Laughing Gland

A Very Small Literary Journal of Poetry Prose and Criticism

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*L*aughing **G**land was first published and distributed for free in Edmonton several years ago in the hopes of drawing greater public attention to experimental writing–especially by young writers that have been overlooked by other Canadian journals. And while this still remains the primary aim of Laughing Gland, starting with this issue I hope to draw greater attention to the creative as well as critical work currently being undertaken. All of the writers who appear in this issue are absolutely dedicated to and passionate about their studies, and welcome the opportunity to share their work and their ideas.

Submissions are always welcome. Please include a SASE.

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voice-overture

a hairless lip protrudes

its angular
apostrophe

knows no voice

one word in front of the other

forever and
over

your virtual
appearances
moulded into
text

a tangible
fiction of

movement

of the sense's
ability
to
lead me into
lines that
lie
in the language

sounds

a pre-
diction
we form
into phonetic
etiquette

a seance of
sentences
influence a
sense

tracing a
trance
the entrance
to process
is passing

transposing
the selected
lecture
an infinite
definition
of unresolvable
references

the con/text

is

energe(ne)tic

slipping

the poem in your voice

–Linda Kingston

Monologue With Racoon

[to be read beneath a suspension bridge in a palpitating city late at night]

i've always played with matches but it was just last week that something made me realize the whole world's made of gasoline, rain forests, see, tranquility and waiting for destruction, the matrix whereby mannequins change clothes, the seconds that i spend in second cups tick down to oh, the world is out of joint; tall demagogues are louder than a thousand thousand walkers, farmers, beggars, breakers, menders, minds and hearts and gasoline-soaked souls.

i've got a marker on my shoulders, see, art and life, it's like a python and it wriggles, snake, and slips across my body and away, electric charge, invisible, infecting, all you see is just the hairs, the little hairs on the back of your neck, they levitate up but you don't have time to warn her so her sweet pink big toe strikes the water and the whole world, grounded, blows.

everything, potential, the words lie so fluently that truth sounds like some kind of primitive guttural sound at the back of your throat, language seed, infecting.

up, the constellations burn like bodies, smoke, caffeine, each poison on the table, lined up like toy soldiers, and you labour and drink hemlock to erect a single star, which most commuters can't be bothered to look up at.

but i can close my eyes and whirl and eddy up above a sea of fire, and rods and cones exploding in the night, starscape, burning marls, oil on the gulf and brain cells go like fireworks, flare and fizzle in addiction, forgetting and trying to forget.

i have a sense of the movement of the magic of the world without words. It tugs at my inner ear, like a sleeping form rocks invisibly in bed after a day of skiing, swimming, watersliding, sky-diving or sea-flying, tumbling through rods and cones as if each one's a pinball bumper, static charge, wheeling back across the mad topography of pinball, bed, of planet, of a sea of stars.

okay: so last week i was huddled in a chair in a movie house and i felt the gasoline; i thought it was the sticky matte of coca-cola cups and popcorn crud at first, but once you feel the texture then the smell is not far off. I wandered out and up and through the doors of glass and out into the rain and wind and parks and rivers, through the shoulder-shrugging mountains to the wild geography beyond

–Scott Sharplin

THE SUKNASKI MANUSCRIPT VARIATIONS:
a performance piece for Re: Sounding

[Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour of Re: Sounding gave a performance of "THE SUKNASKI MANUSCRIPT VARIATIONS" at the University of Victoria on February 15th of this year. This is a photocopy of the text on which Scobie and Barbour based their improvisation.]

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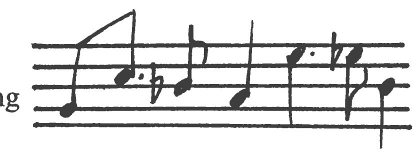
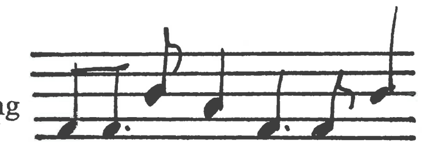
–Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour

Breaking Purple and Something About Cryptography

702
How often do you reach out and take the air? Have you seen all the horizons? Moved with love through the streets sad, slow with great sweeps of emotion? *Bend* your life.

1916
Success. Freed from me I found warmth and did not keep it.

2533
I was thinking  and thinking 

But wrote ~~va?~~Instead.

2790
This is an experiment: this is not what she said: a knee fell, a skull was crushed: the day was red.

I said, "The day cracked: the day groaned: the day died."

4236
The India Rubber Man (although here I wrote "left of empty and right full, growing old" (tried to stall her smile but caught enjoying eyes instead (what about the strength to turn the page and write "and my poem"?))) had the courage to stop.

7101
The fine-tuning it takes to orchestrate a crowd–what I mean to say is can we really substitute heads for 'A Field of Mushrooms = x,' while the stage is still unknown? Isn't *this* the delicate balance?

–Lori Emerson

Skepticism

My aunt taught me how to pick the last tomatoes
I could see
Missing those
tucked
under the dying leaves

wrapping them in newspaper–
I stored them away in the dark
where they would ripen on their own,

or,

wait for someone to sneak in, behind–
replacing the green with red
before I could check.

Merry Christmas! Ripe Tomatoes!
(weren't those Romas we put behind the cellar door?)

or–

did the crumpled words from the newspapers, amid 'stories' of
shootings and taxes
also whisper, command
RI-
PEN.

How did they do it there without
the sun
son
sound of electrodes whirring, vats bubbling
easing our impatience, giving us the ripe fruit
too quickly.

