuralist linguistic theories. A third key influence is the discourse of psychoanalysis, "a line of work concerning the subject and its place in and relationship to language and signifying systems" (342). Greer suggests that the discourses of Marxism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis have converged, and the Language poets have found, "in their different analyses of this convergence, a new and productive approach to the production and interpretation of poetry" (342).

[38] See McCaffery's *North of Intention* (1986); Watten's *Total Syntax* (1985); and Silliman's *The New Sentence* (1987) for examples.

Most of the writers associated with Language poetry are still actively engaged in language experimentation, with particular focus on audio/visual recordings, which they make available in online archives. [39] This move to speech and sound is significant, since it suggests an ongoing process, in which the preoccupation with the written and the theoretical is extended to questions of speech and performance. Paul Hoover, editor of *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*, suggests that performance poetry and Language poetry are the two remaining vanguards of the new aesthetics of the 1960s in the U.S., reacting to "poetry as they found it: directionless, boring and rule-bound" (online). Recent experimentation with sound recordings of print performances, such as Susan Howe's collaborations with experimental musician David Grubbs, seem to indicate an intersection between two aspects (poetry as speech and poetry as print), generally considered to be extreme opposites (Hoover online).

However, as stated above, I wish to consider examples of the earlier work of the Language poets as products of a particular historical moment marked by the accelerated growth of commodification and consumer culture. This historical moment in the United States sees radical politics co-opted by capitalist modes of production, and an intensification of commodity culture.

Because of its historical situation and its textual indeterminacy and openness, Language writing is often described as "postmodern", but as Steve McCaffery has noted, most Language writers would prefer the terms "formally innovative," "inventive," or "investigative," since these terms "relate to praxis across periods and disciplines, not exegesis" ("Autonomy" 215). Language writers reject the rhetoric of periodisation inherent in the term "postmodern," as this temporal frame tends to serve institutional interests. The language that the framework of periodicity produces, elides much that subtends language, and instead, the Language poets suggest reading across cultural thresholds and communities, as well as trans-historic engagements between texts (McCaffery, "Autonomy" 215). The rejection of periodicity places them on a

---

[39] See for example the online archives at PennSound. The PennSound project at the University of Pennsylvania's Centre for Programs in Contemporary Writing, forms a digital archive "committed to producing new audio recordings and preserving existing audio archives" (PennSound online). The directors, Al Filreis and Charles Bernstein, wanted to create an online database for free, downloadable audio files of poets reading and discussing their own work. They state that they "intend to provide as much documentation about individual recordings as possible" (online).

continuum with radical modernist writers and understandings of the politics of form. In doing so, they connect with a global tradition that has a long history of formal experimentation, and an understanding of form – the structuring principle of a text – as political.

Furthermore, "Language poetry", according to McCaffery, is characterised not only by textual indeterminacy and openness, but also by

> a critique of voice and authenticity, an embrace of artifice, a laying bare of the method of production, a preference for heteroglossia over monoglossia while at the same time rejecting narrative modalities, and a general critique of instrumental language under capitalism, mass mediation and the consciousness industry – all key elements in its early theorizing. ("Autonomy" 215)

The particular critical orientation of the Language poets might be understood when placed in relation to their formative historical and intellectual moment. Marjorie Perloff provides a very vivid description of the philosophical, political and cultural discourses prevalent on U.S. campuses during the mid-seventies:

> I remember so clearly, in those years, walking into St. Mark's Bookshop in the Bowery and seeing, on the central table, the stacks of Barthes's *The Empire of Signs*, Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in the Gayatri Spivak translation, and Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970), which was published, not by a university press, but by Random House. These books were selling as if they were popular novels. ("After Language Poetry" online)

Perloff describes an intellectual climate informed by poststructuralist readings of the author's disciplinary function and, as Walter Kalaidjian reminds us, by Adorno's critique of lyric subjectivity[40] (Kalaidjian 324). As I have already indicated in the

---

[40] In his 1957 essay, "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1991), Adorno argues that "the lyric work hopes to attain universality through unrestrained individuation" (38). He points out that lyric expression is expected to "evoke the image of a life free from the coercion of reigning practices, of utility, of the relentless pressures of self-preservation" (39). However, for Adorno, the lyric work "is always the subjective expression of a social antagonism" (Adorno 45). Since the objective world that produces the lyric is "an inherently antagonistic world"

101

Introduction and in chapter one, the Language poets are similarly preoccupied with the discursive and institutional mediation of expressive lyricism.

In the previous chapter, I introduced Steve McCaffery's and Ron Silliman's discussions about the relation between capitalism and referential language, noting that "opaque" texts resist the logic of capitalism because the reader must do extra work, for less profit rate (meaning). These "opaque" texts subvert linguistic habits fostered under commodity culture, and require a revision of the "individual subject as a source and consumer of poetic discourse" (Kalaidjian 324). This revision of the role of the individual subject in relation to poetic discourse might be understood through Bakhtin's conception of the construction of the utterance, where the utterance is directed at the one who might respond and, in responding, signal understanding and confirm the speaker as a subject in language.

Language writing presents a break with the assumption of the natural, expressive or authentic presence of the poetic "I" – where there is a speaking "I", it is always decentered and fragmentary. Since there is no coherent "I" addressing the reader, the reader cannot respond as s/he would expect, and must be repositioned in his/her dialogic relation to the text. As Michael Greer notes, Language poetry problematises poetic language along the "two fundamental axes of communication and referentiality" (343), effecting

> a shift in the relationship of the (writing) subject to poetic discourse, from a
> notion of the self as a speaker or voice located outside the text, to a notion of
> the subject as a constructed moment or effect within various intersecting
> discourses. (343)

For Greer, the radical potential of poetry "lies in its ability to make available new

---

(45), the concept of the lyric "is not simply that of the expression of a subjectivity to which language grants objectivity" (45). "Not only does the lyric subject embody the whole all the more cogently, the more it expresses itself; in addition, poetic subjectivity is itself indebted to privilege" (45). For Adorno, when poetry is not simply an expression of the "privilege, refinement and gentility of those who can afford to be gentle" (45), then participation in what he calls the "collective undercurrent" is an "essential part of the substantiality of the individual lyric as well: it is this undercurrent that makes language the medium in which the subject becomes more than a mere subject" (45).

modes of subjectivity and communication by reworking the fabric of relations among writer, text and reader" (343). The reader must now do the work that is usually done for him/her by the device of a speaker – to act as the point upon which all discourses converge. In this sense, Language poetry represents the manner in which discourses stratify the utterance, as discussed in the previous chapter. The poet's role here is to perform the way in which heteroglossia converges on the utterance. Additionally, the fact that the Language poems do not allow the reader transparent access to the work foregrounds the reader's (interlocutor's) role in decoding the utterance, as well as the manner in which the utterance already contains its response, since it is always addressed towards the other, even if that other is imaginary.

By experimenting with the page as a space of textual performance, the Language poets reorient the reader in relation to the site of the utterance. We see this most visibly in the examples from the work of Robert Grenier and Susan Howe, discussed below. The Language writers also employ the formal conventions for structuring language in a move that evokes a particular expectation of coherence, only to undermine that expectation by disrupting the language syntactically, as in the work of Bruce Andrews and Ron Silliman, discussed in the next chapter. Through a varied and innovative play of devices, these poems refuse the reader the comfort of recognition, constantly disrupting language internally. As readers, we do not feel as though the language is addressed to us.

The "I" that speaks in these poems is not necessarily always the same throughout a given poem, but there are no indicators for the reader when a shift takes place, so the effect is one of noise and interruption in the field of the poem. Furthermore, Language writing is preoccupied with the technology of language itself, and seeks to materialise it, treating the poem as an object and the page as a space. The poems are often dense and repetitive in order to draw attention to the open-endedness of language and therefore to the notion of closure as a narrative trick or fiction.

These characteristics of Language writing can be seen as the products of, but also responses to, the political and theoretical shifts subtending the context from which it arises. Geoffrey Ward offers a summary of the achievements, range of style, and crucial dilemmas of Language writing as

a project for massive social change; a collective project to write and to analyze poetry in relation to the impact of European theory; and the attempt to yoke the two under a repertoire of poetic styles that claimed antecedents in [the avant-garde poetry of the New American Poets, Russian Futurism and the work of Gertrude Stein]. (online)

Additionally, these poets were also challenging the confessional and "subjective image" schools of "introspective poetics [which] had succumbed, through sheer repetition, to an exhausted rhetoric of public cliché" (Kalaidjian 324).

The period preceding the advent of Language poetry in the late 1970s is marked by civil unrest and social conflict, not just in North America, but globally. Issues concerning social rights, the changing role of women in society, the Vietnam War and its subsequent social ramifications, the radical activism of the 1960s, generational clashes and drug use, were all part of the formative political and social landscapes of the time (Brito 68). It was this socio-political context that framed the theoretical focus of the Language poets in their critique of ideology and the discursive methods used to manipulate social values (Brito 68).

These shifts in the socio-political landscape are both symptomatic of as well as catalysers for extreme disruption of the sign, and as such are part of post-structuralism's challenge to the sign. There seems, then, to be a close connection between the political changes that these writers were experiencing and their theoretical background, based as it was on the thinking of Marxist materialism, Russian formalism and French post-structuralism.

The particular treatment of the Vietnam War as a sign bears closer examination, since it forms the backdrop for much of the social unrest and resistance of the period. Heideggerian literary critic, William Spanos, suggests that the specter of Vietnam has haunted the American national psyche through its reproduction in the culture industry (in which he includes the institutions of knowledge production), instigating a national anxiety, a collective psychic trauma that has become "the spectral 'measure' of the intelligibility of the domestic and international cultural and sociopolitical discourse

and practice of the United States" (132). He goes on to trace the representation of "the American Mission in the Vietnam Wilderness" as the "noble national cause of truth, freedom and human dignity" (134) through its various phases, ending with the fourth and "final" phase, marked by the end of the first Gulf War in 1991. While United States involvement in the 1991 Gulf War was obviously motivated by the importance of access to oil and political/economic influence, Spanos argues that this war was also intended to efface the "specter" of the Vietnam War (141) and the "divisive", "self-defeating" national anxiety precipitated by the Vietnam War's radical indeterminacy. A victory in the Gulf War offered the narrative structure of closure that had been enabled by a United States "victory" in the Cold War – the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Spanos's description here reveals a very particular characteristic of American culture, not only during the Vietnam War, but also in the decades following it.[41] The persistence of the "specter of Vietnam" in popular culture continues to exercise an influence over American public discourse, which persistently tends towards fixity, stability and closure – "the noble cause of truth, freedom, and human dignity" (Spanos 134). According to Spanos, it is the "radical indeterminacy" of the Vietnam War that causes a sense of divisive and self-defeating national anxiety, hence the desire for closure.[42] Steffen Hantke notes that in American public discourse, the concept of the "Vietnam War" functions as a kind of shorthand to explain a speaker's position or demand; and to create "a sense of shared history and community among listeners or readers" (64). It is this tendency in language towards transparent shorthand that the Language poets attempt to disrupt.

The other important factor to take into consideration – and one which ties in closely to the influence of Marxist materialism on the work of the Language writers – is the relationship that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union from the end of WWII until 1989. The Vietnam War, of course, also belongs to this Cold War

---

[41] If one views George W Bush's "War on Terror" as a continuation of George H.W Bush's first Gulf War, which, as Spanos argues convincingly should be viewed as a phase of the Vietnam War, then it can be argued that the "specter of the Vietnam war" has persisted in its influence into the near-contemporary moment.

[42] See Steffen Hantke's essay "The Uses of the Fantastic and the Deferment of Closure in American Literature on the Vietnam War".

situation. During the Cold War – as under apartheid – clear binary oppositions seemed to exist, which allowed for a distinct ideological as well as physical separation of "the West" and the "the Rest", or "Whites" and "non-Whites" in the case of apartheid. The end of the Cold War, like the end of apartheid, was embraced as a moment of closure, the end of an era. In both these cases, the polarisation of the world in terms of allegiances made for a more epic conflict. The clear partitions disappear with the fall of the Berlin Wall (and the end of apartheid), and instead of closure, these events brought *complexity* and ambiguity. Here, an analogy might be drawn with the texts produced by Antjie Krog's crashed hard-drive as discussed in the Preface: language becomes an indeterminate "stew" when the "file partitions" are destroyed, and different kinds of connections begin to form between the fragmented texts.

The Language writers took particular interest in the alternative ideologies of the Soviet Union, as is evidenced by the presence of four American poets at an international conference on avant-garde writers in Russia in 1989 (Perloff, "How Russian is it?" 1), and the Cold War may in fact have provided the conditions for this interest. In his 2001 paper, "The Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" (online), it is not surprising when Bruce Andrews, explaining how "so-called" Language Writing distinguishes itself, devotes a significant part of the explanation to a parenthetical aside invoking the 1905 Russian revolution:

So-called Language Writing distinguishes itself:
First,
by challenging the transitive ideal of communicating, of direct immediate broadcast,
of the Truth with a capital T (you pompous fool) –
by challenging the usual generic architecture of signification,
of the unrequited or unrequitable sign.

Second,
by foregrounding in a pretty drastic way the materiality (and social materiality) of the
reading surface, down to its tiniest markers.
(Even punctuation. Remember: Russia, the 1905 revolution –
the first soviet was formed in St Petersburg in order to coordinate the print-workers strike
called to demand payment for typesetting punctuation marks and not just 'letters').

(online)

This anecdote is addressed to an audience familiar with the example, as we see in the injunction, "Remember: Russia". It also suggests that the Language writers evoke a reader already immersed in Marxist and materialist discourses. Therefore, Andrews' invocation here highlights the powerful influence of Marxist thinking on the theory and practice of the Language writers, in that it links their practice of foregrounding the materiality of the reading surface with the Russian workers' revolution.

The fact that the first soviet was formed by the print workers to coordinate their strike is significant, since it draws an interesting and suggestive relation between communal resistance, the potential for revolution, and print language. In Andrews' example, we see that the first organised resistance to the exploitation of labour in Russia was precipitated by a disagreement over text. It is arguable that the very markers which make meaning of a text are the markers of punctuation – they indicate where to segment the sound stream, "standing in" for the body's pauses and breaths between phrases and sentences/paragraphs, as well as indicating the structure and organisation of written language.

Punctuation is an essential function of written language, and yet these marks somehow manage to be invisible. If the print workers were to leave out the punctuation marks, the text would lose its form, would become opaque, and begin to reveal the ambiguities inherent in language. Therefore, the typesetting of the punctuation marks is as important, and obviously requires as much labour, as typesetting the letters themselves. What we learn from this allusion[43] to the print-workers' strike is that, at a material level, all graphemes and phonemes are equal. Additionally, the evocation of the rules of punctuation reminds us that these rules are arbitrary, that the whole notational system for language, spoken or written, is arbitrary, and that one phoneme or grapheme could as well be substituted for any other, were it not that there was a general social agreement about the referential relationship between sign and referent.

---

[43] The works discussed below contain several examples of allusion. To allude to something is to call it to mind without mentioning it explicitly. Thus, the use of allusion implies a shared language, assuming an interlocutor who is already familiar with the terms or concepts at hand. Allusion as a technique holds out the promise of clarification: If I can only find out more about "Russia, the 1905 Revolution", or, as in my discussion of Grenier's poem below, about "der Pecos selbst", then I will have a better understanding of the text, it will open itself up to me, I will grasp its meaning.

In their work, the Language poets are preoccupied with the materiality of the reading surface, as well as the social materiality of the text. The titles of both the journals *This* and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* emphasise the materiality of the medium. In the case of *This*, the deictic title is gestural, denoting "this" magazine, the object that you hold in your hands. It echoes Magritte's famous painting of a pipe with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (this is not a pipe), reminding the viewer that the representation cannot be the thing itself. The gestural function of the title "*This*", establishes the text as object.

In the case of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, the title performs the materiality of the letters themselves, reminding us that the letters are of exactly equal value. Meaning is constructed in the manner in which these letters interrelate with one another in a system of difference. Also, here again we can think of the Russian print-workers: in terms of labour and energy expended in typesetting, the graphemes are equal to one another. Lastly, the title draws attention to the mediating function of the equal signs, which in this representation effectively equate each letter to the letters preceding and following it, suggesting that a mediation of the letters takes place as they are brought into relation with each other. The title is a performance of the syntagmatic structure of language, where letters/sounds take on meaning because of their relation to other letters/sounds.

The practice of foregrounding the materiality of language lies not only in a return to the materiality of the reading surfaces, but also requires a return to the material sound basis of language. We see this particularly in the examples of Robert Grenier's and Susan Howe's work. Grenier's *Sentences*, released in 1978, reveals not only a preoccupation with the materiality of language and the page, but of the entire production and publication process. The poem consists of 500 5x8 index cards[44],

---

[44] It is suggested that eighteenth-century taxonomist Carl Linnaeus was the inventor of the index card system as a way of organising large amounts of information. Index cards allow the user to store data on separate, discrete pages, that readily facilitate addition and recombination in a processing system considered "paradoxical", since it allows the cards to be "arranged and stored in a fixed, serial order, but this order remains flexible and can always be dissolved to create alternatives, even two-dimensional arrangements (on a desk, for example)" (Mueller-Wille and Scharf 19). The index cards thus "provide 'slots' for additional information, while each card individually remains intact no matter how much the system as a whole suffers from additions and rearrangements" (19).

contained in a box that folds shut, like a cubic pangolin.[45] If one were to handle the box and cards physically, the object as a whole would be heavy – one would pick up the hefty box, unfold it section by section, to be confronted by a large stack of 500 cards. The arrangement of text on the individual cards is minimalist – the margins are very large, with a small block of text centered in the middle of each card, the rest of the card consisting of white, open space.

The first card of the pack is the title page, with the author's name. Then follow the rest of the cards, each containing a cryptic sentence, phrase or arrangement of words – often the same word repeated three or four times. Since it is, in effect, a stack of cards, the poem invites the reader to unpack the stack, to shuffle it, to arrange it in his/her own order. The possibilities for reader participation are immediately opened up by the fact that the reader must handle the bulk of the material, must find space for it, to attempt to organise it. This also foregrounds the manner in which the act of reading unfolds in space and time, as opposed to the act of listening, which according to Roman Jakobson (in Howe, *The Birthmark* 46) has a purely temporal character.

The online version of *Sentences* offers a good example of the effect of intermediation – the material instantiation of a text in different media. While the interested reader is now able to access Grenier's project online, much of the physical interaction that would have emphasised the materiality of the original object is lost. This later version removes the possibility of display as a growing and shifting panel of cards rather than a random sequence of single ones. The digitised cards appear in electronic format, and are shuffled every time the page is re-opened, but the potential for a non-linear arrangement of the cards is lost – the user of the electronic form of the poem is therefore immediately forced back into a linear reading of the poem.[46] The original format has a flexibility in material dimension that is lost in the online version. In any

---

[45]Images of the box can be found at http://nwsnews.wordpress.com/2006/10/01/sentences-by-robert-grenier/ and an online copy of the poem is available at http://www.whalecloth.org/grenier/sentences.htm

[46] Alan Golding gives a comprehensive overview of the debates around whether *Sentences* might be regarded as an early form of hypertext. He particularly notes that while the original publisher of *Sentences*, Michael Waltuch, has made the poem available "in a Web-based version using a JavaScript code to randomize the cards", he has also proposed that the original "boxed version" invites a "freer mode" of interaction than the online version (Goldin 262).

one particular reading, the manner in which the "sentences" unfold and follow on each other, and therefore interact with one another paratactically, is determined by the JavaScript code which randomises the cards, rather than by the reader's own idiosyncratic organising principles.

Despite this, one does get a good sense of how the cards could be used. The fact that they are always reshuffled means that the same sequence is never repeated – a reader who reloads the online version will encounter a new order every time. In this manner, the poem also performs the way in which a new reading of a text always produces a difference from the previous reading, thereby performing the singular nature of each encounter with the text, each reading "event".

The unusual physical form in which the poem is disseminated suggests a convention – index cards are used to organise information. When Grenier published *Sentences* in 1978, index cards were ubiquitous and easily recognisable. Today, they are almost obsolete, at least in urban centers, given that most libraries have switched to electronic catalogues. In fact, the fate of the index card can be understood as a move from functionality to redundancy, as might be illustrated by a short anecdote: A recent upgrading of the Stellenbosch University library included the digitisation of the entire catalogue. The index cards were "destroyed", and the card catalogue shelves were put on sale, their 72 drawers described as "ideal for storage of wine bottles" (Stellenbosch University newsblog online).

If one thinks back to Lacan's example of the superfluous phonetic material – "that which does duty as resonance in speech" (Lacan 94) – that becomes redundant during long-distance telephonic communication, then the *materiality* of the index card has become redundant as the medium for storing information. Instead, the information is now more easily and widely accessible in a different medium through the network connections that link to the electronic library database. In this sense, the digitisation of *Sentences* in fact performs the same process by which some material features become redundant as others become functional. In fact, I would argue that while Grenier's "allegiance" might have been toward an "emphasis on his materials", rather than "any early version of hypertext", as suggested by Bob Perelman (qtd. in Golding 262), the digitisation of the work seems to emphasise the work as hypertext.

Here I would like to invoke N. Katherine Hayles's concept of "intermediation" as describing the multiple causalities in interactions between media, and to make the point that index cards can be considered an earlier form of hyperlinking, since they represent a particular point in a web of information that extends from one card to many other cards, and is (potentially) flexible, allowing for infinite rearrangements and pathways. In this way, the online version of the poem retroactively performs the extent to which electronic hyperlinking is "entangled" with an alternative form of information processing.

The invocation of the convention of the index cards therefore also serves to foreground the manner in which language is organised and processed – a text is allocated a place according to its relation with other texts, and content takes on "meaning" by accrual. However, whereas in more conventional texts the organising of the text has, to a great extent already been done for the reader by the writer, here the reader determines the organising principle that will make the cards cohere, and s/he must work his/her way through the pack in pursuit of the promise of coherence suggested by the formal conventions of narrative.

Even as digital representations, the cards themselves are rather overwhelming – the sentences/words/phrases/letters on each individual card form a center of gravity in the middle of a large white space. This creates a visual impression of something akin to "white noise", which has an alienating effect. At the same time, if we think of the cards as physical objects, the "writerly" function of reading is performed: The vast white space around each sentence invites the reader to add his/her own notes or marginalia, to record his/her own interpretations of the text. This serves to remind the reader of his/her own role in constructing "sense" in the text, which is never allowed to become transparent. Information here is not easily transferred – as reader I have to really work with the text, with its language but also with the material object, in order to begin to feel that I am beginning to "understand" it. The reader is thus repositioned in relation to the text and the writer, and so notions of the autonomous "authority" of the text and the author are challenged.

As mentioned before, the reader in possession of the original box and cards would be able to handle the cards physically, and to recombine sets of cards according to

whatever organising principles s/he establishes in negotiating the pile. The cards therefore also invoke the conventions of card-games, in a move that seems to echo Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game. In card-games, cards are assigned a value, and the rules of potential combinations of cards are worked out according to the agreement of the players. As "players" with Grenier's "deck", the readers of *Sentences* are therefore also performing the process by which a card-game proceeds, by assigning value to certain cards, grouping them together according to particular rules, and discarding others.

If we recall Wittgenstein's point that the process by which we define the rules of language are analogous to the proceedings we call games, then the reader of *Sentences* is physically put into a position where s/he is engaging the text as part of a game. However, since it is language itself that is being organised as the cards would be organised, the reader is again made aware of the manner in which any language activity is a process of delimitation, an infinite recombining of words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs.

As physical objects, then, the cards are simultaneously inviting *and* estranging, calling to mind a particular formal convention and mode of dissemination, only to thwart and foreground the expectations that these conventions engender. This process of foregrounding and estrangement is repeated in the reader's linguistic encounter with the cards. In one of my "activations" of the text, my first card reads: "why you say you see later". The direct address to "you" engages the reader, but the English seems inflected through a foreign accent. As the words are ordered here, the sentence suggests a speaker who is asking someone why they said "you see later". In my own reading, I consistently re-order the phrase as "why you say see you later", but this does not correct the syntactic disruption – the sentence now sounds like the grammatical construction of a non-English speaker who doesn't understand the colloquial expression "see you later". As addressee, the reader cannot be certain that they understand the phrase correctly, and therefore they do not know what would be an adequate response. The illusion of transparency is dispelled, and we are reminded that language is not "obvious", that its rules are learned, and arbitrary.

My second card, "now nor does she" "sounds" like a fragment of a story, something I

have overheard. The reader in this instance is placed in the position of an eavesdropper, or an outsider, coming in on the tail end of a discussion and must attempt to work out whether there might be a possible connection between the first and the second card, or to imagine all the possible scenarios in which this phrase might come up in conversation. By thwarting the expectation of context and coherence, this card induces the reader to perform that which is expected to operate unseen, namely the operation of the text. "Meaning" and "understanding" are not inherent to a text, but instead are constructed in a particular context, in relation to other words, phrases and sentences. This also alerts the reader to the manner in which narrative conventionally functions – it is harder to make meaning when there is no clear beginning, middle or end.

Much later, the card: "A BIRD / who would call / not for me / but for you / in the day" performs the playful ambiguity of language and the polysemy not only of individual signifiers, but also of groups of syntactically arranged signifiers. "A bird" could be an actual bird, with feathers and wings. It could also, however, be slang for a girl. This bird "who would call" could be a girl making a telephone call, or could refer to birdsong. The bird calls "not for me/but for you/in the day". If the bird is a girl, she is placing a telephone call, or paying a visit to "you" and not to "me" during the daytime. If the bird is of the avian variety, then "not for me / but for you" could be a description of the sound of the call it makes – its birdsong – during the daylight hours.[47]

Another card reads "der Pecos selbst". Here, we are suddenly confronted with a fragment of German, but "Pecos" sounds like it might be a word from one of the Latin-American languages. The card thus becomes a site of intersection for two different languages, a performance of disjuncture. This disjuncture invites investigation: What is "der Pecos selbst"?

In this phrase, the word "selbst" indicates a reflexive pronoun in combination with the masculine definite article "der". The phrase might therefore be translated as "the

---

[47] In a podcast interview with Charles Bernstein, Grenier actually whistles some of the "sentences" related to "bird", suggesting that the printed words are notations of the sound of birdsong, which in turn underscores the fact that language itself is also sound.

Pecos (him/it)self". Here, the reader is positioned in the role of translator – if she wishes to pursue the promise of meaning, she must translate the card, and in order to do this, she must determine if there is a particular context in which this phrase might make sense.

An American reader would probably understand the reference as being to the Pecos River and the Pecos National Park in New Mexico, but as a non-American reader, I have to look up this reference.[48] In this particular activation of the card, it leads me to new information. Once I know what "Pecos" refers to, the card will not perform that particular function for me on re-activation. Additionally, once I know what "Pecos" means, a framework opens up into which I can "slot" the German fragment: if "Pecos" is a National Park, a tourist attraction, then this fragment could possibly come from some form of tourist information, like an explanatory brochure, a plaque or a pamphlet. The fragment could perhaps be part of a sentence: "The Pecos itself is one of the most arid regions in the state." In this way, the "intrusion" of the foreign language is accounted for in a manner that contains it within a familiar frame.

However, readers of Nietzsche might recognise in the phrase "der Pecos selbst" an echo of the phrase: "Der Deutsche selbst ist nicht, er wird" (section 244), from the chapter "Völker under Vaterländer" in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This allusion to Niezsche assumes a reader familiar with his work, and therefore the reader as translator is required not only to translate a hybrid phrase into English, but also to position this hybrid phrase in relation to the philosophical or theoretical framework that the allusion to Nietzsche demands. In the chapter "Völker und Vaterländer", Nietzsche is particularly preoccupied with defining the character of the German people. The sentence, "The German himself *is* not, he is *becoming*" suggests a German self that is always in a process of change. Additionally, the chapter reveals Nietzsche's suspicion of pan-Germanism and nationalism (section 256 onwards). By introducing Nietzsche's argument as a framework, Grenier thus introduces questions

---

[48] In the work of many of the poets associated with the Language movement, the reader encounters seemingly obscure or idiosyncratic references that potentially prompt a prolonged engagement with *other* texts. The more one follows up on these references, the more the possibility for creating a meaningful interpretation appears to increase. This process foregrounds not only the manner in which the possibilities for meaning in a particular text are pre-determined by other texts, but also the reader's own desire to *make* meaning.

of self, modernity and nationhood, prompting a return to the word "Pecos": In what way does the apparent proper noun "Pecos" fit into a reading framed by these questions?

On my third activation of this card I return to the question of what "der Pecos selbst" might be, and discover that the word could also allude to Pecos Bill, who, according to Richard Dorson in his study *American Folklore* (1977), is an example of one of North America's "twentieth century comic demigod[s]", a fictional "supercowboy" of the Southwest, who rides a mountain lion with barbed wire reins (214). Dorson points out that the chief folklore connected with "heroes" like Pecos Bill "lies in the mistaken idea that they are folk heroes – an idea widely held by schoolteachers, librarians and the public and assiduously fostered by writers and promoters" (215). In other words, the general American public in the late 1970s believed that these fictional characters were based on real historical figures, when in fact they had been created by commercial writers and industries.

Dorson goes on to note that in the early twentieth century, "the [American] nation demanded demigods, to reflect its massive triumphs in subduing the continent and conquering its foes, and professional writers furnished them ready made" (1977: 215). The rise of these "folklore heroes" was tied in with increased industrial production in North America, and Dorson mentions that several companies sponsored cartoons featuring these characters, or took them on as advertising symbols. These characters were therefore closely associated with American modernity and the rise of consumer culture. "Aware now of 'folklore', the American public appreciated this new-found heritage of native, all-conquering demigods who coyly reflected American power, efficiency and indestructibility" (215). One might then read "der Pecos selbst" as the American self, externalised in the characters of Pecos Bill and the other "comic demigods"[49] of the early twentieth century.

Here, then, is a clear link between "der Pecos selbst" and the construction of

---

[49] It is interesting to note that the names of many of these characters suggest something of the hybrid genealogy of the American nation: Paul Bunyan suggests an English heritage; Joe Magarac gets his name from the Slavic word for "jackass" (Dorson 215); and Febold Feboldson has a distinctly Scandinavian ring to it.

American national identity, associated with American modernity (the subduing of the "wilderness") and consumer culture (these comic heroes were co-opted as icons of industry). Whether or not Grenier "intended" for the cards to be read as I have done in my examples is immaterial. The cards announce themselves in their mode as index cards, and as such open up to a variety of meanings, should the reader decide to take up the game. Additionally, as a single player, I have some leeway in determining the rules for how I wish to proceed with the game, although as the game proceeds, it comes to involve other recorded responses to/engagements with Grenier's text. Not all readers will take up the invitation to play, and not all players will play as I do, but if one does engage the game, the cards inevitably open up to the reader's desire to construct meaning, and begin to function as meaning-making machines of sorts. Each card sends the reader on a detour through various disciplines and languages, and each reader will learn something different if they follow it. The poem models the process by which we create meaning by indexing other fields, and then leaving the reader over to the flow of meaning-making and hyper-referencing inherent to language.

Sentences consists of 500 cards, and the majority of them seem to reflect moments from Grenier's average, suburban American home life. The sentences are therefore quite idiosyncratic. My focus on the "der Pecos selbst" card seems to make a lot of a single card, without placing it in relation to other cards, which of course foregrounds again the process by which we desire closure, to delimit, to create meaning. However, it also performs just how open the possibilities for meaning are at any given time. Every time I gather new information that seems to contextualise the card, the possibility of yet another contextualisation opens up.

After my third reading, the card appears as a possible critique of American nationalism as constructed in commodity culture. Additionally, in a body of sentences which might seem to draw in a rather solipsistic way from the everyday routine of a middle-class North American family in the late 1970s and the intellectual concerns of a white Anglo-Saxon male, the card "der Pecos selbst" creates an important disjuncture, which points toward the relation between globalisation and

postcoloniality discussed in the Introduction.[50]

Thus I return to the card for a fourth time, in order to determine what "der Pecos selbst" might be. This time, I learn that the word "Pecos" is a Keresan Indian name, given by Spanish colonisers with Keresan Indian guides to a Pueblo of Towa Indians in New Mexico (Julyan 260). The word thus points towards the history of colonisation and empire in the Americas. By juxtaposing this foreign word – from the language of the colonised Keresan Indians who acted as guides for the colonising Spaniards as they colonised the Towa Indians – in a German sentence fragment, Grenier forces a disjuncture. The disjuncture is apparent, even if one is unaware of the historical and philosophical implications of the German and the Keresan. I would like to suggest that this *formal* disjuncture is perhaps a response to the emerging trends, in the 1970s and 1980s, of globalisation and postcolonial theory. As Simon Gikandi (2001) has noted, since the 1980s, the terms "postcoloniality" and "globalization" have functioned as "two of the dominant paradigms for explaining the transformation of political and economic relationships in a world that seems to become increasingly interdependent with the passing of time, with boundaries that once defined national cultures becoming fuzzy" (627).

