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Acronyms

Works by Nicole Brossard

Referred to in the Essays

POETRY

| AM  | AMANTES1 |
| AS  | AUBE À LA SAISON |
| AV  | AU PRÉSENT DES VEINES |
| CB  | LE CENTRE BLANC (1970) |
| CR  | CAHIER DE ROSES & DE CIVILISATION |
| DI  | DOUBLE IMPRESSION |
| EB  | L’ÉCHO ROUGE BEAU |
| GN  | GREEN NIGHT OF LABYRINTH PARK |
| IF  | INSTALLATIONS (AVEC ET SANS PRONOMS) |
| IE  | INSTALLATIONS (WITH AND WITHOUT PRONOUNS) |
| L   | LOVERS |
| MC  | MORDE EN SA CHAIR |
| MJ  | MÉCANIQUE JONGLEUSE |
| NV  | LA NUIT VERTE DU PAEC LABYRINTHE |
| P   | LA PARTIE POUR LE TOUT |
| SL  | SUITE LOGIQUE |
| TD  | TYPHON DRIU |
| VA  | VERTIGE DE L’AVANT-SCÈNE |

FICTION

| A   | L’AMÈR OU LE CHAPITRE EFFRITÉ (FICTION THÉORIQUE) |
| AB  | A BOOK |
| BA  | BAROQUE D’AUBE |
| BD  | BAROQUE AT DAWN |
ACRONYMS

Notes

1. Following all the essays contained in this volume, Works Cited contain only the works by authors other than Brossard. For references to Brossard’s works, acronyms are given in parentheses immediately following citations. Full bibliographical information is given at the end of the volume in “Works by Nicole Brossard.” Several of Brossard’s works and translations of them have had more than one edition. Where this is the case, it has not been possible to provide page numbers for all editions.
The Inédit in Writing by Nicole Brossard

Breathing the Skin of Language

LYNETTE HUNTER

In the necessity and the desire to reinvent the language there are certainly an intention of happiness, a utopic thread, a serious responsibility (WT 184).

I am interested in knowledge and moral action.1 Hence I engage with Nicole Brossard’s work mainly through her sense of language being the material place for the articulation of the unthought and unknown (one cannot know until a thing is articulated), which in itself is moral action. The unknown doesn’t just get said. It’s a laborious process of working on the words, a kind of training in engagement specific to each reader-writer relationship, that is coincident with the engagement itself. The better trained one is, the more material the engagement, to the point that the writer-reader begin to articulate together, to work on growing the skin of language, the huge second lung of breath on which the material depends. Yet training never stops. If it does, the articulation becomes representation, or reproduction in the Marxist sense, and language splits into the semantic and fictional divide about which Brossard speaks so often.

To get there is difficult. Brossard’s criticism, like her
poetry from which it is scarcely distinguishable, uses words that are over-oxygenated because we often don’t know how to take up the invitation to work on articulation. The critical text gives off energy at random, makes us vulnerable in the intimacy of conceptual sensation it promises, leaves me light-headed or feeling the unbearable intensity of insistent but elusive significance. I have to train to read so that the images do not drift toward nausea but toward meaning. I have to learn to work with the texts – but what makes me persist as I am flung from white space to white space? Probably the quite different experience of reading Brossard’s novels in a classroom with a group of other readers, and I will return to Baroque at Dawn in the concluding discussion. But also, because my experience of reading Brossard’s texts is so similar to her descriptions of writing them.

In “Author” Brossard reiterates a topic that infuses her writing of the late 1990s, and states that she is a humanist writer “profoundly moral, that is to say attentive to human life in its small and great struggles to signify beyond reproduction” (2). The definition is significant: unlike the ethical, which is bound to ideological and discursive institutions of power, the moral delineates our willingness to take into account all that representation ignores or obscures or represses, all the messy details of our lives that are beyond reproduction because they do not fit. To attend to the moral we have to work on articulating those parts of life/our lives that are not-yet-said, a process Brossard calls the inédit, which is fundamentally an exploration of the creation of knowledge. Her writing works endlessly on articulating and increasingly on what articulating is, how it happens. This is one of the most pressing philosophical issues of humanist inquiry and politics that we face today in western democratic states, because of the growing pressure of overdetermination by institutional power and new technologies operating on a global scale and denying located knowledge, agency and moral action to the individual. Yet there are remarkably few attempts to write about the process of creation that articulating involves, to bring into presence and recognition the material reality of the body and word of the inédit.

