Aussi / Or

Un Coup de dés and Mistranslation in the Antipodes
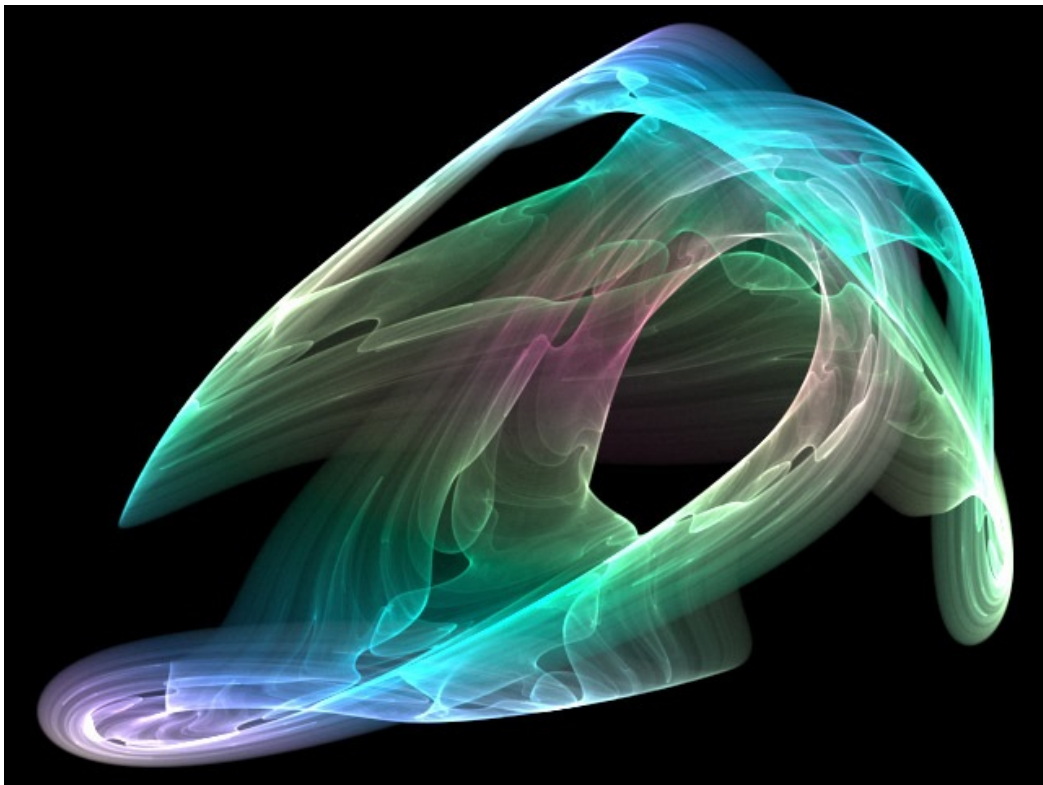

Fig. 1: Lorenz Attractor, *Chaoscope*, 2009.

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Abstract

"Shipwrecked on the shoals of contingency", Australian poetry is haunted by Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de Dés*. Its publication in *Cosmopolis* in Paris in 1897 struck a nerve or, rather, a vessel within Australian poetry bloodlines, starting with Christopher Brennan. *Un Coup de dés* was the score that inspired him to compose "Musicopoematographoscope", also in 1897, a large handwritten *mimique* manuscript, or pastiche, that transposed the more extreme aesthetics of an *avant-garde* French Symbolism into the Australian poetic psyche. Now well into the twenty-first century, *Un Coup de dés* is still a blueprint for experimentation in Australian poetry, spawning a number of versions, two of which are homophonic mistranslations—"A Fluke" by Chris Edwards and "Desmond's Coupé" by John Tranter—both published in 2006, and both revelling/rebelling in the abject, and in "errors and wrecks". This essay/assay provides a comparative reading of these homophonic bedfellows, traces their relation(ship)s to their antecedents, to various theories of translation and punning, and begins an enquiry into the significant influence of Mallarmé's great "vessel" on Australian poetry and poetics.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Aussi/Or: *Un Coup de dés* and Mistranslation in the Antipodes:

List of Illustrations

I

aussi

The French adverb *aussi* means "also", "in addition", "as well", and "too". It is also used as a comparative, as in "as", as an exclamatory "so", and also at the beginning of sentences as a "therefore", or "consequently". Its English homonym is "Aussie", of course. And its meaning of "too", T double-O, might fancifully be taken for the English number "two", its double, or even *tu* = you.

or

The French noun *or* is two different words with two different Latin origins. One, from Latin *aurum* (and popularly *orum*), is a noun meaning "gold" (with adjective, "golden"); the other, from Latin *hora*, is a conjunction meaning "now", "but", "in fact", "as it happens" and, more rarely, "thus" or "therefore". Its doublet is *heure* = "hour".[1] In English heraldry, "or" also means gold. The English homonym for *or* is obviously "or", that infinitely useful word that links alternatives, but we also have "ore", "awe", "oar", and "aw". From Middle English, "or" is a reduced form of the obsolete conjunction *other* (which superceded Old English *oththe*). "Or" can also be found as a suffix in English nouns denoting a person or thing with agency: "escalator", "resistor", or "conductor".[2]

aussi

Un Coup de dés by Stephane Mallarmé, a gnomic poem of the late nineteenth century, full of esoteric symbolism and disjointed syntax, that broke with convention, exploding from the left margin across the page, and across the gutters of eleven double-page spreads, in scattered fragments—like *disjecta membra*—visual, musical, collage-like,

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[1] A. Brachet, *An Etymological Dictionary of the French Language*, trans. G. W. Kitchin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1873).

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

and typographically diverse, looks like many things on the page: rocks emerging from the white foam of the sea; ash on the table to be swished about by some diviner; a mobile, hung across a child's crib; threads or strings blown in the wind; constellations in the night sky[3]; it could even be seen as a representation of Brownian Motion.

or

Pedesis (from Greek: πήδησις /pɛ̆ːdɛːsis/ "leaping"), which is the random motion of particles suspended in a fluid (a liquid or a gas) resulting from their collision with the quick atoms or molecules in the gas or liquid. The term "Brownian motion" can also refer to the mathematical model used to describe such random movements, which is often called a particle theory.[4]
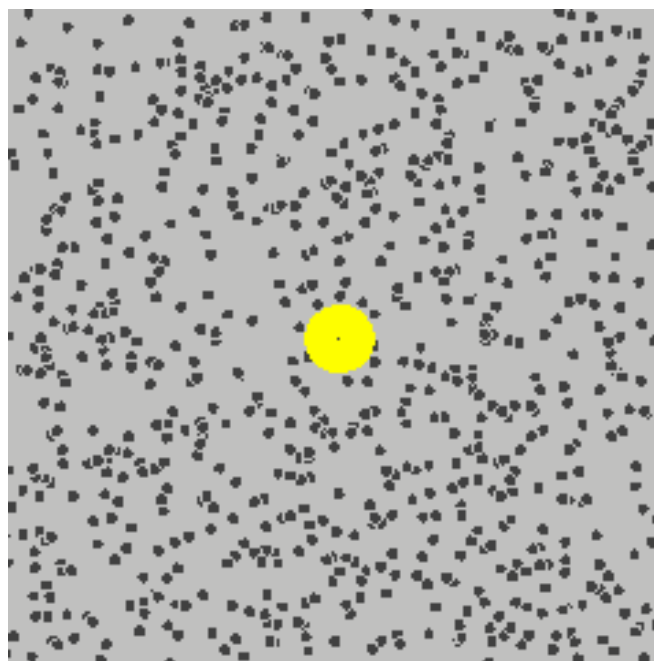
Fig. 2: Brownian Motion, gif, *Wikipedia*.[5]

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[3] There are two representations of the "Big Dipper" (U.S.) or "The Plough" (U.K.) in the poem's fragments. The Big Dipper is an asterism that represents the seven brightest stars of the northern hemisphere constellation *Ursa Major*.

[4] Albert Einstein, *Investigations on the Theory of the Brownian Movement*, trans. A. D. Cowper, 1926 (Mineola: Dover, 1956), http://users.physik.fu-berlin.de/~kleinert/files/eins_brownian.pdf.

[5] For active gif, see: *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownian_motion.

or

The atomic law of the clinamen—the mimimal swerve of an atom in laminar flow. Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery, evoking Lucretius' use of the clinamen in literature, compare the movement of atoms to the movement of letters: "Atoms … are to bodies what letters are to words: heterogeneous, deviant, and combinatory". Citing Paul Valéry, who saw the words in *Un Coup de dés* as "atoms of time that serve as the germs of infinite consequences lasting through psychological centuries", Rasula and McCaffery then note:

> The spaciousness evoked here is a reminder that, in Epicurean cosmology, the contextual prerequisite of atoms is a void. We might say by analogy that void is to atoms what space and *différence* are to letters. Mallarmé's spacing in *Un Coup de dés* solicits—as integral to the experience and the eventual dice-throw of the poem—the backing of that void (the ground of emergent figures) through which the lettristic swerves disseminate.[6]

aussi

Its full title, *UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD* ("A THROW OF THE DICE WILL [N]EVER ABOLISH CHANCE")[7]—perhaps a serious interpretation of probability—describes the event of the poem and, like dice, its words bounce or leap through the double-page spreads[8] in corresponding large and capitalised typeface: *UN COUP DES*

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[6] Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery, eds., *Imagining Language: An Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 532–3.

[7] I have translated *JAMAIS* as "[N]EVER" to preserve both possible meanings of *jamais*, "never" and "ever".

[8] "Page openings" is the common bibliographical term, but for the purposes of this essay I will use Chris Edwards' "double-page spreads", or "double spreads". He employs the term "double-page spread" to describe Mallarmé's "unit of composition" in *Un Coup de dés*. See Chris Edwards, "Double Talk" (paper presented at the Sydney Poetry Seminar on "Poetry and Authenticity", May 20–21, 2005), *Poetry International Web* (Nov 1, 2006), http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/cou_article/item/7929/Double-Talk/en.

DÉS ("A THROW OF THE DICE") appears alone as a title page, *JAMAIS* ("WILL [N]EVER") appears on the following spread with a few fragments of text below it, *N'ABOLIRA* (ABOLISH) three spreads later with much more surrounding text, while *LE HASARD* ("CHANCE") rounds out the phrase a further four spreads on, marooned in the most chaotic double spread of the book (in terms of the number and variety of particles on the page), two spreads from the end. Every fragment of the poem that falls around this title, thrown across the sea of pages in variously sized typeface, switching between roman, italic and capital letters, unravels and overlays in what Alain Badiou describes as "a stupefying series of metaphorical translations around the theme of the undecidable".[9] Or, as Mallarmé dubs it in his Preface: "prismatic subdivisions of the Idea". Lines of text, if read from the upper left, across the book's gutter, to the lower right, "speed up and slow down the movement … intimating it through a simultaneous vision of the Page."[10] Within these subdivisions, fragmented images surface as remnants of some lost-at-sea narrative, wavering, oscillating, vibrating throughout: the Master of a vessel, standing at the bottom of a shipwreck, his fist holding the dice shaking eternally at the stars, the lurching ship, a feather hovering over the Abyss, the proposed rolling of the dice between possible outcomes. "All Thought emits a Throw of the Dice", to quote the last line, yet, "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance"—a decisive act with a result determined by ever greater and obscure forces.[11]

or

Inertia.[12]

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[9] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 1998, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 194.

[10] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, trans. and with a commentary by Henry Weinfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 121.

[11] Mallarmé, "*Un Coup de dés*", *Collected Poems*, 144–5

[12] Inertia, in classical physics, can apply to a body in uniform motion or at rest. It was Isaac Newton's first law of motion from *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*: "The *vis insita*, or innate force of matter, is a power of resisting by which every body, as much as in it lies, endeavours to preserve its present state, whether it be of rest or of moving uniformly forward in a straight line" (in Isaac Newton, *Newton's Principia: the mathematical principles of natural philosophy*, trans. Andrew Motte [New York: Daniel Adee, 1846], 72).

or

Henry Weinfeld, one of Mallarmé's translators, sums up the various angles from which to read *Un Coup de dés*: "What is allegorised *…* is the ebb and flow of humanity's continual struggle to seize hold of the Absolute: the Master-Seaman's confrontation with the oceanic abyss, the Poet's confrontation with the white page, the Philosopher's with the Void, and Everyman's with the 'errors and wrecks' (to borrow Ezra Pound's phrase) of experience."[13]

aussi

When Paul Valéry first witnessed the event of *Un Coup de dés*, he remarked: "It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought, placed for the first time in finite space. Here space itself truly spoke, dreamed, and gave birth to temporal forms",[14] which seems like a reaction that Theodor Adorno might have classified as "astonishment vis-à-vis what is beheld rather than vis-à-vis what it is about."[15] According to Immanuel Kant, however, space and time are nothing but forms of intuition; they are the base of all experience, *à priori*. We make non-empirical, singular, immediate representations of space and of time and it's only through these representations that we can experience things as distinct from ourselves/our inner mental states.[16] By this he means that we don't come to our understanding of space and time by first observing the objects we experience and then "by abstraction". Our sensibilities are a jumble of representations, and so our interpretations of a poem, which itself is contingent on language and how it's arranged on the page, is thus, and inevitably, a representation of a representation, a construction of a construction.