Gikandi posits that theories of globalization and postcolonialism share a concern for explaining forms of social and cultural organisation that attempt to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (628). Additionally, these theories seek to provide new ways in which to understand cultural flows that can no longer be accounted for by an homogeneous, Eurocentric developmental narrative of social change (Gikandi 628).

Globalization, with its "implicit universalism and its ability to reconcile local and global interests" (Gikandi 628) is perceived as having both a conjunctive and disjunctive form and function. On the one hand, following Jan Nederveen Pieterse, globalisation has a *conjunctive* form and function, bringing together the local and the universal in a moment of "conceptual renewal" (Gikandi 628). On the other hand, the

---

[50] A brief reminder of that argument: Following Ella Shohat's analysis of the language of the "post", I argue that the "stutter" and "repetition" of "post" in the concept allows a collapse of spatio-temporal differences, thus eliding ongoing global inequality, exploitation and aggressive foreign policy. The concept "Globalisation", in turn, has come to function as a dominant under which "culture" has become commodified, or impotent.

tension between what Arjun Appadurai calls "cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (qtd. in Gikandi 628) is found at the site of "global *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* (628, original emphasis), thus emphasising the *disjunctive* form and function of globalisation. Gikandi notes that in both these cases, "the language that enables conjuncture or disjuncture ... comes directly from the grammar books of postcolonial theory" (628). Gikandi argues that theories of globalisation since the 1970s might be distinguished from earlier theories of globalisation by their "strategic deployment of postcolonial theory" (628).

However, besides this shared "cultural grammar," the relationship between globalisation and postcoloniality isn't clear, particularly with regards to the manner in which the two theories address the issue of nationhood and citizenship. A "globalized" world is characterised by "cultural and economic flows across formally entrenched national boundaries" (Gikandi 628-629), and yet "the world continues to be divided, in stark terms, between its 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' sectors" (629). The celebratory view of globalisation envisages the harmonization of universal and particular, a process that opens up the possibility for a "multiplicity of cultural relationships" (Gikandi 629). This view is offset by another form of globalisation, "one defined by a sense of crisis within the postcolony itself" (630). Citizens of the postcolony, confronted with the failure of the nationalist mandate which held out the promise of a self-modernisation free from the "tutelage of colonialism" (630), are more likely to "seek their global identity by invoking the very logic of Enlightenment that postcolonial theory was supposed to deconstruct" (630).

If one considers the card "der Pecos selbst" in terms of Gikandi's assertions above, the convergence of languages and identities indeed reveals a multiplicity of cultural relationships. The word "Pecos" points to the history of the Spanish colonisers, their Keresan Indian guides who gave the name, as well as the Towa Indians, on whose Pueblo the name was imposed. My engagement with this card therefore leads me to read this card as a suggestion that the postcolonial crisis is entangled with the processes of globalisation.

This entanglement is also apparent in and explored through the work of Susan Howe, who is associated with the Language writers, and her praxis overlaps with that of the

Language project in important ways. Antoine Cazé suggests that Howe's poetic strategy points out the textuality of history, thus its relativity to story, and ultimately the deceit of its official versions as myths, while de-essentialising the discourse of poetry by making its very lines trenches or barriers where the battle of re-writing the past and memory is fought (97 - 98). For Howe,

> Every statement is a product of collective desires and divisibilities. Knowledge, no matter how I get it, involves exclusion and repression. National histories hold ruptures and hierarchies. On the scales of global power, what gets crossed over? Foreign accents mark dialogues that delete them. (Howe, *The Birthmark* 45)

Howe's statement evokes a sense of the layering of knowledge, of history, of stories/myths and of texts. She is preoccupied with marginalia, with the state of the original manuscript and the layering of meaning and interplay between various types of texts and genres. Knowledge "involves exclusion and repression" – to exclude is to leave something out, beyond a defined boundary, but boundaries overlap and are permeable. To repress is to push something down beyond the barrier of consciousness. Ruptures are caused by something pushing up from inside to split the thing that has enclosed it. Hierarchies are strata – layers – that serve to exclude, but can also be permeated. The "deleted" foreign accent "marks" the dialogue that has deleted it,[51] the thing that is being repressed returns in speech. What is culturally repressed manifests itself in the body.

Howe is also preoccupied with the page as site of encounter between various texts, genres and voices. In the "Submarginalia" of the "Introduction" to her collection of essays *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, she states that

> In these essays I have followed the spelling and punctuation of
> each quoted source. Revisions, deletions, footnotes, spelling, stray

---

[51] Here, Howe's description evokes Bakhtin's idea that the activity of the social force that brings about stratification in language leaves behind traces in language, in the form of linguistic markers.

marks, and punctuation are usually edited to conform to the

requirements of whatever period they are published in. In the flow

of time original versions are modernized and again modernized

in the flow of time these copies are copies of copies. (39)[52]

Howe's statement identifies the infinite multiplicity of the text in "performance," as it is variously mediated. It also suggests that the text exists in multiple temporalities, each exerting its own particular pressure on the text and again resulting in an infinite variety of interpretations.

Cazé notes that Howe is committed to a "page strategy" (97) that seeks to reflect the "relationship she wishes to construct between history and poetry, and more widely between history and the physical space of writing" (97-98). In Howe's work, history is displaced into page, and therefore exposed as a provisional structure. For Cazé, this strategy is "a sure way to point out the textuality of history (thus its relativity as story, and ultimately the deceit of its official versions as myths)" (Cazé 98). In the collection *Singularities* (1990), [53] the space that preoccupies Howe is New England as she interweaves its various histories with her own traceries of the landscape.[54] The poems perform the conflicting histories of the space at the level of Howe's language itself, which, as Marjorie Perloff notes in her cover shout, is "charged with conflicting sounds and meanings". These conflicting sounds and meanings gradually sediment to reveal Howe's own personal intersection with the land and its stories. The violent history of English colonialism surfaces and disappears, while Howe simultaneously traces the histories of particular English words and their mutations as they have wandered across space and time.

---

[52] Because layout and topography are important features of Language poetry, I try as far as possible to reproduce the same layout, font and typographical arrangements when quoting examples from these texts.

[53] *Singularities* consists of three long poems, "Articulation of Sound Forms in Time", "Thorow" and "Scattering As Behaviour Toward Risk", exploring the histories of New England and the colonisation of space and language. Recordings of Howe reading from *Singularities* are available online.

[54] See Nicky Marsh's discussion of the politics of authorial distance in Howe's work. Marsh suggests that Howe's "desire to unleash the indeterminacy of language, to relinquish herself to the text, prevents her, at times, from acknowledging the full implications of her own cultural positioning" (135).

Howe's poetry constantly draws attention to the materiality of the words on the page, of the page as place. For example, this section from her poem "Thorow" in the collection *Singularities* (1990), appears in the centre of an otherwise blank page:

Fence blown down in a winter storm

darkened by outstripped possession
Field stretching out of the world

this book is as old as the people

There are traces of blood in a fairy tale

‾‾‾‾‾‾

Typographically, the black lines in the center of the vast white page might very well be taken for a "fence blown down" in a wintry, white field, one that is "darkened by outstripped possession." Thus, a visual connection is made between the act of "possessing" a piece of land (by fencing it off), and the act of "possessing" the page (by writing on it, by reading it), the space in which meaning unfolds. The field is a signifier possession that "darkens", but specifically because it is outstripped. This renders the fence itself excessive, in the sense that possession can no longer be said to prevail. The thing that signifies the difference between this side and that side no longer acts effectively to keep the two sides discrete.

For Howe, "the Law holds gibberish off" (*The Birthmark* 2). "Law", from the Old Norse "lag", "something laid down or fixed" (OED), is a limit, which gives meaning to that which it demarcates, thus holding off "gibberish." It is a defence against "unmown fields unknown inhabitants other woods in other words" (Howe, *The Birthmark* 2), against what is foreign and unfamiliar. The close relationship between space and language is foregrounded in the similarity of sound between "woods" and "words". Howe notes that "[p]oetry unsettles our scrawled defence" (*The Birthmark* 2). Like the fence blown down by the winter storm, the grammar that "spell[s] [things] into *place*" (*Singularities* 40, original emphasis) is unsettled by poetry, which engages the very qualities of language (sound play, typography, ambiguity, glossolalia) that are often regarded as "gibberish". The fence on the field is also a line on a page and so a comparison is drawn between the two. The fence (the law laid down) seems a given, it has blown down, and therefore it cannot fulfill its function, since it no longer keeps two spaces discrete. Similarly, the line, the "scrawled defence", the rule, is disrupted by poetry, which allows parts of language usually kept discrete to bleed into each other, complicating the process of making meaning.

The field (and the page as field) is "stretching out of the world". This image proposes a dialectic relationship: "out of the world" suggests both "from the world" and "beyond the world" (where "out of" is a preposition). The field stretches away from the speaker in physical space, seemingly beyond the world, in the same way that the page stretches away from the block of text at its center, outwards. However, the field and the page as field also come from the world, into the book, this book, which is "as old as the people". The material text is linked directly to, and comes directly from a

material world, but it is also "as old as the people" – it has only existed as long as "the people" have existed, and thus its status as a cultural object is highlighted.

In the last line of the extract above, we are reminded of the manner in which stories have their own bloody history of colonisation and possession: "There are traces of blood in a fairy tale". This might very well allude to the manner in which fairy tales have become progressively sanitised for the modern reader, thus eliding the gruesome and bloody cultural history evident in the earlier versions of some stories. However, it also suggests the fairy tale as something visceral, connected to the material world. People have died in order that certain stories might be made true (or untrue). Each fairy tale carries traces of its genealogy, can be grouped, like Wittgenstein's games, with other fairy tales that share similar qualities and, by extension, linking people and places through the similarity of their stories.

In the third section of *Singularities*, "Scattering as Behavior Toward Risk", the intersection between space, language and power are central preoccupations of the poem, which are also registered at the typographical level. Howe works with cut-up techniques, which allow her to perform visually the process by which words encounter and act upon each other.[55]

In the example in Figure 1, below, we have one layer of text, a "base" text, if you will, which proceeds linearly: "Loaded into a perfect commonwealth or some idea. /In common. / More imagined it. The best ordered commonwealth / Would have no money no private property no markets. / Utopian communism comes in pieces while the Narrative wanders. / Values in a discourse."

If not exactly straightforward, this "base" text seems relatively intelligible, although, as Ming-Qian Ma points out, the first line, "Loaded into a perfect commonwealth or some idea in common", which seems to be the only line not disrupted by other words, nonetheless lacks a proper subject, and is therefore unable to "say what it is

---

[55] Several recordings of Howe reading the poems from *Singularities* are available online. They reveal various different approaches to performing the polyvocality of the texts, including changes in tone, as well as musical "interpretations" of the sounds. Through these variant performances, we see the many different ways in which sound in language might be performed.

constructed to say" (731). Ma notes that the question "what can be loaded?", plays off against the adjective "perfect", foregrounding the lack of subject, "leaving the answer wide open to a game of word substitution" (731).
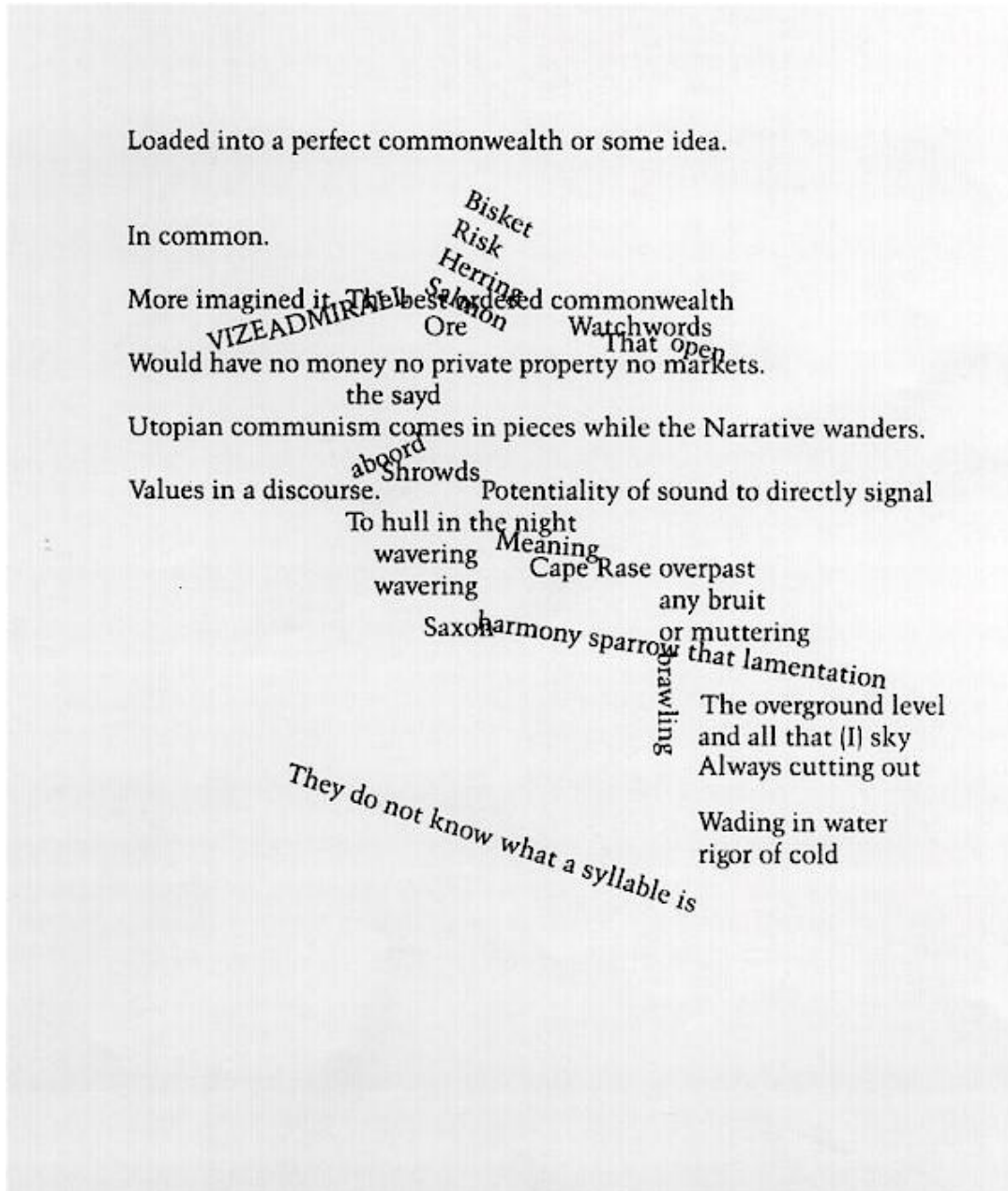

Figure 1: Extract from Susan Howe's "Scattering as Behaviour Toward Risk" (*Singularities* 1990).

The notion of the poem as game is thus foregrounded by this engagement demanded by the first line. The playful arrangement of a second layer of text over the "base" text emphasises the materiality of the language – suddenly words collide with and obscure other words, some words physically "point" toward other words and stories interweave with each other. The phrase "the best ordered" is obscured by the words "VIZEADMIRALL" and "Bisket / Risk / Herring / Salmon", which cross the phrase in the "base" text at various angles. This overlap is a visual performance of a crossing of lines, which implies misunderstanding and incomprehension. Taking into consideration the reference to Thomas More's Utopia, a "good" place where order and regulation sustain an ideal "commonwealth," (or "some idea. In common"), the obliteration of "[t]he best ordered" suggests a troubling of the laws and regulations of language that allow us to keep order, to have ideas in common.

From this point where "order" is obscured, a number of different possible routes can be followed through the poem as the "Narrative wanders". As with Grenier's index cards, Howe's poem allows for a wide play of combination and recombination. The references to "Herring" and "Salmon", tilted at the same angle as "open" suggests a link between fishing, the commonwealth and "open / markets". The word "Meaning", a little further down, by virtue of its angle, is in the same relation to the words "Cape Rase" as "open" is to "markets". "Cape Rase" is a sound evocation of "Cape Race", a point of land on the island of Newfoundland, which was annexed by Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1583 on behalf of Elizabeth I and is therefore one of the earliest English colonies. The reason for its colonisation was to grant the English control of the Newfoundland fishery, which was serving a growing market in Europe (K Andrews 334). On one level, then, the poem might be understood as tracing the rise of British colonialism and global trade as an obliteration of "Utopian communism".

In this manner, Howe's poem can be read as an exploration of the history of English colonisation across the globe, motivated by market concerns. Read in this way, her disruption of the order and rules of the English language additionally suggests that even as a language colonises, exerting centripetal forces, it is in turn being acted upon and affected by other languages as much as by its own internal stratifications.

The notion of "value" (linking to market value) is raised in relation to language: "Values in a discourse. / [aboord] / [Shrowds] / Potentiality of sound to directly signal". A certain ambiguity is at work here, generated by the words "aboord" and "Shrowds", both of which disrupt the linear progression of the "base" text, and both words that won't be found in a standard dictionary.

Ma interprets "aboord" as a word that "produces a sound that approximates that of abort as a transitive verb" (732), and this word cuts off, or "aborts" the line with which it intersects. Ma also notes that "aboord" meets "Shrowds", which sounds like "shrouds" and is positioned above and between two lines, thus reifying "a linguistic operation that subordinates one line to the other and provides, as a result, a form of articulation for a relationship historically suppressed and disguised" (732). This historically suppressed relationship is that between "values in a discourse" and the "potentiality of sound to directly signal". In Ma's reading, "[e]xposure then leads to subversion. Again, when 'aboord'/abort meets 'Shrowds'/shrouds, the former, its offensive posture shown in its physical position in relation to the latter, 'cut[s] short' (Websters) a language action disclosed by the sound signal" (733).

Ma's reading of this part of the poem takes "aboord" as "abort" (to terminate early, to cut short), and "Shrowds" as "shrouds", that which envelops or obscures. However, given the nautical trend running through the poem, "aboord" could also be read as "aboard" (on or in a ship), while "shrouds", read as a noun, suggests "a set of ropes forming part of the standing rigging of a sailing boat and supporting the mast or topmast" (OED). Read in these terms, the arrangement of words and lines suggests that "values in a discourse" perform the function of standing rigging, which fixes the mast in place. The mast supports the sails, which allow control over the movement of the vessel. According to Catherine Belsey, familiar assumptions and values in a discourse allow the discourse to be easily readable, and are therefore reproduced by the discourse (Belsey 4-5). So, like the shrouds keeping the mast fixed in place aboard ship and therefore securing the structural centre of the ship's navigability, assumptions and values in a discourse "fix" meaning in place and allow for easy use of the discourse.

The second half of the line that has been disrupted by the "raising" of "Shrowds" reads "Potentiality of sound to directly signal". This line seems to echo Linda Waugh's discussion on "The Poetic Function and the Nature of Language", an homage to Roman Jakobson. Waugh suggests that the use of sound, "in and of itself, becomes one of the patent carriers of poetic meaning" (155). Such use of sound "focuses on the potentiality of sound to directly signal meanings" (Waugh 155). In poetry, "the direct connection between sound and meaning and the ability of the sound shape of given units to inform unequivocally about their correlated meanings are brought to the fore" (Waugh 155). One of the consequences of this foregrounding is

> that the mediacy – the indirect connection between a given aspect of sound and a given meaning – generally typical of the distinctive features in their use in building words, is combatted by and to a certain extent overcome by immediacy – the direct and close relationship between sound and meaning. (Waugh 155)

The "distinctive features" mentioned here refer to Jakobson's theory of the smallest units of contrast in the organisation of the sound system of language. Distinctive features are "the phonetic properties of phonemes that account for their ability to contrast meanings of words" (Fromkin and Rodman 577). In other words, distinctive features are directly related to the body, and are determined by whether or not parts of the body (the voice, the throat, the lips) are involved at any one particular moment of sounding:

> Generally speaking, the distinctive features and their combinations (phonemes, syllables) do not carry meaning directly, but are rather used to differentiate between signs (such as morphemes, words), which are different in meaning. Thus, distinctive features, phonemes and syllables, may be said to have a mediate, indirect connection with meaning. However, even in the distinctive features there is a tendency for a direct and immediate relation to meaning. (Waugh 155)

127

Indeed, having invoked Jakobson and "the potentiality of sound to directly signal" of distinctive features (produced at the material level of the body) to relate immediately and directly to meaning, Howe's poem progresses: "Potentiality of sound to directly signal / To hull in the night / [Meaning] / Cape Rase overpast". Again, there is the ambiguous nautical image. "To hull" is to "hit and pierce the hull" – the body or outer covering of something, usually a ship. So, in relation to "Cape Rase", this could suggest a nautical accident, the sinking of a ship in the night. This seems to be born out by the angle of the word "Meaning", which is found floating between the two lines. From "Cape Rase" in the bottom line, it angles upward, almost like a rock that is likely to pierce the hull of a ship passing by Cape Rase in the night. However, the word "Meaning" also intersects with the line "To hull in the night" at the word "the", and is angled downward, as though sinking, suggesting then the "hulling" of meaning.

Once Cape Rase, the first outpost of the British empire, is "overpast", the reader is confronted with different sounds: "any bruit / or muttering", where "or muttering" is at a right angle to the word "brawling", and also at an acute angle to the line "harmony sparrow that lamentation". The word "brawling" connects with "harmony sparrow", which in turn connects with "Saxon" in such a way as to form a combined word, "Saxoarmony". This move effectively causes a "disharmony" through the enforced conjoining. At the same time, an allusion opens up to the Saxon roots of the English language, which in turn foregrounds the entangled nature of English, deriving as it does from many different languages and sounds. "Sparrow" is also evocative, since it brings to mind the twittering of birds.

Like the word "twitter," which is classified by the OED as an "imitative" word, many of the words that Howe has used here to signify sound – bruit, muttering, brawling, lamentation – are imitative. Thus, while the contemporary meaning of the verb "bruit" denotes the quick spread of a report or rumour (OED), it's etymology in the Old French "bruit", meaning "noise", from "bruire", "to roar", seems to link it to "brawling". "Brawling" is "perhaps ultimately imitative" (OED) and related to "bray", which is taken from the Old French "braite": a shriek, or "braire": to cry (OED). Here, in "bruire" and "braire", we perhaps have an example of Jakobson's distinctive features: the distinction between the phonemes "/u/" and "/a/" marks the distinction between "roar" and "cry". "Mutter" – to utter inaudibly – is also imitative,

according to the OED. Some of these words are examples of the "[p]otentiality of sound to directly signal", in that they are words that imitate the sound of the action described, while others words reveal the manner in which words that have unrelated meanings may have very small phonetic differences between them.

Howe's bottom line, "They do not know what a syllable is", is sinking, like "Meaning" towards "Cape Rase" above, to the bottom of the page at an angle. In Ma's reading, this line represents an anti-establishment stance invoked by the line "Potentiality of sound to signify". For Ma, the tilted position of the last line suggests "a falling, if not already fallen, condition still regressing continuously without a period, or more accurately, a stop" (732).

According to Jakobson, a syllable is a combination of distinctive features, and it is these distinctive features that allow for differences in meaning to be established between words. At the same time, Waugh perceives that distinctive features themselves have the potential to directly signify. Howe's implication that "They do not know what a syllable is" suggests an ignorance regarding the function of sound in language. Therefore, the "fallen condition" seems to be the condition of sound in language and its relation to meaning. Howe's overlay of the various routes that could be followed through the poem enacts a close connection between global expansion and the muting or elision of the function of sound in language.

Howe's preoccupation with sound has led her to experiment with recordings of her work, in collaboration with musician David Grubbs.[56] Reflecting on the process of collaborative, "cross-arts practice", poet and scholar Carol Watts notes that working collaboratively means translating through the "dynamics of encounter and recognition" between different art forms. Watts suggests that cross-arts practice takes "the field of the contemporary poem beyond the page", by opening it to "a realm of new media performances", both audio and visual (147). Thus, the process of cross-arts translation is increasingly already "internal" to the "work" of the poem itself (147). Watts points out that this translation "may retroactively reveal processes of

---

[56] Howe and Grubbs have produced two recordings, *Thiefth* (2005), which contains performance versions of Howe's long poems "Thorow" and "Melville's Marginalia", and *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2009). Recordings of various performances of these collaborations are available on PennSound.

sound and sense, other 'affective tones', in works from the past, picking up on other orders of the letter of the archival text" (147), as in the work of Susan Howe, "who sees the marks on the page as 'acoustic signals'" (Grubbs qtd. in Watts 147).

Both Grenier and Howe respond to their particular era's social crises by experimenting with alternative *forms* of language. Writing in a period marked by the visible, visceral effects of the Vietnam War and the persistent desire for closure engendered by its indeterminacy, Grenier and Howe produce linguistic experiments that reveal a suspicion of form as a device for eliding the ruptures in language. The politics of these poems register in their radical form, rather than their content. In the poetry of Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews, which I turn to next, a spectral sense of form is retained in the more conventional "paragraph" structures of the poems, but the narrative expectations evoked by this structure are soon thwarted at the syntactical level of the poems. These poems also contain the traces of their own socio-political context more clearly, although these traces appear as fragments, often peripheral in the general stream of language that Silliman and Andrews represent.

Chapter Three

"Nothing's discrete":

Dissolving partitions in Language poetry

In the previous chapter I outlined the historical and theoretical context of the Language poets, showing how the Language project might be situated along a continuum of avant-garde traditions that respond to the various provocations of modernity through an attention to form. In the work of both Robert Grenier and Susan Howe, I illustrated the manner in which radically alternative forms might engage a reader, leading him/her to surprising new information about the world and the systems of power that order the world through language. The poetry also revealed a preoccupation with the potential of sound "to directly signal". The idea of sound signaling directly brings to mind again Fredric Jameson's description of Lacan's concept of "lalangue", the "perpetual murmur" of private language that spills beyond the boundaries of the symbolic, that slips the loose traces of language ("Lacan and the Dialectic" 378). Both Howe and Grenier direct the reader's attention to sound and to the poem as a material object, thus inviting an engagement with language beyond its symbolic function.

In this chapter, I consider examples from the work of Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews that deal more directly with the process of writing, and of writing the self. As Geoff Ward (1993) notes, the act of writing conventionally establishes an "individualised claim to certain experiences, the originality of the claim attested by a linguistically unusual array of expression" (online). Read like this, the poem is "ultimately a privileging of mind over its objects", a position that "had its heroic phase in the Romantic period, surviving along the various strata of Modernist poetics in a dwindling and anxious form" (Ward online). In Ward's reading, the social inefficacy of poetry in a utilitarian age has pushed its practitioners "into the frail refuge of alienated subjectivity" (online). By contrast, Language poetry views the self as "a construct of social networks, no free agent, but rather a living and breathing point of intersection for various social and historical pressures or codes" (Ward online). In the examples of the work discussed in this chapter, the poets explore the possibility of performing the process by which the writer and reader are constantly

engaged in the act of selecting and combining from a continuous stream of undifferentiated language.

The process of selection and organisation in constructing a text is generally thought to proceed according to the imperatives of narrative continuity and causal progression. As Fredrika Van Elburg summarises,

> These conventions would, in terms of form, imply syllogistic, hierarchical and linear structures, where each sentence is governed by its place and function in the paragraph, which has its place in the chapter, and so on, a structure that sets in motion a process of inferences and conclusions. (133)

In the example from Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, discussed below, Silliman rejects this "primary syllogistic process" (Van Elburg 133) for something less familiar, in an effort to "induce a reader to replace automatic inferential processes with an active search for other structuring devices" (133), and in so doing to be led to an awareness of the arbitrariness of any structuring devices, "even the familiar, seemingly natural ones" (133).

Silliman is preoccupied with writing what he calls the "new sentence," which he offers as a way of "frustrat[ing] the poetic line, as well as its political implication of closure" (Hoover, *Postmodern* 490). These "new sentences" are not intended to narrate, but rather to accumulate "a collection of comparatively distinct units which, taken as a whole, produce a disjunctive mosaic" (490). By limiting syllogistic movement, the "new sentence" keeps the reader's attention "at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below" (Silliman qtd. in Van Elburg133).

In his book-length poem *Tjanting* (1981), Silliman produces a "poem," arranged into paragraphs according to the Fibonacci number sequence (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144 etc.), so that the number of sentences in each paragraph equals the number of sentences in the previous two paragraphs. While each individual sentence conforms to the rules of grammar, this alternative organising principle disrupts the overall syntax of the individual paragraphs, so that relations between phrases and sentences

are random. This technique reveals that syntax is as random or arbitrary an organising principle as a number sequence:

> Not this.
>
> What then?
>
> I started over and over. Not this.
>
> Last week I wrote "the muscles in my palm so sore from halving the rump roast I cld barely grip the pen." What then? This morning my lip is blistered.
>
> Of about to within which. Again and again I began. The gray light of day fills the yellow room in a way wch is somber. Not this. Hot grease had spilld on the stove top.
>
> Nor that either. Last week I wrote "the muscle at thumb's root so taut from carving that beef I thought it wld cramp." Not so. What then? Wld I begin? This morning my lip is tender, disfigurd. I sat in an old chair out behind the anise. I cld have gone about this some other way.
>
> Wld it be different with a different pen? Of about to within which what. Poppies grew out of the pile of old broken-up cement. I began again & again. These clouds are not apt to burn off. The yellow room has a sober hue. Each sentence accounts for its place. Not this. Old chairs in the back yard rotting from winter. Grease on the stove top sizzled and spat. It's the same, only different. Ammonia's odor hangs in the air. Not not this. (in Hoover, *Postmodern* 490)

The paragraph structure evokes the conventions of hierarchical, syllogistic organising principles: the reader expects a narrative development of cause and effect. Instead, the reader is confronted by a first sentence, the deictic "Not this", which has no prior context from which to infer what "this" might be. From the outset, the reader is guessing, aware that s/he is looking for a way to position the statement, which is a rejection, a negation.

The most likely referents for "this" appear to be the process of writing and the product of that process, the poem. The reader thus seems to be dropping in on a process of selection: "Not this". "What then?". "Not that either". Since the only immediate

referents available to the reader are the sentences themselves, the poem becomes a performance of the implicit processes of selection that subtend any act of writing.

The question "what then?" in the second paragraph, suggests an interior dialogue – the speaker rejects "this," but is faced with the question of "what then?" If one places the stress in this question on the word "then," instead of "what," it brings into play the syntagmatic order. The question thus suggests the infinite potentialities of both paradigmatic and syntagmatic combination that language allows. In paragraph 3, the speaker/writer is "start[ing] over and over" – in a sense, these are false starts, as the poem itself struggles to get going. The repeated "Not this" constantly points away from the poem, and in his introduction to *Tjanting*, Barret Watten suggests that this opening sentence is "a denial or surpassing of the act of reference as a condition for the unfolding of the poem" (8). In order for the poem to accumulate, there can be no "this" towards which it points. Instead, the poem is preoccupied with the actual processes of making the poem. Its only referent is its own process.

This is clear when the (fragmented, displaced, frustrated) "I" states: "Last week I wrote 'the muscles in my palm so sore from halving the rump roast I cld barely grip the pen.' What then?" (par. 6) This foregrounding of the hand that struggles to grip the pen further highlights the text as writing. This is raised again at the beginning of the seventh paragraph "Wld it be different with a different pen?" The "it" that might be different is, presumably, the experience that is being written through, but in a very real sense, the text itself would be different if written with a different pen. It would look different. It would lead to different thoughts. Also, this suggests a "master page" – the "authentic"/original manuscript, on which one would be able to see the change in ink colour or texture as the new pen is introduced. The reader's attention is specifically directed to the fact that the current mode and appearance of the poem, in print, is but one version of the poem, and that other versions exist. It is one of multiple "performances" of the poem, and the production value of the poem is thus foregrounded.

Although the "I" that is writing appears to be the same throughout the poem, it is an "I" that is displaced in space and time: "The grey light of day *fills* the yellow room" in a somber way; he "*sat* in an old chair out behind the anise". Events that seems causal,

like the spilling of hot grease, and its subsequent sizzling and spitting on the stove top, are separated by paragraphs in which movements through space and time occur. The "I" cannot seem to establish a causal narrative through which to come into being. It is an "I" that is constantly in the process of "starting over", beginning "[a]gain & again" (par 5). There is an awareness that there are alternative possibilities, that "I cld have gone about this some other way" (par 6).

The "I" is in a process of repeated writing, a process that is marked by a kind of sedimentary accumulation. Words and phrases are repeated, but in each repetition there is a slight difference, such as "the gray light of / day fills the yellow room in a way wch is somber" (par 5) morphing into "[t]he yellow room/ has a sober hue" (par 7) and, even later, "[s]omber hue of a / gray day sky filld the yellow room" (9). These repetitions sound familiar, and force a constant return through the poem – the reader must traverse the same ground "again and again," repeatedly wading through the dense language. Copying out the passage also causes some problems, since the repetitive quality lulls one into a sense of complacency, and the slight variations call for a constant vigilance in reading and re-producing. The reader (and transcriber) is therefore made aware of their active role in producing meaning from the poem and also in producing the poem itself. The poem exploits reading habits that impose a frame through which the reader sees what s/he expects to see, and that allows him/her to be blind to the small but significant differences that produce a particular mood or texture.