This essay charts a movement among the representative, the fictional and the material: the semantic, the installation and the inédit or articulation of the not-yet-said. Brossard speaks of this slightly differently in “Trajectory” when she describes the process of creation in writing as “a wager of presence in the semantic, imaginary and symbolic space” (179). This movement suggests that those locations are not fully distinct, but are particular and necessary to new developments in democratic humanism that distinguish it from the exclusionary rhetoric of liberal humanism that has dominated the formation of nation states in the west.
Installation: Desire and Discourse

A recent translation of Installations (avec et sans pronoms) clarifies an entire range of theoretical inquiry and cultural study in western liberal democracies. During the 1960s and early 1970s, neo-Marxist theory combined with Lacanian psychoanalysis to define individuals as 'subjects' when they participated in the ideological symbolic system of representation. As is well-known, the feminist response to these ideas which deny women subjecthood was to claim the pre-symbolic for itself, for women's consciousness did not enter the world of ideological representations in the same way, if at all, as men's. The feminist response facilitated and contributed to a much wider understanding that the symbolic system defined as Lacanian also denied subjecthood to people of colour, to the poor, to those of different ability and age – in effect to all those who were not part of the small group of propertied, white, Judæo-Christian men who worked in and on institutions of power (see Hunter). But for all the hegemonic analysis of subjectivity or subject position as terms to define the activity of individuals not systemically part of hegemony yet contributing to its maintenance (much of which focussed around the work of M. Foucault after 1976, and the political theory of E. Laclau and C. Mouffe in the 1980s), there was little in the growing field of discourse studies that could identify the agency of the individual and hence the field of moral action.

Brossard's use and elaboration of installation is an early and prescient development of the idea of "constituted" subject positions made by gender studies to discourse theory from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. To name but one, Judith Butler's concept of "performance" as the activity of a "constituting subject" always retained the emphasis on the hegemonic and ideological, simply because of the linguistic bond to the subject defined by the Lacanian symbolic. Installations, by contrast, swings the weighting to the individual's ability to "fictionalise": if we are denied participation as a subject, yet recognise that subjectivity is a matter of representation rather than nature, then why not make our own fictions?

In Installations the verse "Installation" presents the writer settling "je m'installe dans mon corps / de manièrè à pouvoir bouger / quand une femme me fait signe" (47) ["into my body's installation / so as to be able to respond / when a woman gives me a sign" (49)]. On the opposite page is the verse "Ombre" ["Shadow"] in which "une belle subjectivité" ["a beautiful subjectivity"] "n'entame pas / la lucidité" ["doesn't broach / lucidity"] in which the body "prononce de l'ombre / avid d'images" ["pronounce[s] shadow / avid for images"] and in which we are left to "songer ma vie / au bout des bras" (46) ["dream[ing] my life / at arm's
length" (48)]. All ideological representations are constructed from real material, from actual individuals. In order to fit representation, elements must be left out or hidden, so in a sense all representations that are allowed to subjects cast a shadow. Often characterised as loss or absence, this shadow is in effect just as material and actual, but without words, without visibility, unrecognised. And if the materiality installs itself, presents itself so that it can be recognised, it attains agency. Writing is one means by which we effect this installation for, as Brossard puts it in “Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness” published a few years later but containing more contemporary material, writing “translates that enigmatic but reflective operation whereby we process and can transform our versions of reality, that is change its metaphoric and semantic course” (179).

The Inédit: Articulation of the not-yet-said — from Installation to the Body

Installation proceeds to some extent by probing the thresholds between shadow and installation, probing the possibilities for recognising the not-said, not-made-public emotions, feelings, events, significances in our lives. However, the next move toward agency is articulation of the recognised. First in that movement is the difficulty of identifying the not-said as not-yet-said, acknowledging that this is not a matter of lack or absence but of material presence that can be articulated, and once articulated becomes knowledge that can inform moral action. The exploration of the not-said into the inédit emerges in many of Brossard’s essays of the late 1980s and into the 90s. By the time of “Fluid Arguments” she is arguing that the production of the inédit traverses all her books (316). One helpful work from 1990, translated in 1997 along with Typhon dru, is “Harmonious Matter Still Manoeuvres,” which reiteratively explores the “not-yet-said” by saying it, and in the process offers a series of remarkable articulations.

