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Having sex with capitalism: parodic in-citation in the prose poem sequence

Abstract:

In his *Spleen de Paris or Petits poèmes en prose* [*Little Prose Poems*] Baudelaire (1869) forges an instrument of supple and radical potential, declaring the prose poem a ‘dangerous’ hybrid, which he wills elastic enough and staccato enough, to register the flows, jolts and distractions for the *flâneur* in the increasingly industrialised Paris. Here, by the mid-19th century, plate glass and gas lighting enable conspicuous consumption. It is most strikingly the romantic-erotic and the relation between poet and *his delicious, execrable wife, his inescapable, pitiless Muse* (Baudelaire 1989: 177) that provides the nexus for radical questioning of the whole socio-political economy. Departing from Johnson’s *Défigurations* (1979) and using Irigaray’s (1984) hypothesis that the economy of sexual difference is the founding trope for the discursive and thus political economy of differences – of culture, ethnicity and class – this article first looks at the way Baudelaire activates the heterosexual relation as a site for social critique. It examines how Perec continues Baudelaire’s prose poetry experiment, offering, pre-May 1968, a revolutionary critique of desire by exploiting formal constraints to deconstruct still further the consumer subject of capitalism. It then investigates Brossard’s ‘hologrammatic’ challenge (1991) to patriarchal regimes of representation and the forms of desire they outlaw. Finally, it suggests how new work by Walwicz (2015) develops and displaces this radical inheritance.

Biographical note:

Marion May Campbell’s most recent book is *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality & Subversion* (Rodopi 2014). Along with many critical articles and essays, she has published five works of fiction, a cross-genre book, poetry and several works for theatre. Her *konkretion* (UWAP 2013) concerns the legacy of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, deploying parodic poetics to engage with the feminists Meinhof and Ensslin of the Red Army Faction. She is presently Associate Professor in Professional and Creative Writing at Deakin University where she belongs to the Parody Moves Research Group.

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Having any sex in the world is having to have sex with capitalism (Acker 1984: 125).

Introduction

Philosophers as various as Beattie, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Bergson (Morreall 2009: 10) have long recognised incongruity as an important component of the comic. Insofar as incongruity can act as a metatextual alert, through the manifest mismatch of elements – in terms of expectations arising from the semiotic codes at work¹ – it also serves to manifest the workings of parody (Rose 1979; Hutcheon 2000). In everyday life under advanced capitalism, parody might happen in an increasingly *dispersive* modality, with heteroglossia² operating in both pervasive and locally attenuated ways, because of the total reach of advertising and electronic media, but its subversive potential can still be magnified in literary practice through the stylistic jumpcut or the montage of discursive elements allied to the asyndeton.³ I will trace through the prose poem sequence from Baudelaire to more recent manifestations this dynamic, sliding scale of intertextual in-citation⁴ *becoming parodic*. It appears that even brief, discrete occurrences of stylistic montage can lift what otherwise would be pastiche⁵, allusion or citation, into the domain of forceful parody and subversion. As we argue in our foreword to this issue of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, 'the parodic paradigm at work is clearly one of absorption of foreign words and morphemes into [the ... text], adding complexity and depth to its very fabric.' It is the parodic operating within this heteroglossic weave in the prose poem that I will interrogate in works that arguably build on the *Baudelairian experiment* (Maclean 1986), focussing especially on how it might both entail a critique of capitalist consumption and of heteronormative relations.

By the mid-19th century Baudelaire is keenly alert to the frequency of jolting juxtapositions in contemporary life – as asyndetic eruptions before this flâneur's eye, as Benjamin and de Certeau have noted in meditations on the arcades or simply on walking city streets (Benjamin ctd in Lloyd 2002: #3; de Certeau 2006: 101).

At the same time as interrogating the propensity of this form to carry the charge, which led Mallarmé to call the prose poem the *critical poem* (Mallarmé 1945: 369)⁶, I will look at its staging of the heterosexual axis of desire for the capitalist interpellation of the consumer-subject. While it has always been in capitalism's interest to open up new markets, and extending the spectrum of recognised and legitimated sexualities does this, we can also argue in turn, that, as a concomitant effect, the hegemonic melding of capital with heteronormativity is also weakened. It is my hypothesis here that an effective critique of capitalism entails challenging the tropes whereby it targets desires and anxieties, and especially those lodged in hegemonic heterosexuality and its production of gendered performances.

Not my department: the Baudelairian prose poem

In *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* Richard Terdiman (1985: 136) considers the impact of mass newspaper circulation in Second Empire France and, in particular,

the metonymic drift of desire that newspapers, in concert with the new department stores, encourage and exploit. Both department store and newspaper unfold space in a deliberately captivating *disorder* so that desire encounters unexpected objects, in such a way that *I am never quite in my department*, desire always rendering me *borderline*, endlessly permeable to unexpected solicitations:

Just as the tolerance, then later the positive assertion of dispersion slowly increased in the world of the newspaper layout, so too it required some time before the attitude exemplified by Boucicault [one of the department store innovators] – a positive and manipulative intervention in the moment-to-moment experience of the clientele – would take form (Terdiman 1985: 137).