I remember tomatoes
as I try to write about
a change of heart,
use metaphors of growing sweetness for
the heart of the man
who beat
my friend unconscious

Struck by his fists, by the light
glinting off the ten moons of his fingernails

You're no Pollyanna.
You're no Polly.
Your heart cracks
In the night
crossing the parking lot to the car
its dumb chrome offering no protection, no voice of warning

I am told I must put him here
document the evidence
of a changing heart
in a broken tongue
spitting out blood and conventions

How can you trust what I see
wearing a patch over one eye,
astigmatism in the other?

My friend is fair haired, has a way
with children

or/

my friend has short, curly, dark hair, does not feel
the 'maternal instinct'
I am told I must make her
as sympathetic

as possible.

After he beat her up
After the bruises
After the pins were taken out of her elbow
She shifted gears
Returned to work
Turned the dial
Changed the frequency from screams,

to the smell of coffee

Each day she decides
how she will live with the memory of fists
how she will live
how will she live
she will

speak to the muscles that control his hands
to the stammer he thinks of as his heart–

I will not try to document this
I cannot afffirm
but hope

or,

try to

*

During an interview in the summer of 1993 with writer and critic Nathalie Cooke, poet Erin Moure noted that "[p]oetry is a place of infinite capability..." ("And Just" 47). My attempt to be faithful to both the style and the concerns of Moure in creating a translation of Bronwen Wallace's poem "Change of Heart" highlighted, at times to an almost discouraging degree, the depth of Moure's politics and the skill of her poetics (Wallace 73). Indeed, the capabilities of both poets are vast. While the translated poem may resonate and reflect the work of Moure in many subtle ways, some of which may even have been initially unintended, my focus here will be limited to several key features of Moure's poetic as I sought to incorporate them into a translation of Wallace's poem. Any translation into the style of Moure, particularly that of her later work, carries a certain obligation to practice not only the poetry, but also the theory that accompanies, and to some degree, inspires that poetry. Moure insists that the poet can and should exercise both artistic and theoretical practice ("To Speak" 133). The translated poem, then, reflects a number of Moure's key concerns in relation to both style and theory. "Skepticism" reflects Moure's resistance to the concept of the poet as witness, and also plays with sounds which resonate through the use of repetition with minor differences. Further, the translation resists closure to reflect and explore the implications of openness in Moure's poetry, and finally explores a chief concern of Moure with its contemplation of how information is processed by both the human brain and the human eye. All of these concerns illustrate Moure's adamant belief that one must maintain continual vigilance against the temptation toward excessive comfort in conventional structures of language and politics. Only by challenging and questioning the very deep tracks of convention will truly new poetic paths be forged.

The contentious idea of the poet as witness is one with which Moure has struggled during her career, initially embracing the concept, and later emphatically rejecting it at the time she was writing her volume, *Furious*, published in 1988 (J.Dopp, 14/09/98). In talking about her work in *Furious*, and in particular the poem "Seebe", Moure acknowledges that there is a grave danger inherent in bearing witness to another's suffering: "I came to a point where I realized that I couldn't project my experience of witnessing somebody else's experience onto them in poetry. That I couldn't write 'for' anybody else [...] Since then even my representations of my own are suspect" ("Erin" 12). Concurrent with Moure's reluctance to witness, then, is the persona's insistence in the translated poem that "I will not try to document this / I cannot afffirm" (72-73). The persona ultimately cannot write 'for' her friend, as the potential for misrepresentation and appropriation of the friend's experience is seen as a negative risk which the persona is simply unwilling to take. Though conventional social structures referred to by Moure as the "Law" or "Polis" pressure the persona to bear witness to the experiences of both the battered as well as the batterer, the persona undermines the value of such interpretations of others' experiences ("Poetry 201). The male batterer's change of heart, if forced into conventional representation, will come to the reader as already-fragmented, through a "broken tongue" which 'spits' out "blood and conventions" rather than authentic meanings (43-44).

Further, the persona questions how the scale by which the sympathy she is pressured to evoke for her friend is generated and structured. The 'Polis', it is implied, would respond more sympathetically to a victim who is most aligned with its cherished conventional norms: that of a white, maternal, fair haired female. The response to a testimony on behalf of one who does not fit such sympathetic and non-threatening norms, in contrast, is deeply questioned, as is the very nature of bearing witness itself. Moure maintains that the principle of resisting the demands of the 'Polis' for a typical version of the victim is well-founded. In works of hers such as *Furious*, for example, she makes her audience keenly aware that "the reasons for a definitive version are fundamental to the oppression of marginalized groups–notably women" (Denisoff 271).

In addition to questioning the notion of the poet as one who can witness the suffering of others, the translated poem also reflects Moure's questioning of the conventional means by which meaning is generated in poetry. Moure maintains that the features of sound and repetition are often overlooked as effective ways of generating poetic meaning. She says that "[t]here's not just the connotative or denotative value of words [...S]ounds evoke other sounds. A word reminds you of another word. So it's a process of trying to produce a lot of echoes" ("Erin" 13). One hears such echoes in "Skepticism" as the sound of 'sun' evokes its homonym, and eventually evolves into 'sound'; the effect achieves a sense of recalling the spellings and structure of the first two words in the series while also creating a mental leap to new levels of meaning. Implicit within these slight shifts of sound and language are Moure's concerns regarding the power of patriarchy and patriarchally-informed Christianity, as well as the mis/use of technology in the production of the food we consume. The sun, or 'Son' is transmuted into the 'sound of electrodes' which creates the unnatural growing environment for the food which the persona puts into her body. Moure's struggles with physical allergies resonate in these echoes of sound and meaning, as do her struggles with her own Catholic upbringing (Denisoff 240). The carefully

employed strategies of repetition and sound, then, open a window onto a whole host of potential meanings, echoes, and resonances for the reader.