The first stanza suggests that a thought that arises “au milieu de la réalité et de ses poses innommables” [“in the midst of reality, its unnameable poses”] prompts her despite the unnameable to have recourse to the thought that “rien n’est trop lent, ni trop bref pour l’univers” [“nothing is too slow nor too brief for the universe” (8/9)]. The second stanza claims “je sais que tout n’est pas dit parce que mon corps s’est installé avec un certain bonheur dans cette pensée” [“I know that all isn’t said because my body settles with a certain joy into such a thought”]. This sends words into a trajectory along which she can “en liant les voyelles et le dos des pensées me rapprocher, les yeux bridés de fascination, de la mort et de son contraire” [“by joining vowels and the spine of thoughts, get closer, with eyes narrowed in fascination, to death and its opposite” (10-11, my translation)]. There is no clear meaning from this syntax (not-sentence). There is resistant signification. Articulation is
not a solitary process and the reader must engage with the trajectory of words even to recognise them as writing any material presence let alone the materiality itself.

Each stanza in “Harmonious” presents a moment of possible recognition, a moment of words for the not-yet-said being thrown out in arcs whose movement we may recognise and engage with, or not. Whether we do so is largely a matter of training in word skills — the techniques, strategies and stances of poetic and rhetoric — and a willingness to take up the politics of reading. Coincident with the first publication of “Harmonious” is Brossard’s contribution to *The Politics of Poetic Form*, “Poetic Politics,” in which she argues that while a text “shows its politics in the writing” (78), it “becomes political” (80) when it is read. It becomes political because it makes “space for the unthought” (81) and can transform anger, ecstasy and desire into “social meaning” (81). However the reader needs to engage their training in perspective, theme, discourse and style to become a non-conformist reader and find “a space for new experience — travelling through meaning while simultaneously producing meaning” (79).

How does the writer invite the reader into articulation and the production of meaning? How does the text encourage a non-conformist reader? The suggestions scattered through “Harmonious” insistently take one back to the body. The writer is “troubled” by any movement that leaves desire behind (14): desire in most hegemonic discourse is constructed by the Lacanian symbolic as that thing in us that cannot be represented, therefore always already a loss or absence. But for the installed individual, desire is the prompt to recognise the not-yet-said. To leave behind desire is to hand oneself over to representation and reproduction. Desire is awakened by “les coquilles roses de sens” [“coral shells of meaning”] both tongue and clitoris, that through rapture graft matter onto the postures of voice — but this isn’t readily definable matter, it’s “matière secrète, matière plus ronde, matière comme tes soupirs et d’autres liquides encore” [“secret matter, matter more round, matter like your sighs and other liquids yet” (14, 15)]. Later, the body is pointed, punctuated, and retains in its passionate readings and subtle gestures an incredible synchrony of sense that reminds us that all is not said — despite the symmetries of thought. The indistinct/undefinable voice and touch of the body (“nos mains [...] caressent bien indistinctement de la voix et de la paume, le corps humain qui a des seins.”) compasses both the universal and particular, constructing the world “to the measure of our hands” when they caress “a human body [that] has breasts” (18, 19).

On the one hand the writer perceives that life can silence, circumscribe, reduce, and she uses this knowledge to draw energy from the cycles of tears and the dust/push of birth to make sure that she works in
dreams, at night, articulating into voice (20, 21). On
the other, when her skin is "chargée de cyprine et d'é-
cho" ["full of cyprin of echo" (22, 23)] she smiles the
inseparability of the bodily and thoughtful in a deep
breath. In this state stable objects (representations)
make time reverse in her breast, they split thought,
bound to enlighten death: she knows all is not said
because her heart is wrung (22, 23) with the inédit of
materiality. And at times when "la mémoire a peur de
ses bonds et [...] les nerfs au milieu du désir sont
comblés de réponses" ["memory is afraid of leaping
and desire is full of answers"], when she is not "débor-
dant dans l'air d'énergie" ["brimming with the breath
of energy"] she can be seduced or tempted toward cer-
tainty and sentiment even though she knows that all is
not said because "la lumière [...] fracture l'ombre" ["the
action of light breaking shadow"] revives her enery for
re-thinking (24). The final stanza outlines the dilem-
ma: "nommer est encore fonction de rêve et d'espoir"
["to name is still a function of dream and hope"]
because women are still invisibly embodied in repre-
sentation and need fictional form to participate fully in
society. They need the fictional stability of installation
that can insist on its position in discursive knowledge.
Yet in the fictional, "entre la conversation urbaine et la
tradition" ["between cultured conversation and tradi-
tion"] it is vertiginously cold, we are left freezing at the
edge of articulation that requires a precipitous projec-
tion of oneself beyond fiction. Here it is the bodily pres-
ence of tears, in "la matière volatile des larmes" [their
"volatile materiality"] that reminds us that despite the
strange sweat of the true settling representations onto
our life, all is not said (26, my translations).