Here Terdiman looks at a lovely instance in Zola's analysis, characterised by Rosalind Williams as paradigmatic of the subject's interpellation under capitalism, whereby the young heroine of *Au bonheur des dames*, arriving in Paris from the provinces, finds to her shock, instead of the head of the mannequin, a price tag: so goes the drift –

Reification is capitalism's master trope. Here, in a grotesquely comic and revealing figure, reification takes the form of a radical reduction of *being* to *exchange value*. The price tag substituting for the mannequin's head (the anatomical part which most signifies representation of the human) becomes the metonym of the whole display; simultaneously the arrangement metaphorizes desire as money. This is the archetype of figural reduction and displacement, the modification of perceptual structures, which the discourses of emerging capitalism sought to naturalize for the new populations of the city, and which the latter had to learn to "read" in order to function in a world increasingly saturated by the commercial (1985: 136).

As both Terdiman (1986) and Monroe (1987) demonstrate, the progressive feelings of the irrelevance of dandified lyricism before the mass-circulation newspaper also create a desire to gain access to this terrain via the Trojan horse of prose. In its very hybridity and its citational and ironic re-workings from the lyric, the Baudelairean prose poem displays its own repressed, just as negation does: in manifestly *not being lyrical*, yet inscribing by in-citation what it is attacking, it magnifies its own hybridity. This kind of discomfiture arguably explains some of its unnerving, yet pleasurable force. And in its *disfiguring* work (Johnson 1987) it derives from the newspaper a certain gleeful will to metonymy. As Terdiman writes:

The bipolar pairing *prose/verse* had long figured a varied set of distinctions in the natural and esthetic worlds. In the prose poem the antinomic structure becomes more conscious of its capacity to express tensions within the social formation itself (1985: 264).

The project of *Petits poèmes en prose: le spleen de Paris*, posthumously published in 1867, could not have been more consciously articulated⁷ as a challenge to the culture of mass circulation of prose through newspapers like *La Presse*⁸ which, in the name of commerce, no longer carry strong political affiliation, their prose being embedded throughout with advertising. Rob Halpern encapsulates the stakes as follows:

Just as the poem's narrator affirms his new status as a commoner — “so here I am, just like you” — Baudelaire's new literary form, the *poème en prose*, affirms lyric's prosaic situation. By cross-dressing as common prose, modern poetry insinuates itself within the newly dominant system of commodity exchange where it finds a way to go on circulating. But this formal masquerade — challenging in advance Mallarmé's injunction that poetry exempt itself from all channels of circulation contaminated by journalistic reportage — like the poet's “incognito,” is dialectical insofar as it simultaneously betrays and preserves poetry's social mobility, allowing poet and poem alike to do strange commerce with the “foul acts” and “debauchery” that describe the most common economic behavior under modern capitalism — selling — which not even the most militant of poets could definitively defy in good faith. It's as if by avowing his inescapable rapport with such “foul acts,” and by working with that relationship as thematic and formal material, poetry might stand a chance under modernity. (Halpern 2009: 2)

As Barbara Johnson's analyses demonstrate (1978; 1987), the subject staged in these prose poems is radically opposed to that of their lyrical counterparts in *Les fleurs du mal*, with which it wills an overt and subversive dialogue⁹, magnifying the terms of address characterising the latter and undermining them.

Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and choppy enough to fit the soul's lyrical movements (Baudelaire cit Halpern 2009:1).

Here, in the prose poem, willed as *without rhythm and without rhyme*, prone to the constant interruptions and jolts of the urban social, ‘*on*’ [one] is often the pronoun subject; and if *je* / [I] is used, it immediately is thrown into intersubjective relay [*I-thou*]. Of *Parisian Spleen* Baudelaire writes that it has ‘no head nor tail ... at once head and tail alternately and reciprocally’ (Baudelaire cit Monroe 1987: 96) and often the prose poems drop the reader *in media res* into these orphaned narrative fragments whose larger context is unavailable, as with the chance encounters in the city:

[I] beg you to consider how admirably convenient this combination is for all of us, for you, for me, and for the reader. We can cut wherever we please, I my dreaming, you your manuscript, the reader his reading; for I do not keep the reader's restive mind hanging in suspense on the threads of an interminable and superfluous plot (Baudelaire cit Monroe 1987: 96).

‘L’invitation au voyage’/ ‘Invitation to the voyage’

From ‘L’invitation au voyage’ as lyrical poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal* to its prose poem counterpart, extraordinary transformations take place. While the prose poem likewise positions the loving couple more as fraternal-mystical than sexual, and certainly more as idle and passive consumers than as incestuous accomplices, the irony that is soothed away by lyricism in the verse comes savagely to the fore in the initially matter-of-fact, rather essayistic prose. The prose ‘Invitation to the voyage’ reveals the famous ‘*luxure, calme et volupté*’ / ‘luxury, calm, and sensual delight’ of the lyric, clearly to be won at the price of the raided East: all the still lives and

landscapes of the Netherlands will not smother this fact. The Netherlands as dream refuge is a still a *counter*, both kitchen bench and money-counter: the prose poem celebrates the liminal as translation of desire into *thing*, and, just a little bit behind the profusion of goods, which include a *cuisine both rich and stimulating*, we hear the counting of money:

On walls panelled in gleaming timber, or lined with rich and mellow leather, serene paintings live out their discreet lives, calm and deep **like** the souls of the artists who created them. The sunsets, which so lavishly colour the dining and drawing rooms, are filtered by gorgeous fabrics, or by those tall latticed windows, which the lead divides into myriad facets.