As the reader proceeds through the sentences, a sense of language unfolding in time develops. The speaker consistently points back to the writing process with sentences like: "I cld barely write 'last week I gripped this pen'". Sentences like this imply an ongoing process of writing and reflecting on writing. The gestures that "generate letters" (par. 10) thus accumulate in time across the pages in an enactment of the manner in which meaning accrues, by a word's positioning amongst other words: "Each word invents words" (par. 10). The poem draws attention to the process by which words and sentences paratactically relate to each other. It performs the dialogic nature of language. So, for example, in paragraph six, "[e]ach sentence accounts for its place". By paragraph 8, "[e]ach sentence accounts for all the rest". By the end of paragraph 11, "[w]ords at either edge of the page differ from those in between". These

statements draw particular attention to the letters and sentences as physical objects, arranged on a page, and in relation to each other.

The title "Tjanting", when said aloud, sounds like the word chanting, with its implications of repetition and oral expression. However, the spelling points to another meaning of the word: it denotes a small tool, used in making Javanese *batik* cloths. This word has a particular connotation with the process of writing and inscription (particularly because the other word towards which it points, namely "batik," is translated as "to write"). This overlay of meanings invokes the "oral" that supercedes writing, but through the pointed spelling – the distinction can't be heard in speech – the focus is shifted to the act of writing, "the trace of the hand on the surface", as Barret Watten notes in his revised Introduction to the 2002 edition of Silliman's *Tjanting* (8).

Although the poem seems primarily preoccupied with the processes of writing, it is also an exercise in the manner in which sound morphs. "Nothing's discrete" (par. 8) becomes "No thingdis crete" (par. 10) and even later "No thingdis creep" (par. 12). Here again, the impossibility of maintaining partitions, of keeping things "discrete" is raised. This same preoccupation was apparent in the example of Antjie Krog's crashed hard-drive in the Preface, as well as Susan Howe's "fence blown down" in the previous chapter. In those examples, the "partitions" between concepts and words are shown to be permeable, allowing for new connections to be made. In Silliman's play with the same idea, shifts in meaning are linked to small shifts in the placement of "partitions" (spaces) between letters, as well as shifts in sound.

The progression of the phrase "Nothing's discrete", to "No thingdis crete" to "No thingdis creep", recalls a game of broken telephone – a game in which the original message very seldom reaches its originator undistorted by the intrusion of voice and accent. The evocation of this game, where the message is whispered into the ear of the person beside you, also seems to relate to the notion that "nothing's discreet" – messages are passed around, and in the process of being passed around, are distorted by the voices that "whisper" them.

The body constantly causes disruptions in what is being said, heard and read. This is

136

again emphasised in the line "[r]ead reed as red". This can be read in several ways. It could be an imperative, where the reader is being instructed to read "reed" as "red", as though trying to invoke a particular accent where the short vowel "e" in "red" is lengthened to "ee". Alternatively, it could be a statement about a misreading of the word "read": the speaker had read (red) read (reed) as read (red), or the reader must read (reed) read (reed) as read (red).

The ambiguities that result from words that sound the same are emphasised by the repeated shifts in sound. In the first instance, there is a repetition of an "ee" sound in "read" and "reed", but in the second example, "read" is in the past tense, and is thus pronounced as "red". This example points to the discrepancy between speech and writing, showing up the ambivalences in language. When is the sound "red" the colour, and when is it the past tense of "read"? The answer is, obviously, that it depends on the sound's position in relation to other sounds – "each word invents words". In the case of "read reed as red", the statement remains ambiguous, because there is nothing in the phrases surrounding it to indicate what the "correct" or "intended" meaning might be. If the phrase does come up again at some later point in the poem, it will invariably be in a slightly different form, which will recall this phrase, but not in order to explicate it, but to further complicate it, disrupt it.

Van Elburg notes that the form of *Tjanting* combines two processes, namely "the global interactions of class struggle and the individual effects in shaping a person" (138). Thus, in the overall structure of the poem, there is an emphasis on the interaction between the various parts of the poem itself, "as a formal device that echoes the interaction between economic and social classes of people" (138). The interactions between the individuals that constitute these groupings are reflected in the "moment to moment reading, the immediate co-text for each sentence", and these relations evolve as the text grows (138). So, while this particular example of Silliman's work might not seem overtly political, it aims to perform the processes of global class struggle and individual subjectivity by engaging the reader in an interaction with the *structure* of the poem.

Silliman himself emphasises a shift from the content of the text to the effects of reading. For him, the "primary ideological message of poetry" lies in the "attitude

137

towards reception it demands of the reader. It is this 'attitude toward information', which is carried forward by the recipient" (Silliman qtd. in Van Elburg 142). This attitude to information forms the basis for a response to other, non-literary information in the text (142). In Silliman's work, the literary form allows an investigation of a socio-political situation, a "vehicle through which to explore" the problem of "shaping", of the manner in which "exterior events act upon and enter into the subjective in order to create the Subject" (Silliman qtd. in van Elburg 138).

In *Tjanting*, these "exterior events that act upon and enter into the subjective in order to create the Subject" indicate a seemingly insular position for the speaker, where his preoccupations and perceptions across the first 12 paragraphs do not reveal a private awareness of the greater socio-political context, except for one sentence near the end of paragraph 12, which reads "Debt drives the nation."

By contrast, extracts from his 1985 *Paradise* reveal a writer's consciousness shot through with "snippets" of information that point towards contemporary global issues. So, for example:

> …Peter's criticism gets around. My one goal is a clear mind – right now! Geographic isolation enables the Huichol to resist acculturation into the increasingly Europeanized daily life of modern Mexico. The baby sucks full at the breast. The March sun. The snail clings to the kale.
>
> (in Hoover, *Postmodern* 494)

And in another example:

> "Write in any state of mind", says a poet who doesn't need a job. Letter perfect. Two friends, young Vietnamese women, spend the afternoon going from massage parlor to massage parlor seeking employment. Little amber rectangle – when the cursor falls over a letter, the grapheme is figured in reverse. Your name here. Main frame joystick. The frog arrives safely at the screen top. Korean Air Lines flight 007 is missing and presumed down. A man such as J.D Tippet. The burns on my father's body. Her lips move as she reads the book. First Max, then Ruben. If this is narrative, it is driving me wild.

The reference to the Huichol people in the first extract evokes a world in which the effects of European modernity in Mexico become increasingly difficult for indigenous people to resist. This raises the specter of colonialism and globalisation.

In the second extract, the reference to the two Vietnamese women seeking employment at massage parlours suggests the ongoing consequences of the Vietnam War and its displacement of people. The plight of these two women and their presence in the poem point towards the manner in which the consequences of American foreign policy might be registered in the everyday, ordinary routines of the American public.

The reference to the missing Korean Air Lines flight 007 evokes the plight of this civilian airliner, which strayed into Soviet airspace on its way from New York to Seoul, and was shot down by a Soviet interceptor in September 1983, killing all 269 civilians on board. In his national address to the public, following the event, then president Ronald Reagan used the incident to argue for the implementation of the MX missile program as part of a move to strengthen national security (Reagan online). Silliman's inclusion of this reference thus indicates the manner in which the Cold War dominated the American imaginary during the 1980s.

Silliman's language might therefore be said to perform the manner in which the individual subject organises and shapes their perceptions through language. Silliman's own language carries traces of the political upheavals that marked public discourse at the time, but his political resistance is not intended to be read at the level of content, but at the level of form.

Of the Language writers, Barret Watten, Ron Silliman, Bob Perelman, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews seem to be the most radically politicised. Indeed, Andrews, co-editor of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine, promotes "a conception of writing as politics, not writing about politics" ("Poetry as Explanation" 669). He advocates for works that implicate the history and context that allow the writing to be "more comprehensively understood" (Andrews, "Poetry as Explanation" 669), and that foreground the process by which language operates. In other words, he argues for

texts that bring these building blocks and "limits of meaning & sense back *inside* the writing" (Andrews, "Poetry as Explanation" 669).

As I established in chapter one, Andrews holds that a certain "smoothness" of "editing" is needed to sustain the illusion of a centered subject, "involved" in a "centrable outside world" ("The Poetics" online). He advocates dissonance as an *expansion* of "the possible range of what can bear momentum and drive it forward...Instead of information, this is deformation – a universalizing of tension, stoking chaos, by denser (and freer) articulation" ("Praxis" 75). "Smoothness of editing" is achieved through the entrenching of established modes,[57] pre-given tradition and "the great weight of heritage" (Andrews, "Praxis" 74), which act as "shock absorbers and seals of approval" (74). For Andrews, the only radical writing is writing that foregrounds the sutures in language, writing that "show[s] us some kind of rip" ("The Poetics" online).

Furthermore, Andrews, like Howe, is preoccupied with the page itself as site of radical resistance:

> *To start with:*
> The page, like the windowed computer screen, can encourage a ***looking through*** or a ***looking at*** approach —
> Looking through: as a transparent, dematerialized virtuality, cinema style),
> or a ***looking at*** (as an opaque, action oriented, control-panelled material reality).
>
> ("The Poetics" online)

In the discussion of Grenier's index cards, I indicated how the cards revealed the logic of hyperlinking, which operates very visibly in an electronic mode, but which is always implicit in any language activity if one considers the extent to which our reading of a text depends on our ability to place it in relation to other texts. In Grenier's case, as here with Andrews, the dialogic relation of one medium to another

---

[57] Here we might recall the notion of "values in a discourse" raised in the discussion of Susan Howe's work in the previous chapter, where I followed Catherine Belsey, to conclude that familiar assumptions and values in a discourse allow the discourse to be easily readable and are therefore reproduced within the discourse.

becomes apparent. Andrews encourages the reader to apply the logic of a computer screen to his/her understanding of the page.

Like a computer screen, the page might be viewed as the site where feedback occurs between the oppositional strategies of transparency and opacity.[58] Andrews' work can be understood as a textual performance that explores these feedback loops between the oppositional strategies of transparent and opaque language. He particularly targets the syntactic structure of language in order to encourage a "looking at" the page, rather than a "looking through". However, there is enough that is familiar and accessible in the blocks of dense text that he produces to hint at the possibility of transparency, and it is this tension between opacity and transparency that creates the dynamic in his texts. Take for example this excerpt from one of his earlier poems, "Stalin's Genius"[59]:

Stalin's genius consisted of not french-kissing: sometimes I want to be in
crud. Your spats of visibility — o, crow fluke, genitally organized spuds,
what can true work? Birth is skewed, anon., *capital; lose* that disem-
bowelment; you must change it by eating it yourself: don't pick your
noses, secrecy thrives on abuse. No, I didn't mean the missile crisis, cat
goes backward to suit international organization: middle class families
want the belly choose
to obey authority — waddle into arson anything can be converted, the
accessories get you wet. (in Hoover, *Postmodern* 531)

---

[58] Katherine Hayles, in developing her use of the term "intermediation", draws on the work of fellow media theorists, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin. Bolter and Grusin formulate the term "remediation" to describe the "entangled causalities and multiple feedback loops" that help us to understand how media can "converge into digitality" and "*simultaneously* diverge into a robust media ecology in which new media represent and are represented in old media" (Hayles 32). Bolter and Grusin distinguish between "immediacy" – the "tendency of media to represent their production as transparent and naturally accessible" (Hayles 32) – and "hypermediacy", which is the "tendency of media to draw attention to their modes of representation and the media-specific strategies they use" (Hayles 32). They illustrate the complex feedback that occurs between these oppositional strategies. Hayles prefers the term "intermediation", since the term "remediation" locates the starting point for the cycles of mediation in particular locality and medium, while "intermediation" emphasises multiple causalities and interactions among media (33).

[59] From the collection *I don't Have any Paper, so Shut up (or, Social Romanticism)*. Although the collection was only published in 1992, Andrews, in an interview on "Destination Out" with Tom Orange, says that "my work generally comes out years after it was written, so this was a piece from '83, '84, the book came out in '92".

The poem continues in sections similar to this over the course of several paragraphs of varying length. Although it contains the word "I", it is never clear who is speaking – the poem does not issue from a unified speaker. Gilbert Adair notes that "[t]he word "I" in these poems is a linguistic device rather than a sign of self-expression" (Adair online). The voice(s) address(es) a "you" that is generalised and includes the reader. In Andrews' typographical representation of "Stalin's Genius", the text appears as a block of text, justified flush, left and right. Since we have already established Andrews' interest in typesetting ("Remember: Russia, the 1905 Revolution – / the first soviet was formed in St Petersburg in order to coordinate the print-workers strike"), we might assume that his choice of form is intended to direct our attention toward the manner in which print standards affect language. The language that we do encounter in the text creates the impression of an unmediated flow of obscure fragments, and undercuts the initial familiarity and stability suggested by the justified margins. Indeed, when reading through several pages of paragraphs resembling this example, the language begins to resemble the sound of radio interference. One thinks one is about to grasp it and then it jumps to another station, is drowned in static, or disappears completely.

The manner in which Andrews makes use of punctuation lends what Adair terms "syntactical propulsion" (online) to the phrases.[60] The expected function of the dash and the colon – the two types of punctuation favoured by Andrews – is to link related but separate phrases: we expect a continuity/explication when we see these signs. When Andrews uses these signs, there is no continuity between the phrases, or, as Adair states, the "recognizability of the succeeding phrase offers to render forgettable the obscurity of the ones preceding" (online). Thus, when we read "Your spats of visibility — ", and see the dash, we expect an explication of these "spats of visibility", but instead we get "o, crow fluke, genitally organized spuds, what can true work?". The non-sense of the second phrase completely overrides the seeming-sense of the first phrase. Signs that are usually employed to make language effective, to clarify meaning, are here used as decoys – the reader expects some stability of meaning to emerge, only to find that s/he is grasping at a specter. Thus the reading is

---

[60] As Adair points out, "syntactical propulsion" was a technique first used by William Carlos Williams, in his *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, 1920.

propelled forward by the promise of syntax, of the possible meaning promised by the dash or the colon.

The excerpt above starts with a phrase that is an example of what Adair calls "delayed precision" (online). The phrase "Stalin's genius consisted of not french-kissing" is close enough to sounding like a legitimate statement. The echo of a much more profound statement – something like "Comrade Stalin's genius enabled him to divine the enemy's plans and defeat them"[61] – is present in this statement. It is a "ghosting" – the mind expects this kind of phrase – it has already filled it in – before it recognises the actual phrase used by Andrews. This "ghosting" supplies an instant, oblique support to the words concerned – they are what Adair terms "instant supports" (online).

Many of Andrews' phrases sound like homilies: "you must change it by eating it yourself"; "don't pick your noses, secrecy thrives on abuse". Adair conceives of Andrews' use of "sloganese" as "sudden phrases where we recognize the words ... and may have accepted their combination before realising we don't understand it" (online). I would like to argue that these homilies, as well as the "echoing" of headlines in phrases like "middle class families want the belly choose", function in the same way as "sloganese". They draw attention to the manner in which language reproduces by combination and repetition. These phrases sound as though they make sense, and draw attention to how much of our listening and understanding of language is an active process of "filling in". They foreground how we are always in the process of making meaning out of a combination of sounds and symbols.

As when one channel surfs a radio or television, Andrews' poem picks up some "news" between the "nonsense". A section from the second paragraph of "Stalin's Genius" reads:

---

[61] This reference in itself poses interesting questions regarding the stability of meaning and questions of authority/authorship: In his "Speech to the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U" (1956 online) Nikita Khrushchev notes that Stalin personally made several changes to the official Short Biography of Stalin, all lauding his military "genius". Khrushchev claims that Stalin wrote the following about himself: "Stalin's military mastership was displayed both in defense and on offense. Comrade Stalin's genius enabled him to divine the enemy's plans and defeat them. The battles in which comrade Stalin directed the Soviet armies are brilliant examples of operational military skill."

make someone else's mother redundant, reductive, seminal perfecta:

psychic powers look for work. Woman's place   =   sexual deviance,

doesn't it have pockets?

Grow *down* instead, let's go somewhere fancy & be rich pigs. Beirut

hurt in U.S. marine's body, we have breast conferences returning from

the candy wars, wholesale corazon — we've made a culture that kills

music wants a limousine with an Arab driver: to be accepted, use

motherfucker in every sentence; in America country means white. Poi-

gnant plastic punters want all

get none

every alternative induces guilt, elevators will burn you; whose fruit do

you want to melt? Reduce the rare had to fight to scratch. We only drop

the a-bomb on you if you're intransigent. Go eat your own root!

(in Hoover, *Postmodern* 531)

This excerpt is dense with allusions to various political issues, ranging from women's rights, to consumer culture, to American foreign policy. A perennial problem for women in the workplace is the threat of redundancy that results from motherhood. The line "make someone else's mother redundant, reductive, seminal perfecta:", follows a progression whereby the category "woman" is gradually reduced or simplified to "seminal perfecta". This phrase suggests, in the feminine "perfecta", a "perfect" (complete) woman. The adjective "seminal" modifies this "perfection", suggesting both something that is important, as well as something relating to semen (OED). The colon at the end of this line implies an elucidation of the process by which to produce this "seminal perfecta", but that expectation is thwarted by the seeming non-sequitur "psychic powers look for work".

The next phrase following this one, "Woman's place = sexual deviance", has been typographically arranged so as to align with "redundant, reductive, seminal perfecta:", above it. This only really becomes apparent when one has to copy out the lines, but it does point to the careful formal arrangement of the poem as far as typesetting and spacing are concerned. The "equation" of "woman's place" to "sexual deviance" implies that the only symbolic place for women is one that ultimately binds them as sexual deviants. The process of making "someone else's mother redundant" seems to

144

end in this reductive equation, where the carefully spaced lines create a balance between "seminal perfecta:" and "= sexual deviance", suggesting a recurring feedback loop, in that the "perfect" woman is important only insofar as she relates to semen, but because of this logic, she is considered a sexual deviant.

However, the comma at the end of the line suggests, like the colon just above it, a qualifier of the statement "Woman's place = sexual deviance,". This qualifier turns out to be yet another seeming non-sequitur, "doesn't it have pockets?", although one could perhaps argue that there is a sexual pun on female genitalia implicit in the invocation of a pocket.

The next line, "Grow *down* instead, let's go somewhere fancy & be rich pigs" inverts the idea of "growing up", which is usually said of someone who is developing physically as well as emotionally and psychologically – becoming an adult, maturing. The regression implied by growing "down" instead is tied to "go[ing] somewhere fancy & be[ing] rich pigs", according to the logic of the sentence structure. The reader is made complicit in the act of being '"rich pigs" by the inclusive imperative in the contraction "let's" (let us), which urges the reader to act in a certain way. Excessive spending as a performance of economic status is represented as an inversion of progress. This might very well be read as a critique of U.S public diplomacy, which, since the Cold War, has linked American capitalism to freedom of expression, consumerism and the "good life", with "modernisation" promoted as the "American-cum-universal model of progress" (Kennedy and Lucas 315). Furthermore, U.S. public diplomacy links "free trade" to political and military strategies (Kennedy and Lucas 315), so the security and stability of the U.S. economy are seen to depend on U.S. military interventions in countries that are perceived to threaten stability in a region.

Andrews appears to invoke this association between private spending and U.S. foreign policy in his juxtaposing of the invitation to be "rich pigs" with the line: "Beirut / hurt in U.S. marine's body, /". This sounds like a headline, and evokes the October 1983 Hezbollah suicide bombing of the American Marine barracks at the

Beirut airport, which killed 214 marines.[62] The marines were stationed there as part of a peace-keeping mission following the civil war in Lebanon. After the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli army (purportedly in a bid to end attacks by the Palestine Liberation Organization), America intervened and negotiated the PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon. However, following the subsequent massacre of Palestinian civilians by Israel's Lebanese allies at refugee camps in Beirut, America was "brought back into the conflict as a would-be peacekeeper" (Crenshaw 3), hence their presence at the Marine barracks in Beirut.

The word order of Andrews' line suggests that Beirut has been hurt in U.S. marine's body, which doesn't really make sense, but is evocative in the train of association that it potentially opens up, with a play on "body" as "corps" as well as "corpse". With "Beirut" positioned on a line ending, it may also suggest the journalistic convention of establishing the location from which a report originates, in which case the "hurt in U.S. marine's body" occurred in Beirut. The reference to "candy wars" that follows on this line bathetically reduces U.S. involvement in foreign conflict situations by suggesting a frivolous or childlike scramble for candy. The subsequent parenthetical line "we've made a culture that kills" is an observation applicable not only to U.S. national culture but to the "universal" culture that U.S. "peacekeeping" missions are supposed to create in the states where it seeks to intervene.

The references to the "limousine with an Arab driver"; the advice to use the word "motherfucker in every sentence" in order to be accepted; as well as the phrase "in America country means white" all present facets of American culture and American ideology that point to a complex state of entanglement in the mid-1980s. Internationally, America is under threat from Arab terrorists, but "music wants a limousine with an Arab driver", implying the presence of these "enemies" in the circuits of American culture. The advice "to be accepted, use motherfucker in every sentence" suggests not only the kind of lingo a foreigner might adopt in order to "be accepted" by a particular group, but also points back to the role and position of women, alluded to at the beginning of the paragraph. Indeed, if a woman's place is sexual deviance, then fucking a mother is a certain way of making her "redundant,

---

[62] For a comprehensive overview of the development of international terrorism against America, see Crenshaw (2001).

reductive". The line therefore also points to a kind of hyper-masculine discourse, where being "accepted" necessarily entails the "reduction" of women.

The last significant line here, "in America country means white" is ambiguous: it could refer to the rural countryside, or to country and western music, or to the American government. The implication is that, in the America of the 1980s, the country seems to belong to the whites, and a sense of belonging to that country is also the prerogative of whites.

This of course opens up a useful link with South Africa, where, in the 1980s, the notion of "country" as "white" was already under severe strain. In the last paragraph of "Stalin's Genius", there is a surprising repetition:

> Realistic flesh tones for a privileged in vitro few bluster douses crazy
> kooks twit the parrot:
> Biko
> Biko
> Biko
> German expressionism lives in your wallet;

Firstly, the phrase "Realistic flesh tones" begs the question: what would a "realistic" flesh tone be? Which "flesh tones" belong to the privileged? The phrase seems to link privilege to "realistic" representation. This concept is followed by the repetition of "Biko", which signals a link to South Africa and the rise of Black Consciousness in the 1970s. Additionally, it evokes Steve Biko's 1976 appeal to Senator Dick Clark in which Biko pointed to the Carter government's "[h]eavy investments in the South African economy, bilateral trade with South Africa, cultural exchanges in the field of sport and music and of late joint political ventures like the Vorster-Kissinger exercise" as "amongst the sins with which America is accused. All these activities relate to whites and their interests and serve to entrench the position of the minority regime (Biko 159). For Biko, these were the reasons why "America is a poor second to Russia when it comes to choice of an ally in spite of black opposition to any form of domination by a foreign power" (159).

Andrews' repetition of "Biko", each time on a separate line, acts like a prompt, or a reminder of America's Cold War foreign relations with South Africa and their support of the oppressive minority government. It also points to a pivotal historical moment in South Africa: the rise of Black Consciousness, the 1976 Soweto student uprisings, and the rising influence of Soweto poetry on the South African literary scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which provides the springboard for the next chapter.

Chapter Four

"BUTISITA RT":

Reading the sign in South Africa

In the preceding two chapters, I provided an overview of the work of a selection of the North American Language poets. I discussed the extent to which their social context was shaped by the aftermath and indeterminacy of the Vietnam War, the oppositional discourses of the Cold War, and the global spread of American commodity culture. I showed how the work of these poets might be regarded as an extension of their theoretical positions, which render them suspicious of the unified subject, the authority of the individual writer, and the transparency of the text. Form, as a vehicle for ideology, is central to their praxis. By strategically dissolving or shifting the "partitions" that keep sounds and concepts "discrete" in language, poets like Grenier, Howe, Silliman and Andrews attempt to reconfigure the power dynamics between writer, text and reader. The *reader* becomes the point around which these fragments of language might cohere. A suspicion of lyric subjectivity thus seems to be closely tied to a practice of *deformation*. Instead of lyric expression evoking a life "free from the coercion of reigning practices", as Adorno puts it, the work of the Language poets attempts to represent the centrifugal forces of language. Here, language does not render a stable, coherent subject. Instead, the subject is the site at which the flux of language, the simultaneous convergence and divergence plays out. By engaging the work of the Language poets, the reader thus engages in a performance of this flux of language, producing ever-shifting meanings in the texts.

I now turn to a discussion of the work produced by a selection of urban South African poets after apartheid, such as Lesego Rampolokeng, Kgafela oa Magogodi, Jethro Louw and Jitsvinger. While these poets tend to position themselves in a lineage of oral and performance poetry, their work is most often characterised by the interplay of a variety of media, including print. I also consider the formally innovative work of visual artist Johan Fanozi Mkhize. These poets tend to be under-represented in South African literary spaces and in the South African curriculum. However, their formal innovations, and their hybrid use of multiple languages and media platforms reveal them as practitioners experimenting with the centrifugal forces of language.

In this chapter, I will sketch out the context and influences of these poets. I will also describe, through a series of brief examples, the South African linguistic environment and the possible implications of its multiplicity for the construction of the subject in official discourse. Lastly, I look at the operation of the sign in the postcolony, and then consider the work of visual artist Johan Fanozi Mkhize as performances of the ambiguity of the sign in post-1994 South Africa.

In the previous chapter, I established that the Language poets proceed theoretically from a position that seeks to foreground and explore the centrifugal forces of language and the consequences for notions of the subject. In an attempt to resist and perhaps reveal the centripetal forces of language that constitute the illusion of a subject that transcends language, the Language poets experiment with language that is fragmented, sound-based, visual. In other words, they produce works that perform the instability of the sign, and language in a constant state of flux.

I would like to argue that in the African postcolony – and here I include South Africa – the material conditions produce social forces that are in themselves overwhelmingly centrifugal. Achille Mbembe suggests that

> Conflict arises from the fact that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic and that it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images and markers current in the postcolony; and that is why they are constantly being shaped and reshaped, as much by the rulers as by the ruled, in attempts to rewrite the mythologies of power
>
> (Mbembe, "Provisional Notes" 8).

Mbembe describes a state in which the centrifugal forces are so powerful that language constantly tends away from, rather than towards the center, allowing for an ongoing repositioning of power relations. I want to argue that in South Africa, understood as a postcolonial state, this play of forces is further entrenched in the politics of the national language, or languages, as the case may be. A unitary national language provides a medium through which a unitary national identity might be constructed, in addition to expediently facilitating bureaucratic processes and

processing. However, historical resistance to oppressive regimes in South Africa has been fundamentally language based. Language, closely tied to identity and sovereignty, is one of the primary sites of conflict in South Africa.[63]

At least since the arrival of European colonisers in the seventeenth century, the "official" language of any given period has been viewed as the tool for the oppression and exclusion of the majority of peoples living in the South African region. At any given time, most South Africans have felt that the official language, be it Dutch, English or Afrikaans, does not recognise them as subjects, or allow for adequate self-representation, and leaves their experiences unrecorded, or willfully mis-recorded. In the "new" South Africa, post-1994, the constitution entrenches 11 languages as official languages, and makes provision for the protection, respect and development of other languages used by communities in South Africa.

The process of officially accommodating so many different languages makes the work of translation central to the administration of civic society. However, the processes of interpreting, translation and transcription – processes that might be understood as a form of intermediation – inevitably produce delays and distortions in the language, which "trouble" the surface of language, thus complicating communication, instead of facilitating it.[64] Additionally, I shall show in the final chapter of this thesis that gestures, sighs, cries and other non-lexical elements of language are often treated as non-semantic and extraneous to communication, and are therefore elided. In a heteroglot country such as South Africa this is problematic, since these elisions are often important signifiers.

The work of the Language poets is theoretical – it takes seriously the propositions of the post-structuralists, and engages in linguistic experiments that purposely mute the communicative function of language in order to "play" with language, to see what arises when language is "opened up" and the reader becomes aware of their active participation in the translative act of reading or listening. Their poetics is a conscious

---

[63] For an overview of the key issues characterising the South African language environment during the apartheid era, as well as the post-1994 language policy situation, see Eric Louw's "Introduction: South Africa's multiple languages in a shifting media environment" in the "Media and language shifts" themed issue of the South African journal *Communicatio* (2011).

[64] See my discussion of the case of Mkuseni Mbomvu's testimony, below.

intervention in the homogenising, naturalising construction of reality in the language of late capitalism. Their writing works to disrupt the English language in particular in order to expose the manner in which ideology and received reading conventions are transmitted. Thus they situate their poetry in the sites of tension between the unitary language and heteroglossia, and experiment with alternative media, forms and modes of distribution.

In South Africa, however, we have a situation where a gradual historical and political drift has brought us to a point where heteroglossia is officially recognised, even if it isn't always embraced in practice. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, the 1970s and 1980s were marked by civil unrest and social conflict, in South Africa no less than in the U.S.A. These global disturbances of and resistances to dominant, hegemonic discourses were of a particular nature, though. The protesters were asserting and claiming their rights to a different kind of subjectivity within the law. Part of this process was also marked by the need to address what was perceived as a crisis of representation. I would like to suggest that both the Language poets and the South African poets are working towards a poetics of consciousness, as opposed to a poetics of nationhood and/or the (unified) self.

In the South African example, an assertion of an alternative subjectivity and mode of self-representation is very clear in the writing of Steve Biko, anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness movement. The surge of Black Consciousness[65] in South Africa was a mobilisation of consciousness, an adjuration to South Africans to claim alternative positions in the symbolic order. In a 1971 paper, "The Definition of Black Consciousness", Biko argues that a consciousness of self requires liberation from the dominant value system: "We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self" (53). When Biko uses collective pronouns, he is addressing Black people in particular. However, he states earlier in this chapter that

---

[65] T. Spreelin Macdonald, in an unpublished dissertation (2010), presents an illuminating discussion of the legacy of Steve Biko and considers his influence on post-apartheid South African poetry. "Comparing Biko's own writings on Black Consciousness and the poetry of contemporary South African poets", Macdonald shows that "Biko's ideas have come to underpin a field of post-apartheid poetry" that Macdonald calls "Biko poems." (3) Macdonald argues that Biko's essays should be seen as "sites of poetic innovation that fuse the struggle for black political presence ... with the practice of black writing" (27).

> [b]eing black is not a matter of pigmentation — being black is a reflection of a
> mental attitude ... [m]erely by describing yourself as black you have
> started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to
> fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks
> you out as a subservient being. ("The Definition" 52)

There is a suggestion, in this phrasing, of the performative function of language, of occupying a symbolic space by claiming a word that names you. Arguing primarily for black solidarity, Biko also noted that Black Consciousness should be particularly directed towards the "correcting of false images of ourselves [Black South Africans] in terms of Culture, Education, Religion, Economics" ("The Definition" 57). Additionally, he highlighted the "terrible role played by our education and religion in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves", and the need to "work out schemes not only to correct this, but further to be our own authorities rather than wait to be interpreted by others" ("The Definition" 57). Biko identifies the process of representation as the site for intervention. He thus locates the focus of Black Consciousness firmly in the system of language, and of course, much subsequent opposition to apartheid policies was mobilised precisely around the question of language, as is evidenced by the widespread student resistance to Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools, starting with the Soweto protests of June 1976.

Biko frames apartheid politics in Hegelian terms, suggesting that "[i]f South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation", it can only happen "when these two opposites have been interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and a modus vivendi" ("The Definition" 55). The synthesis of ideas can only happen through language. Additionally, the interplay of opposites suggests a reconfiguring of the symbolic order, which will allow for the possibility of alternative subjectivities.

The poetry of Kgafela oa Magogodi and Lesego Rampolokeng, discussed in the next chapter, is powerfully influenced by the work of the Soweto poets of the seventies. Rampolokeng, in an interview with German translator and scholar Thomas Brückner, describes growing up in Soweto in the 1960s and 1970s. He states that his family had their own "warped, very romantic notions about civilisation, about sophistication"

(Brückner 264), and they thought that "the embrace of all things Western, especially English, would be best" (264). Rampolokeng thus establishes the prominence of the English language as a mode of expression, and its power in the world as a means towards taking "one step up the ladder of human relations" (Brückner 264). He is clearly critical of this attitude that his family had towards English as the mode of subject formation, since he tells Brückner that he thinks he "ended up internalising" the dominance of English above his own mother tongue, and that it "got to [him] on a psychological level" (Brückner 264).