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[13] Henry Weinfeld, "Commentary", in Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 266–7. The Pound phrase is actually back to front. It comes from "Canto CXVI": "Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me". See Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 1934 (New York: New Directions, 1993), 816.

[14] Weinfeld, "Commentary", 265.

[15] Theodor Adorno, "Subject-Object", in *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 225.

[16] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (New York: Dover, 2003), 23–33.

aussi

As Mallarmé wrote to André Gide, shortly after the poem was first published, likening the shape of the poem to a constellation locking into place: "the constellation will, fatally, assume, according to the precise laws and in so far as it's possible in a printed text, the form of a constellation. The ship will list from the top of one page to the bottom of the next, etc.: for, and this is the whole point … the rhythm of a sentence about an act or even an object has meaning only if it imitates them".[17]

aussi

Negative space does the semantic inverse, according to Jacques Derrida, who suggests that the "rhythm" of the white spaces in *Un Coup de dés*—"as if without support"— succeeds in collapsing space and time:

> The white of the spacing has no determinate meaning, it does not simply belong to the plurivalence of all the other whites. More than or less than the polysemic series, a loss or excess of meaning, it folds up the text toward itself, and at each moment points out the place (where "NOTHING / WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE / BUT THE PLACE".[18]), the condition, the labor, the rhythm. As the page *folds in* upon itself, one will never be able to decide if *white* signifies something, or signifies only, or in addition, the space of writing itself.[19]

or

As Octavio Paz writes of Mallarmé: "The meaning does not reside outside the poem but within it, not in what the words say, but in what *they say to each other*".[20]

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[17] Mallarmé, "Letter to André Gide", May 14, 1897, in *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 223.

[18] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 142.

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Mallarmé", 1974, trans. Christine Roulston, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1991), 115–6.

[20] Octavio Paz, *Alternating Current*, 1967, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1967), 4.

Mallarmé states his own (subjective) objective best: "This aim, I call Transposition; Structure, another … The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet speaking, who cedes the initiative to words, through the clash of their inequalities; they light each other up through reciprocal reflections".[21]

aussi

"Shipwrecked on the shoals of contingency",[22] Australia is haunted by this poem. Its publication in *Cosmopolis* in Paris in 1897 struck a nerve or, rather, a vessel within Australian poetry bloodlines, starting with Christopher Brennan. *Un Coup de dés* was the score that inspired him to compose "Musicopoematographoscope", also in 1897, a large handwritten *mimique* manuscript, or pastiche, that transposed the more extreme aesthetics of an *avant-garde* French Symbolism into the Australian poetic psyche. Now well into the twenty-first century, *Un Coup de dés* is still a blueprint for experimentation in Australian poetry, spawning a number of versions, two of which are homophonic mistranslations—"A Fluke" by Chris Edwards and "Desmond's Coupé" by John Tranter —both published in 2006, and both revelling/rebelling in the abject, and in "errors and wrecks". This essay/assay will provide a comparative reading of these homophonic bedfellows, will trace their relation(ship)s to their antecedents, various theories of translation in the process, and will begin an enquiry into the significant influence of Mallarmé's great "vessel" on Australian poetry and poetics.

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[21] Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", in *Divagations*, 1897, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007), 208.

[22] Weinfeld, "Commentary", 266.

II

In his reluctant introduction to *Un Coup de dés* (he only wrote it to appease the wishes of the periodical *Cosmopolis*), Mallarmé "retain[s] a religious veneration" for "the ancient technique of verse", to which he "attribute[s] the empire of passion and of dreams".[23] He may well have been attempting to appease traditional readers, but at the same time Mallarmé is alluding to a crisis which, at first, plays out as a revolution in French prosody, but "is not merely a crisis *of* poetry or verse, but a crisis of modernity —indeed, a religious crisis that manifests itself *in* poetry or verse".[24] Furthermore, in his famous essay *Crise de vers* Mallarmé struggles with the admission that "Languages [are] imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking ... the diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from proffering words that would otherwise be, when made uniquely, the material truth. This prohibition is explicitly devastating, in Nature ... where nothing leads one to take oneself for God".[25]

He demonstrates that languages are at once imperfect and multiple, that there is no necessary or natural connection between word and thing, between sound and sense, offering the example that *jour* (day) is a dark sound, for instance, while *nuit* (night) is a bright sound. This is the same as Ferdinand de Saussure's revolutionary formulation— that the relationship between the linguistic signifier and what it signifies is arbitrary.[26] This suggests that Mallarmé's crisis was also a crisis between subject and object, and explains how he came to a poetics of indecision, polyphony and counterpoint. Adorno had similar aesthetic concerns in mind when he wrote of the subject-object bind:

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[23] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 123.

[24] Weinfeld, "'Thinking out afresh the whole poetic problem': Brennan's Prescience; Mallarmé's Accomplishment", *Southerly* 68.3 (2008): 11.

[25] Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 205.

[26] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 1893, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 67–70.

In the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, performed and mediated by the object.

For the artwork and thus for its theory, subject and object are its own proper elements and they are dialectical in such a fashion that whatever the work is composed of—material, expression, and form—is always both.[27]

aussi

Jacques Derrida describes Mallarmé's poetics as "and/or", citing Mallarmé's deft use of homonyms and puns and their chain-like linkages across his oeuvre not as a crisis but as the key to its understanding, and to new possibilities for literature:

Let us not forget that these chains, which are infinitely vaster, more powerful and intertwined than is even possible to hint at here, are as if without support, always suspended. It is the Mallarméan doctrine of *suggestion*, of undecided allusion. Such indecision, which enables them to move alone and without end, cuts them off, in spite of appearances, from all meaning (signifed theme) and from all referents (the thing itself, and the conscious or unconscious intention of the author). Which leads to numerous traps for criticism, and numerous new procedures and categories to be invented.[28]

or

Weinfeld describes Mallarmé's chains with an almost religious fervour, even at the same time as acknowledging the immanence of words and things:

polysyllabic chains of homophonic rhymes, rhymes that will hyperbolically, but also actually, evoke the island of poetry from which the spirit has been exiled and in which it can dwell …

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[27] Theodor W. Adorno, "Subject-Object", 226–7.

[28] Derrida, "Mallarmé", 120–1.

For the inhabitants of Mallarmé's mythical island, subject-object distinctions and discrepancies between words and things no longer obtain. Everything is immanent and no longer transcendent; everything comes immediately to the eye, to sight itself, and so there is no longer any need for the visionary.[29]

aussi

Regarding Derrida's "doctrine of suggestion, and undecided allusion", there is a little known theory of anagrams that Saussure worked on in his many unpublished notebooks. Tracing the works of Homer and others to discover laws governing the distribution of consonants and vowels, Saussure accidentally noticed recurrent groups of phonemes that combined to form prolonged echoes of words of special import—hidden motivic theme-words embedded in poetic texts. Jean Starobinski, in unearthing these unfinished theories, enters into conversation with Saussure's notes and addresses some unanswered questions of the origin or function of the anagram-forming process. Applying a Claude Lévi-Strauss phrase, "phonic tinkering", he aligns Saussure's process with a poet's, and describes the poem in general as an emanation—an "act of words" [*fait de parole*] which "appears as the superfluous luxury of the hypogram" (the hypogram being the semantic nucleus of a poem, whether a title or motivic theme-word). One of the key conclusions Starobinski comes to is that "the words of a work are rooted in other, antecedent words, and that they *are not directly chosen* by the formative consciousness."[30] In other words, the poetic process, however procedural, is largely unconscious—words are written one by one, yet patterns of words *upon* words form subliminally. Starobinski continues: "To the question What lies beneath the line? the answer is not the creative *subject* but the inductive *word*. Not that Ferdinand de Saussure goes so far as to erase the role of artistic subjectivity, but it does seem to him that this subjectivity can produce its text only by passage through a *pre-text*".[31]

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[29] Weinfeld, "'Thinking out afresh the whole poetic problem'", 21.

[30] Jean Starobinski, *Words Upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand Saussure*, 1971, trans. Olivia Emmet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 120–1.

[31] Jean Starobinski, *Words Upon Words*, 121.

or

As Julia Kristeva has written: "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it".[32] Kristeva argues that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of inter-textuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double".[33]

aussi

Saussure and Starobinski's theory of anagrams need not only be applied to Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*. Derrida focuses on the expansive use of the word "*or*" throughout Mallarmé's oeuvre as an example of his punning chains ("*or*" is just one of many words employed in this manner). As suggested previously, "*or*" isn't stable as a word. It's a noun ("gold"), an adjective ("golden"), and a conjunction ("now"), and its English homonyn "or" is a conjunction that links alternatives, giving the "otherwise" equal billing. Mallarmé utilises the sound and meaning of "or", not just as a word on its own, but within words, and amongst many other similar concatenations, to redouble semantic indecision and scatter meaning: "no identity is stable enough, of itself, to give rise to relationships of the whole and the part, of cause and effect".[34] Derrida then shows how, in a single line from Mallarmé's *Les mots anglais*, we can gain a taste for how the word *or* and its multiplicity might concatenate across an oeuvre: "*une eclipse,*

[32] Julia Kristeva, in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, ed. Jonathon Culler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 105.

[33] Saussure's anagrams are a ghostly kind of intertextuality, a term associated with poststructural theorists that refers to more than just the "influences" of writers on each other. Julia Kristeva coined this semiotic notion, proposing that language has powers which not only exceed individual control but also determine subjectivity. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37. Roland Barthes had similar ideas when he wrote: "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the AuthorGod) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath [London: Fontana, 1977], 146).

[34] Derrida, "Mallarmé", 124–5.

or, telle est l'heure", which translates as "an eclipse, now, such is the hour". The other meanings of gold, goldenness, money, seasonality, midnight, time, epoch, are all at once there. In this golden light, the fragmentation that is so indicative of modern poetry under the modern subject might be seen as refractions of the *word* that Mallarmé has "by disintegration, liberated".[35] And so, if we now apply to Mallarmé's line an extreme translation (a mistranslation at the level of letter and word, swerving as one may) using an Australian vernacular, we can get: "An eclipse! Gold! Such is life!" Or, homophonically: "You kleptos, tell a lie".

aussi

So what is mistranslation? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to mistranslate is to translate (something) incorrectly: "passages from the Bible were either mistranslated or taken out of context".[36]

or

"Take a poem, or part of a poem, in a foreign language and translate it word for word according to what it sounds like in English … Try this with a language you know and then with one you don't know. Don't use a dictionary, just rely on what your ears hear and go from there … Use slang and other nonstandard English words. Let the syntax take care of itself."[37]

aussi

Mistranslation in poetry, according to many experimenting or procedural poets—as in Charles Bernstein's instructions above for a homophonic translation—is a means to an end, a constraint-based, generative practice, whereby a poet "translates" another poem (usually from a foreign language) into something *newly mistaken*. Transposition from

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[35] Derrida, "Mallarmé", 116.

[36] *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[37] Charles Bernstein, "Homophonic Translation", in *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach*, ed. Robin Behn and Twichell Chase (New York: Harper, 1992), 126.

one mode to another, as a practice/praxis, shortcircuits control, bringing chance to the fore—the poet is at the whim of words and their swervings. To double-up (or double-down) on Walter Benjamin's "Translation is a mode", let's think of mistranslation—predicated on ceding the initiative to a pre-text—as a *mood* "in which meaning has ceased to be the watershed for the flow of language and the flow of revelation".[38]

aussi

Gérard Genette, in his seminal book on parody and the manifold relationships a text may have with prior texts, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, offers a surprising prototype for the genre of homophonic translation: *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames* by Louis d'Antin van Rooten (1967), a series of French transphonations of *Mother Goose Rhymes*:

Humpty Dumpty	Un petit d'un petit	A little one of a little one
Sat on a wall.	S'étonne aux Halles	Was surprised at the Market
Humpty Dumpty	Un petit d'un petit	A little one of a little one
Had a great fall.	Ah! degrés te fallent	Oh, degrees fail you!
All the king's horses	Indolent qui ne sort cesse	Lazy is he who leaves stops
And all the king's men	Indolent qui ne se mène	Lazy is he who is not led
Couldn't put Humpty	Qu'importe un petit	Who cares about a little one
Together again.	Tout gai de Reguennes.	All happy with Reguennes[39]

or

One of the classic *avant-garde* contemporary examples of homophonic translation is the Zukofskys' *Catullus* (1969), in which Celia and Louis Zukofsky take a visceral approach to the material surface of the original Latin of Catullus' poetry—its shape, sound, and rhythm—and translate it into English by trying "to breathe / the 'literal' meaning with

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[38] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in *Illuminations*, 1955, trans. Harry Zohn, 1968 (London: Fontana, 1992), 71 and 82.