The furniture is massive, quaint and bizarre, fitted with locks and secrets like refined souls. The mirrors, metals, fabrics, silverware and ceramics play out for the eyes a mute and mysterious symphony; and from everything, from every corner, from the chinks in the drawers to the folds of the cloth, a singular perfume escapes, a *come back to me* from Sumatra, which is *like* the soul of the apartment.

A paradise on Earth, I promise you, where everything is sumptuous, clean and bright, *like* a clear conscience, *like* a superb kitchen array of pots and pans, *like* splendid silver- or gold- craft, *like* multicoloured gems, all the treasures of the world flow in, *as* they might for a hard-working man who deserves the world. A unique country, superior to others, *as* Art is to Nature, and where the latter is made over by dream, where it is corrected, embellished, recast (Baudelaire 1989: 78-9; emphasis added).

This tinkling of the cash register is sounded in the relay throughout the French of ‘*comme*’ / ‘like’, as pivot of the simile, keynote of metonymy, which underpins the principle of commerce, and, one could say, the prose that mediates it: the endless translatability of *this* into *that*, the trace of exchange value at work. Here we see also the radical force of metonymy, which not only *condenses context*, as Lyn Hejinian has compellingly suggested (2005: 149), but also the singularity of elements through which desire flows, and whose incongruity in juxtaposition signals parodic intent (Rose 1979; Hutcheon 2000). In the prose ‘Invitation’ it is this contamination of context through the metonymic, and through Hutcheon’s ‘ironic trans-contextualization’ (1994) that Baudelaire parodies the pretensions of innocent, loving retreat, and induces the reader retrospectively to recognise that even there, the lovers are uneasily couched in the lullaby of fraternal and paternal incest: ‘*Mon enfant, ma soeur*’ / ‘My child, my sister’ (Baudelaire 1975: 53)

Here Baudelaire evokes ever-retreating horizons before the limitless desires of the consuming West, which thereby contains the East, as Vermeer’s ‘Geographer’ (1669) surely does, between the points of his compass.¹⁰ But Baudelaire asserts magically, that all along the canals, rivers and oceans of their importation, it is the poet-lover’s invocation that is the true agent of transport, bearing back the treasures, locating the recovered ‘black tulip’ and the ‘allegorical blue dahlia’ in the beloved herself. Thus the prose poet short-circuits the hyperbolic endlessness of consumer goods, while showing, even in this symbolic full stop, its translatability into further substitution: the elusive *black tulip* is not, after all, the *blue dahlia*. A

still more hyperbolic crescendo is reached in the cornucopian enumeration in ‘The Eyes of the Poor’.

The eyes of the poor

The framing address of the ‘Eyes of the Poor’ shows clearly what is at stake:

So you want to know why I hate you today?

Perhaps this will be harder for you to understand than for me to explain, as I believe you are the most perfect example of female impermeability to be found anywhere (Baudelaire 1989: 110).

The intimate address (je-tu / I-thou), a generic convention of the love lyric, is immediately converted to negative modality: hatred, insensitivity (*thick skin*) and *impermeability* are straightaway foregrounded in this prose poem, together with the dumping into prosaic time (*today*) as the narrative is set in train. Here, corrupted by class division and its denial, heterosexual communion is in fact threatened with a blockage – *impermeability* – the responsibility for which is displaced onto the female. Baudelaire stages, as both spectator and spectacle (Maclean 1986), the poor stripped of home and community for the sake of a ‘rationalised’ Paris; First he establishes the scenography:

That evening, as you were rather tired, you wanted us to sit on the terrace of a newly built boulevard which was still littered with rubble but already making a lavish display of uncompleted splendours (Baudelaire 1989: 111).

This terrace fronting rubble-edged boulevard signals the progress towards a militaristically governable Paris that Haussmann’s mid-to-late 19th century town planning facilitates, through the demolition of popular pockets in the mediaeval maze, which might foster potential insurrection. The backdrop to this action, as Baudelaire presents it at the outset through *the eyes of the poor*, invokes the impossible accumulation of goods and gods, all at the service of appetite. It is conspicuous consumption infinitised as its own advertisement by reproduction through concerted tricks of mirror and lighting:

The café glittered all over with lights. The new gas-jets cast their incandescent novelty all around, brightening the whiteness of the walls, the dazzling planes of a multitude of mirrors, the gilt of all the mouldings and cornices, the rosy-cheeked pageboys drawn along by harnessed dogs, the ladies laughing at the falcons perched upon their wrists, the nymphs and goddesses balancing baskets of fruit and pâtés and game on their heads, the Hebes and Ganymedes offering little cups of Bavarian cream or multicoloured pyramids of ices – all history and mythology were exploited in the service of gluttony (Baudelaire 1989: 111).