The tendency both to pen up language and to explore the multiplicity of meanings that occur in much of Moure's poetry does not end with explorations of sound, nor with repetitions with minor differences. Moure's frequent tendency to avoid concrete closure in her work is another means by which she encourages multiplicity, often to such an extent that the reader's expectations are profoundly unsettled. Whereas Wallace's poem ends with a positive sense of closure as 'everything' is 'affirmed' through the limited sense of possibility associated with the man's changed heart, the Moure translation resists the desire for comfort and a satisfying ending: "I cannot affirm / but hope / or, / try to" (73-76). In this passage the potentially comforting affirmation of hope is undercut, the audience is only granted the promise of an attempt by the persona to hope for the desired change of heart. The final omittance of punctuation further undermines any concrete sense of conclusion, and the audience is left to ponder in what other ays the persona's final statement might continue to be altered or qualified. While what may be lost in such a resistance to closure is a sense of security which figures much more prominently in Wallace's work, Moure herself notes that openness can enable sight and thought in new and exciting ways: "I've managed to learn ways to resist the desire to close everything up into a neat package, to insist that the thought process be completed [...] I think our conventional notions about what coalesces and what a finished thing is prevent us from sometimes seeing everything" ("Erin" 12).

The idea of 'seeing everything' and, by extension, broadening one's limited scope of thought, are crucial to Moure's poetic view. While 'seeing everything' and 'knowing everything' are unattainable ideals, Moure maintains that an awareness of and an attentiveness to what both the eye and the brain tend to miss is not only possible, but also absolutely necessary. Moure admits to her fascination with how both the brain and the eye sort information and fill the gaps. She says of the brain that "[e]ven if information is missing it glides right over it" ("Erin" 8). Similarly, she argues, the eye contains a blind spot where the optic nerve is located, but "[w]e don't see the blind spot when we look because while there is missing information the brain samples from the information close by and fills that gap" ("Erin" 8). Knowledge of such biological information has large implications for how we perceive and interpret the world, particularly through language. In terms of the translated poem, such knowledge leads to a questioning of who or what has filled the gap in the duration during which the tomatoes have turned red. The reader is led to question not only what the eye has missed, but also the distortion which may have occurred in his or her own constructed memory: "(weren't those Romas we put behind the cellar door?)" (10). It is suggested that language, itself a construction and here configured in the "crumpled words of newspapers" may have shaped or distorted the current reality, a reality which is regarded with suspicion and is subsequently challenged (15). The pesona destabilizes any firm belief in the accuracy of her perceptions even further when she notes the degree to which her vision is impaired, "wearing a patch over one eye, / astigmatism in the other" (46-47). Such destabilizations of our conventional structures need not be viewed in threatening or negative terms, Moure insists, but can instead be welcomed as containing liberatory possibilities: "[M]aybe if we go away from reading poetry with the notion of being troubled–by noticing the leaks and seams of things–then we can bring that to looking at other things we have to deal with" ("And Just" 39). Complexity is thus not to be rejected, but embraced as the source of new possibilities for re-working our relationships to our language and to each other.

The translation of Bronwen Wallace's poem into a version more reflective of Erin Moure presents its own unique set of challenges and paradoxes. While Moure's language is filled with the possibility and multiplicity, the greater economy of her style, as well as the intensity of her politics which are played out in the context of language, also mean that every word one writes is extremely value-laden. Treading on Moure's poetic ground can certainly give one the sense of tiptoeing around a minefield. The openness of the poem sacrifices a sense of security while generating an increased sense of anxiety, particularly regarding how one uses language and how one regards the relation between the sexes. Moure notes, however, that she doesn't write poetry to make her audience feel comfortable; the unsettling and disorienting qualities of much of her work, critic Dennis Denisoff notes, "may be the point, the starting point" (61). Moure's resistance to the idea of the poet as witness, her engaging use of sound and repetition, her resistance to closure, and her fascination with optical and cerebral processes–all features which have been explored in the translated poem "Skepticism"–reflect a poet who is centrally concerned not only with knowledge and perception as such, but also with how these things are transmitted and perceived. Moure's is indeed a loaded language which contains a seemingly endless supply of resonances and challenges for the mind of her audience, challenges which are not necessarily simple or comfortable, but which certainly can be gratifying for those who agree to follow the intriguing turns of her poetic voice.

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–Jenny Kerber

> The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate, we should need the old term "element"...in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings the style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*. Much more: the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity...what makes the facts have meaning, makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves about "something."[1]
>
> The body...can now be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity.[2]

Let's Talk Bodies: Reconceptualizing Embodiment in Feminist Epistemology

The body, as product of multiple social forces, has become a hot topic in feminist theory. Gender, for example, is refigured not simply as something a body *does* but as that which through the doing becomes body. And this gender, which is body, is produced by the social world of which we are a part. Bodies are rendered intelligible through a number of social forces, and discourses are the vehicles for these forces. Following the work of Michel Foucault, feminist theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler and Donna Haraway have interrogated the discourses that regulate, compel and constitute gendered, raced, classed, aged (to name just a few) material bodies. Socially intelligible bodies are stylized materializations of discourse. In this paper i will address such questions as: Are bodies the only matter so materialized? If all matter is discursively saturated, how does it converse? That is, if bodies are being 'talked to' from all around, how do they talk back?