[39] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, 1982, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 41.

him" (note the quotations around "literal", as if to redefine it).[40] They dismantle the concept of transparent literalism (the dominant mode of most translations) and at the same time redefine semantic correspondence.[41] In poem #22, Catullus ridicules a fellow poet for insisting on new papyrus for his prolific but poor verse, instead of using the cheaper palimpsest:

> idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.
> puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura
> perscripta, nec sic ut fit in palimpsesto
> relata: cartae regiae, noui libri,
> noui umbilici, lora rubra membranae,
> derecta plumbo et pumice omnia aequata[42]

The Zukovskys translate this like so:

> his damn cue's long reams of preoccupied verses.
> Put his goal at ten thousand, some decked out plural.
> Poor script, eh? not so it fit incest in palimpsest—
> realloted: quires, regal eye, new cylinders,
> new little umbiliform roll ends, rubric lore, thongs,
> membranes ruled plumb o (my) all equated with pumice.[43]

Josef Horáček describes the Zukofskys' approach: "Syntax breaks up considerably, with phrases sliding from one to the next without precise boundaries; certain words could be read variably as part of two adjoining phrases. Vocabulary now oscillates freely from archaic to mundane to bawdy: the distinctions among different levels of diction are

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[40] Celia Thaew Zukofsky and Louis Zukofsky, trans., *Catullus* [*Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber*] (London: Cape Golliard, 1969), not paginated.

[41] Josef Horáček, "Pedantry and Play: The Zukofsky *Catullus*", *Comparative Literature Studies* 51.1 (2014): 106.

[42] Gaius Valerius Catullus, *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 66.

[43] Zukofsky and Zukofsky, trans., *Catullus*, not paginated.

effectively erased. Semantic correspondence is fully subordinated to homophony but not in the least ignored."[44]

<p style="text-align:center">or</p>

Mistranslation can be seen as any of these: "word writing",[45] palimpsest, a doubling, a mirroring, a homage, a parody, high jinks, a remix of a classic score, or a combination of these. There is always a trace of the original, however far a mistranslation departs, so it could also be seen as a ghosting or a haunting—as in, the haunting of a location. Whatever the preferred method, whether loose or "pedantic", this "witty translation game"[46] requires alternative ways of reading, and other interpretive approaches.

<p style="text-align:center">aussi</p>

"Mallarmé does not belong completely to French literature", writes Derrida. His "*or-play*" is "a brilliant demonstration of a recourse to the homonym, to what Aristotle denounced as bad poetry, as an instrument of rhetoric for sophists". Having "broken with the protocols of rhetoric", his poetry "escapes the control of [muted classical and philosophical] representation … demonstrates *in practice* its nonpertinence", and makes him at once a sophist and an outlaw of Plato.[47]

A cast out. Which could be one reason why *Un Coup de dés* has spawned a number of mirror images, or mistranslations, in the Antipodes—it resonates with Australian sensibilities of the outsider or the reject. Former prime minister Paul Keating was

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[44] Horáček, "Pedantry and Play", 114.

[45] Charles Olson, "Logography", in *Additional Prose: A Bibliography on America, Proprioception & Other Notes & Essays*, ed. George F. Butterick (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), 20.

[46] Horáček, "Pedantry and Play: The Zukofsky *Catullus*", 108.

[47] Derrida, "Mallarmé", 121–6.

accused in 1994 of calling Australia "the arse end of the world",[48] proving how this hard-done-by outsider sensibility is a national preoccupation. In saying so, Keating also perpetuated, however obliquely, the idea of Atlantis that Plato perpetuated—that this huge island continent was located somewhere on the opposite, underside of the world (*antipodes*, originally from Greek, means "having the feet opposite", which chimes neatly with mistranslation's tendency to undermine the foot of a poem). Taking place at the bottom of a shipwreck, *Un Coup de dés* resonates because of its preoccupation with the impossibility of *under*standing existence, so to speak.

or

Sidere Mens Eadem Mutato: "The constellation is changed, the disposition is the same" / "The same minds under different stars".[49]

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[48] Paul Keating, in Robert Milliken, "Keating's rear view of the lucky country causes storm: Careless remarks have damaged the PM's nationalist stance", *Independent*, June 27, 1994, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/keatings-rear-view-of-the-lucky-country-causes-storm-careless-remarks-have-damaged-the-pms-1425378.html.

[49] *Sidere Mens Eadem Mutato* is also, oddly enough, the motto of the University of Sydney.

III

At the end of the nineteenth century, Mallarmé's poetics haunted the work of the young Australian poet Christopher Brennan, whose formal variations of the *Symboliste* style have since defined his oeuvre.[50] The work of Brennan's that is often overlooked, however, or thought of as an anomoly, is his handwritten *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope & Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*, a large facsimile of two poems that mimic the appearance of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, that were composed in the same year, 1897, but that weren't formally published for nearly 50 years after his death (1981). The central poem in it, "Musicopoematographoscope", spaced across the page like *Un Coup de dés*, but not utilising the gutter and double-page spread as syntactic Abyss, is clearly Brennan's response to some indifferent reviews of his more formal work. John Tranter, in his 1982 review of *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope & Pocket Musicopoematographoscope* recounts Brennan's stab at his reviewers and condemns it: "The main burden of its complaint can be traced by following through the poem the words in large capitals: 'I don't give a tinker's damn for the public and they return the compliment.'"[51]

In large capital letters, this title phrase echoes the style of the embedded and elongated title of *UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD*, fragmented across a number of

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[50] *Poems 1913*, for instance, is a transplantation of and homage to the more formal *Symboliste* aesthetics; it is an oeuvre that came to haunt Australian poetry: Brennan was the start of a chain of poets, including Judith Wright, John Shaw Nielsen, Gwen Harwood, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, and Kenneth Slessor, among others, who refracted a European-influenced literary modernism through the first half of Australia's twentieth century. In the latter half of the century, the significance of these poets and their heritage came to be taught and studied first, and predominantly, at the University of Sydney. From the early 1990s until 2012, the University of Sydney dedicated an entire Honours English unit to the influence of French Symbolism on Australian poets.

[51] John Tranter, "Brennan's Tinker's damn", review of *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope & Pocket Musicopoematographoscope* by Christopher Brennan, *Jacket* 29, April 2006, http://johntranter.com/reviewer/1982-brennan-oscope.shtml.

pages, but not its Idea. Not necessarily aiming to "translate" Mallarmé's "and/or" poetics, Brennan rather self-consciously sticks to the letter of the "law of correspondences", the slightly simpler idea that poetry be an evocative network of symbolic associations:

> O that I grant you // being / existent / undeniable / irreducible // in all heaviness / immovable / without wings / a brick [52]

or he flat-out critiques his critics:

> THEY // Bentley's bungler's / from the leather & duft / I long ago renounced / hither rush / hawklike / their claws / & dirty their noses [53]

or

Occasionally, "Musicopoematographoscope" toys with, or rather breaks the toy of, Mallarmé's "and/or" poetics. And this is where his poem becomes exciting. On the title poster page (fig. 3), Brennan mocks Mallarmé with a punning Australian vernacular, using words like "Maisong", "Paree", and "Malahrrmay".[54] Here, Brennan also mocks himself and his imitative, parodic translation—his poetic dalliance, or liaison, with the French—bringing to mind Judith Butler's writings on drag: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency."[55] If we think of translation as drag—of the poet pretending to be another, of how a translation is ostensibly one language system imitating another—it reveals the imitative structure of language itself, and by extension its ability to queer.

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[52] Christopher Brennan, "Musicopoematographoscope", *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope & Pocket Musicopoematographoscope* (Erskineville: Hale & Iremonger, 1981), 21.

[53] Brennan, "Musicopoematographoscope", 17.

[54] Brennan, "Musicopoematographoscope", 9.

[55] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 137.
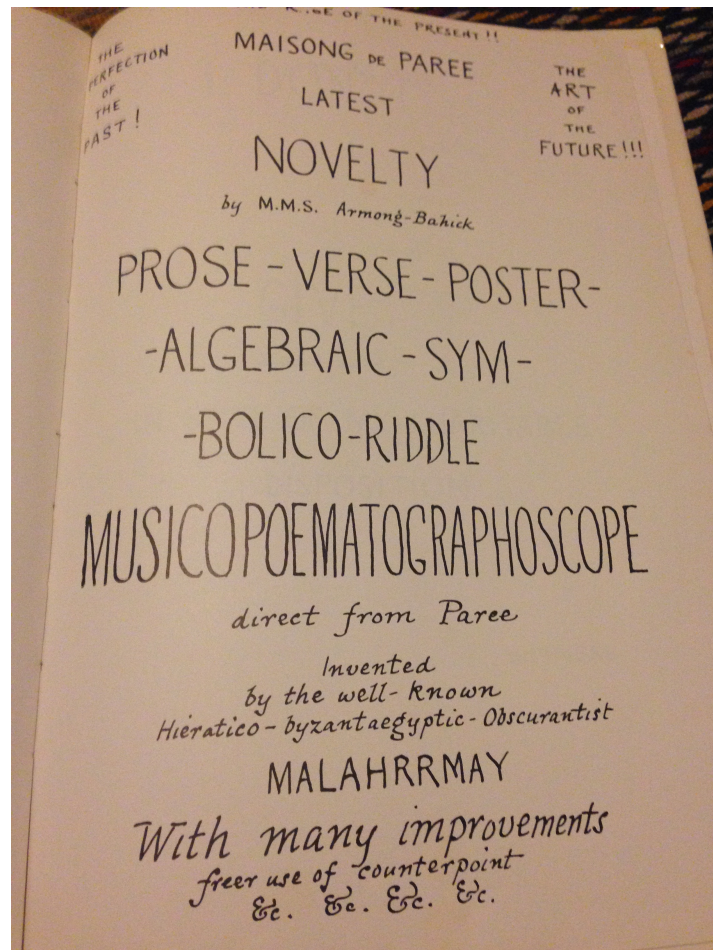
Fig. 3: Christopher Brennan, title page of "Musicopoematographoscope", Hale & Iremonger, 1981.

Are these instances of homophony a transnational echo or a wild colonial (mis)appropriation? Kate Fagan, in an essay on Chris Edwards (whose misappropriation of Mallarmé will be discussed next), describes Brennan's poem's "maverick flamboyance … its feral nature" as effecting "a kind of satirical distance from anxious Anglo-colonial readings that might relegate Australian literature to a second rung after transplanted European models", and as suggestive of "a deeper unease about the legitimacy of antipodean takes on cultural internationalism", citing John Hawke's *Australian Literature and the Symbolist Movement*, and placing Brennan at the *avant-garde* of this lineage:

> Hawke has argued persuasively that in the late nineteenth century "there was a
> stronger interest in Mallarmé's poetic philosophy in Australia than virtually
> anywhere else in the English-speaking world". Brennan's surrealistic description of

Mallarmé as a "Hieratico-byzantaegyptic-Obscurantist" hints at a specialised reading of Mallarmé's centrality to the emergence of poetic Symbolism, while its maverick flamboyance—or perhaps its feral nature—suggests a deeper unease about the legitimacy of antipodean takes on cultural internationalism. There is a finely nuanced critique to unwrap here about late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial Australia on the cusp of modernism, and the larger-than-life or monstrous artistic objects generated over subsequent decades by that tension— including for example the poems of Ern Malley, and more perversely, the Jindyworobak Movement. For now, I simply want to propose that "innovation" in non-Indigenous Australian poetry is marked historically by strong international identifications and sporadic refusals, and to observe that the twentieth century manifestations of these dialogues are strikingly evident in the avant-garde (or post^n-avant-garde) alignments of Chris Edwards' poetry.[56]

Stephanie Guest, citing Walter Benjamin, describes Brennan's poem as both an "abundant flowering" of Mallarmé's eternal yet "ever elusive text", as well as an "abundant de-flowering".[57] Illicit, it is at once a version and an inversion (a "sporadic refusal"). One could say it's also about aversion, as diversion. Its deviation, or deviance, also recalls the atomic law of the clinamen.[58]

Brennan's phrase on the title page, "freer use of counterpoint", is indicative of the swerve his poem takes from the original. It speaks to the interplay of the two texts and parodies Mallarmé's "musical score". Moreover, its multiple inferences reveal the underlying conceit and erotics at play: "counterpoint" comes from medieval Latin *contrapunctum*, which is a melody pricked or marked over the original melody. From punctum we obviously get "to prick", pricksongs too (music written, or noted, with dots or points), and we don't need to go much further. Ears are pricked to all the counterpricking going on.

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[56] Kate Fagan, "'A Fluke? [N]ever!": Reading Chris Edwards", *JASAL* 12.1 (2012): 4, http://www.nla.gov.au/ojs/index.php/jasal/article/view/2270.

[57] Stephanie Guest, "Nothing's Lost: Towards a Poetics of Transnational Unoriginality in Australian Poetry" (Honours thesis, Department of English, University of Sydney, 2013): 58.

[58] Rasula and McCaffery, *Imagining Language*, 532.