To a significant extent the acknowledgement and
recognition of the not-yet-said is at the centre of what
an 'artist' does in the modern period of the Western
world, a period Brossard's texts designate as baroque,
the shift to humanist values in the seventeenth cen-
tury. But the recognised writer-as-artist in the modern
world has usually dealt with issues close to subject-
hood, because they have come from the same socio-
political grouping as those who hold and shape power.
As such, their articulations have precisely addressed the
repressions of representation, and could be perceived to
transgress or oppose them because the representation/
fiction/articulation border is so narrow. The precipice
is not so high. Criticism has usually defined such
attempt at articulation as "transcendent," because in
habitual post-Cartesian fashion they hold language
itself to be inadequate to the real: the limits of language
have to be transcended by the artist in order to fiction-
alise the real, to bring it into representation. Not that
writers do this, and their increasing focus through the
past three centuries on process and the not-yet-said,
may be an indication of their frustration with the
description. But this is how critics have expressed what
they do: one could say that because he is a subject the
modern artist is always gendered male.
From Transgression to Vision

Brossard attests to two specific changes in her life in 1974: motherhood and lesbian life (see These Our Mothers). They coincide with her decision to replace “transgression” with “marginality and vision.” She refers to these two life changes as gaining “carnal knowledge,” which led her to put aside “opposition” for “value” (PP 76). “Carnal knowledge” is the incontrovertible rooting of flesh and skin in “motive,” that moves beyond the “object of desire” to vision (PP 74). These comments are followed by the claim that the “text” of language “calls for vision rather than subversion. It calls for awareness, concentration, sharpness. Vision goes beyond transgression because it brings forth new material” (82). Slightly earlier, in “Memory: Hologram of Desire” Brossard speaks of memory as the field/song [champs/chant] of vision: the memories and memory of women need to find fictional form because an “actualising memory” is “one that initiates presence in the world” (3). Women’s memories, in “becoming visible and exposed in public… help[…] us to expand our field of vision (9). At the same time memory is the “hologram of desire,” a “synchrony” of real life, imagination and “desire’s fullness” (9). Yet the hologram does not retain the carnal knowledge of the lesbian body.

In “Writing as Trajectory” memory’s part in vision is further clarified. The trajectory of writing toward vision is “the momentum of energy” (180) that combines the body and its “circulation of energy” with language and with writing: the body provides “for a network of associations out of which we create our mental environment […] we imagine far beyond what we in fact see, hear or taste” (PP 73), and writing shapes that energy through language to suggest “solutions which can unknot social patterns of violence and death” (PP 74). But writing “toward vision” is not a unitary action that leaves transgression completely behind. First, the individual’s body has to “re-member childhood and to untie the knots that have formed in its throat (WT 180), a “ritual of trembling” that is a recognition of the unsaid in one’s life, the process of memory. To enter the social world an individual needs to write in language that discursive or ideological power can recognise. If we choose to write for the representative world of ideology we transgress, we come up against the “antagonistic and hierarchical structure of misogynistic and patriarchal sense” that makes words invested with our energy “crash violently into the same word, the one invested with masculine experience,” in what Brossard calls the “ritual with shock” (WT 181).

If instead we write for the discursive world we engage the “ritual with sliding” which subtly negotiates with power. All language connotes through semantic and metaphorical circuits that produce an
"aura," "odour," or "tempo." "Ritual with sliding" displaces "slightly but sufficiently the semantic aura of words in such a way that they produce an unforeseeable resonance without alteration in the signifier" (182). The energy charge of this concentration on "sonority," "orthography," "usual sense," "potential polysemy" and "etymology" produces an effect that "conducts sense well beyond the signified," and "she who writes displaces imperceptibly but radically the order of the world" (182). "Ritual with sliding" fictionalises, reinvents language for the discursive, negotiates with hegemonic power, has direct social and political effect. At the same time it needs motivation, and I would argue, it finds this largely in the "ritual with breath" which multiplies "energy by modulating it to the rhythm most appropriate to thought in the body" (183). These four rituals are not separable, although they may be differently weighted. Together they make a "space for the existence of the woman subject and her desire [...] But [...] above all an unedited [articulation of the not-yet-said] space in which the unthought of the world suddenly takes the form of evidence" (184).

The Complications of the Body

Brossard describes the ritual of breath as an activity about "tonality," "music made of silence and harmony" that is "practised absolutely without mask" (WT 183). Most of her poetry engages us into some insight into the workings of the ritual of breath, and a different kind of engagement with it is offered by the text "Only a Body to Measure Reality By." Here the lesbian body, which has "felt the presence of the other woman as vital in your life [...] develops a skin so soft that it almost becomes a personal proof of faith in each woman" (9). The "radiant" lesbian body situates "on the side of insoumission [the not-compliant]." It begins as "our solitude, our only certitude," but because "the body has eyes to see, ears to listen, a memory to fantasize and words to compare, so it is, we are not alone anymore": we need "to read the in-between you and me" (5).