However, these are not yet epistemological questions. i will argue that these material conversations are integral to how and what we know. As much as the world produces our knowing and knowable bodies, our bodies produce a knowing and knowable world. One of feminism's most significant contributions to epistemology has been to reveal the fiction of universal, detached, disengaged, disembodied knowledge as profoundly androcentric and otherwise exclusive. The fiction that the disembodied knower tells about his/her positivist, empiricist knowledge claims serves to obscure his/her privileged raced, gendered, classed, sexed, aged positions–particularly privileged positions, feminists argue, that make the fiction of impartial, universal Truth possible. Many feminists seek a conscious and responsible account for the very partial, socially contingent, and necessarily embodied location of all knowledge claims.

[1] Maurice Merleu-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwest UP, 1968, p. 139. All further references are from this edition.

[2] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994, p. ix. All further references are from this edition.

Understanding the actual, material location from which knowledge claims come, and the complex social constitution of that location is at least as important as understanding the knowledge claim itself. Feminist epistemologists talk about this locatedness in terms of 'embodiment' and 'embodied knowledge.' In this way, 'bodies' have come to figure prominently in feminist epistemology: bodies as representations of partial knowledge. Complex, material and active bodies have been largely left out of feminist models of epistemology.

This is not to say that feminist epistemologists have not developed more complex understandings of bodies, but that these complexed bodies have not mattered significantly in their epistemology. In other words, bodies are well considered as produced by knowledge–with its correlates, discourse and power–but have not been clearly discussed as productive of knowledge. i will argue that bodies, as totally cultural-semiotic matter–at least there is no telling where culture ends and 'biological,' pre-constituted body begins–in turn make meaningful matter. Bodies engage with and organize matter into a material world that is known.

While i am arguing for a corporeally contingent material world, i am not abandoning a revised realist project. In the spirit of work by Lorraine Code, Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, i am dedicating my work to *better* accounts of the world we live in. In Haraway's words, i am committed to having

> *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world.[3]

However, i seek a faithful account of a real world that is always shaped by an historically contingent knowing and knowable subject that is a corporeal semiotic technology who makes that real matter mean.

My argument is born from a sort of cross-fertilization between a number of distinct but related theoretical fields: feminist epistemology, phenomenology, literary theory and feminist theory. Although the theories i use may have begun their lives with very different intentions, naming them separately is an uncomfortable exercise in boundary making. All of the theories i draw from contribute to the central interest of this paper: the relationship between discourse, bodies and knowledge. This paper's working conception of bodies is best articulated by Foucault and Grosz. Foucault asserts, "the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of [the] fundamental implications of power-

[3] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Press Association Books, 1991, p. 187. All further references are from this edition.

knowledge and their historical transformation."[4] *In Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Grosz explains that this power saturated knowing subject is also corporeally constructed:

> [bodies] are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type (x).

I argue that these socially constituted, knowing subject/bodies are active in models of feminist epistemology in ways that feminist epistemologists have not explored. These bodies are active in the way that phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes in his chapter "The Intertwining–the Chiasm" (130-155). He writes: "through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, *the body contributes more than it receives*, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body seees" (144, emphasis added). Even those feminist epistemologists dealing explicitly with 'embodiment' have not seriously considered how bodies contribute to the world that we can know. Because of the degree of variation, it is misleading to continue referring to some singular 'feminist epistemology' or 'feminist epistemologist.' i must specify: i am considering a strand of feminist epistemology which argues that "Rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among 'fields' of interpreters and decoders...knowledge [is] situated conversation at every level" (196, 200 Haraway). In this paper, i am reading the culturally constituted body into Merleau-Ponty's argument, to ask feminist epistemologists this question: If knowledge is always negotiated within communications of interpreting, decoding, socially situated subjects, then what do these complex bodies contribute to the negotions?

Objects/Bodies: In Brief

In his chapter on "Discourse In The Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the interrelated concepts of 'dialogization' and 'heteroglossia.'[5] While ostensibly addressing novelistic discourse, his discussion has implications for the function of social discourses more generally. Heteroglossia refers to the multitude of living languages that each utterance (whether spoken, written or gestured) at once draws from and contributes to. And dialogization is the process by which any of these languages acquire meaning: each language is in dialogue with the heteroglossia from which it is born. In a claim consistent with Haraway, Code and Barad, he asserts that all meaning is made in relation. A word, or a phrase, or a gesture, can only be knowable through its relationship to the social heteroglossia where it lives. It is crucial here to note that he conceives of every utterance as communicating a particular "world view"–a "hetero-as well as polyglot consciousness" (264, 274). Every utterance is an expression of polyglot consciousness that is at once social and particular:

> The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance (272).

And the social world of the utterance is shared by both verbal and non-verbal 'material-semiotic actors.'

Not only is every utterance "internally dialogized" (279), but Bakhtin contends that objects as well are alive with social heteroglossia. There is no direct access to an unmediated, static, object that is not always already resonating with multiple meanings:

> any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist–or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents....Along with the internal contradictions inside the object itself [we] witnes[s] as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia *surroundings* the object...the dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it (276-278).

Material objects are always full with languages which insist on talking back to the body that would know them. Moreover, the knower's body itself, as material object, inevitably enters the conversation.

Particular, sexed, raced, classed, aged bodies are concretized instances of heteroglossia which are internally dialogized at the same time as they are engaged in dialogic exchanges with the world surrounding them. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that the physical stuff of bodies becomes intelligible through a reiterative process of materialization. She reconceptualizes "matter, not as a site or a surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to*

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[4] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979, pp. 27-8.