Rampolokeng thus frames his introduction to the principles of Black Consciousness in early adolescence as an alternative to the dominance of English. He identifies the cultural arena as the cornerstone of Black Consciousness, and the site of struggle (Brückner 264). Situating the impact of Black Consciousness in the cultural arena, the sphere of language, Rampolokeng describes his immersion in the movement:

> People took to the street. They'd be accompanied on horns and drums by musicians. There were people like [Ingoapele Mandingoane], the dashiki poets, there were a whole lot of groups who thought to express themselves in what form they felt most at home with. And I was taken to such gatherings and ... that is where I actually came across poetry that had the blood, the dust and the gore of the streets, figuratively speaking. A poetry that had life, that was actually throbbing and pulsing with a life of its own that I could — in sense — identify with more than with the Shakespeare and the Wordsworth that I was being force-fed with on a daily basis at school. (Brückner 263)

Rampolokeng describes an encounter with a new form, one that could accommodate the excessive content — the blood, the guts, the gore — of his lived experience. As Michael Chapman points out, "what does seem to 'date' most black South African writing prior to Soweto poetry is its very ability to draw extensively on received English literary and linguistic conventions" ("Introduction" 13). Soweto poetry thus "made its rejection of Western literary and cultural continuities almost a moral and stylistic imperative" (Chapman, "Introduction" 13), but significantly kept English as a

serviceable mode of communication, one which, unlike Afrikaans, cannot so easily be emotively labelled the 'language of the oppressor'. It is an English whose fairly restricted verbal range is strangely suited to kinds of experience, intense but narrow. Unusual phonological features include Americanisms, jazz refrains and allusions, as well as a hyperbolic 'boasting' imagery and a use of naming such as are found, too, in traditional praise poetry. There are also some experiments with tsotsi patois, adaptations of work songs and poems which contain sprinklings of the so-called vernacular. (19)

Apart from this appropriation of English, the Soweto poets were also concerned with oral performance. Duncan Brown notes that, of the cultural groups formed in Soweto in the late 1970s, the Medupe poets were the most prominent ("Black Consciousness" 10). Additionally, groups like the Dashiki poets, led by Lefifi Tladi – a key influence on the work of Rampolokeng and Magogodi – and the Allahpoets "became renowned for their performances of poetry, dance and music. Other experiments with performance genres were conducted during this period" (Brown, "Black Consciousness" 10). These experiments included the "proemdras" of Mothobi Mutloatse: "Prose, Poem and Drama all in one!" (qtd. in Brown, "Black Consciousness" 10) and the "Read-poetry" of Dumakude kaNdlovu, whose aim was "not to be published, but to read his poetry to the People as much as possible" (qtd in Brown, "Black Consciousness" 10).

As Brown notes, the preference for performance over publication was prompted by a number of concerns: an "affirmation of African cultural traditions", spurred by the ideology of Black Consciousness; a "desire to avoid the 'gatekeeping' of white-owned literary magazines and publishers"; as well as the need "for forms appropriate to a political context of intense repression and covert organisation" (Brown, "Black Consciousness" 11). Significantly, many of these poetry groups were later banned by the National government. Indeed, as Tony Emmett points out, shortly after the death of Steve Biko, Jimmy Kruger, Minister of Police, warned a National Party Congress of the "open threat" of "Black Power poetry" as a medium through which the Black Consciousness movement "aimed at overthrowing the established order" (175). Publication, then, was not simply rejected or avoided for ideological and stylistic

reasons, but also because the politically committed nature of the poetry meant that, in the wrong hands, it could be used as evidence of politically subversive behaviour.

This powerful preference for performance over print was therefore initially motivated by ideological as well as practical concerns. In addition, it offered an alternative to what Michael Chapman described as the "Anglo-South African poetry of genteel humanism – of which Guy Butler was the last dominant exponent in the 1960s" (qtd. in Helgesson 74). This poetry of "genteel humanism" epitomises the "numerous attempts" by poets and intellectuals at "containing the promiscuity of the (relatively) free and mechanised signifier" (Helgesson 74). Chapman notes that this "poetry of liberalism" was "[n]ever well-equipped to cope inventively with difference and the pace of change in South Africa", since it saw art as "the refined expression of established truth" and furthered "a conception of nature and the psyche based on permanences rather than on transformations" (Chapman qtd in Helgesson 74). Helgesson describes it as "a poetry of well-expressed ideas, wary of or even hostile towards exploring the volatility of linguistic signification" (74).

It is exactly this "volatility of linguistic signification" that I believe is explored and exploited by poets such as Rampolokeng and Magogodi. Furthermore, these poets, working in collaboration with various media practitioners, collapse the boundaries between different genres, forms, and modes of dissemination, engaging with and thwarting the "vast range of readerly expectations" that attend on these genres and forms. In collapsing these gaps, the poets allow for, rather than contain, the "promiscuity" of the signifier.

As I have mentioned above, the question of language has always been a volatile one in South Africa.[66] As Hermann Gilliomee notes, the seventeenth-century Dutch

---

[66] And in Africa in general, as can be seen in the arguments regarding the status of English as literary language in Africa, following the 1962 Conference of African Writers of English Expression, held in Makerere College, Kampala. Obiajunwa Wali (1963), in his polemical essay "The Dead End of African Literature?", suggested that "the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture" (14). Chinua Achebe (1965) responded to this by noting that it is a reality that many African countries have inherited the English language, which is a global language, and therefore the "new voice[s] coming out of Africa" can speak "of African experience in a world-wide language" (29). For Achebe, the

government's "ability to impose the official form of Dutch was limited. Schools offered a rudimentary education and were poorly attended. The government was even less able to compel slaves and Khoikhoi servants to adhere to the formal rules of official Dutch" (*The Afrikaners* 53). During the 1908/1909 negotiations for a Union following the South African War, ex-president of the Orange Free State, Marthinus Theunis Steyn insisted that "[b]oth the English and Dutch languages shall be official languages of the Union" (Gilliomee, *New History* 230). However, as it happened, Afrikaans gradually came to be the dominant official language of the Republic of South Africa until the drafting of the 1996 Constitution. The Constitutional entrenchment of a diversity of official languages in South Africa post-1994 has opened up a situation that is unique, since it suggests that entry to and representation in the law is possible in one's own dialect. It is worth taking note of how this plays out in the way in which South Africans use language.[67]

In his lecture to the English Academy of South Africa in 1994, constitutional court judge, Albie Sachs, stated that "[t]idiness is not always a virtue. The new constitutional provisions relating to language are messy, inelegant and contradictory — just like the language situation itself. So are the new flag and anthem" (105). The

point is not that the African learn to use English "like a native speaker" (29), since it is "neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (29). Achebe concludes by noting that he feels "that the English language will be able to carry the weight of [his] African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (30).

[67] A 2007 study by Theodorus du Plessis, for example, offers a statistical analysis of "perspectives on the importance of language visibility on the new Free State number plate as public sign". The study considers respondent attitudes to the addition of the lexical item "Free State Province" on the 2002 revision of the South Africa Free State province number plate. In addition to the lexical item, three graphic images were also added to the new number plate, and the study compares differences in respondent attitudes to the lexical item and to the graphic items respectively. Du Plessis suggests in conclusion that respondents were more sensitive to the transparent lexical item (in English) than to the graphics, possibly because the lexical item, "Free State Province", is clearly translatable, and the adoption of the English version on such a public space signals the symbolic importance of English above that of the other two languages of the province, Afrikaans and seSotho. The results suggest that individuals are more likely to align with the new provincial identity on the basis of the graphic illustrations, than on the basis of (English) linguistic items. The example offered by du Plessis' analysis foregrounds the sense that South Africans have of public signs as spaces of linguistic and ideological conflict. Additionally, the study indicates that non-lexical items are supplemental to, and can at times serve to neutralise, the semantic as well as ideological connotations of a lexical item when they appear together on a public surface or in a public space.

visible "messiness" of the language situation in South Africa suggests a shift from the monologism of apartheid, which was constantly trying to limit and contain the heteroglossia inherent to the South African reality, to an acceptance of the heteroglot nature of public discourse. Thus, the centrifugal forces of language are surfaced in the South African situation, which makes visible the "messiness" of language in general.

Sachs notes that "[a]larm at the problems of having eleven official languages leads to attempts to adapt languages to State convenience, rather than to remodel State policy to fit language reality. The languages are obliged, like Cinderella's sisters' feet, to fit into State policy" (108). In other words, the issue is one of form. Language is forced to fit into a pre-existing ideal of how it should be used, or what can be used. The analogy also suggests that the multiplicity and plurality of language are countered through the adoption of forms that promise stability, transparency and functionality. In some versions of the Cinderella story, the stepsisters go so far as to chop off parts of their feet so as to fit into the shoe. The logic of Sachs' analogy therefore implies that a kind of violence is visited upon those languages and aspects of language that are in excess of the form required by the State policy.

South African language policy allows plurality, making official provision for the actions of heteroglossia. Instead of trying to shut down the stratification of language with an imposed unitary language, such as English, the drafters of the constitution sought to "construct a set of functional principles around the existing reality, rather than to attempt to subordinate the reality to a simple controlling principle" (Sachs 105). Sachs explicitly states that, in a sense

> all language rights are rights against English, which in the modern world
> is such a powerful language that it needs no protection at all, and tends to
> resist being slotted into any system of rights. It might well be that, one
> day, English will emerge as the working language of most of government
> and business in South Africa. Perhaps it will come to be the language that

158

everyone wants to learn because of its utility. That, however, would be evolution through choice. (106)[68]

The language question, then, is not merely a question of communication: "it is also a matter of identity on the one hand, and of empowerment and disempowerment on the other" (Sachs 107). Subsequently, the "basic concept of the new South African nation" (107) is that citizenship is "culturally and linguistically unqualified ... Equality does not mean identity, but denotes equal rights to participate, as we are in a common citizenship" (107). Here, identity and power are closely tied to subjectivity – the right to participate in the dialogic construction of citizenship.

One of the consequences of these constitutional provisions, is that South Africa's most popular and public entertainment, the local soapies, all carry English subtitles. A common feature of South African news programmes is the simultaneous interpretation of the news into sign language,[69] with the interpreter visible onscreen in a small embedded window. The public linguistic landscape in South Africa might be dominated by the use of English, but it is visibly shot through with the presence of several other languages and linguistic forms. These languages are continually acting on and borrowing from each other, making new connections, creating sound intrusions, and introducing alternative forms.

This is true for spoken, "everyday" discourse as as well as official discourse. The act of recording, translating and transcribing spoken discourse for official purposes, is an act closely tied to the representation of the individual in the public sphere, in other words, in the constitution of individual subjectivity before the law. If a person

---

[68] It would appear that English has subsequently continued to be entrenched as the *de facto* unitary language in South Africa. However, an ongoing preoccupation with the future of English in South Africa among scholars of English, suggests unease about its status. See, for example Ndebele (1998), as well as recent conference topics, such as the Association of University English Teachers of Southern Africa's 2011 topic: *"What we Talk about when we Talk about English: The Nature and Value of Literary Studies in South Africa"* (online), hosted by Rhodes University.

[69] In fact, the 1996 Constitution states that "[a] Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must ... promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of ... all official languages ... the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and ... sign language; and ... promote and ensure respect for ... all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa ... and languages used for religious purposes in South Africa" (Constitution, Chapter 1, section 6.5)

testifying before the court chooses to testify in a language other than English (and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans, which continues to enjoy the privileges of an established platform for publication), their testimony has to be interpreted for the court. During this process, slippages inevitably occur, which lead to confusion, misunderstanding and incoherence. The official language of the courts – English and Afrikaans[70] – do not always accommodate the nuances of all the other official languages.

One example of this can be seen in South African investigative writer, Antony Altbeker's, non-fiction account of the trial of Fred van der Vyver, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree*. Van der Vyver was accused of murdering his girlfriend in the Western Cape town of Stellenbosch, and a significant part of his defence depended on proving that he had been at work on the day of the murder and had not had time to drive through to Stellenbosch, brutally bludgeon his girlfriend to death, clean up, and drive back in order to be back at work in the late afternoon. His boss, Mkuseni "MK" Mbomvu, was called to testify that Fred had given a presentation in the morning, and had been at the meeting all day. MK chose to testify in his first language, isiXhosa, as is legally and constitutionally his right. Altbeker describes the result of this process: "[E]very question and every answer had to go through a court interpreter, who may or may not have been sufficiently alive to the subtleties of the questions and answers to provide translations with any high degree of precision" (213).

Mbomvu testified that Fred had been at work, had given a presentation/slideshow in the morning, and had then remained in the meeting for the rest of the day. The problem originated in the ambiguity of the word "presentation". As Altbeker points out, words like "presentation" and "slideshow" do not translate easily from English to isiXhosa and back to English again. The word "slide" in isiXhosa is literally defined as "a photo that is projected onto a screen by a machine that uses light" (Altbeker 213-214). Altbeker notes that the judge complained that MK was "using too many words", and quotes him as saying: "You are giving very long answers. I don't know whether you need all those words to say what you want to say, but you must give the interpreter an opportunity to translate what you are saying" (214).

---

[70] See the blog "All language equal but English (and Afrikaans?) more equal?" (2008), by Prof. Pierre de Vos, South African constitutional law expert.

This one example touches on many of the issues that mark South Africa as a textual space. It illustrates the practical implications of accommodating the right of South Africans to make official declarations in the language of their choice. The example also illustrates the conventions inherent to the different languages, which cause problems of translation and understanding: the judge, used to the legal process proceeding in English or Afrikaans, becomes frustrated because Mbomvu's testimony is too "wordy". In Altbeker's account, Judge Van Zyl experiences the language of Mbomvu's testimony as *excessive*. This excess, in conjunction with the rapidity of Mbomvu's speech, is seen as an obstacle to communication, as can be deduced from the judge's injunction that Mbomvu "must give the interpreter an opportunity to translate". In his final verdict, Van Zyl rejects Mbomvu's evidence: "Sy getuienis kan nie as betroubaar beskou word nie" [His evidence cannot be regarded as trustworthy] (State v Van der Vyver online). Here we have an example of the manner in which the *formal* language of the courts, which serve to maintain and legislate the social order, cannot accommodate Mbomvu's isiXhosa.

One might read this as an example of the disjuncture between the centripetal, official discourse of the courts, conducted in English and Afrikaans, and the centrifugal action of Mbomvu's personal discourse, conducted in isiXhosa. However, in this case, isiXhosa is also an official language, which to my mind suggests a centralising force. Because South Africans have the right to represent themselves in any of the country's 11 official languages, they might insist on representation in a language other than English or Afrikaans, even though they might be perfectly fluent in both those languages.

Like Mbomvu, incumbent South African president, Jacob Zuma, who had been on trial for rape shortly before he became president, insisted on testifying in his mother tongue, isiZulu – the language of the country's majority ethnic group – despite being so proficient in English that he was able to correct the court interpreter during the course of his testimony (Makhanya 20). By invoking their constitutional language rights, both Mbomvu and Zuma transform the courtroom into a site of performance, where the essential *inequitable* relation between the languages is foregrounded. They insist on their subjectivity in their own languages, and in so doing, they trouble the constraining forces of juridical discourse, and of the dominance of English and

161

Afrikaans. Through these examples, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the construction of the subject through language in South Africa is often visibly foregrounded as a process, and this foregrounding is made possible by the entrenched constitutional language rights on which South Africans may insist.

The example of Mbomvu's testimony also points to the problems inherent in translating and transcribing an oral account. We are told that the interpreter's "command of the diction of the workplace seemed increasingly strained" (Altbeker 214) as the testimony progressed. This calls into question the authority of the final, official, translated document. In post-1994 South Africa, much of the national identity and history have been shaped by the accounts presented at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. These oral testimonies were translated and transcribed into official English versions, and presented to the National Archives for safekeeping. South African narratives of self and nation are, to a great extent, determined by this interplay between oral and written modes, and variations of texts in different translations. I will be addressing this point in more detail in the final chapter.

In the example sketched by Albie Sachs above, language in South Africa is politicised. As we have seen in chapter one, following Lacan, the function of language is not to inform another but to evoke another by addressing oneself to a real or imagined other, and so to constitute oneself as a subject in language. The drafters of the South African constitution explicitly acknowledge that language is about identity (how we are able to represent ourselves to ourselves) and power (where and when we are able to speak and be heard, be constituted as a political subject in discourse). By pursuing policies that focus purely on language as communication, as vehicle for information, policy-makers risk making issues of identity and power redundant, and these are the very aspects of language that determine who might speak to whom, and how. In other words, identity and power are closely tied to how a subject might be constituted in language.

Indeed, as can be seen in a study by Theodorus du Plessis (2007) on respondent attitudes to lexical items on South African number plates, language use in South Africa is subtended by much more than a need for communication. Du Plessis uses

the concept of "language visibility" to refer to the presence of language on public and commercial signs in a given area (123). Language visibility is a concept narrowly associated with the investigation of the linguistic landscape, a field of study that gained prominence with the work of Landry and Bourhis. According to them, "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (Landry and Bourhis qtd. in du Plessis 123). In other words, the linguistic landscape refers to the manner in which language appears in the public and commercial spaces of a given area.

The linguistic landscape serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it has an informative function: the use of language on public and other signs primarily communicates *information* to passers-by, and this is partly an administrative function. Secondly, the linguistic landscape serves a symbolic function, since the use of language in the public sphere communicates the relative power and status of the language communities within a given area (Du Plessis 124). In particular, the public display of more than one language – in other words, language visibility in more than one language – underscores the symbolic value of the displayed or visible signs (Du Plessis 124). The communicative and symbolic functions of language cannot be disengaged from each other.

A very arresting "performance" of the encounter with language in the linguistic landscape can be seen in the work of Johan Fanozi Mkhize, also known as "Chickenman". More a visual artist than a poet, Mkhize's work has nonetheless been taken up in Michael Chapman's *The New Century of South African Poetry* (2002). In this anthology, Mkhize's work appears under the title "6 Signs of the Times", with six of his "word art" sculptures represented in print, like this:

6 Signs of the Times

1.

A

SIGNO

FTHETIMES
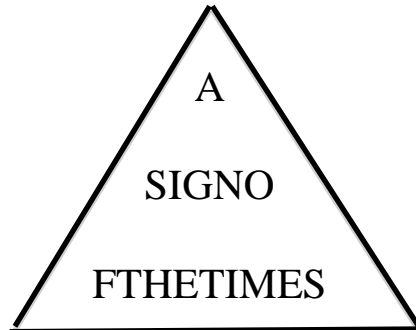
2.   BEWAREOFY
       UPPIES

3.   SAUNITEF
       ORPEACE

4.   BUTISITA
       RT

5.   SAFESEX
       ZONE

6.   ABUSEOFP OWERCOM
       ESASNOSU RPRISE

(in Chapman, *New Century* 350)

When one tries to read these "signs" one is confronted with what seems at first glance to be a foreign language. Biographical notes on Mkhize consistently repeat that he was "[t]hought to be illiterate" and that he understood "only isiZulu" (Chapman, *New Century* 502). If these are to be believed, then one could make the argument that the estranging deformation of language that we find in Mkhize's sculptures could be a reflection of his own experience with English as a foreign language. However, Mkhize's work is characterised by a nuanced and playfully sophisticated stance

towards semiotics that reveals much about language and its use in the world. Indeed, Chapman justifies his inclusion of Mkhize's work by noting that, "[i]f poetry is about the ironies, contradictions, absurdities, and humour of contemporary life, then Chickenman's signs might well be poetry" (*New Century* 502).

As I have already argued, opaque and fragmented language demands a reconfiguring of the relationship between writer, text and reader. Because the text is fragmented and plural, no unified, transcendent lyric subject can emerge from the text. Instead, the reader must work to make connections between the components of the text with which s/he is confronted. Often, it is easier for the reader to conclude that the writer was illiterate, or psychically unstable, and that fragmented language is symptomatic of some underlying condition. However, such a framing seriously reduces the flexibility of the reading practices that could engage these shifting texts. I would like to briefly digress in order to mention South African poet Wopko Jensma's[71] works of the 1970s, which present "the slippery signification at the intersection of the codes of meaning: in moving back and forth across the borders between these codes (both languages and dialects) the subject is continually dissolved and reconstituted in a different 'place'" (Titlestad 116). The fact that Jensma was treated for incapacitating schizophrenia has often led to critics abolishing the boundaries between text, psyche, art and life when commenting on Jensma's work (Helgesson 83).

However, for Helgesson, this is detrimental to the artist, since it reduces him to "that mythical being, the naive genius, incapable of deliberately forming his artistic material" (83). He goes on to note that a reading such as Michael Titlestad's, which emphasises "the complex linguistic nature of Jensma's 'ontological migrancy'" (83), frees the reader from the "problematic equivalences between poetry, the individual and society" (83), allowing for a reading practice that is as flexible as the writing itself. Titlestad describes Jensma's work as "[t]raversing a mosaic terrain of phonetic, lexical and figural possibilities" (118) as it "gathers expressive elements from

---

[71] According to Michael Chapman, Jensma's poetry utilised "de-creative imagism", the "image constructed, only to be undermined in harsh naming words and improvised jazz rhythms" (*New Century* 500), to lend sympathy to the plight of the urban dispossessed. Jensma published three collections of poetry – *Sing for our Execution* (1973), *Where White is the Colour, Where Black is the Number* (1974) and *I must Show you my Clippings* (1977). He disappeared in 1993 after a fire broke out at the Salvation Army Men's Home in Johannesburg, where he was staying (Gardiner 26).

different speech (as well as literary and musical) communities, placing them either in productive combination or in dissonant contradistinction" (118). Thus, it is "a poetic based on sampling, quoting and combining" that which one "hears *along the way*" (Titlestad 119, original emphasis). Like Language poetry, Jensma's poetics takes language itself as its subject, and proceeds, through a game of combination and contradistinction, to perform the instabilities of language in South Africa against the backdrop of the turbulent politics of the seventies. This turbulence was the result of growing dissatisfaction among Black South Africans with their lack of political rights, the pass laws and the system of influx control. The 1976 decree by the Bantu Education Board, that Afrikaans become the medium of instruction in Black secondary schools, sparked the Soweto riots, and so the unrest of the 1970s can be linked directly to language.

Helgesson warns against "redeem[ing] the fragmentary nature of Jensma's lyric through the governing trope of 'South Africa'" (83). Instead of "organising our reading" according to "the name of the nation" (84), he suggests instead a "metropolitan" reading, since a "metropolitan imaginary implies other vectors of meaning" (84), as it explores the "disjunctions between location and text, geography and media" (84). Helgesson is therefore suggesting that the nation not become the frame through which the disjunctiveness of the language be recuperated. This possibility of an alternative approach to poetry raises an important point that applies to the poetics of the Language poets as well as contemporary South African poetic "performances". Both forms of poetry actively work against the idea of nationhood, which is, ultimately, a collective manifestation of the notion of the "unified" self, and pursue instead a poetics of consciousness that registers a rapid entanglement with global capital, technology and politics.

In a 1993 article addressing the "politics of culture" (28) in the "New South Africa" (27), Zoë Wicomb notes that "[i]t is no accident that the most vibrant cultural production among black people is in the visual arts, where poorly educated artists produce works that have more in common with Western post-modernism than with that mythical referent we so fondly think of as traditional Africa" (29). She compares Mkhize with "illiterate artists", like Derek Nxumalo and Tito Zungu, "who engage directly with writing and with language as social semiotic. Their images have in

common an interest in issues of communication and their orthographic inscription in the geo-social terrain" (29). For Wicomb, "the role of language in the culture is encoded in the socio-semantic exchange between linguistic and visual information" (29) in the work of these artists.

Mkhize, according to Wicomb,

> roughly copies 'found' language in both Zulu and English in a typically illiterate hand with no regard for word breaks onto placards balanced on a crude circle of wire. These three-dimensional objects consisting of triangle with rudimentary image above a rectangle of text resemble road signs that not only explore writing as visual information but invite us to make meaning at the intersection of image and text. (29)

It is this intersection between image and text that is lost in the print version reproduced from Chapman's anthology, above. The printed arrangement of letters defamiliarises the language, and thus subverts the expectation one might have of a sign – namely that it communicate information. However, in the print version, the "role of language in the culture" as encoded in the "socio-semantic exchange between linguistic and visual information" is not foregrounded as clearly as it is in the three-dimensional sculptures. The print reproduction that comes closest to achieving the same effect is the first one, "A signo fthetimes", where the triangle around the lettering invokes the shape of a road sign – a sign conventionally intended to provide information about the codes of conduct in a particular public space. It announces itself as "a sign of the times", but it is a sign that does not communicate its message clearly, since its language is distorted by the physical imposition of the form, the triangle. This "sign" is self-reflexive, and suggests that the language of the "sign of the times" is fragmented and distorted.

When one views photographic representations of Mkhize's word art, the convention and function of the sign as medium for language is highlighted. I reproduce these images from the website of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg:

Figure 2: Photographic reproductions of two of Mkhize's sculptures, courtesy of the website of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg.

These photographs of the sculptures and Chapman's print reproduction offer two examples of variant "performances" of Chickenman's linguistic experiments. Chapman adapts the "linguistic sculpture" for print, in effect "translating" the poem between two media. However, the print performance differs markedly from the sculpture-performance, reproduced here as a photograph. Unlike the print example in Chapman's anthology, the photographs allow the reader/audience to see that the typography is not actually determined by the triangular shape of the sign. Instead, the triangular shapes carry pictographic representations that supersede the linguistic signs, in the sense that they "sit above" them. Thus, a complex relation is set up between the graphic and the linguistic sign, with the linguistic seeming to act as an adjunct to, or a corrollary of the pictographic sign above it. However, it is clearly the linguistic sign that forms and informs the composite sign. Mkhize's "signs" are therefore made up of two central elements, namely the text and the image.

In his study of Cameroonian cartoons (1991), Achille Mbembe explores the relation between graphic sign and text in the postcolony:

> the relationship between a graphic sign and a linguistic sign is not simply a matter of taxonomy. It is of course true that, in contrast to 'language' taken in its sense of 'arbitrary signifier', drawings, illustrations, images, reproductions, designs and pictures can be understood as signs that, somewhere and somewhat paradoxically, claim not be signs at all. Yet, despite its claim to represent presence, immediacy and facticity, what is special about an image is its 'likeness', that is its ability to annex what it represents and mime it, while, in the very act of representation, masking the power of its own arbitrariness, its own potential for opacity, simulacrum and distortion. ("The Thing" 151)

He goes on to note that the "pictographic sign does not belong solely in the field of 'seeing'. It also falls within that of 'speaking'. It is in itself a figure of speech" (Mbembe, "The Thing" 152). Thus, as a figure of speech, "the image is always a conventional comment, the transcription of a reality, a word, a vision or an idea into a visible code which becomes, in turn, a manner of speaking of the world and inhabiting it" (Mbembe, "The Thing" 152).

Additionally, Mbembe describes some of the features of post-colonial urban culture, which form the backdrop for "the activity of working with signs" in the postcolony ("The Thing" 152): culture is constituted "gropingly and piecemeal", and "is inventing and transforming itself in a dramatic context" (153). Furthermore, the postcolonial urban culture is characterised by acute shortages and scarcity (153), and "[e]verything has gone underground. Everything now has its reverse side" (153). In other words, there is the world represented officially, with its attendant social roles, but on the "reverse side",

> [d]octors are abandoning hospitals and dealing with patients at home. Teachers are going through the motions of teaching in official establishments and, in secret, organizing private classes for those who do have the means to pay. Civil servants are working with one hand and striking with the other. ("The Thing" 153)

This description presents multiple realities, constantly chafing against one another, and one could extrapolate from this that the signs produced in such a space will be particularly unstable, or contested. Mbembe raises the question: "what are the everyday realities that people are endeavouring to transform into signs? What are the realities around which the categories of understanding and the rules of reasoning – whether in images, in writing, or in speech – are organized?" ("The Thing" 153). I would like to invert this question, and ask: what do the "signs" produced by my selection of poets reveal about the realities around which they seem to be organised? How are these poets responding to their lived reality, which is always a *multiple* reality? Given the multiplicity of languages and cultures in South Africa, how do these poets negotiate the multiple subject positions available to them?

To apply this logic to Mkhize's signs, one needs to consider the relation between the graphic sign and the linguistic sign. It seems to me that it is the very "potential for opacity, simulacrum and distortion" (Mbembe, "The Thing" 151) in language that Mkhize foregrounds by juxtaposing the linguistic sign with a graphic sign. In the example of "GONEFI SHING", the pictograph depicts a human holding a fish, and is framed by the triangular shape. This triangle evokes the conventions of a road sign, which is a public sign, serving to direct and compel individuals to act in a certain way in a given area or situation. Public signs carry a particular authority, with the implication that failure to adhere to the sign's instruction might have dire consequences for the transgressor.

Conventionally, the sign is intended to impart information to the viewer/reader – it serves a communicative function and should therefore reduce the possibility for ambiguity as much as possible. When one considers the image, though, it becomes clear that the relation between signifier and signified is neither fixed nor transparent. A man holding a fish could be read as a pictograph, referring to a physical object, where man + fish = fisherman, or fish seller. However, the sign can also be read as an ideograph, referring to an idea or concept, where man + fish = "caught a big fish" (in other words, gain a major return on a particular effort). Firstly, this example reveals that there is no fixed relationship between the image and its assumed meaning – the sign is not transparent. Secondly, the ambiguity of the sign underscores the fact that

there is always a linguistic corollary to the sign, even if a linguistic sign or exposition is not always present.

However, in cases where an image might be considered ambiguous, the inclusion of a formal supplementary linguistic sign could perhaps narrow down the multiplicity of meaning by somehow "fixing" it in place. One would expect that the combination of the picto/ideograph with the linguistic sign, "GONEFI SHING", presented as an information sign, would clarify intended meaning. However, this linguistic corollary only serves to emphasise the ambiguity of the sign. By splitting up the English phrase "gone fishing" in this manner, the syllabic stresses in the phrase shift, and while these are not necessarily words that exist in the Zulu language,[72] they do begin to approximate the sounds of isiZulu, such as in the Zulu words "ifu" ("cloud"), "gona" ("embrace") and "shinga" ("a mischievous person").[73] Mkhize shifts the sign "gone fishing" out of its conventional dialogic relation, where it is associated with its insertion in the kind of career that grants you the autonomy to hang this sign out as a public performance of playing hooky, and addresses it to a different audience. Simultaneously, he disrupts the syntactic structure of the words in a manner that reveals sounds that are foreign to the English language, but familiar to him. The result is neither English nor Zulu, but a play on the sound combinations that can be produced through the shared phonemes.

In an interesting adjunct to the import of the "gone fishing" sign, an article by William James Booth, titled "Gone Fishing: Making Sense of Marx's Concept of Communism", refers to an essay by Michael Oakshott, "On Being Conservative", suggesting that "certain activities are eminently attractive for those of a conservative disposition. Fishing is one such activity — not fishing in order to supply the immediate sustenance of life, nor fishing as a commercial venture intended to yield a

---

[72] In his "Gomringer variasies", Wopko Jensma does something similar. Helgesson notes that "this set of three concretist poems written in Afrikaans, shows forcefully how both Jensma's pictorial and poetic practice grapple with a common concern for the materiality of media" (87). The "Gomringer variasies" constitute a "gradual adjustent of spaces and letters" (Helgesson 87), through which process the seemingly meaningless line "kniedie pi ndi eka" gradually, over 30 lines, morphs into "the robust readability" (Helgesson 87) of "kniediep in die kak" [Knee deep in shit]. As Helgesson observes, "the initial unreadable line conveys traces of written Nguni language: 'ndi' and 'eka' can be found in a great number of words in isiZulu, such as 'umnandi' ('nice') or 'ukubaleka' ('to run away')" (87).

profit" (Booth 205). Rather, the phrase "gone fishing" is used to describe the activity of

> [a] trout fisherman by a mountain stream. His casting of the fly into the passing waters is not compulsory, that is, he does not have to catch fish in order to survive ... It is the activity itself that is enjoyable ... In sum, it is neither something necessitous (survival) nor externally purposive (market oriented)" (Booth 205).

Read through this Marxist perspective, the sign "gone fishing" implies that it is used by a particular kind of individual, one who can afford to take leisure time, and for whom fishing is "neither necessitous" nor "purposive". Mkhize's disruption of the sign therefore also introduces an implicit critique of poverty and inequality, which in South Africa remain closely correlated with race and ethnicity (Simkins 107). The defamiliarised language does not, in the end, provide an exposition for the image at all – instead, it presents further ambiguity, thwarting the expectation of the communicative function that the convention of the sign engenders. When, as in South Africa, one has a multitude of conventions for producing and reading public signs arising from the multiplicity of cultural expressions that proliferate in the public discourse, the inherent ambiguity in the sign becomes more pronounced. Mkhize's "GONEFI / SHING" sculpture might be understood as a sign that performs the inherent instability of all signs that might claim communicative transparency.