The extended sub-title of the piece, published from the Ravenscroft Lecture given with Daphne Marlatt in 1996, includes "Writing the In-Between." The harmonious lesbian body is not simply a body with many masks like difference, utopia and performance, but a body in touch with other bodies. This is the single element that makes it possible to turn away from transgression toward value, away from ideology to moral considerations. If the first step is to recognise the reductiveness of the representations of subjecthood, the second to separate the fictionalities of installation from the fiction of the subject position and its shadow, the third is to delineate the body for articulation as one that will be able to control the slide back into installation. The isolated hologram cannot do this, but the necessary in-between negotiations of the harmonious les-
bian body can. What makes the concept philosophically different and challenging is that it does not suggest an isolated alternative, despite the lingering signification of its utopian tendency. The “harmonious” body is complicated because it is anti-transcendent and focused on materiality, while simultaneously it creates effects, articulations that can emerge into and change the discursive, and may even become new representations or characters. The intellectual complexity is focussed through Brossard’s brief commentary on beauty: as she notes in “Harmonious,” if the materiality of the real were to fail/fall, it would strand us without warning, “la peau hésitante entre les philosophies et l’aube” (“skin hesitating between philosophies and dawn”) in “la vaste complication de la beauté” (“the vast complication of beauty”) (TD 16-17).

Skin “hésitates” in the complication of beauty because beauty occurs when articulations erupt into the discursive. When the inédit is recognised by ideological or hegemonic systems, when it acquires fictional if not representative power, the not-yet-said is made public, explodes with certainty into fit the first time, and thereafter settles, “s’installe.” Beauty marks the point where social meaning is first given to articulations. In Mauve Desert “La beauté est avant la réalité”, d’une antériorité polysémique, impensable [...] La beauté précède le désir, son fragment, l’histoire, la coupe transverse de la réalité et de la fiction” [“Beauty is before reality,’ of a polysemic, unthinkable antecedence [...] Beauty precedes desire, its fragment, history, the transection of reality and fiction”]. Beauty précède réalité because without representation reality cannot be recognised. It transects reality and fiction because it is both the source of representation and the presence of installation. The notes in Mauve Desert then go on to distinguish between the production of beauty that “prend forme dans le chaud ventre de l’espèce [et] se transforme, langage, bris, miroitement, séduction: la beauté, angle de réflexion, neurone sélectif, langue à la source” (“takes shape in the warm belly of the species [and] transforms itself, language, break, shimmering, seduction: beauty, angle of reflection, selective neuron, source tongue”), and beauty as sustained eruption into fit that is the “Beauté froide de l’éternel, la beauté intimidée” (“Cold beauty of the eternal, beauty intimidates”), “la beauté achève en nous l’intime, oui, menace suprêmement comme un langage froid” (160) (“beauty puts an end to intimacy in us, yes, threatens supremely like a cold language,” makes an image into an astounding installation (145-6)).

The translator in Baroque at Dawn speaks of beauty as an enchantment, a “sentiment de pouvoir toucher à la lumière” (217) [“feeling that we can reach out and touch light” (213)]. But she also says that we need this conceptual sensation that the image fits. Indeed the Writer, having said that she doesn’t write “any more” (205), is revived by the beauty of a fountain in Montréal, a response that allows her to “exist”
(234) just as she “existed” in Buenos Aires when writing her previous novel (212). Beauty is allied to truth in a profoundly Keatsian manner: it is eternal and cold, but at the same time like Keats’ urnmaker, full of the complications of politics and the necessity to reinvent language and make recognisable the not-yet-said, and pregnant with evidence for value and moral action. Beauty is produced in the belly of the writer/text/reader.

The Body of the Inédit: Selfhood and Knowledge

Whatever verbal beauty becomes in the discursive or ideological, it comes from the hard labour on words we have undertaken during articulation, during the process of creating the not-yet-said, the inédit, the “objects of thought and emotion that can be shared” (PA 336). This work is also work on the self, but if the self is represented in the Lacanian symbolic, installed into the discursive, how is it present in the inédit? the harmonious lesbian body? The exploration of poetics and rhetoric made available by Brossard’s critical writings is also a philosophical exploration of selfhood and of knowledge. For we cannot know that we exist if there is no other person to confirm our existence, just as we do not know that we know unless someone else shares the articulation as knowledge.

One text that braids beauty, selfhood and knowledge into close proximity is La nuit verte du Parc.