Just like the near-contemporary parody in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (2008) of potboiler romance illustrations, which, with their indiscriminate and incongruous montage of elements, ground Emma Bovary’s subjectivity, this list indifferently juxtaposes the real and the mythic. If this enumeration does service to the ‘democratic’ republic of bourgeois appetite, all featured items share the same

ontological status in this regime of conspicuous consumption. All is at the *service* of gluttony – a key word in the text – whether servants to the gods, like Ganymedes, Hebes, or indentured to the human as rosy-cheeked pageboys, falcons and sled dogs. All bear fruits, pâtés and game, from all points of the compass to *serve* the café's clientele. As in 'Invitation to the voyage', it is the categorical heterogeneity of the inventoried items that signals the promiscuity of appetite: the whole planet, along with its mythic productions, is enlisted to cater to the appetites of capitalist subjects. For both Baudelaire and Flaubert the metonymic relation of the mythic and the material is a *tell-tale* diet: *one eats myth* in the Barthesian sense (Barthes 1970). Myth as depoliticised speech or ideology represents 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence' (Althusser 1971: 109). It grounds subjectivity, fuels desire, and the body consumes it as food. The manifest incongruity of mythic and material entities, of contemporary and archaic allegorical modes of representation¹¹, makes us aware that consumption itself is myth literally *incorporated*.

So, the reader *watches* the Baudelairian cipher *watch* his beloved and loathed companion *watch* a poor man and his hunger-weak children *watch* the gas-lit café frequenters consume before this mural of cornucopian excess. The I-persona and his companion, at her instigation, because she is *tired* from a day of leisure, occupy what is, as in 'Invitation to the Voyage' a liminal zone, the terrace. Through their money she, as scapegoat for his consumer complicity, can command him to command the headwaiter as ersatz cop to have the poor removed. The poet can turn this currency into the counter-discourse of the poem, but only as a trace of his own complicity; his very language draws on the same semiotics of cornucopia as enticement and barred refusal. As can be seen in the passage cited above, the very syntagmatic accumulation of items makes the sentence as if burst from its seams. It does so with such bulimic excess, that one cannot help, at least in the French tradition, think of Rabelais' itemisation of Gargantua's hyperbolic feasting, and the comparison reads here like an indictment of decadence – the egregious excess remains in display, rather than in pleasurable consumption. It is as if, with the disgusted companion's request to have the poor removed, the I-persona is also disabled in desire and he can only disgorge, in this parody of the menu rendered through bulimic syntax¹² the excess, the *trop-plein* on display.

The spectacular magnification of the categorical mix in the inventory makes us aware that no real food is consumed *beyond* the representation: and towards the end of the poem, the forest of half-empty bottles and glasses on the table of the I-persona and companion testifies to *appetite* in excess of needs. In fact, all the semiotics at the *service* of appetite, all the urban planning at the *service* of regulated urban subjects, seem only to have cleared this theatrical space in which the poor watch the rich – not so much *eating*, but displaying their *eating-potential*. In fact, as noted from the beginning, the sight of the ogling poor *disgusts* the poet's companion, not simply disabling the taste for consumption but *reversing* it¹³.

Not only was I moved by that family of eyes, but I felt a little ashamed of our array of glasses and decanters, all so much bigger than our thirst. I was turning my eyes towards yours, my dear, to read *my* thoughts in them; I was plunging into your

beautiful strangely gentle eyes, your emerald eyes, full of caprice, and the inspirations of the Moon, when you remarked, ‘I just can’t stand those people with their eyes as wide as gates. Could you not ask the head waiter to see them off?’ (Baudelaire 1996: 110-11).

Most radically, the poem sets this infinitisation of negated appetite inside the ‘bookends’ of the amorous discourse, thus corrupting its axis. It remobilises the tropes of erotic drowning in the beloved familiar to the reader of *Les fleurs du mal*, the traditional patriarchal clustering of traits around the lunar feminine (*gentle; caprice; inspirations of the Moon*) and, rhetorically at least, inscribes the *narcissisme à deux* celebrated by romantic poetry (*to read my thoughts in them*). The poem, as we’ve seen, opens with a declaration of hatred – at least *today* (Baudelaire 1989: 111) and closes with the note of perplexed incomprehensibility of the other, while resuming the now-contaminated lover’s discourse:

So you see, how hard it is to understand one another, my dear angel,

How incommunicable our thoughts are, even between those who love each other (Baudelaire 1996: 113).