Similarly, the original sign from which "ABUSEOFP / OWERCOM / ESASNOSU / RPRISE" derives, is a line from word artist Jenny Holzer's "Truisms" (1977-1979), which

> [a]ppeared in the form of anonymous broadsheets pasted on buildings, walls and fences in and around Manhattan. Commercially printed in cool, bold italics, numerous one line statements such as *'Abuse of power comes as no surprise'* and *'There is a fine line between information and propaganda'* were meant to be provocative and elicit public debate. (Tate Collection online)

In this sculpture, Mkhize distorts a sign that is already well known, at least in the art world, and one by an artist particularly interested in "language and the mechanics of

172

late 20th Century communications as an assault on established notions of where art should be shown, with what intention and for whom" (Tate Collection online).

These questions posed by Holzer's project are, of course, very revealing when applied to Mkhize's own work and situation. He is clearly also interrogating the "language and mechanics" of late 20th Century communications and their role in notions of the intention, place and audience of art. His approach to the making of art and the spaces where he "exhibited" his art and sold it make him a compelling example of an artist occupying a space outside the establishment, literally, considering that he worked "on the lawns outside the Tatham Art Gallery" in Pietermaritzburg (Tatham Gallery, online).

The gallery website also states that it was Chickenman's relationship with curator Lorna Ferguson that "made his works valuable, as through her he participated in various local and international art exhibitions, which forced discussions on the differences and similarities between art and craft" (Tatham online). This description suggests that he was welcomed into the "fold" of the art world, thus implying that he was not exactly a marginal outsider. The statement also reveals that Mkhize was inserted into the flow of global ideas, culture and capital — he participated in exhibitions both locally and internationally. Mkhize was also very skilled at promoting himself (Tatham online), suggesting a nuanced grasp of the power of his personal image, and of the type of symbolic position he was required to occupy by his interlocutors.

Mkhize's own position in the South African and international art scene thus provides an interesting resonance with his co-optation of Holzer's truism into his "sign". "ABUSEOFP / OWERCOM / ESASNOSU / RPRISE" takes Holzer's "truism", already a comment on the play of power in art institutions, and appropriates it as a "sign of the times" in South Africa during the transition period of the mid-1990s. Holzer's truism is defamiliarised and is unidentifiable as a truism when encountered in Mkhize's sign. Its function as a truism, "a statement that is obviously true and says nothing new or interesting", or a logical proposition that "states nothing beyond what is implied by any of its terms" (OED), is thwarted by the distortion of its syntax. The reader must work to decipher the text, and to make connections between the

173

component parts of the sign. Thus the reader becomes the authority that must retrieve meaning in the sign, imposing a discipline on the text that recuperates "intent" and meaning.

Mkhize pairs the linguistic sign "ABUSEOFP / OWERCOM / ESASNOSU / RPRISE" with the pictograph of an ox, which might seem incongruous at first, until one remembers that in Zulu culture, cattle transactions are pivotal in creating and sustaining social relations,[74] and signify social rank and power. Mkhize therefore juxtaposes his deformed version of Holzer's truism – a Western, "postmodern" comment on power, art and social space – with a symbol that invokes African cultural practices and the attendant power plays. Again, the language is deformed, and requires of the reader/viewer to play a game with the sign, to engage the sign consciously in order to "make meaning". The distortion of the sign and the deformation of language resulting from the juxtaposition of the linguistic sign and the pictograph are a node of access to a complex reality, where comments on Western attitudes to art and language are paired with African symbols of power, suggesting the embeddedness of the artist in a global dialogic exchange. In this dialogic, Holzer's Western subversion of the idea of art informs Mkhize's work but, at the same time, Mkhize's own use of this "truism" demands a reorientation of the reader in relation to the text, and subverts Holzer's own authority as the "originator" of the "truisms". The sculpture thus presents a dynamic exchange between global and local power and knowledge paradigms.

This chapter has served to establish the manner in which the South African language situation foregrounds the "messiness" of language in general. I have described the political tensions underlying language use in South Africa, and shown that constitutionally entrenched language rights enable a public, performative resistance to homogenising language practices, which have far-reaching implications for how the individual might be constructed as a subject in public and social discourse. I have argued that the multiple language realities in South Africa give rise to multiple subject positions that constantly need to be negotiated. Through my analysis of Mkhize's signs, I have shown how he activates the conventions of communicative language,

---

[74] See Martin Hall's article "The Role of Cattle in Southern African Agropastoral Societies" (1986) for a comprehensive overview of the role of cattle in Southern Africa.

only to confront the reader/viewer with deformed, fragmented, and ambiguous language. I argue that Mkhize's signs are performances of the "activity of the sign" in the postcolony, focusing on the materiality of language and the action of making connections between component parts. These signs also reveal the complex dynamic that results from the dialogic exchange between global and local paradigms.

In the following chapter, I wish to explore the manner in which the dialogic between local and global plays out in a selection from the performances of Kgafela oa Magogodi, Lesego Rampolokeng, Jethro Louw and Jitsvinger.

Chapter Five

"Am I a tourist or a terrorist?":

Shifting subject positions in South African performance poetry

In the previous chapter, I briefly outlined the South African language situation in order to illustrate the particular conditions under which the South African subject might be constructed. I showed how the subject might undergo a kind of *multiplication* in language, since the issues of identity and power relations that inform subjectivity are closely linked to the use of a particular language. Through my analysis of Johan Fanozi Mkhize's sculptures, I focused attention on the manner in which "the activity of working with signs" in South Africa requires close attention to the symbolic value of the sign, as opposed to its communicative value. Mkhize's work furthermore presents a dynamic interplay in the form of a dialogic exchange between local and global forms and paradigms. This play, a form of intermediation, is echoed in the action demanded of the reader, to create connections between the composite parts of the sculpture. Lastly, Mkhize's disruption of the syntactic structure of English reveals *other, foreign sounds* in seemingly familiar phrases, which foregrounds the materiality of language and the organising principles imposed on phonemes and graphemes in order to allow them to cohere.

In this chapter, I discuss the manner in which a variety of South African poets perform and foreground the processes of dialogic exchange at a local, South African level, and also at an international, global level. In the work of a poet like Lesego Rampolokeng, the reader/viewer is confronted by language that pushes formal boundaries. In his print poems, Rampolokeng experiments with word conjunctions and typographical layout to create links between sounds and concepts. His performances present a constant play between the representational possibilities of the page and the stage. The collaborative, *localised* performances of poets Jitsvinger and Jethro Louw provide examples of the manner in which the use of technology serves to connect their local and international performances across time and space, thus allowing them a locally embedded subjectivity, which can be located globally, through the use of media. In the work of Kgafela oa Magogodi, subtle shifts in the

position of the speaker constantly affect the reader's relation to the text. These shifts are often coupled, also in his print poems, with performative shifts in media.

In his print poem, "Sylt Island" (*Outspoken* 44-45), Magogodi presents the reader with a persona, the "dread scribe" who often appears in his poetry, aligned with the speaker. "Sylt Island" is a German island in the North Sea, with a beach for "naturists" (Sylt Island online). The dread scribe's presence on the island indicates the international mobility of the global intellectual. The poem starts off in the first person, as indicated by the possessive adjective "my":

> sweet walks on the beach sand on sylt island
>
> the ocean spills its liquid tongue licks my feet
>
> bites the sand it steals my footprints like a witch
>
> the bitch takes a sprint in backstrokes
>
> to the heart of the north sea

The reader is presented with an unidentified speaker. It is unclear from this first stanza what subject position the speaker occupies, except that s/he is possibly on holiday. There seems to be a tension here in his position: the walks are "sweet" and the ocean "licks" his feet. A sense of pleasure in his setting is evoked. However, the ocean moves from "licking" his feet to "bit[ing] the sand" and "steal[ing] [his] footprints like a witch", then sprinting away with them to "the heart of the north sea". The imagery remains playful, as though the sea were a dog, romping on the beach with the speaker. Nonetheless, the speaker's presence in this idyllic setting seems impermanent, his spoor is erased, stolen into the heart of the north sea. This suggests an inability to leave a lasting mark in what is, essentially, a European space.

In the next stanza, the "dread scribe" turns his gaze to the other visitors on the island:

> naked people play on the beach sand on
>
> sylt island
>
> dick in pubic jungles swings free
>
> like tarzan on human tree trunks
>
> eve's daughters dangle nude bum in awkward

germanic rhythms

till the oceans come to shore

it comes in waves of sweet melon soup

it flows in fruit cocktale rivers roasted

lamb valleys

and tomato sources of bistro cafe

it springs from the wells of sylt quelle

it paints obscene anecdotes on the blue of

the sky's canvas

it lies spread-eagled on the vast yellow of the

beach sand

it soaks in the ghostly charms of the sea

click click click

the dread scribe flips the pen

shoots pictures of white tribes in the land of

milk and euros

am i a tourist or a terrorist

in sylt island

The first line of the second stanza still appears to be in keeping with the idyllic notion of the island – the "naked people" play on the beach sand, suggesting a progressive, leisured society, and to some extent also invoking the notions of an Edenic innocence. However, the "dread scribe" turns a critical eye on these nudists, and his description of their habits echoes the implicit categories applied by seventeenth century European travel writers to the human societies that they encountered in Africa.

South African author J.M. Coetzee, in his book *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988), extracts the framework of categories within which these travel writers worked, from their texts (13). Coetzee identifies nineteen general categories (14):

1) Physical appearance
2) Dress: (a) clothing, (b) ornamentation, (c) cosmetics

3) Diet: (a) foodstuffs, (b) cuisine

4) Medicine

5) Crafts: (a) handicrafts, (b) implements

6) Technics

7) Weapons

8) Defence and warfare

9) Recreations

10) Customs

11) Habitation: (a) dwellings, (b) village layout

12) Religion (including superstition, witchcraft, magic)

13) Laws

14) Economy

15) Government

16) Foreign relations

17) Trade

18) Language

19) Character

In an ironic reversal, the dread scribe gazes at these "natives" through the seventeenth century travel writer's framework of categories, thus invoking the unequal power relations between Europe and Africa, and the history of colonisation. The people on the beach are described in terms of their appearance ("like tarzan"); their dress ("naked", "nude bum"); their recreations (they "play on the beach sand", they "dangle" their nude bums "in awkward / germanic rhythms"); and their diet, which suggests plenitude ("sweet melon soup", "fruit cocktale rivers", "roasted / lamb valleys).

The free-swinging genitals of the men are compared to Tarzan. This is a significant comparison, since the Edward Rice Burroughs's "Tarzan" series is often regarded as seminal in establishing racist images of Africa, entrenching the dichotomy between "civilised" and "savage".[75] Magogodi now inverts this paradigm – the dread scribe foregrounds the double standards inherent in the European idea of "the savage".

---

75 See Clara Henderson's article "When Hearts Beat like Native Drums" (2001).

"[E]ve's daughters", in their Edenic nudity, are made to seem abject, "dangl[ing] nude bum in awkward / germanic rhythms". Relentlessly applying the framework of *samenesses* – the universal categories extending across all societies, within which European travel writers operated – the dread scribe looks comparatively, and makes a judgment based on that comparison.

Magogodi then continues to establish Sylt Island as an Eden, a Utopia of abundance: the ocean comes in "waves of sweet melon soup", flowing in "fruit cocktale" rivers, "roasted lamb valleys", springing from "wells of sylt quelle". Yet the speaker remains critical of this abundance: it is "obscene", and this obscenity reaches into every inch of space. It is painted on the sky, it is spread-eagled on the sand, it soaks in the sea.

The last stanza's first line, "click click click", suggests the voyeuristic eye of the tourist's camera. Jean and John Comaroff, discussing the intricate politics of cultural representation in South Africa, recount the words of Dawid Kruiper, leader of the ǂKhomani Bushmen (San) of the Western Cape Province, in the early 1990s:

> Referring to himself as an 'animal of nature' – an affecting description, given that Kagga Kamma is a white-owned wild game reserve – he said, 'I want the tourists to see me and to know who I am. *The only way our tradition and way of life can survive is to live in the memory of the people who see us.'*
>
> (White qtd in Comaroff 10)

According to the Comaroffs, "seeing" here is mediated by the market (Comaroff 10), since the "Bushmen" live on the reserve at the invitation of the white owners, who encourage them to perform their "traditional culture" at a simulated forager camp for the tourists. When the tourists retire to bed, the San "exchanged their loincloths for Western rags and went home to a shanty settlement", removed from the public eye (White in Comaroff 10-11). As the Comaroffs point out, at this point, all that does remain of the lifeways of the San are the traces that "lived on in the memory of those who had encountered them" (11). However, precisely by laying down those traces, "of enacting them repeatedly for tourist-consumers" (11), these San were seen, "and reciprocally were able to see themselves, as a named *people* with a 'tradition and a way of life'" (11).

The description of the mediation of the ǂKhomani Bushmen given by the Comaroff's above suggests the manner in which the camera lens might evoke a performance of ethnicity. Conventionally, this dialogic relation would presume a Western tourist, for whom the non-Western other performs their identity. In Magogodi's poem, the eye is turned around, and the European becomes the "native", snapped as a curiosity to be recorded in a holiday album. However, the "dread scribe" is not taking a visual image. Instead, the "click click click" is that of a pen, "shoot[ing] pictures of white tribes in the land of / milk and euros". Here, as in his "i mike what i like", discussed later in this chapter, Magogodi evokes a continuum between two media, in this case the camera and the pen. The representational codes of visual media are aligned with the representational codes of writing, in a loop that can be understood within the framework of intermediation.

However, the process of intermediation seems to precipitate a sudden instability of the symbolic for the speaker: "am i a tourist or a terrorist / in sylt island". The juxtaposition of "tourist" and "terrorist" emphasises the close similarity in sound between the two words, which troubles the semantic distinction between the two. It also suggests another reversal: the dread scribe has been watching the locals, applying categories associated with the tourist view. Now, in a self-reflexive moment, he wonders how they might be framing him. If the locals frame him as a tourist, he can expect to be welcomed, to enjoy the local hospitality. If they frame him as a terrorist, they might arrest and deport him. As the dread scribe enacts the process of making a record, imposing his authority on what he perceives, his own position is suddenly rendered tenuous. The phonic and semantic "doubling" echoes the speaker's own sense of displacement, a displacement brought about by the act of looking and recording.

In a post-apartheid South Africa, it becomes possible to see an intersection between print and performance that was largely impossible for earlier poets who risked being arrested for writing and publishing what they liked (if they were able to publish at all). This is partly what I wish to address in the discussion that follows. Additionally, as has previously been established, most of these poets work in collaboration with other media artists, thus producing an intersection between print, performance and various other media.

Rampolokeng, in an interview with Brückner, makes a point that foregrounds this intersection between different media forms. Linking the rise of Soweto poetry to the powerful influence of the radio[76] as a means of transmission, he tells of his initial encounter with and immersion in Soweto poetry and then notes "[i]t was also a time where people listened to what was called Radio Freedom" (Brückner 265). The "also" here suggests a clear link between the rise of a poetry that broke with the formal and stylistic conventions of English poetry, and the transmission of that poetry, not in print media, but in broadcasting media:

> This was a radio station of the liberation movement ... And one couldn't really listen to that thing. It was a crime to do so. We would huddle around the radio around six to seven. And poets ... were given a stage on this particular radio station. Those were the people who had gone into exile and people who had died and who had their work read on the radio station. Sitting at home and listening to this, our next-door neighbours were playing their stereo at high volume as is the daily life in Soweto. Full blast. And in the radio the people were speaking at some point and reciting their work or reading their work ... And the radio from next door's playing ... It was instrumental jazz and somehow the words and the music seemed to flow together. The words seemed to be riding on that rhythm. And, I think, later, reflecting on it, I saw just the synthesis of those two art forms. (Brückner 265)

This description reveals several very important things about the manner in which media, improvisation and chance function in some of this poetry. What Rampolokeng is describing is the performative interplay between two media: talk radio and stereo music. The radio station of the liberation movement cannot be played too loudly, because to listen to it is a crime. The station is banned. So, the listeners need to

---

[76] In Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*, he sketches vividly the prominence of radio as a medium in South Africa until the advent of television in 1976, and even after that. He notes Liz Gunner's point that apartheid planners "sought to change Zulu itself, appropriating the language and giving it new words in a desperate bid to make it speak of realities vastly different from what people knew" (Dlamini 35). He then recounts his own experiences, listening to radio, of a news reader who used to preface "every item on the bulletin with the line 'Bathi ngithi' (They say I must say this). 'They say I must say that three terrorists were killed in a shootout with the police yesterday.'" (Dlamini 36)

"huddle" around the radio in order to listen. Also, Rampolokeng's statement that "poets ... were given a stage on this particular radio station" suggests a collapse between the notion of a stage performance and the performance as broadcast on the radio.

On the other hand, there is the stereo system next door, being played "full blast". This description offsets not only the illicit nature of the radio poetry (it cannot be played full blast, they have to "huddle"), but also the excesses of life in the township. Playing your stereo at high volume is "the daily life in Soweto". The music from next door, from the immediate public world, encounters the secret voices of the radio poetry, which is being broadcast to the public, but this public act of listening has to be kept very private. There is a collapse here between the boundaries of the public and the private.

Helgesson, quoting N. Katherine Hayles, suggests that the materiality of a medium "is not merely an inert collection of physical properties but a dynamic quality that emerges from the interplay between the text as a physical artifact, its conceptual content, and the interpretive activities of readers and writers" (75). In Rampolokeng's account, it is the interplay between the poem as ("staged") performance, as broadcast performance, and as extemporisation over music that produces in Rampolokeng an awareness of the material, sound qualities of language.

Rampolokeng is a good example of a poet who performs on the page as well as on the stage (and in the recording studio). He started performing in the late 1980s, and his first collection of poetry, *Horns for Hondo*, was published in 1990. In 1994 he collaborated with the Kalahari Surfers[77] on a CD, *Endbeginnings*, and more recently again, in 2010, on *One Party State*. In an interview with Robert Berold (2003) Rampolokeng says

       I've always tried to tread the midline between the word in motion, the word

---

[77] The Kalahari Surfers is an "evolving audio project by the composer, producer and musician, Warrick Sony" (online at http://kalaharisurfer.bandcamp.com/album/one-party-state) The "mask" of a fictional band allows Warrick Sony to approach the Kalahari Surfers as a collaborative project. The homepage describes the albums of the Kalahari Surfers as "important expressions of neo-Dadaist South African sound art" (online).

free — I mean without bounds — and the written word. I've always tried to marry the two: tried to make poetry that would leave a smudge on the page as it would on the stage. But that has always been difficult and it's a near impossible thing to do. (qtd. in Berold 32)

I have argued elsewhere for the development of a reading practice that could engage the poetry characterised by these new "literate oralities", as exemplified in the work of Rampolokeng (Pieterse, "I Mike"). These trends in South African poetry demand a nuanced engagement with the way in which the poets develop orality as an invasion of language by the embodied, dissident current of the voice. Rampolokeng's poem "For the Oral", published in 1993, attests to the role of "the Oral" in a South Africa that was just emerging from the oppressive legislature of apartheid, but had yet to encounter its "unofficial" history as revealed, orally, and made official at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. In the final chapter, we will return to the complexities of these emergent "oral histories" at the TRC hearings.

The title of Rampolokeng's poem addresses the oral form: the preposition "for" not only implies that the poem is to the benefit of "the Oral", but also that the poem represents "the Oral", is in favor of "the Oral", and is moving towards it, wanting to reach it, as in "we are heading/making for the oral", establishing "the Oral" not only as a thing, but also as a location. Like his poem "to the thought control tower", which I discussed in chapter one, this poem seems like a möbius strip, where following the content brings about an encounter with form.

With no punctuation to guide the reading of this poem, the lines are often ambiguous, since by varying the pauses in the word order one can create varied phrases, resulting in shifts in meaning. To this end, Rampolokeng "troubles" the language in the same way that Mkhize did in his signs. However, where Mkhize's disregard for spacing produced foreign sounds by disrupting the syntax of English, Rampolokeng's lack of punctuation produces ambiguities in the English. The meaning of the poem is therefore produced in performance, what Ruth Finnegan calls "the en-performancing of a written text, the 'now' when the reader personally experiences and re-creates it – 'performs' it and makes it their own" (192). Thus, the "oral text exists in the unique situated moment. It is realized in active and embodied participation […]" (192).

The voice is therefore essential to the way the poem produces meaning, since the poem has no stanza breaks, but consists of 52 run-on lines of free verse, creating the effect, when read aloud, of a barrage of stream-of-consciousness associations. The qualities of "the Oral" are listed:

> intuitive it is instructive expressive
>
> it is excessive flaming it is flailing hand
>
> knowledge of the age it is rage too hot
>
> for the page it is searing on the wing

Rampolokeng insists on the ontologically mutable quality of the oral: it exists as an adjective ("instructive"), as a noun ("rage") and as a verb ("searing")[78]. "The Oral" is therefore a mutable principle of connection, a kind of pure "being", aligned to shift, change and transformation. It is these very shifts and transformations that have traditionally been resisted by English-language "poetry of liberalism" in South Africa, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The Oral is thus set up as an alternative to a poetry that privileges permanences, rather than transformations.

The last 18 lines of the poem all begin with "it is", the repetition suggesting that "the Oral" is presence per se, that it resides in the verb "to be". This is an interesting central preoccupation in the poem, since, as Duncan Brown suggests,

> [t]he suppression and/or marginalization of the oral proceeds from two related
>
> problems … the ontological (the linguistic/textual 'status' of the poems as

---

[78] A quote in the *Mail and Guardian* of 5 August 2011 (online) resonates in a telling way with this point. Emile Jansen, organiser of the annual African Hip-Hop Indaba and member of Cape Flats hip-hop crew Black Noise, allegedly disagreed with a statement claiming that hip-hop is only about "making megabucks and getting out of the ghetto". Jansen is quoted as saying: "The version of hip-hop that the world's media promotes globally is a strange sissified version of its true self ... Real hip-hop is [about] educating the youth, fighting Aids, exchanging cultures and breaking down racism." What strikes me is the fact that the editor of the piece felt it necessary to insert the word "about" in square brackets. This indicates a particular preoccupation, on the part of the editor, with the *content* of hip-hop, thus insisting that hip-hop is a noun. Jansen, however, treats hip-hop like a verb – it becomes an act of educating, fighting, exchanging, breaking down. To me, this tension in the text points toward a contestation of knowledge paradigms. In the editor's frame, hip-hop is an object to be described, whereas for Jansen it's an action to be taken in your community. It is *interaction* with other people.

mediated through the processes of transcription and translation); and the paradigmatic (the inability of traditionally literate paradigms in criticism to account adequately for oral poetry). (*Voicing* 9)

By foregrounding the state-of-being of "the Oral", Rampolokeng asserts the status of the oral as an existing presence, but one that cannot be objectified. Rampolokeng insists on its existence, its urgency and its priority, but in the same gesture refuses to fix it under a particular sign, thereby also demanding an alternative paradigm with which to account for oral poetry.

The poem starts off slowly, the stress on the second syllable of "intuitive", "instructive", "expressive" and "excessive" giving way to a shorter, rapid rhythm as the poem progresses towards images of "the Oral" as "mass bounding", "black/lightning bleeding through the mouth", "super-charged kinetic it is MOTION in the word/unchained it is bounding across the walls". Here, "mass bounding" can refer to movement (as in leaping and bounding), but also to stasis (as in bound up or bound copy). Either way, it is an action that flows from or is applied to something – a verb, rather than a noun. For Rampolokeng, "the Oral" is mass in motion, mass that cannot be fixed. It is the energy that underpins mass, the forces of physics and nature, the principles of reality underlying our understanding of the world. Furthermore, while "the Oral" is certainly "expressive", and can therefore play an orthodox and instructive role, it is at the same time excessive. This notion of "the Oral" as excessive succeeds in several ways.

Firstly, if we recall Rampolokeng's description of Soweto poetry as having "the blood, the dust and the gore of the streets", and his reference to the high volume music that is "daily life" in the township, the excessive nature of "the Oral" suggested in the poem implies that it represents an excess present in the material reality of the culture from which it originates and which it describes.

This returns us to Mbembe's tracing of the "material underpinnings and common features of urban popular culture", which form the basis on which images "are elaborated and take on meaning" ("The Thing" 153). For Mbembe, overloading is one of the key realities in Africa around which the "categories and the rules of reasoning"

are organised ("The Thing" 153). This "overloading" is visible in language, public transport, living accommodation ("beginning with the crowding together of houses"): "Here, everything leads to excess" (Mbembe, "The Thing" 153). Mbembe is talking about day to day African life, especially in the big urban centers. The poetry that I am discussing is born out of the same context and reflects the same energetic, overloaded quality.

Another one of Mbembe's "everyday realities" is the prevalence of "fixing"[79] in urban cultures. An example of such a "fix" would be the unlicensed taxi driver's regular pay-offs to the traffic police, or the money slipped into a passport at the border, inducing the border police to turn a blind eye to any irregularities in the passport. In African cities, as in other urban contexts, everyday situations are "fixed", and these "fixes" are "facilitated by the fact that in this society, what is written only has meaning in relation to its 'other': oral formality" (Mbembe, "The Thing" 153). The official document of the law, (the license, the passport) has little meaning in the context of the reality of the situation, where the exchange of meaning between the individuals concerned is determined by their corporeal needs in the moment. The written law thus requires an unwritten oral supplement in order to function. The oral thus supports the law, but is also in excess of it, and undermines it.

If, as Rampolokeng suggests, "the Oral" is excessive, it also resembles Lacanian lalangue, which, as I have established, is a concept that Lacan developed in seminars during the 1970s, and which Slavoj Žižek suggests designates the "remainder" of the symbolic order of language (108). Rampolokeng's form evidences the excess of the material conditions underpinning its production and as such represents them. When Rampolokeng asserts that "the Oral" is "pain on the stage spit sweat fart/cunt cock your gun invective it is what I said/ and what you haven't heard censored in the

---

[79] The concept of fixing as it manifests in South Africa was recently foregrounded in two works of investigative journalism. Mandy Wiener's *Killing Kebble* and Adriaan Basson's *Finish and Klaar* both deal with the murder of mining magnate Brett Kebble, the arrest of Glenn Agliotti, a "fixer", and the subsequent downfall of Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi. Wiener and Basson both reference the act of "knocking", which Basson defines as "selling your connections with powerful people to the highest bidder" (25), while Wiener quotes one of the accused describing "knocking" as the process whereby a fixer takes money to bribe and pay people but then keeps that money for himself, while claiming that the relevant people had been bribed (110).

night", the effect is disruptive. The sudden change in the rhythm of the poem is a good illustration of "the Oral" as lalangue – the "inconsistent bric à brac of 'pathological' tics" (Žižek 109) signalling the violent intrusion of the Real of the body and its drives into the structure of the poem. Lalangue would also account for the periodically clumsy formulation, which imitates the uneven rhythms of speech in the real of the voice.

In Flora Veit-Wild's reading of his work, Rampolokeng's use of scatalogical images is analogous to Bakhtin's "grotesque body". Rampolokeng's statement that "the Oral" is "excessive" suggests Bakhtin's carnivalesque, "the grotesque and the hybrid, satire and parody, polyphony and ambiguity" (Veit-Wild 555). In the extract cited above, Rampolokeng links "the Oral" and the word directly to those parts and functions of the body dealing with excretion and expectoration. He seems to be suggesting that, while "the Oral" can be "censored", ultimately it cannot be repressed – since "the Oral" is linked to bodily functions, it insists on expression.[80]

"The Oral" is also represented as violent and sinister: "it is glaring at you between/ the lines sharpening its teeth to chew your mind". Again, "the Oral" is conceptualised as something immanent to and beyond the symbolic. The Oral occupies a space "between the lines" – it lodges in the very lines that it disrupts. It is produced by the symbolic, and at the same time threatens the symbolic and the securities it offers. It is important to bear in mind that these are poets working with orality in prominently literate contexts. They conceive of orality in relation to the written line, not as some "pure and authentic" separate genre, but inscribed by it in order to contain the danger that "the Oral" poses to the mind of the reader-listener.

---

[80] Mbembe has shown the link between the proliferation of the obscene and its relation to power in the postcolony ("Provisional Notes" 7). Additionally, as Joshua Esty has argued, scatalogical works by such postcolonial writers as Soyinka, Armah and Awoonor "signaled a wide cultural reorientation in which questions about nationalist excess began to mute the celebrations of independence" (24). In a discussion comparing scatalogical tropes in Irish and African writing, Esty notes that these texts question "political and aesthetic standards that were a legacy not only of British colonialism but of heroic national struggle against British colonialism" (24). According to Esty, the "literature of disillusionment brings excremental motifs – with their symbolic disturbance of inside/outside models – to bear on African societies as they move from an era of heroic decolonization to the postlapsarian realities of stalled revolution" (35).

This is confirmed in the next line, which claims that "it is mad psychopathic guilty before it's charged", where "the Oral" is described in terms of those socio-psychological states (of madness, psychopathy, and criminality) that threaten normativity and are in excess of the symbolic. One can thus deduce from Rampolokeng's imagery here that "the Oral" is circumscribed and trapped by "the lines" (of language and symbolization) because it is beyond them, and it can be beyond them only in the sense that it is trapped between them. Freedom, in other words, is always already inscribed in the symbolic.

The general lack of punctuation is in itself an evasion of the symbolic, since it breaks down the boundaries between phrases and sentences that constitute fixed meaning. This makes it possible to read the phrase "guilty before it's charged", as "guilty before, it's charged". Both these variations can be borne out by the poem, and depend on the voice for realisation. The first reading suggests "the Oral" as victim of the law, and invokes memories of the apartheid-era Terrorism Act of 1967, which allowed detention indefinitely, with no public access to any information regarding the detainees. In other words, your guilt was determined before you were even charged.[81] However, the second variation suggests both the always already existing, perceived "guilt" of "the Oral", not only as "guilty before" – that is, before the present time – but also as before a court or judge (or literary critic?). This also affects the meaning of the phrase "it's charged", since "charge" again has a legal connotation, but at the same time, the phrase calls to mind and re-iterates the kinetic nature of "the Oral" suggested earlier in the poem, aligning it to a position both outside and immanent to the symbolic.

The polyphonous nature of "the Oral" as site of excess is also addressed by Rampolokeng when he claims that "it is lkj speaking in voices of the living and the dead/it is checking it out muta style/it is rasta ranting in Benjamin", invoking Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka and Benjamin Zephaniah. In this way, he introduces his affinity with dub poetry, in which "resonances of 'the oral' are introduced to both

---

[81] The last chapter of this thesis discusses the testimony of one of the mothers of the "Gugulethu Seven", whose deaths are a poignant example of the apartheid state's cynical practice of training young men in basic combat in order to be able to find them guilty of terrorist acts.

political and poetic effect through the spellings of their printed forms – less phonetic transcription than deliberate assertion of the oral … voice in the midst of a print culture once restricted to the written 'standard' language of European English" (Finnegan 182). Furthermore, his statement that "the Oral" is "lkj speaking in the voices of the living and the dead", that it is "rasta ranting in Benjamin", resonates with the practice in spoken word poetry of summoning by name — and thereby invoking through remembering — the presence and voice of other poets, writers and activists and insisting on their embodiment, since they are seen to "speak" through a living person.

The intertextual nature of these invocations, recalling not only the voices of other poets but also their styles and subject matter, suggests a sense of shared authorship, which further serves to complicate the relationship between "the Oral" and "authority". Drawing on Helgesson's technique for reading the work of Wopko Jensma, discussed earlier, I would similarly like to situate the poetic utterances of poets like Rampolokeng and Magogodi in the "shifting, at times obscure, terrain of local and transnational literary fields" (Helgesson 73), and to suggest that they, too, are "playing several games at once, among them the game of 'autonomy,' of relative freedom from economic and political imperatives, or, conversely, wilful subjection to the inverted economy of the field of restricted production in which the 'loser wins'" (73). Helgesson points out that the literary field can "authorise deviations from the authority of the law (of apartheid, European civilisation, capitalism, fashion, Marxism, nativism)" (73), and that this "paradox of authorised deviation" is inherent to literary endeavour. The poet is allowed to differ from the systems in which s/he operates, but to be granted the right to differ, s/he must "be fully of the system" (Helgesson 73). This is exactly the position of "the Oral" that emerges from a reading of Rampolokeng's poem.

Helgesson also offers a useful way of understanding the effect of media on language in considering the work of Jensma and Mozambican Rui Knopfli. He notes that their work "evinces an accelerating degree of media awareness" (72), which has implications for the "generic assumption of lyric as an expression of self" (72), since the "deployment of media such as print and film" by these two poets "often suggests that the poetic subject is constituted rather than expressed discursively" (72). Here is a

powerful echo with the notion, discussed earlier in relation to the work of Lacan, that the function of language is not to inform but to evoke an other. The construction of the subject in language is closely tied, in Helgesson's reading of the work of Jensma and Knopfli, to their use of media.

This is not to say that Jensma and Knopfli "simply disavow subject-centred lyrical aspiration" (Helgesson 72), but rather that their lyric "addresses this aspiration in the mediatised circumstances of southern Africa" (72) in a particular manner. Helgesson argues that "while Knopfli and Jensma, as poets, are 'thrown into' a world of technologically mediated and colonially weighted signs not of their own making, the writing of poetry itself offers ways of entering and symbolically reinscribing this world" (72). His study shows that a consideration of the poetic interplay between media and language in South Africa tends towards a "recurrent dissolution" of the poetic self and an interrogation and construction of the *possibility* of personal truth, rather than an expression of personal truth.