Another notable moment of linguistic intercourse comes in Brennan's final line:
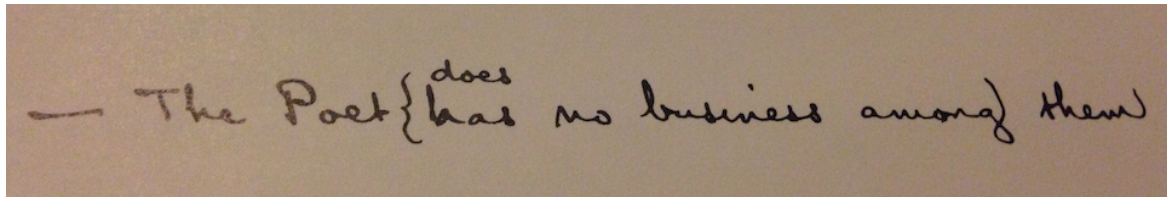
Fig. 4: Christopher Brennan, final line of "Musicopoematographoscrope", Hale & Iremonger, 1981.

On the page, the word "does" appears just above "has" and acts as an alternative way to read the line, allows for other meaning: "does" appears as a half-pun on Mallarmé's "Dés", and the English translation "dice", and speaks to the illicit dice-play involved between a poet, and their chancy, risky business with "them", their readers and critics. It says everything about Brennan's grievances in one allusive/illusive line, whether he was aware of this skewed homophone at the time or not.

While Brennan's tract may seem unnecessarily churlish in parts, I'd argue that there's a nascent "and/or" poetics—an early *or*-play—at work here in Australian poetry. There is certainly a hint of larrikinism, a deliberate maverick contrariness and queerness, evident in Brennan's process. We have to remember that Brennan was very quick to pen his parody of Mallarmé; it was penned the same year, 1897, that *Un Coup de dés* appeared in *Cosmopolis*. Despite his own and ongoing Mallarméan project (that of introducing Australian poetry at large to the more traditional forms and imagery of French *Symboliste* poetry), by simultaneously and urgently rolling the dice on "Musicopoematographoscope"—his spoof poem that upends the very same *Symboliste* vogue—Brennan ended up presenting two different options for Australian poetry just as Federation loomed in 1901, the year that established Australia officially as part of the Commonwealth and a "successful" colonialist state. The former option, an arguably more colonial poetics, was adopted almost ubiquitously in twentieth-century Australian poetics, while the latter and alternative (and far more playfully experimental and subversive) is only more recently being explored.

Now, over a hundred years hence, Chris Edwards and John Tranter have both written homophonic mistranslations of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*. Both were published in *Jacket* in 2006. Edwards came first and encouraged Tranter, according to Tranter writing about Tranter in the third person, to also finish and publish his mistranslation as a "friendly rival".[59] The next two subchapters will compare these two homophonic bedfellows and their "anti-versions" of *Un Coup de dés*.

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[59] Tranter, "Distant Voices" (Doctor of Creative Arts Thesis, School of Journalism and Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, 2009): 117, http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/3191/.

IV

Collage poet Chris Edwards, who knows all-too-well the connotations of that descriptor (the French verb *coller* means "to paste, stick, glue", while *collage* is French slang for an illicit sexual union[60]), took to *Un Coup de dés* with a "willy-nilly … mish-mash of approaches" (note the self-consciously silly and phallic double entendre). Or, more technically, he mistranslated it with "a variety of transformational logics", including homophony, paranomasia, litotes, malapropism, mimicry, metonymy, and translation. Yet he sticks to many of Mallarmé's poetic principles:

> At the heart of things, at the heart of the poem, at the heart of the Idea with its double proposition, is division, according to Mallarmé: the gap, the fold, or, more famously, the Abyss … The unit of composition in *Un Coup de dés* is not the line or even the page, but the double-page spread, and the Abyss is physically embodied in the fold or gutter dead centre. It's a place the eye can't quite see into, full of stapling, stitching and gluing.[61]

aussi

Maintaining the visual form of Mallarmé's poem, Edwards' "A Fluke" is a clever and ludic mimicry that parodies Mallarmé's notion of *pure literature* at the same time as achieving a kind of pure "litter chewer", rustling and mucking about in the gutter of the double-page spread and in the gulf between itself and *Un Coup de dés*:

> Mallarmé's notorious difficulty, his untranslatability—figured, for example, in the abyss between the English translations I relied on for the sense of his poems and the mutant music I could hear in the French—inspired "A Fluke", my mistranslation of *Un Coup de dés*, which it only now occurs to me was an attempt at

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[60] Marjorie Perloff, "Collage and Poetry", in *Marjorie Perloff*, 1998, http://marjorieperloff.com/essays/collage-poetry/.

[61] Chris Edwards, "Double Talk".

pure literature, marred perhaps inevitably by its own impure thoughts. (One can only remain philosophical about it.)[62]

Edwards' mutant music, his slippage from pure to impure, his awareness and adoption of this as a philosophy, reveals the libidinous nature of such a translational project—i.e. his bending the original text over—and thus an abject revelry in the resultant collapsing of signifier and signified. According to Julia Kristeva, the abject refers to the human reaction (such as horror, spasms, nausea) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, between self and other. A corpse (traumatically reminding us of our own materiality) is a prime example for what causes such a reaction; other things, however, can draw the same reaction: blood, shit, sewage, even the skin that forms on the surface of warm milk.[63]

or

Incidentally—or just dentally—Derrida compares Mallarmé's method of writing, and the form it took, to the careful cutting up and reallocating of body parts: "Mallarmé knew that his 'operation' on the word was also the dissection of a corpse; of a decomposable body each part of which could be of use elsewhere". He then quotes Mallarmé from *Les Mots Anglais*[64]: "Related to the whole of nature and in this way coming closer to the organism that possesses life, the Word presents itself, in its vowels and its diphthongs, like a piece of flesh, and, in its consonants, like a skeletal structure difficult to dissect".[65] And this might be how Edwards sees the poem, as a body to dissect into its many parts, but also as an abject provocation.

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[62] Edwards, "Interview with Chris Edwards", ed. Michael Brennan, *Poetry International Web* (July 1, 2011): http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/cou_article/item/19012/Interview-with-Chris-Edwards/en.

[63] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1980, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1–3.

[64] David Brooks describes *Les Mot Anglais* as an "eccentric account of the strange correspondences and etymologies of English words", in Brooks, *The Sons of Clovis: Ern Malley, Adoré Floupette and a secret history of Australian Poetry* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2011), 87.

[65] Derrida, "Mallarmé", 117.

aussi

Kristeva's notion of the "abject" is in direct contrast to Lacan's "object of desire", his "*objet petit a*". The *objet petit a* allows a subject to coordinate his or her desires, maintaining the symbolic order of meaning and intersubjectivity, whereas the abject "is radically excluded" and, as Kristeva writes, "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses". Our reaction to such abject material re-charges what is essentially a pre-lingual response in us: "as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live".[66] Edwards lifts the already dismembered body parts of Mallarmé's poem from the gutters of the past and re-enlivens them, dramatises them in new gutters, for new readers. His blatant gay erotic imagery, his abject subjectivity, is also designed to shock those readers expecting a "straight" translation, perhaps showing them what they have "thrust" aside.

Where the French of *Un Coup de dés* has:

<div align="center">

cette blancheur rigide

dérisoire

en opposition au ciel

trop

pour ne pas marquer

exigüment

quiconque

prince amer de l'écueil

s'en coiffe comme de l'héroïque
irrésistible mais contenu
par sa petite raison virile

en foudre[67]

</div>

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[66] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2–3.

[67] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 136–7.

"A Fluke" reads, in Australian English:

this blank rigidity

derides

in opposition to the ceiling

tramp

porn-palmer

exegetical

cock-up

prince amid sewage

your hair-do may well be considered heroic
oh irresistible make-over
parsed by rational virility

fondler[68]

or

To quote Fagan: "In an exemplary queering of his own text, Edwards performs a drama of progenitorship by robbing 'A Fluke' of stable lines while reinstating its 'sameness' as a fair copy".[69] Note the quotation marks around "sameness" because, of course, it's not a like-for-like French-English translation and rather a corpse brought back to life, a "prince amid sewage", an "exegetical / cock-up".

In Edwards' hands (fingers, or ears), Mallarmé's full title, *UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD*, is broken down, contorted and reassembled into, "A FLUKE? [N]EVER! NOBLE LIAR, BIO-HAZARD". The brackets around the "N" are to cover both meanings of *jamais* at once: "never" and "ever", also allowing for an echo of the "Never Never", that Australian settler version of the Abyss or void—the outback. Edwards explains his choice of title as "the remains of a quarrel … it reminded me of the quarrel

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[68] Edwards, "A Fluke", in *People of Earth: poems* (Sydney: Vagabond, 2011), 53.

[69] Fagan, "'A Fluke? [N]ever!': Reading Chris Edwards", 3.

that broke out in me between various possible mistranslations at every turn of phrase."[70] The third wheel to this quarrel is Plato, his "old quarrel" between poetry and philosophy, and his "noble lie".[71]

Edwards' "fluke", an unexpected piece of good luck, speaks to Mallarmé's prismatic subdivisions of the Idea (that a throw of the dice will never abolish chance), the "noble liar" to Edwards' misreadings, and "bio-hazard" of his misrenderings. As in Mallarmé, all of Edwards' fragments that fall around the title to form the poem are deduced from the flukes laid out in the title. A "fluke", incidentally, can also be a parasite, a flat fish, the triangular bits on an anchor, and anything resembling that shape, like barbs on a harpoon or the tail of a whale.

These connecting flukes are Mallarméan chains, but Edwards isn't creating knock-off, fake jewellery made of flukes (however much Mallarme's *La Dernière Mode* might have something to say about the connection between fashion and poetry). Edwards' chains are the stuff of chaos.

aussi

According to Edwards, in writing "A Fluke" he was guided mainly by what he calls in his "homophonically (mis)translated" preface, "the latent conductor unreasoning verisimilitude imposes on the text" (in Mallarmé's preface it's a *fil conducteur*, meaning "guiding thread"),[72] which alludes to (presciently, in Mallarmé's case) the strange attractors of string theory/chaos theory. Strange attractors make an interesting theory for mistranslation, as Edwards writes:

> An attractor is the state into which a system will eventually settle. The black holes
> around which galaxies cluster are examples of attractors; cultural attractors

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[70] Edwards, "Double Talk".

[71] A fourth wheel might be William Butler Yeats: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" (in Yeats, *Mythologies* [London: Macmillan, 1924], 331).

[72] Edwards, "A Fluke", 39.

include chiefs, tribes, states and anything that gives us identity, like religion, class and world view. Strange attractors are a special class. They live in phase space, a multidimensional imaginary space in which numbers can be turned into pictures. Fractal objects, they consist of infinite numbers of curves, surfaces or manifolds, and as their name suggests, they draw things toward them.[73]
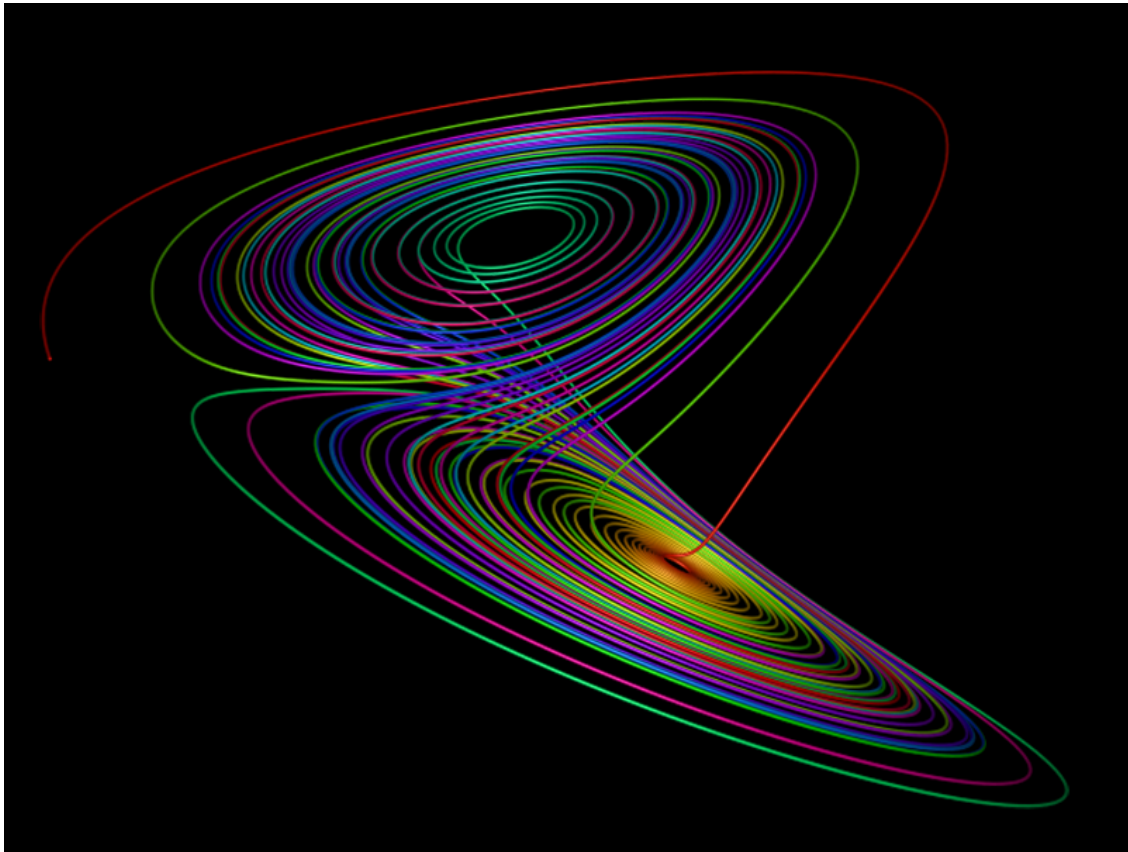
Fig. 5: Paul Bourke, "The Lorenz Attractor in 3D", 1997

So, here, mistranslation is a gathering together of multiple swerving objects, objects that become interchangeable (by dint of their correlations and correspondences), which brings to my mind (strangely) George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, an erotic novel that is "really the story of an object", a composition that "should be called a 'poem'", as per Roland Barthes. The initial object of attraction in the narrative is the Eye, but then other globular objects become variously and erotically interchangeable, in both form and content: an egg (in French, egg is *oeuf* and eye is *oeil*), disc-shaped objects like a saucer of milk, then testicles. A secondary metaphorical chain concatenates from these,

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[73] Edwards, "Double Talk".