So here, bringing back inside the prose poem the conventional address of the love lyric and subjecting it to subversive, parodic rancour, Baudelaire plays out *difference* in what might be an endless *mise en abyme*. Like a recursive e-worm, extreme difference of economic buying power corrupts the symbolic system throughout. Baudelaire stages sarcastically the axis of lyrical (‘je-tu’/ ‘I-thou’) address by dis-playing it as viral host of the egregious inequality perpetuated by capitalist rapacity. *The eyes of the poor* literally disrupt the soft, smooth consumption of the heterosexual couple. Calling for the poor, as reminder of economic oppression, to be banished from sight, the beloved companion cannot repress it: *Could you not ask the head waiter to see them off?* Itself a disgusting spectacle, the proletarian gaze is progressively amplified through the I-persona’s critical look at the spectacle in which he is an actor, and which has found perverse discharge in the opening burst of hatred for his companion.

Marie Maclean (1986) has persuasively demonstrated that for Baudelaire contemporary Paris is indeed a theatre of looks, whereby desire both circulates and is corrupted by the gaze of the destitute Other. This is arguably the case, even when the poor are not staged as such¹⁴, as in ‘Le galant tireur’ / ‘The Gallant Marksman’ (Baudelaire 1989: 176-77), where poetic address is caught up in the mortal games played out between the sexes (Johnson 1979; 1987) but also overtly in the *mise en scène* of ‘Le joujou du pauvre’ / ‘Plaything of the Poor’ (Baudelaire 1989: 82-5), in which potential revolutionary energy is intimated in the reversal of desire, as a current running from behind the gilded gate of rich inheritance to the sleek live rat of the poor boy (Johnson 1979; Terdiman 1985; Monroe 1986; Oliver Mills 2012).

To leap nearly a century ahead, we see the gaze of the Other in the post-WWII capitalist boom over-determining desiring subjectivity. It is to Perec’s *Les choses* [*Things*] that I now turn to enquire into the effectiveness of critique delivered in this extended prose poetic comedy of heterosexual consumption. While Irigaray (1984) contests that there are only two sexes, her important hypothesis is that the

economy of sexual difference is the founding trope for the discursive and thus political economy of differences – of culture, ethnicity and class. It is at least useful heuristically to speculate on the possible effects of a post-heterosexual fix¹⁵ along with a post-human fix in terms of the preparation of a revolutionary subjectivity. The cosiness of the heterosexual couple as captivated for advertising myths in Barthes' sense is the infinitely soft target of Perec's satire in *Les Choses / Things* (Perec 1967[1965]).

Perec's consuming subjects

As an early member of OLIPOU¹⁶, Perec adopts here the constraints of montage, which, like other paratactic, de-hierarchising devices deployed in subversive poetics (Campbell 2013), offers the reader room for manoeuvre, and thus, in principle, as no passive textual consumer. Alternating in the conditional voice, the imperfect and the future, but *not the present indicative*, the text projects, six years after the appearance in France of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) the 'characters'' desire as produced by the interpellations of mythic formations, in 'tradition' and in advertising, thus disallowing them to become subjects *beyond the market*. At times considered more of an imaginative sociological tract or a *mise en scene* of one, than a novel, Perec's text stages Jérôme and Sylvie foremost as subjects of consumption of cultural myth in the form of consumer goods and leisure pursuits; Perec himself says, 'they don't have any psychology; they don't have any existence'. The author passes no judgement and, as Séguy argues (2010:5), Perec's critique, as in Baudelaire's 'The eyes of the poor', is more in the excessive pile-up of detail in terms of things possessed and coveted, than in any authorial judgment. Performative in this way, it catches the reader in anticipated consumer breathlessness also. I would argue that this activates as model or hypotext (Genette 1982) the syntax of Baudelaire's take on reified desire, and here interiority has been entirely replaced by the amplified furnishings of the Other's desire

This would be the living room, about seven metres long, three in breadth. To the left, in a sort of alcove, a big divan in mellowed black leather would be flanked by two bookshelves in pale wild cherry and in which the books would be leaning every which way. Above the divan, a navigator's map would occupy an entire panel. Beyond, a small low table, and under a silk prayer mat, attached to the wall by three fat-headed copper tacks, matching the leather wallpaper, another divan, perpendicular to the first, covered in light brown velvet, would lead to a tallboy in dark red lacquer, equipped with three shelves, which would display various knick-knacks: agates and stone eggs, snuff-boxes, sweet boxes, jade ashtrays, a mother of pearl shell, a silver fob watch, a cut-glass vessel, a crystal pyramid, a miniature in an oval frame (Perec 1965 7-8; all translations mine).

This ironic paean to consumerism *à deux* of the second half of the 20th Century, in which the joint desire for *the thing* occupies the place of heterosexual romance written by capitalism, is strangely nostalgic for the always-already elusive pleasures of possession. However, as Perec points out in his interview with (Séguy 2010), the same, apparently celebratory gesture of descriptive pile-up mocks the

will to infinite consumption of the capitalist machine. He jokes that, were his pseudo-characters Sylvie and Jérôme to get their dream apartment, it would be so cluttered that they wouldn't be able to move in it. Like Baudelaire's café mural, it really only provides living space as fantasy, along with its implied values and lifestyle. Already, as in Baudelaire's taste for the *fâné* (Richard 1955), the couple's sustained daydream is to acquire the pre-faded to encode their cultural capital in terms of 'higher' distinction: a certain patina and wear-and-tear, the 'faded' as built-in security against the charge of *nouveau-riche*.