[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. All further references are from this edition.

produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter."[6] Through a socially regulated and compelled process of reiteration, discourse comes to materialize the physical matter of bodies. Her argument is that bodies are called into being as sexed and in order to remain socially intelligible, we must reiterate in speech, in gesture, in appearance that primary call. She insists that 'sex' is the foundational subjectivitizing call: "a subject comes to be through a subjection to the norms of sex....'Sex'...[is] one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies the body for a life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (13, 2). However, it is not the only norm that renders a body viable. Bodies are also always raced, classed, aged, and often sexually marked with a call different from 'sex'–think, for example, of the effeminate fag or butch dyke. i do not intend to rank these in order of importance, or which call is loudest, rather i want to assert that all of these are talking at once. Also, and more to my point, they are being *heard*. That is, the discourses which constitute these calls are organized into meanings by the listening (seeing, sensing) world around us. Our bodies enter into conversation with the equally talkative material around us–including people and 'objects.' And, as Code reminds us, conversations are never ideology-free or power-neutral.

Bodies On Bodies

In "Incredulity, Experientialism, and the Politics of Knowledge," Code discusses the crucial role of audience in constructing meaning.[7] While not making a 'death of the author' claim, she argues that what is said as well as what is heard in conversation is structured at least as much by the listener as by the teller, and that the teller's 'truth' can be determined, depending on the social location, and corresponding degree of power occupied, by the listener. Code explains that all subjects both talk and listen through already existing narratives, and after Butler i can extend this to argue that bodies perform and are read through already existing narratives. Moreover, the narratives that the body performs are structured in a similar way to those that the speaker tells. The reader of the body's talk is reading "through available narratives, stories, character possibilities, stereotypes" (78). To use Code's example:

> A black man is asked at an accident scene: "Were you wearing a seat belt?" When his affirmative response is heard askance, the incredulity is not about the information conveyed, but about him, about the story into which he is slotted. It is about the difficulty in a racist society for him to expect...that he will be believed (78).

'The story into which he is slotted' is not one he can choose to un-tell, but one which he literally embodies. The race that his body speaks shapes the resistant, skeptical, incredulous world that he knows as much as the world shapes what is knowable about him. Whether he opens his mouth or not, his body is already heard–but so, of course, is the body of the incredulous listener.

The body of the listener affects what the teller can say. Code quotes Dori Laub saying,, "The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of *an addressable other*, an other whoc an hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (68). This annihilation takes place not only through interpretation–the listenere hearing only what s/he already knows–but also actually, by silencing the teller. For example, when i was particularly jubilant around that house that i share with three older, heterosexual, white men, my landlord (one of the three men) inquired after the reason. Because of his older, heterosexual, white, male body i was disinclined to tell him about my new lover. Since i don't know my landlord well, my hesitance to 'out' myself to him was not a reaction to anything he had said, but a result of the narratives that his body spoke to me. Living on a student income, well below the poverty line, in a homophobic, patriarchal culture, where (clean, healthy, well dressed) older white men enjoy a larger share of cultural capital than a twenty-two year old, white, academic, dyke me, my landlord's body meant the power to put me back out into the uncertainty of housing shortages and rising-uncontrolled rent. Moreover, his body, combined with the two similar ones in the house, resonated with well-known stories of homophobic/sexist harassment and violence.

While i have chosen to emphasize the efect of the listener/reader's body, my body is just as active in the conversation that makes the world that i know and interact with. i cannot possibly know how the men in my house read me, but i do know that my youngness, my femaleness, my whiteness and my (potential) straight-lookingness contribute to the father and/or suitor roles that they assume with me. Therefore, because of my body, when i interact with the other members of my household, i interact with a father and/or a suitor and must negotiate my way through such a social world accordingly. However, were i an older, female, (more) visibly dyke body of color, i would likely be interacting in a very different social world. My body is engaged in a power-sensitive, socially conscious dialogic negotiation with bodies both inside and outside this house in order to make the world that i know–a world that is always there, but morphs into various incarnations depending on the bodies involved.

This is definitely not to make a relativist claim that the world is entirely different for every body, but to say that what is always really there changes significantly for different social bodies. For example, in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* Patricia Williams describes the materially different worlds that black and white bodies both inhabit. She begins "The Pain of Word Bondage (a tale with two stories)"[8] by comparing her apartment hunting experience with that of her white colleague Peter Gabel. Whereas Peter "didn't need to sign a lease because it

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[6] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 9. All further references come from this edition.

[7] Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 58-82. All further references to "Incredulity..." are from this edition.

[8] Patricia Williams, "The Pain of Word Bondage," from *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991, pp. 146-165. All further references to Williams are from this edition.

imposed too much formality" and he could hand over his $900 deposit on the trust born of a "handshake and...good vibes" (146), Williams does not have the same trusting and trustworthy world open to her. She asserts, "many Manhattan lessors would not have trusted a black person enough to let me in the door in the first place, paperwork, references, and credit check notwithstanding" (146-7). The actual material world, of apartments and social interactions, that responds to Peter's white (male) body is different than the one that responds to Williams' black (female) body.

In "The Death of the Profane"[9] this point is even more explicit. Williams is barred from Benetton's because of the narratives her black body resonates to the white salesman. Material space is literally transformed by her body. And, "the repeated public urgings that blacks understand the buzzer system" (46) attests to the fact that particularly raced (classed, sexed, aged, etc.) bodies occupy significantly different material worlds, even while in the same city (or the same street). The claim that "by putting themselves in the shoes of white storeowners...then blacks would "just as surely conclude that [they] would not let [themselves] in under similar circumstances" (46) is essentially a move to normalizing racism in the name of neutrality and Reason: any reasonable person would understand/condone exclusionary racist practices. And, to paraphrase Butler, it is through a highly regulated (read 'masked/hidden') process of reiterating this reasoning that whole sections of 'public' space, along with their corresponding economic and cultural possibilities, are *de*materialized, rendered invisible, for particular bodies. Actual sections of the world–apartment buildings and clothing stories, for example–materialize or dematerialize because of our material-semiotic, socially active bodies.