I have already indicated how Magogodi performs the dialogic exchange in the dread scribe's encounter with the Western "other" in his print poem "Sylt Island". I established that the act of looking and recording – the moment where the author is constituted in his act of representation – precipitates a doubling of the poetic self, vacillation between first person and third person, between "tourist" and "terrorist". Magogodi's film and audio collaborations similarly perform the *constitution*, rather than e*xpression,* of the lyric self.

In his "spoken word film", *i mike what i like*, Magogodi performs the urban poet, drawing on oral and traditional influences in dialogue with his (urban) audience, but he also performs the writer as iconic individualist at his typewriter. He positions himself as located in the folds where these two modes interpenetrate. Magogodi exploits the density of signification available to him in the urban spaces of Johannesburg, drawing on African metropolitan images and dialects. His use of "deep" Tswana[82] is juxtaposed against his more "metropolitan" language use, which

---

[82] In a review of the 2007 Spier poetry festival in *The Weekender*, Fred de Vries complains that "a dour Magogodi goes into a whole spiel of rapping in his mother tongue, without translation, thereby not only shutting out the whiteys, but most of the coloured and black

includes English and Afrikaans, as well as colloquialisms and slang. When he performs in English, he foregrounds the sound elements of his other languages that disrupt the sounds of English. So, for example, he will pronounce the "r" sound, which is an alveolar approximate in English, with an alveolar trill instead, as in Tswana or Afrikaans. In this manner, Magogodi not only performs his multilingual identity rooted in both an urban, global identity as well as a more "traditional" cultural identity; he also performs the manner in which these languages and discursive frames act upon each other. Furthermore, he forces the reader to occupy constantly shifting perspectives on the role of the "postcolonial" writer in a global society.

Magogodi describes his work as celebrating "the mutinous journey of the underground nation towards spoken word uprisings" (Magogodi, DVD leaflet). Again, the choice of image suggests the revelation or release, through spoken word (the oral), of the excess of the reality that is repressed, the nation kept underground. *i mike what i like* was originally performed live as a stage play and then developed into a film through collaboration with director Jyoti Mistry, who claims that the film "aimed to capture the visceral connection of the sound of words, its social and political commentary with complimentary and contradictory images inspired by the city of Johannesburg" (DVD leaflet). Language here is thus mediated by the conventions of spoken word, the staged production, as well as filmic codes.

The title, "i mike what i like", obviously derives from the collection of Steve Biko's columns, entitled *I Write What I Like*, published in the journal of the South African Student Organisation under the pseudonym "Frank Talk". Magogodi adopts this derivation as his title, thereby not only signalling the influence of Black Consciousness on his work, but also, in the tradition of South African imbongi and performance poets, invoking the memory of those who have gone before, calling Biko to mind and thereby assuring his presence for the duration of the poem. Similarly, Magogodi also refers to (dambudzo) "marechera", "papa ramps" (Lesego Rampolokeng), "mumia" (Abu-Jamal) and "lefifi tladi". These writers all employ oral

---

audience as well. When I ask a girl in front of me in which language he is rapping she says: 'Tswana, but a very deep Tswana that I also don't understand'" (De Vries 1).

techniques that confound conventional literary categories.[83] At the same time, however, he also signals his stylistic affiliation with these writers and performers, suggesting that his work should be read and understood in a similar manner.

 In changing the title from "I write" to "I mike", Magogodi has the pen give way to the microphone as technological medium for his voice and performance, and he emphasises its role in the poem, linking his freedom directly to the microphone when he concludes the poem by stating "when i sound check 1 2 3/i'm free". Here, the microphone, like Rampolokeng's "the Oral", transforms from a noun to a verb. Magogodi's mixture of media (theatre, performance, film and written texts) and of languages suggests what Karin Barber describes as "a scene of metamorphoses and mutations, in which written texts are performed, performed texts can be given a written recension, and a network of allusions and cross-references enables audiences in whatever state of literacy to access texts in one way or another" (Barber 12). This illustrates the manner in which oral texts should be envisaged as "created and changed and manipulated for many purposes and through many media by active participants in the world, present no less than past" (Finnegan 184). As such, an analysis of Magogodi's form and the media through which he chooses to present it reveals poetry which carries the potential for radical innovation in terms of circumventing and decentering the dominant structures of literacy as well as artistic appreciation.

i mike what i like is Magogodi's manifesto of his spoken word resistance to the imposed norms and censorship of the symbolic. In a sense, Magogodi appears to be aligning himself with the role of an imbongi, a praise poet whose function is "to negotiate relations of political power within the society, which means that the imbongi is "licensed" by the poetic form to criticise the king when this is perceived to be necessary" (Brown, *Voicing* 91). However, Magogodi invokes the convention of the praise singer only to invert it, by stating "i am not a lick-ass poet", "i give no blowjobs to politicians", "my tongue can't be bought/to dance in the rot of the king's

---

[83] At a recent seminar hosted by the Department of English at the University of Stellenbosch, Rampolokeng delivered a "talk" entitled "Writing the Ungovernable". His 45 minute talk radically extended the concept of the "research seminar", in that it took the form of an oral performance, complete with improvised riffs in response to unexpected disruptions of his talk, which traced the history of what he calls the "ungovernable" generation: those young South Africans who in the 1980s followed Oliver Tambo's injunction to make South Africa "ungovernable". A podcast of the talk can be accessed online (Rampolokeng 2012).

court" and "i'm nobody's official poet or puppet". Magogodi claims the license of the imbongi to "negotiate relations of power within the society" and so to criticise the government. Additionally, the "strong rhetorical sense of the presence of the imbongi" (Brown,*To Speak* 47) is also conveyed by the poem, since oa Magogodi positions himself firmly at the centre of the poem, the pronouns "I" and "my" appearing repeatedly throughout. By creating such a strong sense of his presence, oa Magogodi insists on a recognition of his self-appointed role as "the unwrapper", stating, "i unwrap the napkins of this baby nation/to show you the slime of the times". As with Rampolokeng's imagery, oa Magogodi's suggests that what he reveals in his poetry is the excrement/excess of the structures which he interrogates, and that this is an inevitable result of the form of the oral, or the "spoken word".

As spoken word poet, oa Magogodi claims for himself the culturally privileged space of the imbongi. Jeff Opland argues "that the imbongi's freedom to censure the king constitutes a 'ritual of rebellion' which functions to confirm the validity of the kingship by institutionalizing criticism" (Brown, *Voicing* 92). However, "the extent of the imbongi's licence to criticize has … been the subject of much debate" (Brown, *Voicing* 93). While the imbongi can be critical – it is, so to speak, coded into the symbolic – he/she rarely is. The imbongi decries "whatever threatens the ideal polity" (Brown *Voicing* 92), their "essential role" is political, and they are "concerned with the well-being of the polity" (Brown, *Voicing* 92).

The fact that the imbongi is often expected to be critical makes her/his praise more believable, more authentic. What makes the work of Magogodi and Rampolokeng so transgressive is that they take the possibility of criticism, coded into the symbolic as a way to authenticate the praise, and then proceed to exploit it, so that it starts to undermine the seeming freedom that offers the choice in the first place. By taking the choice seriously, spoken word poets alter the very idea of the imbongi and his or her function. The choice that was supposed to make the praise sweeter is used to launch a bitter invective not only against the leaders and the social structures that produced them, but also against the society that allowed the oral poet the floor in the first place.

Furthermore, these poets see poetry as a kind of violence. The relationship between speaker-poet and listener-reader is essentially an imperative, violent one: the poet-

speaker commands the reader-listener's attention and insults him or her. This echoes the obscene, hidden violence that underpins social relationships in the contemporary African context (e.g. between the police and the citizenry, between husband and wife, between teacher and pupil). But by speaking the violence, and harnessing it to a revolutionary vision, this poetry starts to undermine the very bonds that violence normally enables.

Both Magogodi and Rampolokeng thus assert their preference for the oral/spoken word as a means of expression that allows them to uncover and expose structurally inherent forms of violent repression and oppression. Their form relies heavily on the presence of many voices, invoked not only as a source of inspiration for the poetry, but as inherent to the very poetry itself. The poetry is the presence of these voices. In this sense, although Magogodi seems to speak from the subject position of the "I", that position of the "I" becomes overdetermined as other voices are invoked.[84] The unified subject, the "self", is therefore under erasure[85] as those others who also occupy the "I" are constantly summoned into the discursive space.

The poets are thus situated in a broad context of influence, and in constant dialogue with the work of various other writers/performers. This suggests a tradition that is, according to Jen-Marie Makang "in continual development" (in Finnegan 180), a point borne out by the poets' use of electronic media as a means of production and reproduction, allowing them to by-pass more traditional means of publication and platforms for performance, not only in order to reach a larger, more international audience, but also as a means of subverting the dominance of established agents in the field of cultural production. As such, the oral form allows greater freedom of expression not only because it can express, through its similarity to lalangue, the excesses of social existence, but also because it is in itself an excess of social existence and therefore able to remain beyond the symbolic even while it is intimately connected to it.

---

84 This overdetermination of the "I" becomes a print performance of authority in the book *There was this Goat,* discussed in the next chapter.
85 Esty says of what he calls "excremental fiction" that there is "a double refusal of, on the one hand, the comforting retreat into reconsolidated selfhood/aesthetic pleasure and, on the other hand, false prophecies of national redemption" (41).

New media technologies not only change the texture of the live performance, they can also provide a material record of the performance. The poet can therefore "produce" a polished product using different media, but someone with a video recording device on their cell-phone or camera can also record a live performance and disseminate it through various platforms. These media tend physically to interpose between the performer and the audience in the form of feedback, static, echoes, bad sound and visual production etc. These "interruptions" are an inevitable part of performing and poets very often work these "extratextual" features into their performance for effect, thus foregrounding the open-ended nature of the performance and, by extension, the sign.

A recent personal experience offers a variant example of this: during a poetry session hosted by the Stellenbosch Literary Project, Cape Town hip-hop MC Adrian Different (2011 online) challenged the audience to a game.[86] He asked six people to join him in the performance area, and each had to hand him a personal item, which he would then use as inspiration for an improvised poem. I was one of the organisers and also video recording that session, so I volunteered. The object I happened to have on me was the camera bag, which is what I handed to Adrian. He then improvised the following:

> I come through, you can always vouch
>
> Why is this lady handing me a camera pouch
>
> She's looking at me quite in past tense
>
> I can say hi to your camera lens
>
> Never underestimate me the great MC
>
> It's Adrian Different with a capital D
>
> Come through take your pouch back in hand
>
> Tell all your friends on that camera that you are a fan of greatness itself
>
> Because I'm going to give you a lyrical laugh

Now, I handed Adrian a camera pouch, but he makes the poem about the camera instead, addressing it directly: "I can say hi to your camera lens." The presence of the camera also introduces the concept of time in relation to the live, embodied

---

[86] A recording of the performance can be viewed at SLiPnet (online).

performance, and Adrian foregrounds this temporality as part of his performance. The camera lens becomes an opportunity for self-promotion, a form of verbal "tagging": "It's Adrian Different with a capital D" "tell all your friends on that camera that you are a fan of greatness itself". Additionally, whereas Adrian's other poems were performed without accompaniment, this improvisation is done to a drumbeat. Presumably this rhythm, combined with the rhyming couplets that dominate the formal structure, are aids in the process of improvisation, in which he dramatises the manner in which the performance poet tends to constitute his or her content by drawing on the immediate context and environment. By extension, the manner in which the poet is situated in relation to the onscreen audience, as well as the future viewer/listener, is also foregrounded.

I wish to treat certain existing "technoscripts" – the multimedial "texts" – of the performances of select poets as a space of encounter. The overlay of an oral genre with new media forms creates a site of interaction between the spoken poetic line and the cues from beyond the "frame" of the poem. This interaction causes a dynamic of process, and the poems cannot be foreclosed, thus presenting a continually shifting landscape of meaning, particular to the manner in which the sign currently functions in South African culture.

As I have suggested in my previous chapter, reading contemporary South Africa as a textual space[87] makes for valuable observations. The city of Johannesburg is literally built on the mines that drive its economy. A vast network of mining tunnels run under many of the city suburbs. During the construction of the Standard Bank head office building in Simmonds Street in the mid-1980s, the stope tunnel to the old Ferreira goldmine was discovered beneath the basement. Today, one can visit the mine during banking hours to view the archeological/geological site: The banking headquarters,

---

87 See Sarah Nuttall's chapter "Stylizing the Self" in the critical collection *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (2008). Nuttall states: "One of the ways in which Johannesburg projects its surface is through its representations: in many ways, it is a city studded with texts [...] As surfaces [these texts] are sometimes just that, but they also on occasion suggest a deeper diagnostic, a layering in which, for example, the apparent fixity of race so often privileged in accounts of the city is underwritten by the potential unfixing of the commodity form, or in which the past resurfaces in the present" (91). Nuttall goes on to claim that the forms of Johannesburg representation that she discusses are "ones that will metamorphose before long, but which nevertheless operate as important signals, even in their transience" (92) of the remaking of the city.

laid over the mine, laid over the mineral rich ore, laid down by the layering of geological processes – the Witwatersrand supergroup formed more than 2650 million years ago.

These geological strata subtend other human directed layers – cultural, linguistic – that were added during the rapid urbanisation of this site in the late nineteenth century.[88] By establishing a new layer of meaning, older layers are inadvertently exposed. In South Africa, the underlying layers constantly threaten to erupt to the surface. This process is repeated in our texts and in the manner in which we sign/post things in South Africa. The extreme and confusing discrepancies between places, their names, and how these names are registered on road signs and street maps are key examples of the manner in which South Africans and visitors to South Africa are confronted with the instability of the sign, of the word that names, that fixes something into place in the Symbolic.

On a recent trip (2010) from Johannesburg to Musina (Messina) in the Limpopo province, I passed an overhead road sign indicating the turn-off for "Polokburg". The sign referred, of course, to the city of Polokwane, which used to be called Pietersburg under the old dispensation. The "wane" had fallen off the signboard, to reveal the "burg" beneath. To me, this was an amusing breakdown, brought about by the "malfunction" of the material medium through which information is transmitted. It not only served to perform the manner in which languages from two different linguistic families encounter each other on a material surface, but in that encounter, and the "nonsense" word that resulted from it, "Polokburg", the sign actually went a long way towards performing the overlay of frames and the dynamic disruption of

---

[88] Significantly, the nineteenth century is marked by the "troubling of traditional social positions", caused by the "creation of a new social positionality where social place is ... determined by the possession of money and the skill in its use" (Coward and Ellis 59). This is the historical period during which gold becomes the universal commodity. "[A]s soon as it [gold] monopolises this position in the expression of value for the world of commodities, it becomes the money commodity, and then [...] the general form of value become[s] changed into the money form" (Marx in Coward and Ellis 59). Coward and Ellis point out that "[g]old gains a new economic meaning (the money commodity) which brings with it new social positions (finance capitalists). This is an alteration in the chain of difference of social meaning, and as such it supports and produces new positions" (59). The very moment at which Johannesburg comes into being is this moment of a "disturbance of positionalities" (60), and the existence of the city itself is firstly predicated on the gold - the "universal commodity" – that lies beneath its suburbs.

language that characterise the South African cultural and literary landscape.

The South African linguistic landscape confronts the individual with the traces of *other* realities in the signs that occupy the public sphere: in road signs, in speech, and in poetry. And in South Africa, much of our poetry is oral. North American Language writer Charles Bernstein suggests that "writing does not eclipse orality nor does the symbolic law supersede the amorphousness of the 'semiotic'" ("Introduction" 20). Indeed, for Bernstein

> Poetry characterized as presymbolic (and praised or condemned as primitive, infantile or childlike, nonsensical, meaningless) would more accurately be characterized as postsymbolic (and thus described as paratactic, complex or chaotic, procreative, hyperreferential); just as such works, when they aver rationality, are not irrational. Rather, such works affirm the bases of reason against a dehumanizing fixation on the rigidly monologic and rationalistic. The problem is being stuck in one modality of language — not being able to move in, around, and about the precincts of language. (20)

Bernstein advocates for the interplay between various modalities of language. His description suggests a process of intermediation, where the imposed boundary between "oral" / "performance" and "literate" / "print" is collapsed. Furthermore, occupying the shifting pronoun "I", he situates the subject of language in this site of collapse:

> I am not antisymbolic any more than I am pro-"semiotic". Rather I am interpolated in their folds, knowing one through the other, and hearing the echo of each in the next. This is what I mean to evoke by 'a/orality — sound language, language grounded in its embodiments. (20)

The "I" is constituted, and escapes through, those very spaces in language that perform the interplay between symbolic and semiotic. I would like to address this question of the subject in language in relation to my argument that the South African reality externalises the collapse and interplay of various modalities of language, and

to consider what the effect of this might be. Following Bernstein, the semiotic and the symbolic cannot be disentangled from each other, and the "I", which is constituted by and in language, is the point at which these convergences are externalised.

Emile Benveniste argues that the "unique but mobile sign, I" can be assumed by any individual speaker, provided that s/he "refers each time only to the instance of his own discourse" (220). The sign "I" is thus linked "to the exercise of language and announces the speaker as speaker. It is this property that establishes the basis for individual discourse, in which each speaker takes over all the resources of language for his own behalf" (Benveniste 220). Thus, "I cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution', not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is" (Benveniste 218). It is this act of locution that defines the "I" in relation to the rest of the world.

Bernstein suggests that

> Human consciousness has as much a sedimentary as a developmental disposition; stages don't so much replace each other as infiltrate or interpenetrate — I want to say perform — each other. Consciousness is a compost heap, to borrow a term from Jed Rasula. Neither the symbolic stage nor the rise of literacy marks language's de-absorption in the world. Language itself, speech itself, is a technology, a tool, that ... allows us to make our way on the earth by making a world of it. The iconic sound shape of language beats the path [...] Sound brings writing back from its metaphysical and symbolic functions to where it is at home, in performance. (20-21)

Bernstein's suggestion that human consciousness is sedimentary also resonates with my earlier point that in South Africa, our senses of self and nation are built upon a geological, archaeological and cultural layering, where elements of our history are concealed and exposed continually, and where many "sound shapes", as well as interpretive frames, interact with each other.

Because language has these sedimentary properties, and because our consciousness of the world is largely constructed through language, the layering of our sign systems is

200

a reflection of the sedimentary nature of consciousness. But, at the same time, the modes through which language is activated, through particular structures and limitations, shape the manner in which we are conscious of being conscious of the earth, allowing us to make a world of it.

Bernstein advocates a "close listening" to poetry, and an acknowledgement of audio and visual archives of a poet's work as significant, rather than incidental ("Introduction" 7). "The poem, viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual intertranslatability, has a fundamentally plural existence" (Bernstein, "Introduction" 9). It is this plurality that is foregrounded in the work addressed in this chapter – a plurality that arises from the particular South African context in which the poets produce their work, as well as in the overlay of oral and written forms, and various media technologies.

As I established in my Introduction, globalisation is characterised by the proliferation across the globe of telecommunications and electronic media. The increasing availability of devices and software that facilitate easy recording and editing potentially heralds a new phase for performance studies.

The recording device helps to situate the poet, in the sense that the poet is captured in the space of the performance for as long as that copy of the recording exists. All the disruptions from that particular space and the responses of that particular audience thus come into play when listening closely to the poet's performance. The existence of the recording also implies excess beyond the frame of the screen: we know that someone was handling the camera, but we often don't find out who that person is – the camera operator seldom appears onscreen. However, the implied presence of this single viewer serves to remind all viewers of the world beyond the screen. The camera's lens becomes a frame behind which a legion of viewers stands, the eye of the camera serving in a similar way as the shifting "I" of speech.

In his seminal work, *Frame Analysis*, sociologist Erving Goffman conceives of the cued frame through which a situation is viewed as a function that necessarily excludes other features from the frame, putting them into what he calls the "disattend track" (Bernstein, "Introduction" 5). Normally, the study of poetry focuses on form and

content, "putting the audiotext as well as the typography – the sound and look of the poem – into the disattend track ... Such elements as the visual appearance of the text or the sound of the work in performance may be extralexical but they are not extrasemantic", according to Bernstein ("Introduction" 5). I would like to argue that with the advent of handheld, easily operable recording devices, we are now able to include the presence of the individual doing the recording, the presence of the rest of the audience, as well as the space in which the performance takes place as elements that normally get shifted to the "disattend track" and that deserve closer inspection.

In Magogodi's film, we see him in collaboration with action painter Musawenkosi Xokelelo and musician Ernest Mothle. The film juxtaposes Magogodi's spoken word incantations with images of Magogodi, Mothle and Xokelelo in the space of the stage set, and film footage of iconic Johannesburg scenes. Director Jyoti Mistry states:

> By using action paintings created by Musawenkosi Xokelelo during various performances, the film version relies strongly on the bricolage idea as a visual trope. Thus, through an integrated play between Magogodi's spoken utterances, his performance itself, the mediated images produced by Xokelelo's paintings, and the visual landscape built through the film layers, the representation of the city takes the form of not just a single experience but what Mikhail Bakhtin described as heteroglossia: the derivations of meaning of texts based on contextual frameworks. ("Johannesburg" 54)

Mistry identifies the essentially plural nature of the work: many different performances are put into play with one another in the film version. Bernstein suggests that performance emphasises the material presence of the poem and the performer, while overthrowing the poem as "fixed, stable, finite linguistic object" (Bernstein, "Introduction" 9). Again, I would like to make the point that the "linguistic object", as often encountered in South Africa, is seldom fixed, stable or finite. The plurality of language is often foregrounded, especially in our courts, as we

have seen in the example of MK Mbomvu.[89] The plurality and instability of the linguistic object is thus often inadvertently performed in South Africa, particularly in the public, legal sphere, where the fixing of a particular meaning is almost inherent to the function of the legal system.

Additionally, South Africa is also a country noted for its oral and performance culture, particularly as a form of political resistance, as I have illustrated in my discussion of the Soweto poets, as well as in Jeremy Cronin's example of "insurgent" poetry. In a context such as this, cultural products will emerge that cannot be "read" in the conventional way. Their semantic supplementation, through performance, is not readily accommodated in conventional print media. The growing use of media technology in South Africa opens a space in which the material presence of the poem as well as the performer can be presented more effectively. At the same time, these media also shape the content, depending on their structure and limitations.

I have illustrated the extent to which these poets are inserted in a flow of global culture, reflecting critically on their local position in relation to the rest of the world. Their appropriation of oral forms is a strategic and purposeful, politicised response to the limitations of print, and a conscious interaction with audio and video devices as alternative modes of dissemination — they are not passive subjects for the gaze of the eye of the camera, or mere "vessels" through which language speaks, but active participants in the process of meaning-making, acutely aware of how and when language speaks them.

As my test cases, I have chosen selected video material by Magogodi as well as

---

[89] The 2010/2011 dispute around the singing of the struggle song "Dubula bhunu" ("Shoot the Boers") might serve as another example of this. One group claims that the song is incitement to race violence against whites. Another group claims that the word "boers" does not refer to "whites", but to the system of Apartheid-Capitalism. Cultural worker and social critic, Mphutlane wa Bofelo suggests, provokingly, that the current ANC government's "harping on 'struggle songs' as they were sung in the past, is not a reflection of how attached they are to the struggle, but an attempt to locate the struggle literally in the past" (online). In so doing, they "want to focus the people on imaginary fights with the Boers while the filthy rich black political and economic elites are involved in equity deals with the stinky rich whites" (online). The song as text is plural, open to multiple readings and renderings, depending on the frame in which it is placed. The court hearing around this case, instituted by Afriforum against ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema, is an attempt to officially narrow down and determine the song's meaning.

recordings of Cape Town based "Afrikaans vernacular hip hop artist … and poet" (Jitsvinger online) Quintin Goliath, or Jitsvinger as he's known in performance. Jitsvinger (Jits pronounced "djits", not "yits") also collaborates closely with Jethro Louw from Khoi Kollektiff, who has been referred to as the "official Khoisan praise poet" (Jitsvinger online). All three of these performers are thus defined by the orality of their work: "spoken word", "vernacular artist" and "praise poet".[90]

In 2008, a short film documentary of Jitsvinger was released, entitled "Jitsvinger: Maak it Aan", directed by Nadine Angel Cloete from University of Cape Town as part of her Honours Film studies theory and practice course[91]. When asked in an interview with Evan Milton in the *Cape Argus* "Tonight" section (28 June 2009) how he feels about the way in which he is depicted in "Maak it Aan", Jits is reported as replying: "It is Nadine's film ... so it is how she's Jitsvinger, or what she wants people to see. It's a moderate picture of what is really out there, but that is fine." If he is being quoted correctly here, it suggests that, while he recognises the limitations of the representation, he doesn't regard "Jitsvinger" as *his* identity, but as *an* identity, and one to which others have a right of access and, I would argue, authorship.

When browsing the internet for material of Jitsvinger, one is immediately struck by his strong online presence. This varies in form from his MySpace and Facebook profiles to the video clips on which I would like to focus in particular. The video clips range from "official" (but not necessarily produced or professional) footage of large-scale poetry events, such as the Migration Music Festival in Taiwan in 2007, to "amateur" footage shot by tourists in Kalkfontein, where collaborator Jethro Louw

---

[90] This section of the chapter formed part of a conference paper delivered in 2009, the proceedings of which were published in a collection edited by conference conveners Daniella Merolla and Jan Jansen (2012).

[91] Dylan Valley's 2010 documentary, *Afrikaaps*, starring Jitsvinger and other "hip-hop generation Cape Town-based artists" (online), was released just as this thesis was being finalised. It is described by the director as "a theatre piece within a film, based as it is on the creative processes and performances of the critically acclaimed stage production of the same name. But rather than depending on the drama on stage and the production's prominent characters to carry the narrative, Valley finds revealing moments from the cast's and production crew's personal narratives that transcend what happens on stage." (online at http://www.thebioscope.co.za/2010/08/11/afrikaaps-world-premiere/) The documentary attempts to "reclaim Afrikaans ... as a language of liberation. It does this by foregrounding alternative histories of 'the Creole birth' of the language and shattering long-existing efforts to whitewash and purify Afrikaans" (online).

hosts local and foreign visitors at his home for poetry and music sessions with dinner.

Most of this amateur footage places Jits and Jethro in a particular setting (as opposed to the "generic" space of the stage). They thus appear to "localize" every space in which they perform. The two clips to be discussed comprise footage of a rehearsal in their hotel room in Taiwan ("21st Century Khoisan Man"), and of their stage performance later that day ("Doen it").

In "21st Century Khoisan Man", the viewer, along with the unidentified camera operator, is given access to the intimate space of the performers' room, which at the same time, being a hotel room, is only intimate for the moment in which they occupy it. The glowing presence of a laptop on the dresser in the background signifies not only the casually embedded nature of the performance, but also the global scope of this imminently local performance. When taken in conjunction with the lyrics, this interpenetration of local and global takes on an even more compelling resonance:[92]

It's about me with a mic in the hand

I- I- I- I- I- I- I- I- I don't know

I don't know

Will I ever know?

I don't know who I am

21st Century KhoiSan man.

(my own transcription)

The lyrics describe the 21st Century KhoiSan man's sense of displacement, attributing this sense to the effects of colonisation and inferior education:

... this black male was never a boy

Commandoes came

like a horse of Troy

the dirty tricks that colonisers employ

against a defenceless black boy

---

[92] Several versions of this song are available on the internet, each a distinct variation despite the relative consistency of the lyrics.

> Student guerilla on the rampage
>
> the school has longtime become a cage
>
> it's curriculum propaganda on every page
>
> to make blacks inferior and slaves
>
> That's why I don't know
>
> I don't know
>
> will I ever know?
>
>   (my own transcription)

These references to the oppression of blacks are invoked by Jethro, who, in the song, describes the performers as "a makeshift band", "conjuring up a tribal jam / unknowingly we wake the keepers of the clan". These images suggest a kind of ritual performativity in the attempt of the 21st Century KhoiSan man to "know".

Furthermore, both performers, Jethro in particular, deliver a very embodied performance. While this is not an official performance, one must of course bear in mind that, where a camera is involved, an audience is always implied. While the camera operator never puts in a physical appearance onscreen, Jits acknowledges this person, and the motion of the camera as it swings from Jits to Jethro, trying to capture the movement of their performance, foregrounds the physical dynamic between the two performers, but also echoes that movement.

The second clip is of the live performance. I assume that the camera operator is the same person who took the previous clip, since Jits seems to acknowledge this particular camera, which is viewing him from below, as though from the audience, rather than from the stage itself, or from the back of the venue. One can hear Jits telling the audience that he will be performing in his mother tongue (Afrikaans) and then as the performance proceeds, the audience responding very positively. It is probably safe to assume that most of the people in the audience don't understand Afrikaans, so this response is to the particular sound of his performance, as well as the look of it.

In another clip from the same evening, during the performance of "Maak it dan", one can see that there are images being projected behind the performers. These are images that clearly represent the organisers' ideas of "traditional" images of the various "migrant" cultures represented at the music festival. As Jethro and Jits perform their Khoi-Afrikaans identity, they are performing it against a backdrop that foregrounds their difference. However, despite this, their identity performance does not seem to flatten out into an iconic one-dimensionality – their performance on this stage is the same type of performance as the one in the hotel room, which is the same as when they are jamming at Jethro's home in Kalkfontein. They are embedded in a locality that they bring with them into their performances, regardless of where these take place. It is as though the space that remains local is not the physical space itself, but the frame of the camera's lens – this is where they really perform.

Magogodi has far less of an online presence. There is a clip of his performance at the 2007 Spier poetry festival and a biographical short produced for French TV channel, Trace. The former is clearly amateur footage, taken by an audience member at the festival, while the latter is a well-produced, brief introduction to oa Magogodi and his work, consisting of interview sound bites, interspersed with short sequences from his spoken word film. A recording, which appears to have been professionally shot, of his performance at the 2009 Poësiefestival Berlin is also available on the Facebook page of the Poësiefestival, and (German) translations and audiocasts of his performances at the festival can be found at lyrikline.org (online).

In the clip from the 2006 Spier festival, oa Magogodi performs his poem "Bomb Bridges with Red Visions". It is incantatory in form, repeating the same phrase over and over and ending with his signature phrase, 'I mike what I like'. What makes it compelling is its sound and look. Oa Magogodi describes himself as a combat poet, and his sound field certainly is a battleground. On the microphone, the plosives are accentuated, dropping like little bombs into the performance and his Rs roll like automatic machine gunfire. He affects a trance-like state, as though the poem possesses his body. The content of the poem seems secondary to the physicality of the performance – it is an excuse for, rather than the goal of it.

The pursuit of meaning becomes secondary to the experience of the poem as

Magogodi's repetitive cadences, rhythmic sounds and movements, and entranced appearance fill up the frame. What does it mean to bomb a bridge with a red vision? Unpacking the image certainly leads to interesting interpretations: bombs can be dropped, or triggered by weight or touch, and South Africans have a particular nasty and lingering history of the bomb.[93] Bridges are structures used to cross divides, they represent the notion of working together, of building infrastructure. They also represent metaphorical structures. "Red visions" could refer to communist ideals, anger, or revenge. The images are hyper-referential – they open up into a vast space of meaning and association, underscoring the "fundamentally plural existence" of the poem as it continually unfolds in its multiple performances.

The hyper-referential nature of this poetry can be linked to the poets' invocation of the formative influence of particular writers and performers. These associations open up the texts, in an example of what Language poet Bruce Andrews calls "multimplication": "An Informalism. Of connections" ("The Poetics" online). As other voices are successively invoked, the "I" is seen to belong to many, and the role of the author becomes a performance that calls into question the authority of the writer/speaker. These shifts in subject position are aligned with shifts in modes of representation, and require a reorientation of the reader in relation to the text. Instead of an expression of self, the reader is confronted by a text that grapples with the constitution of self. In the preference given by these poets to the cross referencing of media, the lyric subject undergoes a "dissolve", since each mediation reconstitutes the subject slightly differently.

Additionally, the use of various media allows audiences in various states of literacy to access the texts. These texts therefore offer alternatives to dominant structures of literacy and artistic appreciation. They illustrate a dynamic interplay between the oral and the written. The oral offers ways of disrupting and inverting the familiar forms of the written, and appears as a dynamic force that is simultaneously inscribed by the

---

[93] In my South African school classrooms in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were often plastic representations of the various explosive devices that white school children were expected to be alert to and identify in the case of a possible "terrorist" attack. In one episode of a popular Afrikaans children's series, "Super Snuiters", one of the children, dining with her father in a fast food restaurant, feels a limpet mine attached to the underside of the table, and in identifying it, saves the day.

symbolic and in excess of it. It is both *expressive* and *excessive*, and its excessiveness is presented in print as a play of sound, a proliferation of verbs, and an unruly grammar that allows for ambiguities and slippages in meaning.