The sequence of scenes – some in conditional, in the imperfect, and in the future, rather than the present indicative – projects the ventriloquised aspirations of a young generation over six years from twenty-four to thirty. Pulsing in wave after wave of anticipation, often recalling the cumulus of details of 'Invitation to the voyage' and 'The eyes of the poor', the couple's desires are fed by myths (in Barthes' sense) amplified by advertising and lifestyle journalism and always breaking on the promised object and quickly extinguished by realisation of the gap between anticipation and consumption. Whether through student fantasies of the St Germain des Prés lifestyle, of rural escapes, of rites-of-passage work experience in exotic locations, such as the recently independent Tunisia, the dream life, as in Baudelaire's 'Invitation to the voyage', is always in another time and place. The dream only survives as ghostly, in reminiscence, in ironic fondness for the fade-out *à deux* that the shared past comes to be.

If Sylvie and Jérôme accumulate something like cultural capital, it's this nest egg of nostalgia. The text closes on the couple's train ride to take up, logically enough, the direction of an advertising agency in Bordeaux: it is cast in the affirmative future tense, and thereby forecloses *on* the future. They will have their Chesterfield and armchairs of mellowed leather and, en route, they will wander to the train dining room and will be glad of their pre-lunch whiskey; they will sit, like Lacan's boy and girl in the railway compartment (1986), masculine opposite feminine, against the dining car window, smiling the complicit smile of anticipatory consumption, enjoying the weight of the massive dining car cutlery in their hands, and the promise of the beautifully starched linen, but the meal *which will be served to them will be frankly insipid* (Perec 1965: 130).

It is perhaps the double-voicedness of the text, its heteroglossic consonance with Baudelaire's critique of consumption in particular, which lends both acuity and nostalgic poignancy to the parody of advertising as hegemonic infiltration of subjectivity and rewriting of desire. It is doubly ironic that 'Baudelaire' as signifier of auratic erosion (Halpern 2009) should pervade with its halo effect this epic of disappointed consumer desire. The resulting attenuation of parody's acerbic potential inveigles the reader into something like wistfully amused co-dependency. Whether or not this is effective as an awakening of an historical and 'revolutionary' consciousness in the Benjaminian sense (see Buck-Morss 2006: 41) is a question more difficult to answer.

While *Les choses / Things* uses the collective to counter the *singular subject* of the bourgeois novel of education or *Bildungsroman*, and although it is delightfully

ironic from the first page to the last, with its cumulative waves of desire, disappointment and pre-written nostalgia, it risks becoming a smooth rhetorical medication for its own disappointed generation. While there is a multitude of honeyed voices seducing subjects to consume, to consolidate, and exalt their union, the voices suffer perhaps insufficient clashing to break the reader from their spell. It is an in-citation whose energy is in part defused by a certain rock-a-bye rhythm, which folds back rather too seamlessly into the generation's narcissistic gratification. *Les choses / Things* was a huge hit and sold out very quickly its first print-runs, despite its Marxist epilogue about the means needing to be true for the end to be one of authenticity.

Nicole Brossard's *Picture theory: fiction foils illysybillity*

More concertedly resistant to commodification in the sense of pervasive heteroglossic interruption is Canadian poet Nicole Brossard's 1986 work *Picture Theory*, jestingly billed as 'novel', but in fact an open-ended poetic sequence in which free verse lyric prose poem are in dialogue. The epistemological and poetic quest for the integration of lesbian experience in language and the trajectory of amorous desire as integrative in terms of community work together here. Brossard plays with the motifs of standpoint in terms of light's particular and wave behaviour and the apparent position in space of objects to ironise and reappropriate the gaze from phallogocentric regimes of looking, sending it in relay from woman to woman, and endlessly diffracting it as lesbian. Here, we can find strong dialogue with the work of Monique Wittig¹⁷ who in turn learned from innovators like Nathalie Sarraute, or OULIPO experimenters such as Perec, how formal constraints can deliver political critique, in alliance with parodic practice at the stylistic level and repurposing on the generic front.

Although spatial constraints inhibit here an intensive tracking of the implications of this more diffuse and atomised mode of parodic practice, it is arguably partly the friction of prose poetry and lineated poetry that performs so effectively the interruption of the spaces of patriarchal culture in this work. Here myriad, so-called non-places (Augé 1995) like hotel lobbies, highways and aeroplane interiors appear as flashes of metonymic compression (Hejinian 2005) where *a man walks like a man*¹⁸ and women desire each other. In the dual processes of differentiation and integration Brossard mobilises motifs from quantum theory and the hologrammatic principle of string theory, as well as from differential calculus. Here the intense and manifest intertextual traffic privileges in particular two key modernist texts, which Brossard invokes as *nightwriting*: Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, in-citing through them a poetics celebrating a coming-to-light with the coming-to-writing (Cixous, Gagnon and Leclerc 1977). In place of any pretence at representation, Brossard rehearses a radical textual politics of performance, not simply of gender and sexuality (Butler 2004; Butler 1990), but in the Kristevan sense of creating a scene for lesbian *subjects-in-process* (Kristeva 1974). The work is a concatenation of poems, which gains by gesturing towards narrative and constantly frustrating it, making the reader aware that the horizon of