Labyrinthe [Green Night in Labyrinth Park], which opens the “Premier Tournant” [“First Bend”] with the comment that life sets pronouns “tout autour du je dans le but de reconnaitre, en nous, les autres sans trop de collision” [“all about the I in order to recognize, within us, the others, without too many collisions”], and concludes that while the sea “fait des fentes dans la vie des pronoms” [“creates fissures in the political life of pronouns”], destabilizing the I, so the pronouns are at times transformed into “d’essentielles figures” [“essential figures”]. Somewhere here is life, not as a principle that “s’épuise en anecdotes” [“wears itself out in anecdotes”] but life “dans la bouche qui énonce le principe. Salive, bactéries, langue, muqueuses, palais” (11) [“in the mouth that speaks the principle. Saliva, bacteria, tongue, mucus, palate” (27)]. And the political purpose of Labyrinth is to “seek the principle” in the bodily mouth of the speaker.

As a political text, it shares with the reader the activity of “making political” by understanding what is “in the mouth” of the writer. The writer first offers us the “story” or “labyrinth,” into which she then walks, describing eleven bends: each of which excavates a strategy for understanding emotion and thought. If we take guidance from the final line of the opening labyrinth, the text outlines possible rhetorical manoeuvres, “I am breathing in rhetoric, in the never ending process of hope” (10, 26, 42). The “First Bend” displays the ambivalent rhetoric of Politics which “can be like a
spell if you can’t spell your name with a woman in mind” (11, 27). The “Second Bend” follows the history of the writer as someone who found the explanations of heterosexual discourse painful but who in time generated so many questions about alternative discourses that she learned to distance herself, flying so constantly among these archipelagos of discourse that she had diverted the initial set of explanations into other routes.

With the “Third Bend” the writer reads one phrase from the labyrinth “le châle bleu qui glissait sur les épaules de Simone” (13) [“the blue shawl slipping from Simone’s shoulders”] as an image that persists as a “relais de ferveur” [“fervent relay” (29)], insisting on engagement without resolution. The “Fourth Bend” is a commentary on the word “pays”/“country” as a contradiction between a unifying lesbian language and its destruction of “lesbian lives,” speaking again to the difficulty of distinguishing between the discursive or installed self, and that of the material, the self as bodily enigma. The difficulty is underwritten in the “Fifth Bend” which returns to “image,” of “quand la neige s’installe sur ton front” (15) [“when snowflakes fall on your forehead” (31)], an image of the impartiality of Death that hints at the enigma of material existence. It knows its enigmatic self only in engagement with other human beings. This does not mean that it is the same as other human beings, but that it needs contact with them to know itself. In ‘Body’ Brossard says that the body can “slip from I to we, from us to them when we talk of freedom and the future,” but also that the body cares about its “singularity and intimacy” (6). Later, in “Elsewhere,” the title rephrases this: “I like to say we and look elsewhere” (60).

The necessity for another person is examined in the “Sixth Bend,” which presents “je thème [...] le je t’aime lesbien” [“I theme [...] the lesbian I love you”] as forming a skin of language that encompasses writer, reader and text in a single body, but also the speaking, the sounds that pleasure makes “quand il longe un énoncé” (16) [“as it rubs up against a speaking” (32)], to find the difference among people pleasurable. The “Seventh Bend” offers lesbian speaking as “Épaules qui longent la nuit comme un absolu in the never ending process of hope” [“Shoulders that rub up against the night like an absolute in the never ending process of hope”]. “Breathing in rhetoric” becomes the lesbian speaking. “Breathe your silence, respira en tu memoria, impregnate rhetoric” becomes the strategy of articulating the lesbian body as she feels “ma langue glisser sur la chair tiède tendre du mot clitoris” [“my tongue slipping on the very tender flesh of the word clitoris”], and simultaneously “Je taille [...] la subjectivité de celle qui me ressemble avec sa bouche” (17) [“shaping the subjectivity of she whose mouth resembles mine” (33)]. The shared skin of articulation effects and affects the installation and the subject.

The “Eighth Bend” curiously slips into untranslat-
ed French, seemingly purposefully because the Spanish translation also retains the French, as it unfolds the phrase “des signifiants mystérieux au coin des lèvres” (18) [“mysterious signifiers in the curve of lips” (34)]. And reading becomes translation. Such a process of translation and the text the reader creates for herself suggest that one way of thinking about the process of articulation, the way images drift into ideas without our conscious or subjected awareness, the way values emerge in the stretching of words into touch of the other person, the way the apprehension of the enigma of self materialises, is to place them in the present, in the moment, saying it must be simultaneous, like rhetoric which provides us with the tools to act in ‘probably-the-best’ way in many situations, like rhetoric which does not pursue the truth (although it can describe it) but moral action. Work on immediate material rhetoric allows the writer-reader to “existe[r] dans la langue écrite parce que c’est là que je décide des pensées qui règlent les questions et les réponses que je donne à la réalité” (19) [“exist in written language because it is there that I decide the thoughts that settle the questions and answers I give to reality” (35)].