I have engaged with the poetry of Rampolokeng, Magogodi, Jitsvinger and Jethro Louw in order to identify the kind of linguistic activities in South Africa that reveal a process or performance-oriented attitude to text and language. I have indicated that the play through various media produces shifting subject positions to be negotiated. The reader cannot simply accept these texts as examples of self-expression – formally, they demand a more active engagement from the reader/viewer, who must *do work*, participate in the construction of the text.

In the next chapter, which is also my concluding chapter, I return to the work of Antjie Krog. In collaboration with two fellow scholars, Krog produced a formally experimental academic manuscript, titled *There was this Goat*. The book recounts the *work*, the process demanded of these academics, as they engaged a text that confounded them in its opacity. The final manuscript itself offers very telling extra-lexical signifiers, which raise questions of subjectivity and representation in ways which are very similar to those encountered in the work of the poets that I have discussed.

Conclusion

Sharing the "I" in South Africa

Over the course of the last four chapters, I have provided an extensive overview of examples of language activities that require an active reader, oriented towards the text as a producer, rather than a consumer, of meaning. In my discussion of the work of the Language poets, I provided examples of a print poetics that presents the reader with language fragments, arranged according to non-syntactic principles. Confronted by the lack of an individuated lyric subject around whom these fragments might cohere, the reader is obliged to make his/her own connections between words, sounds and phrases.

Similarly, in the work of the performance poets, I identified several aspects of the poetry that trouble a transparent transmission of *expression*, and instead require the poetry to be read as an interrogation of the *constitution* of the subject. Here, the "I" fleetingly occupies multiple, shifting subject positions, and the poetic interplay between media and language tends towards a recurrent dissolution of the poetic self, as Stefan Helgesson puts it (72).

In my analysis of the Language poetry, I outlined how practitioners like the Language poets disrupt the coherence of the language-using, language-constituted self intentionally – a feature of the poetry that has lead to many commentators classifying it as "postmodern" – thus performing the manner in which language, at a material level, operates to create a coherent narrative, which is employed to maintain the illusion of an objective "self". These poets perform the formation and deformation of meaning in language in various ways.

Susan Howe creates visual language puzzles and maps that the reader must piece together, as human society does its history, from fragments. In this sense, Howe performs the gaps and elisions in the archive. Ron Silliman's experiments perform the manner in which, by slow accrual over an extended period of time, connections begin to form between fragments in a stream of language. Silliman's work is thus also a

210

performance of the manner in which language operates in time. In Robert Grenier's work, he foregrounds the extent to which meaning in language is based on our conception of categories and classification systems. Like Howe, he is preoccupied with the rule of the margin, and the reader who actively engages Grenier's work is confronted with this "rule" and its restrictions, and will be compelled to question the extent to which the margin shapes and frames our print habits and, by extension, our reading habits. In disseminating his work in the form of a hefty box of index cards, Grenier additionally requires that the reader consider the influence of print and publishing standards and conventions on language and its use. Bruce Andrews interrogates the conventions of text markers and grammatical structures in pre-determining reception when confronted with a body of print text. His work is also a print performance of the sound of the barrage of language fragments, the stream of sound continually confronting the language-using individual, that s/he must learn to listen to in a way that allows intended meaning to emerge.

The work of the Language poets offers very illuminating examples and performances of the processes by which we make language "mean". Their works perform the dissonance of language, the moment before meaning emerges from the stream. The reader wishing to engage this poetry participates in a performance of the operations of language.

But what does the dissolution of categories and the deformation of language mean in the postcolony? What does it mean in a space where many languages, cultural frameworks and knowledge paradigms rub up against each other, interrupting each other, vying for dominance? And what happens to the language that is adopted as the *de facto* "official" language, when other languages act through it? Mastery of language is mastery of the symbolic, and our successful "play" with language also determines our success within the "play" of the symbolic order.

While the Language poets' suspicion of the lyric subject leads them to thwart the conventional processes of language through which the subject is constituted, poets like South African Kgafela oa Magogodi present works where the subject constantly seems to *migrate* between many positions. Magogodi's poems perform, self-reflexively, the moment in which the writer or poet constructs himself in relation to

the other. Among the Language poets, I provided examples of the typographic experiments of Susan Howe and her play with conjunctions and sound. One could argue that a comparable, three-dimensional visual organising principle is at work in the sculptures of Johan Fanozi Mkhize. In the work of Lesego Rampolokeng, the reader is similarly confronted by writing that pushes the boundaries of form, and that experiments – although admittedly to a much lesser degree – with typographical layout and non-syntactic conjunctions to create links between sounds and concepts. His various works present a constant interplay between poetry as writing and poetry as performance. In the recorded performances of Jitsvinger and Jethro Louw, I identified examples of the manner in which their specifically local subjectivity is linked to and informs their global subjectivity through the media that connects their performances across time and space.

As in the work of the Language poets, the reader/listener encountering the linguistic performances of the South Africans is drawn into a performance of the operations of language, the process whereby the subject is constructed in a dialogic exchange. I have argued that these poets are performing the way that language "works" in the postcolony: the many different sounds, the conflicting ideologies, the influence of the media, the slippages in meaning, the prominence of non-lexical elements. Additionally, the work of the South Africans offers alternatives to the dominant structures of literacy and artistic appreciation, in a manner analogous to the way in which the Language poets interrogate the dominance of conventional publishing forms.

Poets and performers are, to some extent, "licensed" to experiment with language in ways that render it opaque. Because the language activities of poets and performers are generally accommodated within the order of symbolic or metaphoric language, their experimentation with non-communicative excesses can be understood as part of their framework. However, in situations where "communicative" language is expected, the order of literal or forensic language cannot accommodate seemingly non-communicative excesses that appear to render the text opaque. In this concluding chapter, I want to consider the consequences when the issues opened up by the poetry – questions of self and subject, authority and representation – are translated into testimony and public record.

As I have previously mentioned, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (1996-1998) produced an archive of oral testimonies, recorded, translated and transcribed into English, and stored in the National Archives. Considering Rampolokeng's conception of the Oral as both "expressive" and "excessive", one might immediately recognise the possible disjunctures that may attend on the interplay between the oral testimonies (with their possible "excess") and the literal, forensic framework of the TRC.

In 1996, Mrs Notrose Nobomvu Konile, mother of Zabonke Konile,[94] one of the seven young men killed in what became known as the Gugulethu Seven incident, testified in front of the TRC. Antjie Krog, reporting as a journalist for SABC radio at the time, was struck by the seeming incoherence of the testimony. In 2004, in an attempt to access and understand Mrs Konile's testimony, Krog approached Nosisi Mpolweni, a lecturer in Xhosa, and Kopano Ratele, a professor in psychology, to engage in a closer investigation of Mrs Konile's words. The resulting three-year collaboration drew on various disciplinary and social backgrounds, and ended in the publication of a book, *There was this Goat* (2009) chronicling their processes and conclusions.

In the process of "clarifying" Mrs Konile's testimony, the researchers are required to work actively with the text: they interpret it, they translate it, they return to various recordings of the testimony and re-transcribe and re-translate it. In the process of engaging the testimony in order to *narrow it down*, multiple texts accumulate around it, so that, paradoxically, the research process becomes a performance of the act of reading. Most interesting, however, is the effect that this process has on the structure of the final manuscript in which the research was made available to the public, in the form of the book, *There was this Goat.*

I argue that the perceived "deformations" in Mrs Konile's testimony that the collaborators pursue represent nodes of encounter between different textual practices,

---

[94] The seven young men were members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, and were first set up, then ambushed by South African Security Services in Gugulethu, a township near Cape Town, in March 1986.

which can only be more fully understood through a collective interpretive attempt, an "intertextual" and transdisciplinary effort, drawing on different cultural knowledges. These "nodes" of incoherence are closely tied to Mrs Konile's *material circumstances*. In a contemporary, global context, different knowledge paradigms constantly act on each other, and through various media, in a process of intermediation. This often results in language that seems deformed in some way. These deformations point towards the particular material conditions underpinning the text – material conditions, I would argue, that characterise the condition of the post-colony.

During my own reading of *There was this Goat*, I had an experience that suggested to me that the structure of *There was this Goat* itself seems to trouble categories, not to fit exactly into a particular frame. I was reading it while on a flight from Cape Town to Johannesburg. My neighbor struck up a conversation with me about the book. She was a sociologist based at one of the universities in Johannesburg. She was interested in what I did and why I was reading this book, because she had recently attended a seminar on clinical psychology in an African context, where this book had served as one of the key discussion texts. She was perplexed to learn that I was busy with a project in English literature – what could this book possibly have to offer someone who should be interested in novels and poetry?

It is true that this text is not "literary" in the sense that it does not conform to literary conventions, and might perhaps be better understood as an anthropological or sociological or linguistic study. However, the text is also a narrative, and importantly, it is a narrative about an encounter with a seemingly opaque narrative. It is a story about a journey through a "strange" story. From the outset, the text deploys literary devices in order to draw the reader into the narrative. Through its constant slide and play of literary perspectives, *There was this Goat* announces itself as a story, as much as an academic study, and the reader is expected to negotiate several shifting subject positions throughout the text.

There was this Goat investigates the manner in which Mrs Konile's particular story does not "fit" within the narrative categories available in the "New" South Africa. The authors frame it as a story that is already "falling through the cracks" (Krog et. al.,

Goat 1). To this end, the text fixes attention on the boundaries of language, and the possibilities of understanding our world through the medium of language. Additionally, the text is also a performance of an encounter between people coming from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds, and the effect that this encounter has on the sense of the boundaries of the self.

Literary scholar, Peter D. McDonald, in his essay "Thinking Interculturally",[95] argues that "[t]he possibility that our own categories and ways of understanding … may be put under real pressure is inevitably acute in any intercultural situation" (378). In other words, the symbolic structures through which we understand our place in the world come under pressure in an intercultural encounter, resulting in the need for alternative linguistic and representative strategies with which to process the experience.

McDonald suggests that *There was this Goat* is a "fascinatingly co-authored", "engagingly self-questioning study", which considers the vulnerabilities involved in any intercultural encounter from the respective positions of the authors as "belonging in various ways to a new post-apartheid majority" (378). Here, McDonald identifies a unifying, shared position for the authors, which in turn suggests a certain authorial coherence, a coherent subjectivity. I would argue, however, that it is precisely in its representation of disturbed subjectivities that the text registers the "pressures" of an intercultural encounter.

At one level, then, *There was this Goat* is about a group of researchers acting as a coherent unit in the sense that they belong to the "post-apartheid majority", as

---

[95] Using a linguistic analogy, McDonald argues that "cultures exist interculturally like languages exist interlingually" (383) and that we should therefore place "alongside the idea of cultural translatability a contrary thesis of culturally transformative untranslatability" (383). He concludes that linguistic history tells us that "languages endlessly 'slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other' [quoting Jean-Luc Nancy] without necessarily fusing into a new whole, and this is at one level how we might think about cultural interaction as well" (383). McDonald warns that any act of cultural translation should not expect a "fusion of the two source cultures or a new hybrid identity" (384). Instead, he proposes that these moments of cultural translation be considered "part of an ongoing, unavoidably risky and illimitable intercultural process in which each source culture, or aspects of each, could potentially transform the other, for better or worse, without the kaleidoscopic play of 'different pieces' ever settling down into a final pattern and without the future survival of either culture ever being guaranteed" (384).

McDonald notes. Sandra Young, whose recent work explores the relationship between representation, the archive and public culture, also describes the authors in terms suggesting a sense of authorial coherence, when she states that the text is "caught up with trying to find common ground in order to create a new public drawn together in the name of *ubuntu*" (132). As Young notes, the book is (problematically) premised on the notion that Mrs Konile's testimony is "strange and incoherent" (129). This suggests a certain unity among the authors in their relation to Mrs Konile, and Young also points out how the authors tend to lapse into the "passive" voice of the "disinterested diagnostician" (129), suggesting that there is a kind of common language that they might occupy as a coherent, disinterested authorial voice.

However, the manuscript *also* registers the authors' encounter *with each other* in the collaborative process, and the text records not only their "objective" research, but also the personal reflections and responses of the authors throughout the process. Both these "intercultural" encounters – the authors' encounter with Mrs Konile, as well as their encounters with each other – result in a certain pressure on categories and ways of understanding, and this pressure registers in the language and structure of the manuscript.

Firstly, its structure is fragmentary. Young suggests that this fragmentary structure shows up the impossibility of achieving "coherence in the name of hospitality to what is strange, or in the name of democracy, or *ubuntu*" (134). Whereas Young thus takes note of the extralexical aspects of the text, she does not develop them. I would therefore like to pursue the idea that the structure of the text in fact acts as a non-lexical interpretative framework, one that guides the reader's understanding of the text as a performance of an encounter that breaks down language and disrupts notions of sovereignty. The fragmentary nature of the text has the reader constantly shifting through multiple points of view and varying perspectives. These shifts are registered typographically, in varying fonts, styles and formats. The extra-lexical aspects of the manuscript are therefore as telling, and play as key a role in shaping the reader's understanding of the text, as the lexical markers.

The manuscript also registers a seeming pressure on the manner in which the pronoun "I" is occupied and used throughout the account. I have repeatedly returned,

throughout this thesis, to Benveniste's account of the function of pronouns. Benveniste[96] makes the point that if each speaker, "in order to express the feeling he has of his irreducible subjectivity" (220), made a "distinct identifying signal" (220) communication would become impossible, as there would be as many languages as there were individuals. "Language wards off this danger by instituting a unique but mobile sign, *I*, which can be assumed by each speaker on the condition that he refers each time only to the instance of his own discourse" (220). By assuming *I*, the speaker takes over all the resources of language for his own behalf (220), and constitutes himself as a subject in language.

The text of *There was this Goat* reveals a strange kind of anxiety around the pronoun "I" that manifests materially, visually in the text, as a square bracket, which acts as a kind of "anchor" to the pronoun, containing the name of the speaker. The text thus briefly *performs* the moment at which an individual speaker assumes "I" and takes over the resources of language for him or herself in an act of enunciation. Through this device, the text in fact creates a referent for the "I", temporarily "anchoring" the shifter to a particular speaker. This notion of the "anchoring" of the position in language, which allows the speaker to enter as a subject into language, might be read as a performance of the anxiety around subjectivity that is provoked by the authors' encounter with Mrs Konile's testimony, as well as with each other in the process of collaboration.

This foregrounding of the manner in which personal pronouns function in the bringing out of subjectivity in language is also related to the indicators of deixis, which "organise the spatial and temporal relationships around the 'subject' taken as referent" (Benveniste 226). Indicators of deixis "have in common the feature of being defined only with respect to the instances of discourse in which they occur, that is, in dependence upon the *I* which is proclaimed in the discourse" (226). The title of the manuscript, *There was this Goat*, therefore also foregrounds an important aspect of

---

[96] Mark Sanders has also used the work of Benveniste to discuss Krog's use of the pronoun "I" in her account of her years covering the TRC hearings, *Country of my Skull*. Sanders uses Benveniste to explain the dialogic structure inherent to the act of telling, predicated on an "I" addressing a "you". We see through Sanders' analysis that Krog consciously works with this dialogic relation in her introduction of the fictional lover, thus drawing attention to the constructed nature of the text (2000: 25-27).

the construction of subjectivity in language. The title contains two indicators of deixis, "There" and "this", which can only be defined with respect to the instance of discourse in which they occur. These markers of deixis organise the spatial and temporal relationship around the subject taken as referent, but in this title, that subject is not clear.

From the outset, then, the book, like the first line of Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, foregrounds questions of the manner in which the subject is constructed in language. Furthermore, the title establishes the *goat* as a key function of the text, and this is crucial, since the goat in Mrs Konile's testimony appears in a dream, kneeling in an unsual position, which is read as a portent of evil. The goat of the title is therefore not *literal* – Mrs Konile introduces a dream, which is of the order of metaphorical and symbolic language, into the essentially forensic discourse of the TRC. This way of reading the landscape lies outside the disciplinary scope of the authors' research.

Sandra Young argues that the researchers occupy the discourses of their disciplines in order to recuperate Mrs Konile's testimony within their framework. Young suggests that the "diagnostician's remove is undone when the authors visit Mrs Konile at her village in Indwe" (130). For Young, the encounter with Mrs Konile's extreme material conditions shatters the researchers' certainties, "anchored in race and the veneer of equality that the academy and its knowledge systems seem 'neatly' to offer the well-intentioned researcher" (131). Young proceeds to note that

> [b]y Krog's own acknowledgement, in Mrs Konile's bare, cold kitchen, the certainties governing race- and class-based identification and knowledge production are toppled so that even, or especially, access to *self* becomes disturbed. (131)

Young points out that this sense of a "disturbed" access to self "occurs most powerfully when the medium of communication becomes *isiXhosa*, a language that excludes Krog and exposes *her* difference in ways that render her ignorant and disempowered" (131, original emphasis). Krog herself describes this as a moment where a new hierarchy is established within the language, and suddenly she is "nobody" (Krog et. al., *Goat* 132). For Young, Krog's acknowledgement of her

218

"profound unsettledness" (131) is "articulated in terms that invite reflection on the effects of openness to alterity for her own subjectivity" (131), and Young asks whether this "unmooring" is "the kind of interruption of self that Derrida would recognize as hospitality" (131). In the rest of her paper, Young pursues the "[t]rouble with 'hospitality'" (131), namely its "paradox, this aporia – it is impossible to be open to the Other without giving up sovereignty oneself, that is, without re-entering one's own home as a guest and therefore without the authority that comes with ownership and with certainty" (131). It seems to me that the linguistic and structural permutations in the text register this paradox, and are in fact material manifestations in language of the authorial attempt to perform this experience of a "disturbed access to self". The book is therefore singular as a textual performance of the effects on subject position that result from the pressures of an act of intercultural translation.

The instability in the subject position is reflected in the open-ended structure of the text. The final manuscript of *There was this Goat* consists of fragmentary sections, in different modes, much like Krog's previous memoir, *A Change of Tongue*, also a text that attends closely to Krog's experience of intercultural encounters and acts of cultural translation. In *There was this Goat,* the authors have juxtaposed chapters forming, as Sandra Young puts it, a

> multifarious and genre-stretching set of meditations on the problematic set out compellingly in its early pages. They include historical accounts, reportage, conversations real and imagined, transcribed testimony, both in the original Xhosa and in the competing English translations, extracts from the official TRC Report, further reflections on the testimony, and an account of their visit to Mrs. Konile. The book ends with an imaginary letter to the late Mrs. Konile, followed by an epilogue in which the authors recount their reaction on hearing of the death of Mrs Konile, some weeks after the fact, and their recognition of what she had come to signify for them. (117)

I find it telling that Young does not include the two addenda in her extensive list of texts that make up the manuscript as a whole. I would suggest that, as with other material elements of the text that might be extra-linguistic but nonetheless aid in the process of establishing a framework for understanding, the addenda might quite

productively be read as part of the overall "performance" of the manuscript. Doing so, I argue, extends two other points made by Young. Firstly, Young notes that Mrs. Konile's second testimony in front of the TRC is not at all incoherent, and registers surprise that it is not given more attention in *There was this Goat*, even though it is included as an addendum (130). For Young, the "sidelining" of the second testimony in this way results in the loss of its potential to counteract the initial depiction of Mrs. Konile and to change the question at the heart of the book (130). It seems to me that this might be explained by the fact that *There was this Goat* is a performance[97] of an encounter with a seemingly incomprehensible text, in the same way that Catherine Cole suggests *Country of My Skull*, "for all its limitations, is more effective than any other secondary sources in terms of conveying the performative dimensions and dynamics of the TRC live hearings" (Cole, footnote, 178). Similarly, *There was this Goat* conveys the performative dimensions of translation, transcription, and collaborative academic writing.

Young's second reservation about *There was this Goat* lies in her recognition that the authors, in trying to open up the archive to "new texts, new experiences, and subjects previously marginalized by poverty and racial injustice … cannot help but affirm the very particular notion of forgiveness as normative, or even requisite, for postapartheid belonging" (133). Unable fully to recuperate Mrs Konile's "strangeness", to achieve coherence, "the authors give up the challenge of finding voice to their understanding of Mrs Konile" (Young 133), as we see when the authorial "we" asks, at the end: "What are the phrases, which are the theories, what is the hypothesis within which we can truly capture Mrs Konile changing for us as she changed our ways of observation? (Krog et. al. *Goat* 212). For Young the end of *There was this Goat* is a "performative abdication of the book's own endeavor to make sense of Mrs Konile", offering instead, "a 'miracle', a moment of 'enchant[ment]', that, although moving, does not, in fact, address Mrs Konile's alienation" (133). I would argue, however, that despite this seemingly forced narrative closure, the text, when read as a whole with the addenda included, actually points back to exactly the issue of Mrs Konile's unwillingness to forgive. Indeed, Mrs Konile's resistance to recuperation is

---

[97] See Catherine Cole's article "Performance, Transitional Justice, and the Law", in which she traces the "performative conventions, modes of address, and expressive embodiment" of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

underscored by the structure of the book.

Throughout the book, and right up until the end, Mrs Konile refuses to forgive. Speaking from the position of the collective "we", the authors, on their way to meeting Mrs Konile, discuss the fact that "Mrs Konile had so explicity positioned herself against forgiving amnesty seeker Thapelo Mbelo" (Krog et. al.: 125). The authors wonder why it was that, unlike the other mothers, Mrs Konile was not "brought around to forgiveness" (125), stating: "It was not that we felt that she *had* to forgive, but we wanted to know how she reasoned this around the concept of *ubuntu*" (125). In the final transcription of the authors' own interview with her, Mrs Konile tells Nosisi Mpolweni about her encounter with Mbelo:

> MRS KONILE: He had no answer for the question from me to him.
>
> NOSISI: Ee, yes. Did you end up forgiving him?
>
> MRS KONILE: Hee!
>
> NOSISI: What did you end up doing with him?
>
> MRS KONILE: I ended up not forgiving him.
>
> NOSISI: You ended up not having peace [*with him*]?
>
> MRS KONILE: I do not want to lie, the only person who ended up forgiving him is Zabonke's daughter Khanyisa. It is Khanyisa who had forgiven him, as well as Thandeka, Zabonke's sister. As for me, I did not forgive him.
>
> NOSISI: Ooh!
>
> MRS KONILE: Yes, so much so that I began to pray for myself and punished myself and taught myself that it is high time that I teach myself to accept somebody's plea for forgiveness. That is all about me.

I would argue that Mrs Konile's refusal to forgive is itself an aporetic event, one that forces open the text. In the final chapter, the authors try to grapple with it, to theorise it, but it seems to remain in excess of their attempts at recuperating it. The epilogue ends with their encounter with Thandeka Konile, "a young Mrs Konile" (214), who has forgiven the perpetrators, who is "humane" (214). In this image, the unforgiving Mrs Konile seems to be reincarnated as the forgiving Thandeka, the hope for South Africa's future.

221

I would like to consider briefly the authors' own methodology in approaching Mrs Konile's testimony. They begin with an official text, in English, one that they experience as incoherent, fragmentary, and perhaps even delusional. The perceived "deformations" in the language of the testimony invite reader participation – it is not a transparent text, meaning is not immediately clear. The text carries many marks of the material disruption of language. The authors begin to trace the testimony's journey through other media, and record the distortions that those media in turn wrought on the language of the testimony. These other media include audio and video recordings, as well as interviews with the interpreters, who mediated the testimonies at the TRC hearings as they unfolded in time. What we see from these pursuits is that, with each medial addition, the testimony acquires more layers of meaning, but many of the researchers' questions remain unanswered, or their answers are conflicted. Eventually, they decide to visit the originating speaker of the testimony, in an effort to resolve some of the questions that her testimony opens up for them. The visit does resolve some of the questions they have, but opens up new ones. Ultimately, Mrs Konile's *self* remains elusive to them. Through a sequence of personal reflections, we see how each of the authors experienced Mrs Konile differently. The text thus performs the impossibility of ever grasping another completely.

Additionally, for Krog, a trace of the physical presence of the *interpreter* of the original testimony remains, "interfering" with Mrs Konile's testimony. Krog states that "[i]n my head, Mrs Konile's testimony exists with the precise intonation, pauses, tiredness and rhythm with which it was delivered by the female interpreter" (85). The embodied experience of Krog's first encounter with Mrs Konile's testimony includes not just Mrs Konile's body and voice, but also that of the interpreter. Mrs Konile's speech act, then, in the moment in which it unfolds, is also "doubling". She "speaks" with two voices, in two languages. This has a curious effect on the manner in which Mrs Konile's subjectivity might be perceived by someone hearing or reading her testimony in translation: on the one hand, she cannot be understood without this "doubling" effect; on the other hand, the seeming incoherence of Mrs Konile's testimony stems precisely from the interference of the interpreter's body. The result is that the position of "Mrs Konile" appears to be over-determined.

The authors ultimately have to extend their idea of "what signifies" beyond the text of

the testimony itself. They have to take into account that much that is incomprehensible in the text has to do with the material embeddedness of the testimony as an oral delivery. In the processes of interpretation, transcription and translation, elements were lost from the record because they were deemed extra-lexical and unnecessary. In other words, they were seen as excessive. The authors' journey through Mrs Konile's testimony forces them to try and recover some of these discarded "excesses".

I would argue then, that if one reads the manuscript as a textual performance, one would follow a similar approach, and pursue those elements of the manuscript that might be considered "excesses" to the "text proper", and here I would like to include the two appendices (Latin: appendere, something attached to something else, additional text containing information that is important, but is not the main idea). Extra texts, in other words. "Appendix I" is the official transcript of Mrs Konile's *second* testimony to the TRC, at the *amnesty* hearings. In this testimony, Mrs Konile makes no mention of forgiveness, but the transcript of the testimony ends with a speech by the Chairperson, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in which he expresses the hope that "people in this country will know the price that is being paid for forgiveness … And South Africa should know just how lucky South Africa is. That we mustn't take for granted it's a very deep pain that people are carrying, but they can laugh, they can sing and they can forgive. And we keep saying how much we wish for the people as it were on the other side to be equally generous and just say – sorry – sorry. And they will be amazed at the response they get" (233-234). It is clear from Tutu's speech that the national narrative is one of forgiveness.

The very final text in the manuscript is "Appendix II: The Truth Commission's amnesty decision", which grants amnesty to

> Wilhelm Riaan Bellingan in respect of the shooting of Z.J Konile and to Thapelo Johannes Mbelo in respect of the shooting of T. Milifi on 3 March 1986. The committee found that the applicants acted in the scope of their duties and within the scope of their authority and that they have complied with the requirements of the Act. (235)

The manuscript thus closes with a performance of the TRC's "forgiveness" narrative, juxtaposed with the reminder that the perpetrators were granted amnesty. The manuscript literally closes, not with Thandeka's enchanting and forgiving presence, but with the presence of the unforgiven and unrepentant perpetrators.

This reminder that there was no visible justice, no retribution for the perpetrators, seems to create a kind of feedback loop in the manuscript, causing the reader repeatedly to return to the notions of forgiveness that are found in the text. To this extent, I would argue that even while the authors appear to "affirm the very particular notion of forgiveness as normative, or even requisite, for postapartheid belonging" (Young 133), the structure of the manuscript itself points back to the notion of forgiveness as a site of dialogic tension, one that produces excesses.

The manuscript itself arises out of what are, essentially, "excess texts". The journey through Mrs Konile's original testimony, the primary text, results in the accumulation of more texts. The text can only make sense in its relation to other texts, variations of the same testimony. After visiting Mrs Konile, the authors count *three* narrations delivered by Mrs Konile:

> The primary source of [their] research, namely the first official website
> testimony […]; the official website testimony of her second appearance
> before the Truth Commission […] and, after [their] return from Indwe,
> [they] had an interview describing the same event ten years after her
> Truth Commission appearances. (175)

In addition, the original testimony and the authors' interview both exist in the original Xhosa text as well as English translation and retranslation. The manuscript is therefore a performance of the manner in which a reader or listener draws on or creates other texts in order to make sense of one particular text.

This suggests again a dialogic structure at work in the act of making meaning. Indeed, the authors of *There was this Goat* note specifically that the "bulk of this book was built up over two years of weekly conversations, readings, discussions, writing together, presenting and talking" (40). Here, they underscore the collaborative, oral,

embodied nature of their research project. In finding ways of performing the collaborative, embodied, *oral* nature of many of the accounts and exchanges in the manuscript, the authors need to experiment with various literary, scholarly and print devices in order to signal shifts within the narrative. However, as I have mentioned above, these shifts often also seem to suggest an ongoing anxiety over or instability of the subject position in language.

For example, consider the multiple shifts through point of view and mode in the first three chapters of the book. The Introduction describes the conditions under which Mrs Konile testified at the TRCs human rights violations hearings. It provides the context in the voice of a passive, objective third-person. Our very first encounter with the text is therefore focalized through an as yet unknown speaker, who ends the short introduction by emphasizing the seeming precarious existence of Mrs Konile's official "self":

> On the website of the Truth Commission later, there was no trace of her name in the index. Under the heading of the Gugulethu Seven incident, her surname was given incorrectly as 'Khonele'. Mrs Konile's real name is Notrose Nobomvu Konile, but even in her official identity document […] her second name was given incorrectly as Nobovu. (Krog et. al. 4)

In a performance of the dialogic construction of the manuscript, the speaker then addresses the reader directly, an "I" addressing a "you": " 'So what?' you might well ask. Why is it important to try to understand this unmentioned, incorrectly ID-ed, misspelt, incoherently testifying, translated and carelessly transcribed woman? In the pages that follow, we have tried to give our reasons" (4). In this direct address, the speaker activates and foregrounds the process of "telling". It is also only at the end of this direct address to the reader that the speaker is revealed as plural: not an "I", but a "we" addressing "you", the reader.

These first three pages of the manuscript introduce several of the structural and functional elements of this singular text. The reader learns that the focaliser is not a unified, single speaker, so rapid jumps in subject position might be expected – the text comprises multiple points of view. The reader has also been introduced to the

particular font and formatting styles that the manuscript uses to distinguish between the authorial voice and extracts from documents recording other voices. Additionally, Mrs Konile, the speaker of the seemingly incoherent testimony, is also represented as a person whose official identity does not seem quite fixed, or moored. In so doing, the text establishes a focus on the notion of subjectivity in the national narrative. However, it also alerts the reader to the complexities related to issues of subjectivity that might arise from the collaborative act of intercultural, cross-disciplinary, academic cultural translation.

The first chapter of the book is still in a passive voice, but the discourse is more forensic than in the Introduction. This chapter recounts the events around the killing of the "Gugulethu Seven", with extensive extracts from the TRC report interspersed with authorial glosses in a seemingly objective, scholarly tone. These sections also contain extracts from the testimony of the other mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, so the reader encounters these voices in advance of Mrs Konile's testimony, which is reproduced in full at the end of the chapter. The reader first "hears" the voices of the other mothers, before "hearing" Mrs Konile's testimony. In this way, the structure of the text performs for the reader the heteroglot nature of the TRC hearings. It also establishes the narrative framework of the TRC, and shows how Mrs Konile's testimony was heard in relation to other testimonies. The process leading up to Mrs Konile's testimony allows the reader to experience the manner in which Mrs Konile was contextualised, in much the same way that someone who was following the hearings at the time would have done. The structure of the manuscript goes some way towards recreating the dialogic structures within which the testimony was initially received.

The text then turns to exploring precisely this issue of the reception of the testimonies. Chapter two and Chapter three are fictional narratives, which imagine the manner in which various South Africans might have responded to Mrs Konile's testimony. Structured in the form of a dramatic dialogue, these conversations announce themselves as performances of possible points of view, and invite the reader to occupy the positions from which these views are enunciated. Chapter two, "A possible white conversation", begins with a statement in the passive voice: "It is said that we *tell* stories so that we do not die of truth. But we also tell stories to know who

we are and to make sense of the world" (19). This statement is a device that draws attention to the text as a construction, as a story being told in order to "make sense of the world". This self-reflexive foregrounding is once again linked to the notion of the dialogic, since it invokes the act of *telling* a story, but also of *listening*: "We *listen* to one another's stories so that we share carrying the truth. But we also listen in order to become, for one brief moment, somebody else, to be somewhere we've not been before" (19). Through this statement, the text alerts the reader to his or her own act of participation in the process by which the story unfolds and enters the world.

After two introductory paragraphs, the authorial voice, which has been a passive, unified "we", now splits open and produces a single authorial voice. The reader is told:

> I [*Antjie*] imagine a Toyota bakkie on that endless stretch of road between Colesberg and Beaufort West in April 1996. The only radio station the bakkie can pick up is Radio 2000, with its eight-hour Truth Commission hearings. (19)

The inclusion of Krog's name in square brackets anchors the shifter "I" to a particular speaker, one who is about to tell us her "story". The reader therefore makes the shift from engaging the collective "we", to engaging an individual. This demarcates the narrative that follows as belonging solely to "I [*Antjie*]": The name in square brackets establishes her as the author of this particular act of enunciation. However, the name in square brackets is a visual trace, a material manifestation of the (usually hidden) processes of language and discourse. The name in square brackets can be read as an "appendix", if you will, which registers the self that will always be in excess of the subjectivity offered by the pronoun "I" in language.