expectations (Jauss cit Belsey 2002: 30), in terms of mimesis and diegesis, is always already compromised in terms of space-time relations under patriarchy. 'Fiction then foils illysybility [sic] in the sense that it always insinuates something more which forces you to imagine, to double. To come back to it again' (Brossard 1991: 28). This translingual pun *illysybility* is also a metapoetic *portmanteau* in Humpty Dumpty's sense: 'You see it's like a portmantea – there are two meanings packed up into one word' (Carroll 1871: ch 6). For 'fiction', I read the prose poem sequences of *Picture theory*, which, in their relation to the verse, make polysemically generative what is *illisible* or illegible, insinuated in Sibylic whisperings between the syllables – in implication.

'From instinct and from memory, I try to reconstruct nothing' (Brossard 1991:15): the impossibility of reproduction *is* the fertile fold in which this writing takes productive place. Here the sexual body and the textual *m'urge* (sic), in a sexual and textual becoming, text and sex being mutually enmeshed: desire deconstructs as it traverses and is fuelled by the already written. Bilingualism or, in this case, polyglot in-citational practice, is where amorous tongues c/leave. Texts and languages collide and diffract in stochastic productivity. Here, with Joycean translingual puns like *illysybility* and *tu m'urges*, the fissures of difference are celebrated just as the gaps between bodies breed desire: a diacritical mark, a slash or hyphen is, as Derrida points out (1980), both a trait of belonging and a separation. While utopian arrival is projected, as with Wittig (1968), it is itself posited as a process, not as an end, since the narrative has no *telos* and, even at its 'end', begins again, from 'Picture theory' to 'Hologram' (Brossard 1991: 153-62).

Ania Walwicz's 'Horse'

On another front, and most strikingly so in the contemporary Australian scene, is the prose poetry production of Ania Walwicz. Ever since the 1980 appearance of her first book, symptomatically entitled *writing* for its foregrounding of textual productivity, of generic repurposing, her experimental prose poetry output has staked a claim for carnevalesque critique and resistance in defiance of the marketplace of consumable story. In this new work 'Horse', extracted in this issue (see, Walwicz 'EAT') the subject-in-process pushes consumption to its bulimic and parodic limits in protest against imperial male violence incarnated in a tsar figure, both father and rapist. To do this Walwicz ventriloquises myriad voices and texts, and this belly-talk from the fathers makes her grow enormously fat, but also in bulimic gush she can externalise and parody the voices of those who have raped, maimed and taunted:

[T]hrough metaphors of the fairytale, through other people's words and deeds, I infer, I suggest, I twist and turn. I eat other people's words. This is my sweet now. I like this. I taste this. Yum (2015).

Her alter-ego, her donor, the eponymous hump-backed horse *konik garbusek*, born of the Polish fairytale, takes her on a ride towards emergence in a process of bulimic consumption reversing that of the Baudelairian Muse: finally, through the transtextual and transgeneric steppes, the lower case *ania* can triumphantly claim a

place in the symbolic order, as *Ania*, a moment analogous to Brossard's calculus-derived trope of *integration*, which suggests taking language from the verbal *curse*, foreclosing on women's desire into a *curve* (Brossard 1991) of becoming.

'Horse' not only jubilates in the wild mixture of mythic and material food we have seen in Baudelaire; Rabelaisian laughter and the paratactic antics of a Gertrude Stein run riot in an emetic emergence from the trauma of predatory patriarchal violence. As with Brossard, this rebel heterogeneity is manifest in a willed generic hybridity: here jostle registers and citations of cultural and literary theory, psychoanalysis, high literature, cinema, and pop music, of autofiction and current affair. Deployed in the guise of fictocriticism, Walwicz's prose poetry hosts diffractive parodies, thus continuing the potential announced by Mallarmé: of *the critical poem*.

In guise of conclusion

How does the prose poem sequence offer, through its parodic take on capitalist interpellations of the consuming subject and its alignments with heterosexual desire, the potential for radical semiosis? Some answers might be, as suggested here, because it can register other forms without *becoming* them; because it is endlessly cannibalistic, just like the novel as theorised by Bakhtin (1981); indeed, even building an extended work on the prose poem as unit, as in *Little Poems in Prose, Things, Picture theory* or 'Horse', the writer can eschew the *telos* of aesthetic integration, the arrest into product and, in most cases, the return to exchange value. With the prose poem, and in these works which further the radical Baudelairean tradition, there is no pretention to resolution: all is subject to restless reconfiguration. Foregrounded are the matrices of textual productivity: acerbically satirical in Baudelaire, wryly ironic with Perec, in post-quantum uncertainty, swinging between particular and wave-like behaviour, from prose poetry to verse with Brossard, and into a Rabelaisian encyclopaedic ride of the subject-in-process and -on-trial with Walwicz – through which all is endlessly mutable, opening out in the jubilation of semiotic productivity and laughter. Here is an open semiotic performance defying the arrest of story into a packaged ending, and displaying the imbrication of heterosexual romance in the economy of exchange. While the metapoetics inscribed through the heteroglossic weave of parody in work like Brossard's and Walwicz's makes them potent as critiques, the performative role demanded of the reader might entrench their minority status, thus further fuelling the resistance of the converted. On this horizon, Kafka's bleak humour resonates: 'Oh [there is] there is plenty of hope – an infinite amount of hope – but not for us' (1968).