"made up of all the avatars of liquid: tears, milk in the cat's saucer-eye, the yolk of a soft-boiled egg, sperm and urine". At the climax of this erotic tale even the sun comes to stand in for the Eye as a "urinary liquefaction of the sky", drawing together the eye-egg-testicle metaphor.[74] Accumulated image-associations form an epic "cataract", in both senses of the word:

> by virtue of their metonymic freedom they endlessly exchange meanings and usages in such a way that breaking eggs in a bath tub, swallowing or peeling eggs (soft-boiled), cutting up or putting out an eye or using one in sex play, associating a saucer of milk   with a cunt or a beam of light with a jet of urine, biting the bull's testicle like an egg or inserting it in the body—all these associations are at the same time identical and other. For the metaphor that varies them exhibits a controlled difference between them that the metonymy that interchanges them immediately sets about demolishing. The world becomes *blurred*; properties are no longer separate; spilling, sobbing, urinating, ejaculating form a *wavy* meaning, and the whole of *Story of the Eye* signifies in the manner of a vibration ...[75]

I hope this goes some way to explaining how a homophonic translation, or simply a poem, can work as a system of attraction, of wavering objects—where the poem is not *an* object but *many* similar objects oscillating; where these word-images, these image-associations, become interchangeable—a poem in which any one of these objects could equal another. Object = desire = fetish = dream. A similar compositional approach occurs (in terms of the imagery used) in Bataille's "Solar Anus" (which Edwards quotes from in his epigraph), but let's look back to the flukes of "A Fluke", in which Edwards' word-images vibrate alongside and askew from Mallarmé's. Here's a double-page spread (reduced in size) of these fractal objects (imagine the gutter down the middle):

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[74] Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye", essay in George Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 1963, trans. Joachim Neugroschal (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 119–27.

[75] Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye", 125.

EXCEPTÉ
à l'altitude
PEUT-ÊTRE
aussi loin qu'un endroit

fusionne avec au delà

hors l'intérêt
quant à lui signalé
en général
selon telle obliquité par telle déclivité
de feux

vers
ce doit être
le Septentrion aussi Nord

UNE CONSTELLATION

froide d'oubli et de désuétude
pas tant
qu'elle n'énumère
sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure
le heart successif
sidéralement
d'un compte total en formation

veillant
doutant
roulant
brilliant et méditant

avant de s'arrêter
à quelque point dernier qui le sacre

Toute Pensée émet Un Coup de dés

EXCEPT
for the attitude
MAYBE
his aussie loins proved quaintly adroit

once fused with the wrecked and disorderly

whore of the internet's
quantified signal
engendering
saloon tales obliquities and declivities
on fire

versus
say *deadhead*
less petrol oh Signor

UNCONSTITUTIONAL

fraudulant doubler of desuetude
part ant
queller of the numerous
suckers of clogged surfaces vacant and superior
each hurt succeeding
in mentioning sideways
the constantly totalled formation

veiled
doubting
roly-poly
brillianted emetic

I want to see Rita
of the collapsible derrière oh sacred

toupéed one my little mate I guess you'll want the code word eh?[76]

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[76] Edwards, "A Fluke", 60–1.

We can read and misread many notions in Edwards' flukes here, but I want to concentrate on some of the more Australian nuggets in the language for a moment:

EXCEPTÉ
        à l'altitude
            PEUT-ÊTRE
                  aussi loin qu'un endroit
                          fusionne avec au delà
EXCEPT
      for the attitude
           MAYBE
                his aussie loins proved quaintly adroit
                        once fused with the wrecked and disorderly

Edwards uses the more colloquial "maybe" instead of "perhaps", turns *altitude* into "attitude" and *aussi loin* into "aussie loins". Now, considering the literary meaning for loins (the region of the sexual organs regarded as the source of erotic or procreative power), we can read into this as saying that, besides the attitude (Mallarmé's hifalutin-ness), his literature (his sexual organ) hangs, much like the shape of the poetry on the page, a little to the right, as the Australian saying goes, and it was only right (as in, adroit, not politically to the right) once it had fused with the "errors and wrecks" caused by its intertextual relations with Edwards.

Further down the page, zooming in on the lines: "veiled / doubting / roly-poly / brillianted emetic // I want to see Rita of the collapsible derrière oh sacred"; Rita, here, and her strangely attractive derrière (perhaps a half-pun on Derrida), in causing this shiny vomit of a poem to emit from Edwards, surely come to represent the promiscuity of the pun and its ability to collapse the sign and the signified … no?

To end the poem, Edwards mistranslates *Toute Pensée émet Un Coup de dés* ("All Thought emits a Throw of the Dice") into "toupéed one my little mate I guess you'll want the code word eh?" Where Mallarmé rounds out his poem almost neatly with his openly enigmatic and existential poetic statement (on how each thought emits a ripple into the universe, affecting the course of history, perhaps), Edwards plays the parodist by presuming that the reader will want to find the code word in the final line of the poem, as if with a code word they might be able to solve the poem, as many have tried to with *Un Coup de dés*. It's a sly comment on how gnomic Mallarmé is (and how gnomic

poetry can come to seem to readers who seek singular or straight meanings in poetry and, by extension, in their being in the world). Edwards' conclusion is also a bizarrely prescient comment on the future gnomic leader of the free world, that "toupéed one" who may want the code word for nuclear weapons some time soon. After all, Australia's "little mate", when it comes to political and military ties (and, dare I say, expediency), is often the President of the United States of America.

aussi

Fig. 6: Screenshot, *Caspar the Friendly Ghost*, New York: Famous Studios, 1945.

I thought to suggest that Chris Edwards is like Casper, the friendly ghost, with a gentle abjection borne out of Bataille. But, considering his view that writing poetry is "play *space*-time",[77] I'm beginning to think that Edwards' all-seeing Eye and disembodied voice are those of the Transformer, Unicron (quite literally a "Solar Anus")—a robot who can transform into a planet in the shape of a massive eye that can see into the Abyss of space, and who, with a quietly deep, futuristic voice, attracts space junk and other gutter-dwellers, other abysmal life (textually speaking) toward him—"a god of chaos who devours realities"[78] …

[77] Edwards, "Interview with Chris Edwards" (my emphasis).

[78] "Unicron", *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicron.
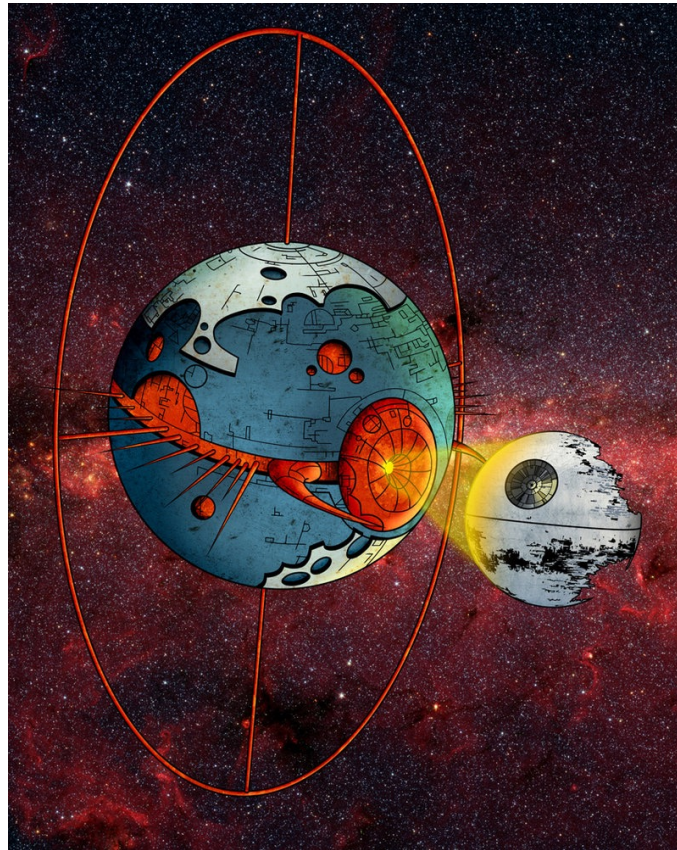
Fig. 7. profkilljoy7z, "Unicron Eats the Death Star", *Deviant Art*, 2012.[79]

or

... is he a unicorn?

or

Perhaps Edwards is taking a leaf (toking a life / talking a loaf / teaking a loft) from (with) James Joyce who, in his Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*, parodied through much rude punning the Apostles' Creed (statement of Christian belief dating from the fourth century; ostensibly drafted by the twelve apostles of Jesus):

> They believe in rod, the scourger almighty, creator of hell upon earth and in Jacky
> Tar, the son of a gun, who was conceived of unholy boast, born of the fighting navy,

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[79] See also: "Unicron transforming", *Youtube*, to hear his voice, see him transform and attract objects and others toward him: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG4GaPcLgOs.

suffered under rump and dozen, was scarified, flayed and curried, yelled like bloody hell, the third day he arose again from the bed, steered into haven, sitteth on his beamend till further orders whence he shall come to drudge for a living and be paid.[80]

aussi

etre un autre // Esprit // pour le jeter

as at the neither either // nor or // of the Spirit self-jettisoned

Edwards plays cleverly on a reader's proclivity to read sexual puns (and often of a queer bent) into the text. His deliberate paranomastic tactics of lapsus and misreading mean that words he has not mistranslated can just as easily be misread by the reader. Take the above fragment. To have the vagueness of "the Spirit" (not to mention the *self*) jettisoned is often Edwards' prerogative in his poems, but his queer and deliberate *in*appropriation of the high-minded language of Mallarmé, his sexualising of its content, his use of litotes (to downplay his intentions but emphasise play with another)— allowed this reader to see "Spirit self-jettisoned" as "Spirt self-jettisoned".

or

Maybe the last word on Edwards' mistranslation is the first word, as in Edwards' epigraph, from Bataille's "Solar Anus": "It is clear that the world is purely parodic—in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form."[81]

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80 James Joyce, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2008), 315.

81 Bataille epigraph, trans. Allan Stoekl, in Edwards, *A Fluke: A mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un Coup de dés…" with parallel French pretext* (Thirroul: Monogene, 2005), not paginated.

V

John Tranter's "Desmond's Coupé" is an anti-tract in the spirit of Brennan's "Musicopoematographoscope" (whose own anger he criticised, ironically) only the spirit is purple, far more *rimbaldien*[82] in Tranter's take-down of the comparably goody two-shoes Mallarmé. Regarding the development of Tranter's poetics, Fagan and Minter have argued that:

> By 1968 Tranter was navigating a chiasmic cultural parallax, attracted to both American metropoetic and post-Romantic French Symbolism. This contest defines the direction of his first three books—the final "crisis" of which is played out in *The Alphabet Murders*. Tranter's solution to history was an inverted, Orientalising dialectic, and its synthesis was in the seminal figure of Arthur Rimbaud.[83]

I would argue that Tranter is still navigating the same chiasmic cultural parallax but with extra parody. In his late work, including *Starlight* and *Heart Starter*, Tranter responds incessantly to canonised poems with constraint-based versions and anti-versions of his own, "an ambiguously postcolonial strategy"[84] to simultaneously uphold and upend European and American modern poetic traditions. *Starlight* in particular contains various recapitulations and decapitations of poems by Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Ashbery, Eliot, and Mallarmé, including "Desmond's Coupé". A self-reflexive and abject tirade toward the poetic urge to highfalutin-ness, Tranter's inversion of *Un Coup de dés* is an uncomplicatedly left-justified, jokey dream narrative that undercuts Mallarmé's inability to make a narrative decision. Its punctuated Ashberyesque or

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82 Standard French adjectival form of Rimbaud; the English being "Rimbaldian".