I am thinking here of the organic matter that Haraway (re)calls: the body of the knower as 'a material-semiotic actor.' Not only do we have to consider the object to be known as an 'active, meaning-generating axis,' but we also have to consider the body of the knower as unwieldy Trickster matter. My body, as object, moves beyond my control to interact with and (re)figure the world of active objects of which it is a part. As with the world, "we are not in charge of [our bodies]" (199). This is not to say that we are not, and do not have to remain, responsible for the effects of these bodies that are not totally in our control. When i say i am not completely in control of my body, i am not suggesting that anyone else is and i am not suggesting that we can lay *blame* on anyone/thing other than myself for what my body does. i am suggesting, with Haraway, that we "give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while we will be hoodwinked" (199). Bodies are always actively producing the meaningful world around us, and we can never fully control, only remain accountable for, what they are making.

So, when Code concludes that "[b]eing believable is about how one is, [is about] how one puts together one's sense of self within the improvisational possibilities that the multiple stories in which one is participant can allow" (82), she forgets *that one's sense of self is not what matters here*. The black man in the example above can have any sense of himself that he wants, but that will not change the racist society that he lives in and the incredulity that his black body elicits. Despite what Code tells Haraway, "struggles over *how* to hear and be heard" are no more complex than "struggles over how to see [and be seen]" (82). They are the same thing: "a matter of working out, collectively, how to produce and circulate new scripts, how to devise improvisational possibilities that can unsettle and disrupt story lines" (78). As Code insists, this is not simply about telling new stories, it is about being new stories, or rather critically, physically re-articulating old stories (which involves not only language, but dress, gesture, gait).

[9] Ibid., pp. 44-51.

Bridge to Bodies on Objects

Merleau-Ponty writes of an entirely physical, embodied way of being and knowing in the world. He contends that we come to know the world around us only through physical interaction with it:

> caught up in the tissue of the things, [the body] draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction (135).

The body, being materially implicated in the world around itself, is "the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things" (135). It is not by transcending matter but by being in the same sensory system that we can come to know 'things.' And by 'things' here Merleau-Ponty means much more than inert and silent matter. He does not deny the existence of a real world 'out there', outside of 'us', but he recognizes our complicated access to the rich 'objects' which constitute that objective world.

Merleau-Ponty argues that all sensible objects–visible, tangible, audible objects–including ourselves, have depths of meanings accessible only through our physical experience of them. He writes,

> It is the body and it alone...that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him [sic] alone that...would coexist with them in the same world (136).

Here he directly contests the fiction of a disembodied, free-floating, all-knower and, in a move that seems to anticipate feminist efforts twenty years later, he makes the argument that the depths of things can only be known by actively engaging with them. One example of a 'thing' he uses is the color red. His discussion is worth quoting at length:

> The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things,

> which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornment and that of uniforms....A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision...but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound (132).

Both the thing looked-at and the person looking are objects rich with meanings which interact to produce a known visible (i.e., a particular color of red). While Merleau-Ponty challenges the assumption of disembodied knowledge claims, he is conspicuously (to these feminist eyes) disinterested in the social implications of his arguments. It is crucial to specify that the 'thing' is not just a color but a dress, and what he leaves out of his discussion of what that dress can mean is a characteristic oversight from his unsaid raced, gendered and classed perspective. He neglects to note the importance of the fact that one's 'field of red garments' is totally socially contingent, so that it could also include the red Holt Renfrew sweater that you buy to spread your warm Christmas cheer, or the red long underwear from BiWay that you can't afford as protection from December's Christmas chill,, or the red Benetton sweater that you want to buy for your mother but are denied access to because of your black face (Williams, "The Death of the Profane"). One's field of red garments is going to be different depending on their gender, race, class and sexuality. The point is, because this visible known comes into being through an interplay between the interior and exterior horizons of both the looked-at thing and the person looking, that visible known is itself highly contingent on the social meanings which collude to make it material. It *is* there. But it is *not found*. The thing looked-at and the thing looking enter into a conversation which makes the visible-material known. This is essentially the same argument that Haraway, Code and especially Barad have made. i am adding to this argument that real, knowable material is made in *corporeal* conversation that we also have to be responsible for.

Bodies on Objects

Haraway argues that "Feminists have to insist on a better account of the world" (187). The 'better' will come from: 1) recognizing and taking responsibility for the partial and limited location of all knowledge and 2) admitting a 'trickster' world. First and foremost in this chapter, she argues "for a feminist version of objectivty" (186): there are 'objective' truths to be known, but all knowledge comes from somewhere. Known truths are only visible from particular, embodied perspectives. For Haraway, bodies figure in knowledge production as "active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life...each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds" (190). Bodies are machines that we have learned to use, in order to organize the world in particular ways. However, her second major point is that we can not assume to just organize the world into anything we want:

> Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of 'objective' knowledge (198).

Situated knowledges require that each perceptual system, which has learned to organize the world in particular, though dynamic not static, gendered, raced, classed, sexed, aged ways, enter into "non-innocent conversations" (199) with the 'active', 'Trickster' objective world in which we live.