Endotes

1. Semiotic codes extend to all aspects of life; thus, in Baudelaire's Paris the juxtaposition of the dandy and the ragpicker (Benjamin cit 2002: 3.) is underpinned by socially coded expectations that 'clash': the material indices of extreme poverty with those of dandified, leisurely bohemia.

2. Heteroglossia, or, as Bakhtin's Russian *xaznoxecie* etymologically invokes, 'different speech-ness' (1986: 263). He refers to the 'dialogized heteroglossia' (273) 'in which is [sic] embodied the centrifugal forces in language'. The novel, Bakhtin argues, is *par excellence* the genre that stages the heteroglossic as the social struggle within language.
3. By *asyndeton* I mean the juxtaposition of syntactic elements without connectives or conjunctions, for example: 'The dandy, the ragpicker – the scandal of their juxtaposition'. The asyndeton or the syntactic jumpcut is characteristic of much avant-garde writing (Campbell 2013: 82, 285).
4. For the purpose of this paper I use the terms in-citation for text and repurposing [*détournement*] (Debord 1967) for genre to look at the slide that that the intertextual takes towards greater disruptive purchase through parodic laughter, whether complicit with the hypotext or resistant to it.
5. By *pastiche*, I understand stylistic imitation, not necessarily in the composite 'hotchpotch' the etymological antecedent pasticcio suggests (see, Aron 2008: 7).
6. For Mallarmé, the radicalisation of what became a virtually scenographic *mise en page* was to be integral to tap the critical force of the 'fold'; this is the 'total expansion of the letter' to which the prose poem or *poème critique* was tending in his hand (see, Murat).
7. In the prefaces and the correspondence to his prospective editor at *La Presse* la Houssaye, to whom he dedicates the collection of fifty prose poems. (See Baudelaire 1975: 275-76; Baudelaire cit Halpern 2009: 3).
8. Its circulation is 38,000 by 1863, a year after it publishes Baudelaire's first prose poems (see Terdiman 1986: 129-30). Forty of the poems were previously published in the mass circulation *La Presse* or *Le Figaro* and some in La Houssaye's own literary journal, *L'artiste*. Terdiman argues that the Baudelairean enterprise is very much borne of the mass newspaper in using the poem in guise of block of prose as a Trojan horse (see Wittig 1992: 68-75).
9. This is very much the thesis of Barbara Johnson's baroquely brilliant deconstructive analysis in *Défigurations* (1979) a study translated in 'Disfiguring poetic language' (Johnson 1987).
10. Both these prose poems are themselves ekphrastic adumbrations; one on the commercial mural as degraded allegory; the other of the Dutch landscape and interior, very possibly of Vermeer and Ruysdael, etc. This traffic in genres is endlessly enabled by the prose poem's citational capacity, and in part explains its subversive plasticity.
11. Littré attests that *dégoûter* (disgust) means *ôter l'appétit* since the 15th century at least, with the accompanying figurative application of inspiring general distaste for, to take away the desire to do something (see *Dictionnaire Littré*).
12. Gluttony personified, albeit disguised in lower case.
13. This concept of bulimic syntax owes not a little to Marie Maclean's analysis of Violette Leduc's style (1993: 167-74).
14. As can be seen with 'Le galant tireur' / 'The Gallant Marksman', in the name of heterosexual amusement, the Muse loses her capital, her head; she is a-mused. As Barbara Johnson shows in her fascinating deconstruction (1979, 1987), since the poet has her to thank for his blind marksmanship, he is thereby disavowing but not avoiding his own castration.
15. I am thinking of Stephen Heath's *The Sexual Fix* (1982).
16. OULIPO, an acronym for *Ouvoir de littérature potentielle* [Workshop of Potential Literature], was founded by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lyonnais in Paris in 1960 as a sub-committee of the Collège de Pataphysique and promoted writing with enabling constraints. A key rule was for the text to refer to this constraint; i.e. for reflexivity within the performance of the constraint. See James regarding the productive friction between constraint and inventiveness in OULIPO practices (2006).

17. See my analysis of the intertextual play at the service of lesbian desire in Wittig's *L'opoponax* and in *Le corps lesbien* (Campbell 2013: 15-41) and, for a sustained analysis of the prose poem sequence *Le corps lesbien / The Lesbian Body* in terms of subversion (Campbell 2014: 76-110).
18. By this tautological simile 'a man walks like a man' Brossard captures the whole Butlerian sex as performance; one performs 'man' as one performs 'masculine'.

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