83 For an excellent study of Tranter's dual modern and postmodern trajectory in Australian poetry since the 1960s, see Kate Fagan and Peter Minter, "Murdering Alphabets, Disorienting Romance: John Tranter and Postmodern Australian Poetics", *Jacket* 27 (April 2005): http://jacketmagazine.com/27/faga-mint.html.

84 David McCooey, "Review Short: John Tranter's *Heart Starter*", *Cordite*, August 25, 2015, http://cordite.org.au/reviews/mccooey-tranter/.

Surrealist flow of ideas, speechiness and sound-association allows for the geriatric Desmond to stumble about and actually encounter other life forms (unlike the Master in *Un Coup de dés*), and for the speaker(s) of the poem to attack the conceits of Mallarmé's notion of the "pure work" (*oeuvre pure*). Despite its distance in form and syntax from Edwards' version, the poem's generative technique was the same for Tranter: it's largely a homophonic mistranslation utilising the same transformational, paranomastic techniques.

If we look for the full mistranslation of Mallarmé's title *UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD*, embedded in the stanzas of Tranter's poem, we get (in non-capitals): "Desmond's coupé is full of jam but that won't abolish folly in Hansard",[85] which seems a deliberate nod to Edwards' "noble lie", and to any truth that an authority, political or otherwise, might pretend to wield—Hansard being the name for the verbatim transcripts of Parliamentary Debates in most Commonwealth countries.[86]

"Desmond's Coupé" is a "disrespectful pie", as Tranter states in his University of Wollongong doctoral thesis, "in the face" of not only Mallarmé, but of literary decorum and tradition, too.[87] Writing in the third person, ironically, and possibly as a parody of the split subject, he quotes himself describing his own mistranslation of *Un Coup de dés*:

> dealing with the work of an important poet like Mallarmé takes us into the realm
> of the "anxiety of influence", as Harold Bloom labelled it: the need to learn from
> past masters without being overwhelmed by their mastery, and the need for any

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[85] Tranter, *Starlight: 150 poems* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2010), 15–21.

[86] The word Hansard also arguably dates back to the records of the Hanseatic League, for Baltic trade.

[87] Tranter's doctoral thesis, "Distant Voices", contains a creative component called *Vocoder*—a collection of poems that make up the first three-quarters of his subsequently published collection *Starlight*—plus an exegetical component in which Tranter provides notes to all the poems in *Vocoder*, historical notes to all his published books of poetry, and an essay about dream-work and how his three main poetic influences (Rimbaud, John Ashbery and the hoax poet Ern Malley) have come to bear on his poetics. The exegesis is a fascinating self-portrait (Tranter writes in the third person about his work) and would be worth studying purely for the psychoanalytical aspects of how an author sees, or cannot see, certain aspects of his/her own work.

artist to clear the undergrowth of history to make room for her or his own new work. That uneasy mixture of respect and aggression colours my poem.[88]

But does Tranter suppose that his methods for dealing with his influences are entirely conscious and intentional? If so, he perhaps misunderstands Bloom who insists on the salience of misrecognition: in one of his seven ratios of misreading, he explains that any writer taking on the burden of tradition enacts an unconscious "swerving" or "misprision" so as to make it new and avoid the accumulating anxiety of past excellence. The "swerving" is the law of the clinamen here, again, but take "misprision" too, which Bloom adopts/adapts from Shakespeare's "Sonnet 87", an erotic poem that he rather reads as an allegory of any writer's relation to tradition: "'Misprision' for Shakespeare, as opposed to 'mistaking', implied not only a misunderstanding or misreading but tended also to be a punning word-play suggesting unjust imprisonment."[89]

While Bloom unfortunately overlooks (and elsewhere downplays) the erotic and its role in the affairs of influence (see my previous analysis on the "promiscuity of the pun" in Edwards), perhaps he has unconsciously lifted the idea of the linguistic swerve from a forebear of his own. In *The Burden of the Past on the English Poet*, W. Jackson Bate opens by quoting Samuel Johnson on the topic: "It is, indeed, always *dangerous* to be placed in a state of unavoidable comparison with excellence", and then unpacks the "original, rather ominous sense" of the word "dangerous": "it means 'having lost one's freedom', having become 'dominated' … subjected to the tyranny of something outside one's own control … A cognate is our word 'dungeon'".[90] There's no mention of Bate's danger or dungeon in Bloom, but if he has read Bate, he couldn't possibly have misread him,— surely not—taking on some of his ideas and swerving unconciously from them … No, no room for misprision in Bloom … But back to Tranter's prison/prism.

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[88] Tranter, "Distant Voices", 118.

[89] Harold Bloom, preface to *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xiii.

[90] W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 3.

Tranter's constant re-negotiation of his literary forebears, his choice to write versions and anti-versions, is his conscious act to avoid said danger. But how language filters through him—as in, playing with poetic techniques that "cede the initiative to words"—is a process that relies on the unconscious. No matter how much he signposts his intentions with notes and witty asides as to his procedures (see his doctoral exegesis), the symbolic Other of language is beyond his control.[91] It's almost as if Tranter over-explains his homosocial dalliance with his male poetic forerunners to hide the anxiety of misprision taking place. In any event, "Desmond's Coupé", as artefact of the poetic process, and as abject experiment, certainly comes out swerving. Mallarmé's "*sauf … que le rencontre ou l'effleure une toque de minuit / et immobillise*",[92] for instance, becomes in Tranter's misprision (or Desmond's dungeon): "so far, so good, // where recounting the effluent is the talk of the minute / and it immobilises you".[93]

or

While offering a self-consciously aggressive critique of Mallarméan poetics, "Desmond's Coupé" is also extremely funny and jazzy. Punning on the French *du gouffre*, Tranter resurrects the clarinet player Jimmy Giuffre and then, in true ventriloquist mode, has him playing guitar, as though he's a member of Tranter's own covers band. Mallarmé might be a master of the enigma, but Tranter is a master of prosopopoeia, which is the speech of an imaginary person, or the conjuring of an imaginary other to speak to or through. Dozens of Aussie characters flit through Tranter's anti-tract, each allowing him to banter with the dead Mallarmé. On top of homophonic mistranslation, Tranter improvises a number of times, not so much with purple prose as with flourishes of word-sound association.

This is how and where Tranter appears and reappears like Disney's Cheshire Cat, distortedly reiterating and purposefully overdetermining Mallarmé's fragments of *pure*

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[91] Jacques Lacan repeatedly refers to "the unconscious" as "the discourse of the Other", where the Other is the symbolic structure of language. See Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", *Yale French Studies* 0.48 (1972): 45, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/lacan2.pdf.

[92] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 136–7.

[93] Tranter, *Starlight*, 18.

literature. From the French, *avance retombée d'un mal à dresser le vol / et couvrant les jaillissements / coupant au ras les bonds*, Tranter has, "makes him think he's dead and buried or makes him realise he's a bad dresser on a plane or in jail / but you don't dress for jail / and people don't wear a jacket on a plane anymore. / Raise the bonds." Later, Tranter manipulates the French, *le temps / de souffleter / bifurcées // un roc*, into "Time to snaffle / a bifurcated soufflé, / thinks the old bird."[94] "Desmond's Coupé" is rife with these mini car crashes of sound and sally. And at times, Tranter comes across like Australia's John Ashbery, in terms of being a medium for the vernacular, only Tranter has a more parodic bent, and a more scathing and cynical tone.

Fig. 8: S "Chesire Cat", screenshot, *Alice in Wonderland*, Burbank: Walt Disney Studios, 1951.

Tranter's inversion of *Un Coup de dés* is pure entertainment and pleasure at the expense of Mallarmé. His punning stunts are replete with downplaying Aussie vernacular, abjectivity, and naughty banter. His goofy narrative spoofs Mallarmé's notion of the "pure work" (*oeuvre pure*), or, as Edwards would say, "gives it the finger".[95]

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[94] Tranter, *Starlight*, 15–8.

[95] Edwards, "A Fluke", 51.

VI

There are dozens of mistranslated suitors that resonate for both Edwards and Tranter: *ombre* becomes "hombre"; *enfouie* becomes "phooey"; *sombre* becomes "sombrero"; *barbe soumise* becomes "barbequed sunset" in Edwards and "barbeque or so you surmise" in Tranter.

Interestingly, "*CE SERAIT*" ("it would be") is translated by both Edwards and Tranter into Pig-Spanish: "*QUE SERA*" for Edwards, and "*que sera, sera*" by Tranter. *Que sera sera* ("what will be, will be") is a pseudo-Spanish exclamation used to convey a fatalistic recognition that future events may be out of the speaker's control (... could *Un Coup de dés* be a long drawn-out analogy for this sentiment?). The phrase rose to popularity as the title of a pop song from 1956, which both Tranter and Edwards would undoubtedly have been subjected to in their formative years.

or

Who is haunting whom, here?

aussi

Reading these four poems side by side—*Un Coup de dés* and its "veiled inversions at a juncture whose supremacy's probably // celluloid / oh puerile shadow" (as "A Fluke" describes them)[96]—at some point they begin to merge into each other's shadows, and superimpose. In the line: "*...and gives it the finger // COMME ÇA*",[97] Edwards can be seen as translating Tranter. In the lines: "eating soup and getting vaguer / ... he enters the aisle, bending his knee / like a bat flopping into the sea,"[98] Tranter could be transmuting

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[96] Edwards, "A Fluke", 48.

[97] Edwards, "A Fluke", 51.

[98] Tranter, *Starlight*, 17.

Brennan. In the lines: "the fair white page // whose candour / illumes / the mystic signs /// Abracadabra,"[99] Brennan might be commenting on Edwards. And, strangely enough, Mallarmé comes to translate all his Australian mistranslators in the lines: "An insinuation   simple / in the silence   enrolled with irony / or / the mystery / hurled / howled // in some nearby   whirlpool of hilarity and horror",[100] i.e. Australia.

<div align="center">

aussi

</div>

During the first drafts of this assay, a plagiarism scandal in Australian poetry was creating a whirlpool of hilarity and horror in which Freud was invoked: "Everywhere the signs that a poet has been here before me".[101] One poet in particular was accused of not citing his theft of other writers' lines, lines that included the Freud doozy above. His defense was that he was writing centos. In terms of plagiarism[102], Brennan, Edwards and Tranter's mistranslations recall pre-eighteenth-century attitudes toward originality, or what was called "creative imitation", whereby the imitation and strategic revision of prior authors was a kind of "filial rejection with respect". Moreover/move over, as Northrop Frye jokes in *Anatomy of Criticism*: "any serious study of literature soon shows that the real difference between the original and the imitative poet is simply that the former is more profoundly imitative".[103]

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[99] Brennan, "Musicopoematographoscope", 17.

[100] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 134–5.

[101] For a brief summary of a recent plagiarism scandal in Australian poetry, see Toby Fitch, "Plagiarism scandal has revealed an ugly side of Australian poetry", *The Guardian*, September 23, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/23/australian-poetry-plagiarism.

[102] The term plagiarism comes from the Latin *plagiarius*, which literally means "kidnapper", and dates back to the first century AD, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The history of plagiarism is a long and complicated one and I don't intend to rewrite it. In the end, this study of mistranslation is conducted in the spirit of epistemological anarchism: not seeking to find the solution to issues such as plagiarism, but rather playfully misreading those issues so to uncover various absurdities that might generate new critical excursions through aesthetics.

[103] Northrop Frye et al., "Imitation", in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Fourth Edition*, eds. Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 675–7.

or

Serio Ludere.

or

The imitative elements of a homophonic translation seem to allow, or even encourage, a kind of jokey vitriol, an ironic deadpanning in the translator. I tend to think of Brennan, Edwards and Tranter's inversions as three big jokes. They certainly adhere to Sigmund Freud's theories on jokes. He wrote of how jokes are an interaction between unconscious drives and conscious thoughts, and he believed that jokes let out forbidden thoughts and feelings that the conscious mind usually suppresses in deference to society.[104]

aussi

Anne Carson psychoanalyses a crisis in Hölderlin's translations, which were idiosyncratic, went through years of compulsive revision, "forcing the text from strange to more strange", and used increasingly violent choices for words as he closed in on his own madness:

> Maybe Hölderlin was pretending to be mad the whole time, I don't know. What fascinates me is to see his catastrophe, at whatever consciousness he chose it, as a method extracted from translation, a method organised by the rage against cliché. After all what else is one's own language but a gigantic cacophonous cliché.

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[104] Each of the mistranslations analysed in this essay could fit, at various instances, all three of Freud's categories for jokes:

    1) The mimetic joke: which is a process involving two different representations of the body in our mind. For example, in the phrase "Their hearts are in the right place," the heart has two representations. One is anatomical while the other is metaphorical;

    2) Tendentious jokes: which are jokes that have to contain lust, hostility or both; and

    3) Non-tendentious jokes, where the joke applies "to one and the same act of ideation, two different ideational methods".

See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Vol. 6 of the Pelican Freud Library, 1905, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 132–67.