Haraway is more interested in the active body of the known than the active body of the knower. While the body of the knower is synecdotally implicated in the production of knowledge–that is, our 'eyes' organize the world–the object-body to be known is the "active, meaning-generating axis" she terms a "material-semiotic actor": "bodies as *objects* of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes" (200, emphasis added). Bodies themselves are not figured into the formula as *subjects* of knowledge production. The importance of the embodied knower is more their position than their body. She argues for "insisting *metaphorically* on the particularity and embodiment of all vision" (189, emphasis added), and uses feminist standpoint theory as a way in. Standpoint theory lets us see the benefits of learning "(at least) double vision" (195). Views from below "are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge" (191). Although Haraway insists on accounting for the body from which knowledge claims come, the 'embodied objectivity' that she describes is about perspective. She argues that knowledge claims are "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, *structuring and structured body*" (195, emphasis added), but what 'structuring' body is she talking about? She describes the organizing force of our visual system, but this 'system' does not depend strictly on any of our actual physicality. 'Embodied objectivity' is about a perspective that we can learn, regardless of our eyes or our skin color (or by extension our age or our ability, etc.)–regardless of our physical body. While she would never claim that we can know outside of our actual bodies, she does not address how our corporeal selves affect what we can know.

In "What is Natural About Epistemology Naturalized?"[10] Code develops helpful ways to think about bodies in knowledge production. Although she is not concerned explicitly with the affective bodies of knowers, she explicates the interacctive and relational constitution of subjectivity and, consequently, concentrates on the constitutive power of every subject. She describes an epistemology based in the "ecological human subject [who] is made by and makes

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[10] Lorraine Code, "What is Natural About Epistemology Naturalized?" in *American Philosophical Quarterly*. 33:1 (Jan. 1996): 1-22. All further references to "What is Natural...?" are from this edition.

its relations in reciprocity with other subjects and with its (multiple, diverse) environments" (13). The ecological knowing subject is "embodied" in much the same way as Haraway's situated subject is (12), but Code concentrates more on the interrelational constitution of this subject. She explains t hat "ecology emphasizes the participation of organisms, whose choices are relationally structured, and who themselves shape social-environmental relations" (12). However, again, this structured and structuring organism is only figuratively physical. While Code labels the ecological subject "marvelously corporeal" (after Annette Baier), she goes on to describe its structure and structuring force in terms of 'subjectivity' (12), signaling her primary interest in subject-mind over subject-matter. The ecological subject "is self-critically cognizant of being part of the world, both social and natural, in which her knowings, feelings and actings always produce effects" (14). i am arguing that, not only do 'her knowings, feelings and actings,' but so also does her body 'always produce effects.'

In "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction,"[11] Barad also uses the discourse of embodied knowing without seriously considering the affective body of the knower. While she argues that "*reference must be made to bodies in order for concepts to have meaning*" (173), the bodies she talks about are not necessarily human, and definitely not the knower's. Like we find in Haraway, the bodies she is interested in are the objects of observation. Barad emphasizes the fact that these objects are neither static nor totally dependent. The object that is observed or knowable is the materialized intra-action of "nature-culture, object-subject, matter-meaning" (188), that she calls 'phenomena.' She revisits Haraway's notions of Trickster world, and embodied knowers and represents the material offspring of their intercourse as the phenomena (objects) that we observe (measure, examine, study). Moreover, phenomenon is the only 'reality' we have access to: "phenomena constitute reality" (185). Therefore, reality is always (intra-)active, matter *and* culture, always agential. Reality is the materialized effect of culturally situated, agential knowers *and* a physical, agential, world that always "kicks-back" (188). Again, i would like to emphasize the significance of the culturally situated, agential knower's body in this formula.

Barad's conceptions of phenomena as 'fully contextual, material-cultural be-ins' (179, 181) and agential reality as phenomena that kicks-back can provide us with the tools to reconsider affective bodies in knowledge production. If, after Grosz, Butler and Haraway, i can claim that bodies are phenomena, neither all biological matter nor all cultural, discursive product but rather a dialogue that incessantly calls each other into being, and phenomena constitute the reality that is always acting up, it follows that bodies always kick-back. Barad asserts that "the apparatus of bodily production, *qua* agencies of observation, are not separable from phenomena" (182). That is, the agencies of observation, which include the located knower, construct particular

[11] Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," from *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*. L.H. Nelson and J. Nelson eds. Great Britain: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996. 161-194. All further references to Barad are from this edition.

apparatus of bodily production, and phenomena are born of their intra-action. The apparatus of bodily production is the experimental condition that creates a particular material-cultural phenomena. Barad uses Bohr's analysis of the light "wave/particle duality" (177) as an example: "'wave' and 'particle' are classical descriptions that refer to different mutually exclusive phenomena, and not to independent physical objects" (179). The wave phenomena occurs in the context of a particular apparatus of bodily production, and the particle phenomena in another. These mutually exclusive phenomena refer back not only to the apparatus of bodily production, but also to the agency of observation. However, Barad does not account for the agential body of the agential observer.

To explain, i will shift my discussion away from quantum physics, into a somewhat more accessible "epistemology of everyday lives."[12] So, for example, if we look again at Williams' "The Pain of Word Bondage," the obliteration of legal rights discourse in favor of a needs-based discourse is the phenomenon that occurs in the context of a particular apparatus of bodily production. This apparatus consists of "overlook[ing] that blacks have been describing their needs for generations" (151) and disregarding those for whom "rights rhetoric has been and continues to be an effective form of discourse" (149). And, both the phenomena of needs-discourse and the apparatus of disregard refer back to an agency of observation that is "rooted in race and in the unconsciousness of racism" (152). Abandoning rights discourse is a reasonable phenomena only for white agencies of observation, "those already rights-empowered" (153), who utilize an apparatus of bodily production that is built on denying the privileged productivity of white bodies, and ignoring its own systemic racism. Only Peter's white, male body could materialize the phenomena of beneficial rights-avoidance:

> a lease or any formal mechanism [of rights maintenance] would introduce distrust into his relationship and he would suffer alienation, leading to the commodification of his being and the degradation of his person to property (148).