If most language is in myths and tears, representations and need from the not-yet-said, as the “Tenth Bend” suggests, the “Eleventh Bend” returns to lesbian space and a different kind of political rhetoric to that in the First. Here is a place on the archipelago that is not territory nor country, but in “des signifiants mystérieux aux coins des lèvres” [“the mysterious signifiers in the curve of her lips”], a “présence d’esprit” [“presence of spirit”]. This reading of the labyrinth has been an exploration of articulation at the same time as it is itself an articulation of that space, a space delineated for the writer in writing and words. An exploration full of danger, for in loosening the discourse of reality one may lose oneself, and so in preparation/as a precaution she first loved “longuement une femme qui comme moi s’était plongée dans beaucoup de livres, sans jamais avoir peur de se tremper dans le rêve et la réalité” (21) [“long and well a woman who, like myself, had dived into many books, without ever being afraid of drenching herself in dream and reality” (37)]. As Brossard notes in “Poetic Politics,” “Sooner or later the body of writing pays for its untamed desire of beauty and knowledge” (81).

The Body and Virtual Reality

The arc of thinking from Installations to Labyrinth builds complex but load-bearing architecture—which makes Baroque at Dawn and some subsequent remarks unusual. Baroque at Dawn problematises the concept of articulation in the moment, with its focus on presence, by writing about a technology, virtual reality, that seems to mimic what articulation does. The photographer Irène Mage has recently turned away from camera photography to the speed and surface of computer-
puter technology as a possible analogue for the fiction created by writing. It constructs a present that puts Cybil Noland, the author of the novel being written about, into "double time", where writing becomes "une volonté de surface où le sens ne risquait pas de faire mal" (176) ["a desire to surf on words, eliminating risk of harm by meaning" (172)]. Later she is "possédée par une envie irrésistible de détails" ["overcome by an irresistible desire for details"] and "Les états d'âme, de rêve, de lucidité et de laisser râler se succédaients" (180-1) ["states of mind, of dream, lucidity and laissez-bellyache followed" (177)] that have her alternating reality and fiction 'hurting on' at speed. That night she dreams of the woman in Hyde Park who is quoting from Alice in Wonderland the same words that open "Only One Body for Comparison: Writing the In-Between." It is as if the enigma of self has disappeared, the absence of any other person has left Cybil Noland floating in a fiction that is impossible to distinguish from representation or materiality: fiction as virtual reality. The eyes are vulnerable to the new visual technologies, for the eye appears instantaneous, as opposed to rhetoric and the word which need time. The difference is time. Its availability. Silence, its marker.

In Baroque at Dawn the writer of the novel about Cybil Noland writing a novel cannot continue to write after that radical deformation of presence until, through translation, presence begins to make material sense once more. With someone else, here the transla-
tor in person, the material present can happen. The apparent immediacy of virtual reality erases the differences between the symbolic, the fictional and the material. But, like any technology, any human craft, it has its own rhetoric. The problem lies in the speed of its change and the effective impact it has on society before we can grasp and engage with that rhetoric, the knowledge it instantiates, the moral action it enables. Despite arguing that “Poetry is simultaneous, in the moment, present: prose dilutes tension, projects into temporal dimension, slows desire” (FA 319), Brossard also knows that all writing presupposes “deferral and delay and difference” (Auther 2). Much earlier, in Journal Intime, she says that writing slows down between each word, that she had to learn to see the whites coming “The white that one calls white spaces are in fact so filled with thoughts, with words, with sensations, with hesitations and with chances to be taken” (FA 342). And much later, she notes the importance of silence as material presence for writing, for silence, which takes place in slow time, “can activate the white on the page, the light that makes it tremble around intimacy” (“The Most Precious Things” 5). This last essay, given as a paper at the University of Calgary, is again subtitled to connect to the other human body: “The most precious things in the future will be water and silence And a human voice.”