Nothing has not been said before. The templates are set. Adam long ago named all the creatures. Reality is captured.[105]

When one approaches the blank white page (as Mallarmé did so warily), its empty surface is already filled with the whole history of writing up to that moment: "it is a compaction of all the clichés of representation" already extant in the writer's world, in a writer's head, in the probabilities of what can be done on this surface.[106]

The act of mistranslating, then—of writing over, through, or under a given text—is also a catastrophising, a method for disrupting or undercutting the originality of the original, but also a way of pointing to the inherent cliché in one's own language, and in poems of the canon, even knowingly mimetic templates such as *Un Coup de dés*.[107]

aussi

Both Mallarmé's and Derrida's writings have a particular penchant for mimesis—are self-conscious of it, and employ it. Mallarmé's prose poem, "Mimique", beginning with the word "silence" and ending with "reading", plays on the varying meanings of mime and mimesis so as to demonstrate the inherent repetition and mimicry in writing, thus offering us a way to read his own work. Roger Pearson's description of the poem makes this clear: it's "a written text describing a silent mime, a mime (as event) by a mime (Margueritte) who has written a visible (but to the reader of 'Mimique' invisible) text … about a performance which is an unwritten page of monologue, itself a silent

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[105] Anne Carson, *Nay Rather*, The Cahiers Series #21 (London: Sylph Editions, 2013), 18–20.

[106] This paragraph was paraphrased, switching "the painter" to "the writer", from Carson, *Nay Rather*, 20.

[107] According to Carson (*Nay Rather*, 4), "Cliché is a French borrowing, past participle of the verb *clicher*, a term from printing meaning 'to make a stereotype from a relief printing surface'. It has been assumed into English unchanged, partly because using French words makes English-speakers feel more intelligent and partly because the word has imitative origins (it is supposed to mimic the sound of the printer's die striking the metal) that make it untranslatable". The word cliché then is onomatopoeic, and a neologism for an untranslatable sound. In a sense, from its journey from action to word, you could call it a homophonic translation, or a mistranslation.

monologue in a dialogue with a soul (a reader of a dead wife) who doesn't speak."[108] And if we substitute 'poet' or 'poem' for 'mime' in the previous description, we conjure a definition of Mallarmé the translator of silence.

or

"Mimique" is another example of Mallarmé's "*or*-play". It even contains the word *or* ("gold"), along with other classic Mallarméan words that create chains of association such as *fantôme* ("phantom", "shade", "shape"), *blanc* ("white", "blank", "space"), *hymen* (both "membrane" and, archaically, "marriage"), which, along with the poem's syntactical ambiguities, act out an imitation, not of a referent or a reality, but of the notion of mimesis itself:

> here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction ... Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences ...

> *ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé,* sous une apparence fausse de présent*. Tel opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans briser la glace: il installe, ainsi, un milieu, pur, de fiction ... Surprise, accompagnant l'artifice d'une notation de sentiments par phrases point profèrées ...[109]*

aussi

In "The Double Session, or Mallarmé's Miming of Mimesis" (*La double séance*), Derrida "executes a kind of '*pas de deux*'—both a dance of duplicity and an erasure of binality—

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108 Roger Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance: The Translation of Silence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 65–6.

109 Mallarmé, "Mimique", in the "Translator's Introduction" to *Dissemination*, 1972, by Derrida, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xx–xxii.

with the history of a certain interpretation of *mimesis*".[110] What is initially striking about "The Double Session" is the suggestive typographic spacing. It takes Mallarmé's prose poem "Mimique" and inserts it into an L-shaped quotation from Plato's *Philebus* (which is concerned with the nature of thinking and art); it has quotations in boxes from *Un Coup de dés* and *Le Livre*; it reproduces Mallarmé's handwriting at one point; and the pages are often loaded with footnotes. The reader's attention is clearly being directed to the syntactical function of spacing in the act of reading. Barbara Johnson, Derrida's translator, writes:

> Through such supplementary syntactical effects, Derrida duplicates and analyses the ways in which Mallarmé's texts mime their own articulation, include their own blank spaces among their referents, and deploy themselves consistently with one textual fold too many or too few to be accounted for by a reading that would seek only the text's "message" or "meaning". By thus making explicit the role of the materiality of space within the act of understanding, Mallarmé—and Derrida— demonstrate the untenability of the logocentric distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between ideality and materiality.[111]

Derrida argues that mime—and by implication, writing—doesn't imitate or copy some prior phenomena, idea, or figure, but constitutes the phantasm of the original in and through the mime:

> He represents nothing, imitates nothing, does not have to conform to any prior referent with the aim of achieving adequation or verisimilitude ... We are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing: faced, so to speak, with the double ... that nothing anticipates, nothing at least, that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference ... this speculum reflects no reality: it produces mere "reality-effects" ... in this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a difference or dyad does exist, since there are mimes and phantoms. But it is a difference without

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[110] Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction" to *Dissemination*, xxvii.

[111] Johnson, "Translator's Introduction", xxviii–xxix.

reference, or rather reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a ghost that is the phantom of no flesh.[112]

or

The ante-simulacrum, the pre-copy of a copy.

aussi

Throughout "The Double Session" Derrida puns on Plato's *antre* ("cave") and Mallarmé's *entre* ("between"). What he is getting at is a characterisation of the "space of writing"—in which writing is not the revelation of truth but an "event" ("hymen, crime, suicide, spasm") where "the simulacrum is a [perpetual] transgression", and where—to continue the sexual metaphor—binaries such as desire and presence, void and fulfillment, become indistinguishable, collapsed, folded over/into one another. The page, the folded tissue or veil of the hymen, is transgressed, but it's "fiction": "What takes place is only the *entre* (between), the place, the spacing, which is nothing …" Endless mirrors, a deadlock of meaning, where "nothing happens", becoming suspense: "Hymen in perpetual motion: one can't get out of Mallarmé's *antre* as one can out of Plato's cave. Never min(e)d [*mine de rien*]".[113]

or

Eternal return.

or

In returning to Derrida's suggestive typography, where "Mimique" is inserted into Plato's cave full of shadows, and where a play of representation seems endless, one

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[112] Derrida, "The Double Session", in *Dissemination*, 206.

[113] In French, *mine de rien* means, in its colloquial sense, "as though it were of no importance"; but literally it can mean "a mine full of nothing" (in Derrida, "The Double Session", 208–16).

doesn't have to think of this concept in Nietzschean terms, as if "some day or night a demon [might] steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more ...'"[114] The inability of a text, of literature, of genre, to escape its own terms, and to escape the play of representation, can be more productive than that. Mallarmé is more productive than that. And so is Edwards, especially. For instance, is not the gutter to Mallarmé what the cave is to Plato, just in a new configuration? And is not the gutter to Edwards—in which the gutter exists literally in the work but also figuratively between his work and Mallarmé's—a cave within a cave, a cave outside a cave, and a cave between a cave, in which a new dimension is breached?

or

Existing *entre* the *antre*, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* tears the page, while, *entre* the *autre antre*, Edwards' "A Fluke" tears the shadow of the page. Edwards' homo-erotic imagery and metaphors in his doubling over of Mallarmé's text make "A Fluke" a literal inversion, meanwhile tearing heterosexual literature a new one, so to speak.

aussi

Derrida's writings are useful in explaining how a text, how literature, is always meta. In many of his essays, but particularly in "The Law of Genre" (*genre* in French also means "gender"), Derrida shows how language is always structured from its opposite, its other. Through two important rhetorical tropes, *chiasmas* (repeated inversion/reversal of words) and *catachresis* (taking a metaphor to extremes), he explores the relationship between *citation* and *récit* (re-citation)—or language versus speech—and how such binaries, when examined extensively, cannot hold up over multiple iterations. He makes the argument that any category that arises (say, a poem, or a visual poem) seems to come from within itself, but also from outside. It comes from both outside and inside, hence Derrida's imagistic use of invagination and (en)folding.[115]

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114 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1887, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 341.

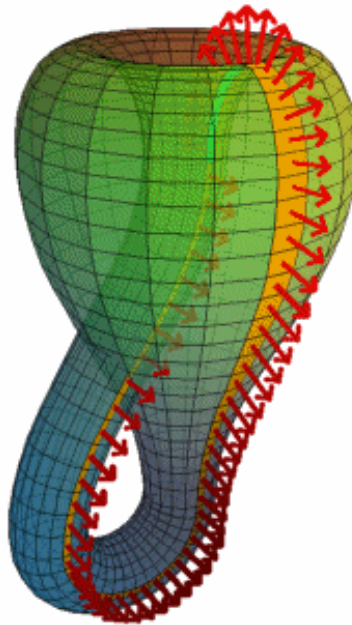115 Derrida, "The Law of Genre", trans. Avital Ronell, *Glyph: Textual Studies* 7 (1980): 202–32.

or

Fig. 9: Konrad Polthier, "Klein bottle", gif, *Plus Magazine* (2003).[116]

aussi

Derrida attempts in *Of Grammatology* (his science of writing) to invert the assumption that writing represents speech. He explains that, in the "play of representation", we don't know which is the chicken and which the egg, because if writing is the representor—the mirror—it thereby reflects speech and things, distorting and perverting them. It splits what it represents and offers up a trace, a *différance*, a double, a supplement, a spectre (all key Derridean terms). Writing is

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[116] The Klein bottle is an example of a non-orientable surface; it's a two-dimensional manifold against which a system for determining a normal vector cannot be consistently defined. It's a one-sided surface which, if traveled upon, could be followed back to the point of origin while flipping the traveller upside down. Another related non-orientable object is the Möbius strip. Whereas a Möbius strip is a surface with boundary, a Klein bottle has no boundary (conversely, a sphere is an orientable surface with no boundary). The Klein bottle was first described in 1882 by German mathematician Felix Klein. Incidentally, it may have originally been named the Kleinsche Fläche ("Klein surface") but was then misinterpreted as Kleinsche Flasche ("Klein bottle"), which ultimately led to the adoption of its current term. See Francis Bonahon, *Low-Dimensional Geometry: from Euclidean Surfaces to Hyperbolic Knots* (Providence: American Mathematical Society, 2009), 95. For active gif, see: https://plus.maths.org/content/os/issue26/features/mathart/kleinBottle_anim.

A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three.[117]

or
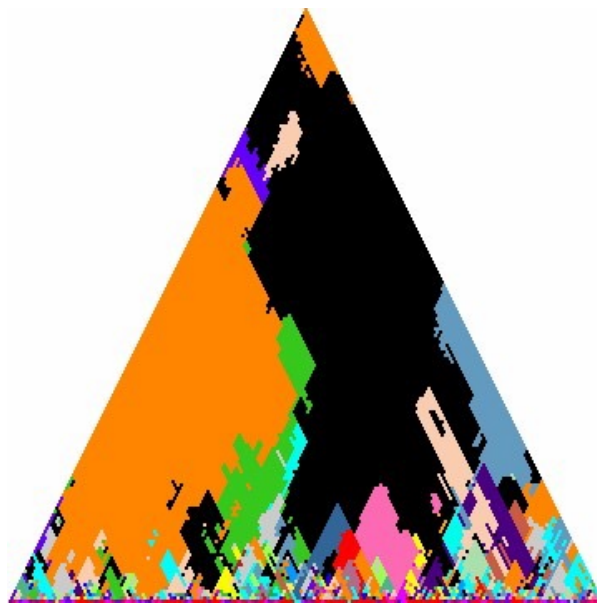
Fig. 10: "Timescape" of Chopin's *Mazurka Op. 68 No. 3*, *CHARM: AHRC* (2009).[118]

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[117] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1967, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 36–7.

[118] This colorful triangle might look like abstract art, but it's actually a visual representation of the similarities between different recordings of the same piece of music. It's a "timescape". The horizontal axis represents time, and the colours show how similar the recording being analysed is to other specific recordings. What is being measured is the relative duration of each note, or the artist's unique rubato. The image is a timescape for Arthur Rubinstein's 1939 recording Chopin's *Mazurka Op. 68 No. 3*. See: *CHARM: AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music*, http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/projects/p2_3_2.html.

In other words, we can't escape on any level how writing is a play of representation, how writing is always already illicit play, our "nefarious complicity" with "meaning". What we think are truths are "in fact" already multi-face(te)d. Our attempts at "meaning" are reductive. What we try to reduce to a singularity is already three-dimensional. Truth in writing is a chimera, yet traces of truth are there—via the "living presence" of speech, as Derrida calls it, through which "the signifier and the signified seem to unite".[119] Like the television, or film, or the phone—writing is a technology that reproduces ghosts. Truth is unreproducible > Writing is forever not > Righting feverish naughts > Writhing in forgery knots. Yet in the speech-y nonsense of punning, truth forms.

<div align="center">

aussi

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According to Gelett Burgess, "Nonsense is the fourth dimension of literature".[120] This nonsense-mining fourth dimension is where the plays on words of Edwards' "A Fluke" and Tranter's "Desmond's Coupé" begin. Their poems offer "Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation" (from "Mimique", above). They foreground mimesis: we already know when we start to read that the phantasm of the original, the ante-simulacrum, is Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*. Homophonic translation is like a feedback loop gone loopy, glitchy. Extra mirrors and reflecting pools reflect back distorted or disturbed magnifications—which whirl/whorl us into a fifth dimension, where representation equals re*prescient*ation—more *multi-nefarious* than before—and where "truth" and "meaning" become even more material, become "literal" again, not only space junk but the filaments in space too, whether we choose to see them or not. Some might need a Hubble telescope. It's the inverse of Mallarmé's white page. Edwards' and Tranter's inversions agitate and blink in black pools of the sky.