Peter's agential body materializes the phenomenon of reasonably obliterating legal rights discourse.

In contrast, Williams looks at rights discourse in the context of an apparatus of bodily production that is built on acknowledging the privileged productivity of white bodies,, and the different productivities of variously signifying agential bodies. This acutely conscious apparatus results in the phenomenon of rights discourse "that can confront the *denial* of need" (152) and ensure the "respectful behavior, the collective responsibility, properly owned by a society to one of its own" (153). Again both the conscious apparatus and the rights-discourse phenomenon refer back to, and are contingent on, an actually embodied agency of observation. Williams' black, female, agential body resonates with the legacy of slavery, breeding narratives of "unreliability,

[12] Lorraine Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account," from *Rhetorical Spaces*, p. 24.

untrustworthiness, hostility, anger, powerlessness, irrationality, and probably destitution" (147). In contrast to Peter, her body materializes "distrust, not trust" (148) and the indispensability of formalized, legal rights discourse. Williams writes:

> [the lack of formal rights discourse] would risk a figurative isolation from that creative commerce by which I may be recognized as a whole, by which I may feed and clothe and shelter myself, by which I may be seen as equal–even if I am stranger. For me, stranger-stranger relations are better than stranger-chattel (148).

To return briefly to Code's overstatement, despite Williams' *sense of herself* as a whole, social self with distinct power, her active body means beyond her control, engaging in an unequal power-play with the also agential world to materialize a reality which may be irreverent. The knowable world around us materializes in collaboration with our agential bodies regardless of our senses of self.

Some Conclusions

Haraway, Code and Barad all work with a notion of embodied objectivity that i find problematic, but Barad ultimately provides what i see as the most promising model for an epistemology based on actual corporeality, responsibility and respect. Haraway talks about embodied objectivity in terms of a located, partial perspective on a particular thing. I am arguing that the thing actually changes, becomes knowable in certain ways, in power-charged conversations with a particular body. Barad concedes that the thing changes, b ut as a result of the apparatus of bodily production, which is chosen or privileged by a particular located knower. The thing itself depends not so much on the body of the knower as on the knower's choice of apparatus. To use her example, light is knowable as constituted by particles in the context of another. The agency of observation need only *choose* one or the other apparatus to gain access to knowable reality. Of course Barad allows that this choice is compelled–socially implicated and subject to regulation and constraint. The point is, however, that according to Haraway, Barad and Code reality can be seen differently if we re-learn how to see. Haraway encourages that we learn "to see from below" (191), and Barad implies that we can choose another apparatus of bodily production to gain access to the real. In "What is Natural...?", see the effects of "her knowings, feelings and actings" (14). In a similar disregard for corporeality, she concludes in "Incredulity..." that "how one puts together one's sense of self" (82) determines one's viability within the real world. Williams reminds us that despite how we learn to see, what apparatus of bodily production we use, what effects our knowings, feelings and activings have, or what our sense of self is, bodies still matter in knowledge.

In Williams' work, the apparatus of bodily production is less crucial for determining knowable reality (phenomena) than is the agential body of the knower. That is, even if Williams chooses the unconscious apparatus that Peter uses, she cannot literally see the world any differently, because her black, female body engages in racist conversation to produce a knowable world that is significantly different than Peter's. Williams cannot walk into Benetton's, cannot even openly criticize the mechanisms of her exclusion, and cannot waive talk of her rights as an excessive formality, regardless of the new ways she learns to see. Different visions are also differences in bodies, where one's body has entered into conversation with and materialized that which one can see. Therefore, since what we see depends on what our bodies say, we cannot learn to actually see anew. Moreover, just as we are not fully in control of what our bodies say, we are definitely not in control of what the world around us says back. Even if we learn to see from below, choose another apparatus of bodily production, take full responsibility for our knowings, feelings and actings, or refigure our sense of self, the world will not be materially different.

This is neither an essentialist nor a relativist argument. First, i am not saying that our bodies determine how we know the world, but rather that our bodies contribute to the knowable world. For instance, just as not all women know the same world, not all female bodies say the same thing in corporeal conversation. Moreover, even if two people embodied identical social signification (i.e., white, middle-class, young, able, female), and performed that signification with identical gestures, gait, intonation, and fashion which altogether functioned to materialize the exact same knowable world, this would not guarantee that the two pepole would know the world in the same way. Second, my argument does not run to say that every body creates her/his own world. We necessarily occupy the same world of matter, but our bodies mingle with it to produce particular materializations. Butler explains that bodies are matter that become intelligible, or meaningful, through a process of reiteration whereby we are materialized as 'sexed.' Similarly, the world of agential matter becomes meaningful through a process of socially contingent, regulated and constrained corporeal conversations–whereby, for example, a Manhattan apartment building is materialized as a possible home, or a store is materialized as a possible shopping spot. Butler is not saying that physical bodies do not exist, but that they are materialized as (multiply) meaningful (sexed, raced, classed, aged, etc.) through social process. i am not saying that the real, internally dialogized, agential world does not exist, but that it is materialized as multiply meaningful through fully social and dialogized, corporeal power-plays.

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