I would argue that for many first time readers, reading Baroque at Dawn is like reading a text through which the images pass too swiftly, through which syntax hurters our body. It provokes a virtual reality of intense presence and vertiginous nausea, a necessarily relativist knowledge that may not even be knowing because we can only know that we know if another person offers context, and the self-focussed action that results can hardly be moral. This is partly because technically the writing is prose, and most western readers are schooled to consume prose swiftly, possibly so well-schooled in novelistic technique (from both book and film) that they are experts at this kind of reading and take too much for granted. Yet any carefully trained reader knows that reading, like writing, needs time. Re-reading, supportively, comparatively, even with other readers as I do in the classroom, and making differences, the text invites us into articulation. It sensitises me to points of touch that release energy into the material through work on the inédit, it integrates another language into my skin. The knowledge I recognise is shared, I learn to value the differences I have made in comparison, and any action I take is located in the detail of shared lives.

The final section of Baroque at Dawn “One Single Body for Comparison,” echoes a warning from “Le futur dark” [“The Dark Future”] that in art “la tentation est toujours grande de comparer à la réalité [...] de réassigner dans le réel la portée énigmatique de l’œuvre” (165) [“it’s always very tempting to draw a comparison with reality [...] to reassign the enigmatic
import of the work in our own conception of reality" (161). We have to train ourselves to use our "seul corps" ["single body"] to find "les mots nécessaires" ["the necessary words"] to "compare," to hold a "corps de mémoire pour inventer et progresser vers le silence" (219) ["body of memory for inventing and progressing toward silence" (215)]. Part of this training, as the criticism explores and the book displays, is training in the rhetoric of poetic: in stress, rhythm, syntax, sound, image, topic, theme. Part of the training is understanding the energy of the body: for example its skeleton, its elasticity, the effect of the vowels (231, 227) — those emotive sounds resounding without the muscular check of consonants through the body. And part of this training is learning to work the body with others. Here in Baroque at Dawn, the writer and translator are both looking for the "ailleurs du par ailleurs" ["other hand part of on the other hand"] not wanting to compromise "le sens du récit, la configuration des destins" (230) ["the meaning of the story, the configuration of destinies" (226)]. So that in conclusion the writer writes "Un seul corps pour composer avec la jeune lumière du jour et la lueur des mots dans les yeux de la traductrice" ["One single body to compound with the young light of day and the words shining in the translator’s eyes"], asking "Qu’allaons-nous chercher dans le silence d’autrui, les yeux alléchés par la proximité et les comparaisons qui font tourbillon de vaste moi? Qu’allaons-nous chercher là dans le réfléxe du rapprochement?"

(260) ["What are we to look for in the silence of others, with eyes enticed by proximity and whirligig comparisons day vastating us? What are we to look for in the very desire for comparisons and closeness?" (256)].

The body we measure reality by is a treasured enigma of self, but it is compounded and comparative when encompassed by the skin of language. Brossard’s own definition of energy is as a term she uses “to analyze those forces in the process of literary creation.” “Imagination goes through the skin the skin is energy” (EA 338), and as the vast permeable lung of articulation it breathes the material reality of the inédit into sound and resonance, into words, into installation, into fiction and yes, into representation. It makes it possible for the powerful to hear those erased from or marginal to power. Sprung by desire it is motivated by the material reality of the located body, a location created by the self and others working on the detail of lived lives: making differences through knowing and in the making learning to value, so that we may make moral actions.

This is how I feel when I read the novels with other people to compare. And this is how I feel now, having had the opportunity to write in detail through the vertiginous fear of the critical rhetoric. On reflection I would say that it was the process of engaging with both the texts and their translations that opened a way to breathe through the skin of language, find a bodily presence in the words, and make new material. Rather like the writer in Baroque at Dawn.
NICOLE BROSSARD

Notes
1. Many of Brossard's texts are interwoven. Hence, for example, 'Memory' is infused into 'Trajectory.' It has not been possible to indicate all double sources in this essay.
2. For bilingual editions cited in this essay page references are given simultaneously to French and English texts.
4. See She would be 109, 115, 129, but also concern with an isolated "I" 91.
5. See also "Fluid Arguments" 332 and "Auster" 7.

Works Cited
———. "The most precious things in the future will be water and silence and a human voice." 1999/2001. Presentation to Graduate Student conference, University of Western Ontario, and English Department, University of Alberta. From typescript provided by S. Rudy.

Works by Nicole Brossard

(Acronyms used in essays are shown in brackets, references are not given for the many books, journals and other periodicals in which pieces by Brossard have been anthologized, many shorter pieces are not included here: of particular importance are those that appeared regularly for many years in La Barre du Jour and La Nouvelle Barre du Jour, including the particularly important tradition of special issues on women and women’s writing inaugurated by Brossard in 1975.)

Poetry
L’écho rouge beau. Montréal: Estrel-Quinze, 1968. (EB)