"I [*Antjie*]" tells the reader how she imagines a possible white conversation about an encounter with Mrs Konile's testimony. The act of fictionalising a set of possible responses allows both the storyteller and the reader to imagine the different positions that might be taken in relation to a particular event. In other words, stories offer readers/listeners alternative subject positions from which they might consider their own perception of and place in the world. Krog's account of "a possible white

conversation" is very particularly localized: she imagines "a Toyota bakkie" on "that" stretch of road between Colesberg and Beaufort West. The word "that", as a marker of deixis, is dependent upon the "I" which is proclaimed in the discourse, and here the reader has been visually directed to the "I" as "I [*Antjie*]". The reader is engaged in the process by which Krog's domain of subjectivity is extended beyond the pronoun "I", as she constructs a local landscape through her discourse. In establishing her setting, Krog makes little concession to non South African readers, and her phrasing suggests that her imagined interlocutor is a South African, who will know why "that" stretch of road is so significant. In doing so, she seems to be signaling the particular material embeddedness attendant on any act of interpretation, but she is also directing her enunciation at a particular audience, one that might respond and confirm her as a subject in discourse.

Krog's fiction is contrasted with a "possible black conversation" as imagined by "I [*Kopano*]" in Chapter three. Ratele's "conversation" is multiply located, a "series of conversations" that are "to be heard all over the land were we to be listening – in kitchens and after lectures, at funerals and weddings, in living rooms and restaurants" (Krog et. al. 29). Again, the effect is to offer shifting perspectives on the testimony of Mrs Konile, this time from the point of view of Black South Africans. This chapter explicitly suggests that the TRC "was staged for the world and for whites" (30), introducing the notion of the TRC as performative. The chapter also raises critique of the TRC's language policies, and this critique is linked to the idea that the TRC was a performance "for whites". The "Second Black" speaker points out that TRC translations were primarily between isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English (30). This statement foregrounds issues around language imperialism in South Africa, and underscores the fact that, as a performance, the TRC ultimately excluded many of the (Black) South African language groups, including the majority isiZulu speakers.

Both of these "possible conversations" articulate uncomfortable positions and reveal some of the ways in which South Africans think about and stereotype each other. These two chapters perform the extent to which the vast thicket of language that lies between South Africans renders them incomprehensible to one another. As "I [*Kopano*]" says at the end of his fiction, "there are many other conversations, thoughts and emotions that remain unexpressed" (37), and he suspects that these

"continue to feed into the interracial misunderstandings, fears, suspicions and hatred that simmer below the many skins of South Africa" (37). Each misunderstanding, or fear or suspicion acts on notions of subjectivity, either to entrench particular subject positions, or to destabilize them.

These issues of subjectivity, illustrated by the "conversations" above, are also compounded by the scope of particular media for accommodating these subjectivities. Krog establishes the important role played by radio as a medium for disseminating the TRC proceedings. Indeed, as a journalist covering the TRC hearings for SABC radio, Krog is acutely aware of the extent to which that medium affects language. Reflecting on her initial experience of Mrs Konile's testimony in a later chapter, Krog writes:

> I remember thinking that if I did a normal reporting job of Mrs Konile's narrative on radio, it would only strengthen the racist views that the Truth Commission was so successfully deconstructing and removing. At the same time, I suspected that her testimony was important, precisely because it was different from the others, and considered the possibility that, perhaps, you *needed other tools to make sense of it.* (39, my emphasis)

Krog describes coming up against the limits of language in South Africa. Mrs Konile's testimony in English, the *de facto* official language, cannot be made to signify meaningfully within the available frameworks. A "normal reporting job" will simply play into people's assumptions. Krog's recognition that one needs "other tools to make sense of it" begs the question: What alternative types of narrative are available that might allow access to a particular kind of South African subjectivity? The desire to recuperate the original intention of the speaker is brought into play again here. *There was this Goat,* in trying to come to grips with different subject positions in South Africa, attempts to recuperate Mrs Konile's narrative to the national narrative of forgiveness. However, at subject level, Mrs Konile is resistant to this narrative from the beginning, and it is this resistance that affects the form of the final manuscript.

What are the implications of a text such as *There was this Goat* for questions of representation in South Africa? The book presents the reader with an account of the difficulties of reading certain texts in South Africa. It performs the kind of linguistic activity that becomes necessary when a seemingly opaque text is encountered in a literal, forensic frame. Confronted with a testimony and a context that appear to deny Mrs Konile her subjectivity, leaving her outside the inclusive framework of the TRC, the authors embark on a process of recuperating her subjectivity. As the authors pursue the perceived deformations in Mrs Konile's testimony, they come up against a resistance in her subjectivity, which cannot be satisfactorily co-opted to the national narrative. This resistance is registered at the structural level of *There was this Goat*, in the feedback loop of the refusal of forgiveness that is created by the appendices at the end.

Furthermore, the act of "engagement" in which the researchers participate engenders a crisis of self. In attempting to recuperate Mrs Konile's subjectivity, the authors' own sense of subjectivity is affected through the operations of a collaborative and inter-disciplinary, polylinguistic, intercultural exchange. These shifts are registered at the material level of the text in *There was this Goat*, and ultimately I argue that the book constitutes a performance that foregrounds the importance of non-lexical signifiers when dealing with text in South Africa.

Mrs Konile's language is not poetry – she is not "licensed", like the Language poets and the performance poets, to explore the play of the symbolic. To a great extent, *There was this Goat* makes explicit what happens when the issues preoccupying the poets are placed in a politicised, material context. Questions of performance, the dissolution of the subject, and the implications for representation are all raised by Mrs Konile's opaque testimony.

Mrs Konile's testimony is received within a context that demands a literal language, one that clearly communicates its intent. In fact, the manner in which she is constructed as a subject in the discourse of the TRC depends upon how her testimony is received. Her unmarked shifts between direct address and reported speech, her introduction of the associative language of dreams, combined with the manner in which her official testimony does not establish boundaries of space and time, are

elements of her discourse that hamper clarity of communication within the discursive frameworks of the TRC and the nation. However, these "redundant" elements in her language that are gradually eroded in the process of translation and transcription are the very elements that mark her subjectivity, which remains in excess of the discourses available to the researchers.

Through the course of this thesis, I have considered the manner in which the North American Language poets and the South African performance poets respond to the same thing, namely the materiality of language and the disruption of the signifier. As I established in chapter one, excesses and ambiguities are inherent to language *qua* language, regardless of national language or dialect.

I chose to focus on poetry as an effective medium for exploring the materiality of language, because it is so closely preoccupied with form, and the way in which form determines meaning. As much as language carries meaning, it also deforms and interrupts meaning, because of its material, contingent and situated nature. Additionally, language is deeply embedded in social and cultural practice. It therefore does not stand neutrally outside its material context, but arises from a material context that informs and disrupts it. I have outlined the manner in which the Language poets and the performance poets respond to, and represent, this particular aspect of language – its ability to disrupt and trouble the transparent communication of meaning.

Although the poets from the north and the poets from the south focus on the same aspects of language, they differ in their praxis and in the manner in which they perform the situatedness and disruptions of language. They explore within their own local contexts, the consequences of this materially oriented language practice for the construction of the subject in language. Whereas the Language poets attempt to mute the lyric subject as much as possible, the subject in the South African poetry is present, but constantly shifting, constantly unsettled by the disruptions in language.

In this thesis, I have tried to determine how the materiality of language might be theorised from the South. To this end, the South African poets' experimentation with subject position, form and media has provided a useful starting point from which to

consider the implications of an attention to disrupted language, also for literary studies. However, the subject matter and form of *There was this Goat* raise questions of how attention to apparently deformed language might play out in other language areas and what the implications of an attention to materiality might be for subjectivity and representation in the South African public discourse.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. "English and the African Writer". *Transition* 18, 1965: 27-30. Print.

Adair. Gilbert. "Line and Point to Voice: Language Poetry and Urban Performance". *Arts on the Edge*: Perth, Western Australia.1998. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/andrews/about/adair.html >.

Adorno, Theodor. "Lyric poetry and society".1957. *Notes to Literature*. Trans. Rolf Tiedemann. Ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. Print.

Altbeker, Antony. *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: A True Story of Murder and the Miscarriage of Justice.* Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2010. Print.

American Declaration of Independence. Web. 8 July 2012. <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html >

Anderson, Perry. "Modernity and Revolution". *New Left* Review 144 (1984): 96-113. Print.

Andrews, Bruce. *I don't have any paper so shut up (or, Social Romanticism)*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1992. Print.

—"The Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E". Talk delivered in the Textual Operations Talk series, organized by A. S. Bessa, at White Box in New York City, 25 September 2001. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.ubu.com/papers/andrews.html >

— "Poetry as Explanation, Poetry as Praxis". 1990. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. Chicago: W.W. Norton, 1994: 668-672. Print.

—"Praxis: A Political Economy of Noise and Information". *Close Listening*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

Andrews, Kenneth. *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. Print.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post-in Postcolonial?". *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991):336-357. Print.

Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Bakhtin, M. "Discourse in the Novel". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. M Holquist and C Emerson. Ed. M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press,

1981. Print.

—"The Heteroglot Novel". 1935. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*. Ed. Pam Morris. London: Edward Arnold, 1995: 112-122. Print.

—"Literary Stylistics". *Bakhtin School Papers*. Ed. A Shukman. Oxford: Oxon Publishing Ltd, 1983. Print.

—"Social Heteroglossia". 1935. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*. Ed. Pam Morris. London: Edward Arnold, 1995: 73-81. Print.

Baker, Harold D. "Psychoanalysis and Ideology: Bakhtin, Lacan and Žižek". *History of European Ideas* 20: 1-3 (1995): 499-504. Print.

Barber, K. "African-language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism". *Research in African Literatures.* 26. 4 (1995): 3 – 28. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z.* Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Print.

Bartlett, Lee. "What is Language Poetry?" *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 741-752. Print.

Basson, Adriaan. *Finish&Klaar: Selebi's Fall from Interpol to the Underworld.* Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010. Print.

Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. London: Methuen, 1980. Print.

Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics.*1966. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971. Print.

Bernstein, Charles. Interview with Robert Grenier, discussing *Sentences*. <u>Close Listening:</u> readings and conversations at WPS1.Org, Clocktower Studio, New York, 20 October 2006. Program two. Web. 19 September 2011. <<u>http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Grenier/Grenier-Robert_Close-Listening_02_Ch-Bernstein_WPS1-NY_10-20-06.mp3</u>>

—"Introduction". *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

—"The Dollar Value of Poetry". *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Eds. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984: 138-140. Print.

Berold, Robert, ed. *South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2003. Print.

Biko, Steve. "American Policy Towards Azania". 1978. *I write what I like.* Ed. Aelred Stubbs C.R. South Africa: Picador Press, 2004. Print.

—"The Definition of Black Consciousness". 1971. *I write what I like.* Ed. Aelred Stubbs C.R. South Africa: Picador Press, 2004. Print.

Bolter, J.D. and Grusin, R. *Remediation.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000. Print.

Booth, William James. "Gone Fishing: Making Sense of Marx's Concept of Communism". *Political Theory* 17.2 (1989): 205-222. Print.

Brito, Manuel. "Ron Silliman's Remarks on Post-Referential Poetry". *Nor shall Diamond Die: American Studies in Honour of Javier Coy.* Eds. Carme Manuel and Paul S. Derrick. Universitat de Valencia, 2003. Print.

Brown, D. *To Speak of This Land: Identity and Belonging in South Africa and Beyond*. South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. Print.

—*Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

—"Black Consciousness, Tradition and Modernity: Ingoapele Madingoane's 'black trial'". *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 9.1 (1997): 1-26. Print.

Brückner, Thomas. "Everything is Rap: An Interview with Lesego Rampolokeng". Eds. Robert Kriger and Ethel Kriger. *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996. 261-273. Print.

Cazé, Antoine. "Lineage/Language: Susan Howe's Poetic History". *Sources: Revue d'études anglophones* No. 12. Orléans: Paradigms, 2002. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.paradigme.com/sources/SOURCES-PDF%5CSOURCE12.pdf>

Chapman, Michael, ed. "Introduction". *Soweto Poetry: Literary Perspectives*. South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007. Print.

—Ed. *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: AD Donker, 2002. Print.

Chimurenga online. Web. 9 August 2012. <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/chimurenga-vol-15-the-curriculum-is-everything-may-'10>

Clarkson, Carol. "Locating identity in Phaswane Mpe's Welcome to our Hillbrow". *Third World Quarterly* 26.3 (2005): 451-459. Print.

Coetzee, J.M. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa.* South Africa: Radix in association with Yale University Press, 1988.

Coffeebeans Routes. Coffeebeans Routes, 2010. Web. 11 December 2010. <http://www.coffeebeansroutes.com/about-us>

Cole, Catherine. "Performance, Transitional Justice and the Law: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commision". *Theatre Journal* 59.2 (2007): 167-187. Print.

Comaroff, Jean and John. *Ethnicity Inc.* Scotsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009. Print.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996. Web. 10 August 2012. <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96.pdf>

Cornwell, Gareth. "James Matthews' 'Protest Songs': The Problem of Evaluation". 1980. *Soweto Poetry: literary perspectives.* Ed. Michael Chapman. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2007: 184-189. Print.

Coward, R. and Ellis, J. *Language and Materialism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. Print.

Crenshaw, Martha. "Why America? The Globalization of Civil War". *Current History* 100 (2001): 425-432. Print.

Cronin, Jeremy. "'Even under the Rine of Terror…': Insurgent South African Poetry". *Research in African Literatures* 19.1 (1988): 12-23. Print.

Crown, Kathleen. "'Choice Voice Noise': Soundings in Innovative African-American Poetry". *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally.* Ed. Romana Huk. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003:219-245. Print.

De Villiers, Dawid. "After the Revolution: *Jerusalema* and the Entrepreneurial Present". *South African Theatre Journal* 23 (2009): 8-22. Print.

De Vos, Pierre. "All languages equal but English (and Afrikaans?) more equal?" *Constitutionally Speaking.* 2008. Web. 3 August 2012. <http://constitutionallyspeaking.co.za/all-languages-equal-but-english-and-afrikaans-more-equal/ >

De Vries, Fred. "A moment of bliss, and then it's all gone". *The Weekender* 11 Feb. 2007: 1. Print.

Different, Adrian. "InZync Poetry Session". Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 3 June 2011. Web. 6 August 2012. < http://slipnet.co.za/view/event/adrian-different-and-khanyi-mbongwa-inzync-poetry-session/ >

Dlamini, Jacob. *Native Nostalgia*. South Africa: Jacana, 2010. Print.

Dorson, Richard. *American Folklore*. 1959. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Print.

Drucker, Johanna. "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text". *Close Listening and the Performed Word*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998: 131-161. Print.

Du Plessis, Theodorus. "Die taal of die cheetah? Perspektiewe op die belang van taalsigbaarheid by die nuwe Vrystaatse nommerplaat as openbare teken". *Literator: A Jounral of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 28 (2007): 119-143. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem.* London: Wiley and Sons, 2011. Print.

Emmett, Tony. "Oral, Political and Communal Aspects of Township Poetry in the Mid-seventies". 1979. *Soweto Poetry: literary perspectives.* Ed. Michael Chapman. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2007:175-183. Print.

Esty, J. "Excremental Postcolonialism". *Contemporary Literature* 40.1 (1999): 22-59. Print.

Evers, Jeanine C. (2011). "From the Past into the Future. How Technological Developments Change Our Ways of Data Collection, Transcription and Analysis". *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *12*(1), 2011. Web. 11 November 2012. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101381>

Ferguson, James. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

Finnegan, Ruth. *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2007. Print.

Fromkin, Victoria and Rodman, Robert. *An Introduction to Language*. Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.

Gardiner, Michael. "'Funking the Jive': The Poetry of Wopko Jensma". *English Academy Review* 3 (1985):109-125. Print.

Gevisser, Mark. *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred.* Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007. Print.

Gikandi, Simon. "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality". *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 627-658. Print.

Giliomee, H., and Mbenga, B, eds. *New History of South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007. Print.

—*The Afrikaners: Biography of a People.* Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, 2003. Print.

Golding, Alan. "Language Writing, Digital Poetics and Transitional Materialities." *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts and Theories.* Eds. Adelaide Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006. Print.

Greer, Michael. "Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing or, The Naming of 'Language Poetry'" *boundary2* 16. 2/3 (1989): 335-355. Print.

Grenier, Robert. "On Speech". *This.* Web. 19 September 2011. <http://english.utah.edu/eclipse/projects/SPEECH/Speech.pdf >

— *Sentences.* 1978. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.whalecloth.org/grenier/sentences.htm>

Gunner, Liz. "Wrestling with the Present, Beckoning to the Past: Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26.2 (2000): 223-237. Print.

Hall, Martin. "The Role of Cattle in Southern African Agropastoral Societies: More than bones alone can tell". *Goodwin Series* 5 (1986): 83-87. Print.

Hantke, Steffen H. "The Uses of the Fantastic and the Deferment of Closure in American Literature on the Vietnam War". *Rocky Mountain Review* (2001): 63-82. Print.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *My mother was a computer: digital subjects and literary texts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.

Helgesson, Stephan. "Sing for our Metropolis: Self, Place and Media in the Poetry of Rui Knopfli and Wopko Jensma". *English in Africa* 33. 1 (2006): 71-92. Print.

Henderson, C. "When Hearts beat like Native Drums": Music and the Sexual Dimensions of the Notions of 'Savage' and 'Civilized' in *Tarzan and His Mate*, 1934. *Africa Today* 48.4 (2001): 91-123.

Hoover, Paul. "Performance and Silence". Web. 29 July 2012. <http://viz.ucsc.edu/wp/vizArchive/vizEventPp94-97.pdf >

— "Introduction". *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. Chicago: W.W. Norton, 1994. xxv-xxxix. Print.

—Ed. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Chicago: W.W. Norton, 1994. Print.

Howe, Susan. *The Birthmark: Unsettling the wilderness in American Literary History.* U.S.A.: Wesleyan University Press (University Press of New England), 1993. Print.

— *Singularities*. U.S.A.: Wesleyan University Press (University Press of New England), 1990. Print.

—"Susan Howe reading the entirety of *Singularities* (gathered from multiple readings)". Eric Baus "to the sound" (blog). Web. 23 July 2012. <http://baustralia.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/susan-howe-the-entirety-of-singularities-at-3-different-timeslocations/ >

i mike what i like. Dir. Jyoti Mistry. Performers: Kgafela oa Magogodi, Ernest Mothle and Musawenkosi Xokelelo. South Africa: Kgafela Productions, 2006. DVD.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Modernist Papers*. London: Verso, 1990. Print.

— "Lacan and the Dialectic: A Fragment". *Lacan: The Silent Partners*. Ed. Slavoj Zizek. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

Jitsvinger. MySpace. Web. 11 December 2010. <http://www.myspace.com/jitsvinger>

Jitsvinger and Jethro Louw. *21st Century Khoisan Man* (Rehearsal). 2007 Taiwan Migration Music Festival. 2007. Web. 11 December 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLBkrk76C3Y>

—"Doen It" (Performance). 2007 Taiwan Migration Music Festival. 2007. Web. 11 December 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtqOD3gLz5g>

—"Maak it Dan" (Performance). 2007 Taiwan Migration Music Festival. 2007. Web. 11 December 2009. <Available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmK-mWaJfEg>

Johnson, David. "Obituary: Nicholas Visser (1943 – 1998)". *Current Writing: Text and Reception* 10.2 (1998):2. Print.

Julyan, Robert. *The Place Names of New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Print.

Kalaidjian, Walter. "Transpersonal Poetics: Language Writing and the Historical Avant-Gardes in Postmodern Culture". *American Literary History* 3.2, Summer (1991): 319-336. Print.

Kennedy, L and Lucas, S. "Enduring Freedom: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Policy". *American Quarterly* 57.2 (2005): 309-333. Print.

Kente, Ana. "Hanging Participle". *Chimurenga* 15, 2010: 56. Print.

Keylock, Miles. "Cape Music Picks: August 5 2011". *Mail and Guardian*, 4 August 2011. Web 6 August 2012. <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-08-04-cape-music-picks-august-5-2011/ >

Khoi Khollektif (Rehearals). Coffebeansroutes. 2007. Web. 11 December 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39i2UbcS-zo>

Khrushchev, Nikita. "Speech to the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U". Speech delivered February 24-25 1956. Nikita Khrushchev Reference Archive. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm >

Krog, A. *Begging to Be Black.* Johannesburg: Random House, 2009. Print.

— *A Change of Tongue.* Johannesburg: Random House, 2003. Print.

— *Country of my Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2002. Print.

Krog, A, Mpolweni, N and Ratele, K. *There was this Goat: Investigating the Truth Commission Testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2009. Print.

Lacan, J. *Ecrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Layne, Christopher and Schwarz, Benjamin. "American Hegemony – Without an Enemy". *Foreign Policy* 92 (Autumn 1993): 5-23. Web. 20 July 2012. <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~volgy/LayneSchwarzAmericanHegemony.html>

Lemaire, A. *Jacques Lacan.* 1970. Trans. David Macey. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977. Print.

Lenta, Margaret. "Ingrid Winterbach: Novelist" (interview). *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa,* 21.1-2 (2009): 164-172. Print.

Louw, P. E. "Introduction: South Africa's multiple languages in a shifting media environment". *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 37.2 (2011): 191-193. Print.

Louw-Vaudran, Liesl. "Sabre-rattling hides West Africa's fears". *Mail & Guardian* 15-21 June. 2012: 27. Print.

lyrikline.org. Web. 11 December 2010. <http://lyrikline.org/index.php?id=162&L=1&author=km03&show=Poems&poem Id=5930&cHash=ebc21715e7>

Ma, Ming-Qian. "Poetry as History Revised: Susan Howe's Scattering as Behaviour toward Risk". *American Literary History* 6.4 (1994): 716-737. Print.

Maak it Aan. Dir. Nadine Angel Cloete. Featuring Quintin Goliath. A University of Cape Town Honours Production, 2008. Web. 11 December 2012. <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=46909041254>. Short Documentary.

Makhanya Mondli. "Zuma needs to stop himself being seen as a latter-day Buthelezi". *Sunday Times* 9 April. 2006: 20. Print.

Marsh, Nicky. "'Out of My Texts I am not what I Play': Politics and Self in the Poetry of Susan Howe". *College Literature* 24.3 (1997): 124-137. Print.

Mbeki, Thabo. "Address of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on the African Renaissance, South Africa and the World: United Nations University Tokyo". April 1998. Web. 29 July 2012. <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1998/98b17_5559811376.htm >

Mbembe, A. "Aesthetics of Superfluity". *Johannesburg The Elusive Metropolis*. Eds. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008: 37-67. Print.

—"Provisional Notes on the Postcolony". *Journal of the International African Institute* 62.1 (1992): 3 – 37. Print.

—"The 'Thing' and its Double in Cameroonian Cartoons". *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Ed. Karin Barber. London: The International African Institute School of Oriental and African Studies, 1997. Print.

McCaffery, Steve. "Autonomy to Indeterminacy". *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.2. (2007): 212-217. Print.

—"From the Notebooks". *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Eds. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984: 159-162. Print.

—"Intraview" [1978]. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Eds. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984: 189. Print.

—*North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986*. New York: Roof Books, 1986. Print.

—"Voice in Extremis". *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word.* Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998: 162-177. Print.

McDonald, P.D. "Thinking Interculturally". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13.3 (2011): 367-385. Print.

McGann, Jerome. "Contemporary poetry, alternate routes". *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1987): 624-47. Print.

Merolla, Daniela, Jansen, Jan, and Naīt-Zerrad, Kamal, eds. *Multimedia Research and Documentation of Oral Genres – The Step Forward.* Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012. Print.

Milton, Evan. "Encounters Film Festival: Spoken-word performer Jitsvinger". *What's On!*.11 December 2010. Web. 7 August 2012.

    <file://localhost/<http/::thelowdown.co.za:blog_read.php%3Fid=61>>

Mistry, J. "Director's Note", *i mike what i like*: DVD leaflet, 2006.

—"Johannesburg: Vocabularies of the Visceral and Expressions of Multiple Practices". *African Cities Reader.* Eds. Notone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse. 2010. Web. 7 August 2012.

    <http://www.africancitiesreader.org.za/reader/chapters/06_JM.pdf >

Mkhize, Johan Fanozi. "6 Signs of the Times". *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Ed. Michael Chapman. Johannesburg: AD Donker Publishers. 2002: 350. Print.

Mueller-Wille, Staffan, and Sara Scharf. "Indexing Nature: Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) and his Fact-Gathering Strategies". *Working paper on The Nature of Evidence: How Well do "Facts" Travel?*. No. 36/08. 2009. Web. 17 September 2011. < http://www.lse.ac.uk/collection/economichistory/ >

Ndebele, Njabulo."Whither English in the 21st Century?" *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 10.2 (1998): 87-96. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil.* 1973. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Nuttall, Sarah. "Stylizing the self". *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Ed. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008: 91-118. Print.

—"Literary City". *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Ed. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008: 195-218. Print.

Oa Magogodi, K. "Bomb Bridges with Red Visions" (Performance). 2006 Spier Poetry Festival. Web. 11 December 2009.

    <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI2K9yyrpps >

— *Outspoken.* South Africa: Laugh it Off Media, 2004. Print.

— "Poet", *i mike what i like*: DVD leaflet. 2006.

Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Postmodernity, Postcoloniality, and African Studies". *African Literature*: *An Anthology of Criticism and Theory.* Eds. Olaniyan T. and Quayson, A. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007: 637-645. Print.

Orange, Tom. Interview with Bruce Andrews on "Destination Out". WRVU-FM, Nashville, TN, April 26, 2008. Web. 17 September 2011. <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Andrews.php>

Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print and electronic.

PASS. 11 December 2010. Web. 21 November 2012. <http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za/?p=240>

Pei, Minxin. "The Paradoxes of American Nationalism." *Foreign Policy* May/June 2003: 31-37. PDF. Web. 28 June 2012. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2003/05/01/paradoxes-of-american-nationalism/2a64>

PennSound. *Thiefth* and *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. Web. 25 July 2012. <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Grubbs.php>

Perelman, Bob. "Let's Say". 1986. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. Chicago: W.W. Norton, 1994: 499-500. Print.

—"Things". 1986. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. Chicago: W.W. Norton, 1994: 500-501. Print.

Perloff, Marjorie. "After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents". 2002. Web. 24 July 2012. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html>

—"How Russian Is It? Lynn Hejinian's Oxota". 1998. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/hejinian.html>

—*Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.

—"Whose New American Poetry: Anthologizing in the Nineties". *Diacritics* 26 (3-4) (Fall − Winter 1996): 104-23. Marjorie Perloff Homepage. Web. 24 July 2012. <http://marjorieperloff.com/articles/ >

—*Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Print.

—"The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in the Eighties" *American Poetry Review* 13 (1984): 15-22. Print.

Pieterse, Annel. "'I Mike What I Like': Excesses of Freedom in Post-Apartheid South African Poetry". *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures.* Eds. Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi. London: Routledge: 2011. Print.

Pinker, S. & Birdsong, D. "Speakers' sensitivity to rules of frozen word order". *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 18 (1979): 497-508. Print.

Poësiefestival Berlin. 2009. Web. 21 November 2012. <http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=1107910791608>

Rampolokeng, Lesego. *The Bavino Sermons*. Durban: Gecko Poetry, 1999. Print.

—*Talking Rain*. Johannesburg: COSAW Publishing, 1993. Print.

—"Writing the Ungovernable". Research Seminar hosted by the Department of English, University of Stellenbosch. 2012. Web. 6 August 2012. < http://slipnet.co.za/view/event/lesego-rampolokeng/ >

Reagan, Ronald. "Address to the Nation on the Soviet Attack on a Korean Civilain Airliner". September 5, 1983. Web. 29 July 2012. <http://reagan2020.us/speeches/soviet_attack_on_korean_airliner.asp >

Rickert, T and Salvo, S. "The Distributed Gesamptkunstwerk: Sound, Worlding and New Media Culture". *Computers and Composition* 23 (2006): 296-316. Print.

Sachs, Albie. "The Eleventh Academy Lecture: Language Rights in the New South African Constitution". *English Academy Review* 11 (1994): 105-131. Print.

Seddon, Deborah. "Written Out, Writing In: Orature and the South African Literary Canon". *English in Africa* 35.1 (2008):133-150. Print.

Shohat, Ella. "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'". *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 99-113. Print.

Silliman, Ron. *Tjanting*. Australia and U.K.: Salt Publishing, 2002. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.saltpublishing.com/assets/samples/1876857196samp.pdf >

—*The New Sentence*. New York: Roof Books, 1987.

—1977. "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World". *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* Eds. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984: 121-132.

Simkins, Charles. "South African Disparities". *Journal of Democracy* 22.3 (2011):105-119. Print.

Spanos, William. *America's Shadow: An anatomy of Empire*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print.

Spencer, Brenda. "International sporting events in South Africa, identity re-alignment, and Schneider's EVENT X". *African Identities* 9.3 (2011): 267-278. Print.

Stanford, Susan. "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies". *Modernism/modernity* 13.3 (2006): 425-443. Print.

State v. Van der Vyver. Uitspraak: 29 November 2007. Case number SS 190/06. Presiding Judge: D.H van Zyl. 2007. Web. 3 Aug 2012. <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAWCHC/2007/69.html >

"Sylt Island". Web. 6 August 2012. <http://en.sylt.de/sea/on-the-beach/sylts-beaches.html>

Szeman, Imre."Poetics and the Politics of Globalization." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 32.2 (2007): 148-161. Print.

Tate Collection online. "Jenny Holzer". Biography. Web. 9 August 2012. <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=999999961&artistid=1307&page=1&sole=y&collab=y&attr=y&sort=default&tabview=bio>

Tatham Art Gallery. "Chickenman Mkhize on Edendale Excels". 2008. Web. 1 August 2012. < http://www.tatham.org.za/chickenman-mkhize-edendale-excels.html>

Therborn, G."Entangled Modernities". *European Journal of Social Theory* 6.3 (2003): 293-305. Print.

Titlestad, Michael. *Making the Changes: Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004. Print.

Van Elburg, Fredrika. "Reading on the Bus: Ron Silliman's Tjanting". *ka mate ka ora: a new zealand journal of poetry and poetics* 5 (2008). Web. 29 July 2012. <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/05/ka_mate05_van_elburg.pdf >

Veit-Wild, F. "Carnival and Hybridity in texts by Dambudzo Marechera and Lesego Rampolokeng". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 23.4 (1997): 553-564. Print.

Viljoen, Louise. "The Mother as Pre-text: (Auto)biographical Writing in Antjie Krog's *A Change of Tongue*". *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 19.2. (2007): 187-209. Print.

Visser, N. "The Critical Situation and the Situation of Criticism". *Critical Arts* 3.2 (1984): 2-8. Print.

Wa Bofelo, Mphutlane. "'Shoot the Boers!': Deflecting attention from new songs of protest". *Pamabazuka News* 475, 25 March 2010. Web. 7 August 2012. <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/63291 >

Wali, Obiajunwa. "The Dead End of African Literature". *Transition* 10 (1963): 13-16. Print.

Ward, Geoff. "Language Poetry and the American Avant-garde". *British Association for American Studies* 25, 1993. Web. 28 July 2012. <http://www.baas.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=232%3Ageoff-ward-language-poetry-and-the-american-avant-garde&catid=18&Itemid=11 >

Watten, Barrett. "Introduction". *Tjanting*. Australia and U.K.: Salt Publishing, 2002. Web. 19 September 2011. <http://www.saltpublishing.com/assets/samples/1876857196samp.pdf >

—*Total Syntax*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984. Print.

Watts, Carol. "Set, Unset: Collaboration, Encounter and the Scene of Poetry". *Contemporary Music Review* 29.2 (2010): 145-158.

Waugh, Linda. "The Poetic Function and the Nature of Language". *Roman Jakobson: Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time.* Eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. Print.

Wicomb, Zoë. "Culture Beyond Color?" *Transition* 60 (1993): 27-32. Print.

Wiener, Mandy. *Killing Kebble: An Underworld Exposed.* Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. 1953. Trans. G.E.M Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967. Print.

Wright, Joanna. "Syncretism as a Strategy of Political Resistance in the Poetry of Lesego Rampolokeng." *Scrutiny2* 9.1 (2004): 88-98. Print.

Young, Andrew. "An Introduction to Mirages". Web. 9 August 2012. <http://mintaka.sdsu.edu/GF/mirages/mirintro.html >

Young, Sandra. "Hospitality in a Postapartheid Archive: Reflections on *There was this Goat* and the Challenge of Alterity". *Research in African Literatures* 43.2 (2012): 115-137. Print.

Žižek, S. *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*. London: Verso, 1996. Print.