<div align="center">

or

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According to Edwards, paraphrasing Robert Duncan, a significant forebear of his:

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[119] Derrida, *Positions*, 1972, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 22.

[120] Gelett Burgess, *The Burgess Nonsense Book* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1901).

The poem ... is "multiphasic", "polyvalent", space enmeshed in time, duration embedded in place (whether page or auditorium). As its recipients, we experience "the concords and contrasts in chronological sequence, as in a jigsaw puzzle [sic]," but Duncan also asks his readers (and listeners, presumably) to bear in mind "the time of the whole," in which "each part . . . is conceived as a member of every other part, having, as in a mobile, an interchange of roles".[121]

From there/here—with the poem vibrating above the Abyss as mobile, as constellation—it's up to us where we take our "play space-time", our imaginations. As Mallarmé puts it, "it is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate!"[122]

or

Do we need a new definition for translation? Attempting to offer a global classification of translation's linguistic aspects, Roman Jakobson distinguishes three kinds:

1. intralingual translation, or paraphrase;
2. interlingual translation, or translation in the most common sense;
3. intersemiotic translation, in which, for example, verbal signs are reencoded in nonverbal sign systems.[123]

Yet each of these classifications presumes the existence of one language and of one translation in the literal sense, that is, that one language can be seemlessly transferred into another—that, as Derrida puts it, "each linguistic system has integrity".[124]

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[121] Edwards, "Interview with Chris Edwards".

[122] Mallarmé, "Mimique", 175.

[123] Patrick Mahony, "Roundtable on Translation", in Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, 1982, trans. Christie McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 94–5.

[124] Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", in *The Ear of the Other*, 100.

aussi

If we're going to categorise translation, then, we might also turn to Australian poet and critic Peter Porter for how *not* to cordon things off. In "Saving from the Wreck", his essay on translation, he plays the school teacher, helpfully laying out seven categories:

1. *Uncompromising Scholarly*;
2. *Aesthetic Scholarly*;
3. *Recreative Scholarly*;
4. *Exhuberant Scholarly or Over the Top!*;
5. *Literal*;
6. *Imitation*; and,
7. *Ecumenical Slovenly.*[125]

Of almost all these categories Porter is scathing, in terms of what makes for a "successful" translation and not a shipwreck, exclaiming: "I think we simply have to admit that much of what passes for translation today is just organised dissemination of misinformation."[126] While Porter acknowledges overlaps in the types, he only mentions homophonic translation once: "More bewildering is Louis Zukofsky's aim in translating Catullus of finding English words which are homophones—or nearly so—while still being approximate translations of the Latin", and lumps this mode into *Uncompromising Scholarly*.[127] Of course, it wasn't simply Louis Zukofsky's work, but his wife Celia's too. Porter seems to overlook this gendered fact in much the same way he ignores other forms of translation, while narrowing the parameters of translation to what is sometimes and elsewhere referred to, in terms of a seemless semantic translation, as "transparent literalism".

Maria Tymoczko writes of the prevalence of this kind of translation, historically: "The history of Western European translation privileges an implicit literalism that has been

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[125] Peter Porter, "Saving from the Wreck", in *Saving from the Wreck* (Nottingham: Trent, 2001), 37–47.

[126] Porter, "Saving from the Wreck", 47.

[127] Porter, "Saving from the Wreck", 41.

used to disseminate the empires of religion, secular rule, and commerce throughout the last five hundred years."[128]

Despite Porter's conservative critique, that falls in line with classical tropes, attempting to uphold the canon rather than recognising alternatives that twentieth and twenty-first century poetics have developed, he manages to concoct (within his categories) a couple of excellent descriptions that could also be applied to a category that I've been calling, up until now, "mistranslation", of which homophonic translation would be one fraction. On damning the process of "Imitation" (another fraction of mistranslation)—of writing versions like those of Robert Lowell, for instance—he writes: "The basic rule seems to be that the translator finds in a finished work of art the bones of one of his own. He is struck by a form of pre-echo".[129]

<p style="text-align:center">or</p>

What if the aim of a translation *is* the "dissemination of misinformation"? or to illuminate—or even set fire to—pre-echoes? Homophonic translation is, after all, part-rendering and part-rubbishing of a forebear's work. And, in any event, writing always already peddles in the symbolic Other that is language, as per Lacan. Results have had to pass through the unconscious. Writing is always already a "translation"—of thought, or of internal monologue. A *mis*translation, through its word-play techniques, its use of *latent* forms of language such as the pun, brings some of the unconscious elements to the surface, makes them "present", an event. Let's not forget, here, Mallarmé's *fil conducteur* and Edwards' "the latent conductor unreasoning verisimilitude imposes on the text". We could add to this Walter Redfern's "Puns are a latent resource of language". Disseminated throughout a poem, puns are "unearthed" by the poet during the ludic process of writing; puns "illuminate the nature of language" and make the reader a participant in the unearthing—an event that encourages collaboration.[130] On quoting Roland Barthes and his pleasure over puns, Redfern, ever the archivist, writes:

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[128] Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2007), 8.

[129] Porter, "Saving from the Wreck", 45.

[130] Walter Redfern, *Puns: Second Edition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), 11.

Experimental psychologists have shown quantifiably what most people know instinctively and by experience: that it is authoritarian personalities who most dislike ambiguity. Hence the double meaning practised in all forms of underground literature. However, as well as pointing outwards in this way, wordplay always points inwards and refers to the duplicity of language itself. This is clearly dangerous territory. The *quiproquo*, one of the multifarious forms of punning, can extend to a whole situation: a misreading as well as an alternative reading superimposed on reality.[131]

or

"... the unquestionable charm of the incorrect line".[132]

aussi

Redfern's description of wordplay doubles as a felicitous description for the methodology behind mistranslation and homophony in poetry. An overly self-conscious psychoanalytic version of this methodology—a *quiproquo* misreading of sorts—can also be found in Freud's "questionable" *re*-membering of "Signorelli", an Italian artist's name he forgot while on a trip to Europe's so-called "subaltern", the Balkans. For Freud, the pun is a psychic release-valve in which humour alleviates the stress of repressing unpleasant truths.

He initially thought the painter's name was either "Botticelli" or "Boltraffio". That he couldn't remember the name, Freud claims, meant that he was suppressing a disturbing memory (a former patient who suicided). Freud's unconscious had also attached to the memory a sexual content, which concealed itself through forgetting the name: "He had formed an unconscious association between the Italian painters and the Bosnians' valuing of sexual enjoyment over life".[133] Yet Freud, as he often does, reassembles his

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[131] Redfern, *Puns: Second Edition*, 12.

[132] Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 201, my translation as opposed to Johnson's.

[133] Dušan I. Bjelić, "Balkan Geography and the De-Orientalization of Freud", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 29.1 (2011): 36.

own "unconscious" processing of language remarkably well, often writing about these instances many years later and explaining the way puns work in his own repressed sexual desires—in this case, for the supposedly "pathological, anal, 'archaic', and in need of Oedipalization" Balkan other. He makes a connection between *Signorelli* and *Herzegovina* via *Signor* and *Herr*, both meaning "Sir". *Trafoi*, apparently the location he received news of the suicide, is linked to *Boltraffio*, while *Bosnia* was where the conversation took place, and *Botticelli*, a logical final step:
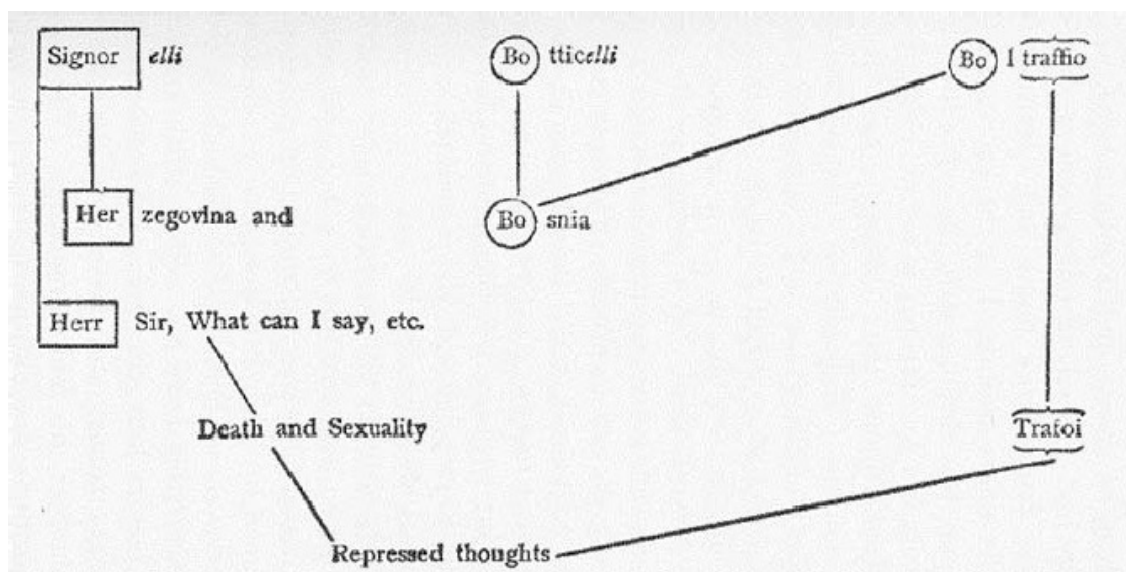
Fig. 11: Dušan I. Bjelić, "Freud's Chemistry of Words", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 29.1 (2011).

Yet Freud, in his analysis, also forgot to include the fact that he'd remembered seeing a picture of the painter Signorelli himself, found in the lower left corner of one of the painter's frescoes. The picture, a kind of signature, was therefore a third substitute to the forgotten name Signorelli. The "signature" can be interpreted as a reference to the Latin verb *signare* and this word, instead of Freud's *signore*, then leads us back to a simple analysis of the Signorelli parapraxis.[134] As would Freud's own name, *Sig*mund. The Bosnia-Herzegovina associations (*Bo* and *Herr*), that Freud himself introduced to bridge the gap between two failures of memory, are no longer necessary. As conscious as Freud is of his mind's movement through language, there are still slips he can't keep track of, voids he can't fill, proving by default his own hypothesis—that the unconscious

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[134] "Signorelli parapraxis", *Wikipedia*, which cites Huub Engels, *Emil Kraepelins Traumsprache 1908-1926* (2006): 66–9, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signorelli_parapraxis. This is the best reference I could find.

thrives on the unreliably interchangeable structures of language. For Freud, the pun is also a subversive device whose tidiness enhances the illusion of self-mastery. So even when we don't believe a word he says, at least we can witness the stunning leaps, laps, lapses and lapsus in Freud's imaginative written accounts.[135]

aussi

The *quiproquo* wordplay methodology has its echo in Gregory Ulmer's coinage, the "puncept". In an anthology called *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, Ulmer illuminates the puncept at play in both Derrida's and Lacan's oeuvres, a Mallarméan/malleable use of the pun, shape-shifting across and shaping their ideas.[136] For a couple of *pat* instances that *tap* into this idea I'm trying to teethe/tease out, Lacan interchanges terms such as *dires* (sayings) and *désir* (desire), anagrams of each other, while Derrida champions the punning stunts in *Finnegans Wake* (read ahead for Derrida's *quiproquo* reading of Joyce via the Tower of Babel myth). At its core, the puncept is a methodology that "allows language to say what it knows, which allows the unconscious to show itself in the play of language".[137]

or

Another example is evident in Lacan's psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance* (bliss). Generally left untranslated to include the meaning of sexual orgasm, a *jouissance* drives the subject (similar to Freud's *the death drive*) to repeatedly attempt to transgress the

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[135] The "Signorelli" account first appears in 1901 in Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Vol. 5 of the Pelican Freud Library, trans. Alan Tyson, 1960 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 38–45.

[136] A separate though no less important example of punning that can shape and shift an oeuvre is embodied in one of Marcel Duchamp's pseudonyms, Rrose Sélavy. The name is a pun on the French phrase *Eros*, *c'est la vie*, which translates to English as "Eros, that's life". Duchamp signed written works with the name, and his cross-dressing alter ego allowed him to collaborate with Man Ray on a series of photographs. The pseudonym appeared in subsequent projects by other artists and writers, including in a collection of aphorisms, puns, and spoonerisms by the poet Robert Desnos.

[137] Gregory Ulmer, "The Puncept in Grammatology", in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 171–5.

prohibitions, or err against the law, imposed on his/her enjoyment—to go beyond the pleasure principle. But going beyond is also painful, and akin to Bataille's erotic philosophy, particularly as he refers to anguish ("when the bounds of the possible are over-reached, a recoil is inevitable"[138]), and as epitomised, here, in Lacan's mention (or "di-mention", an anglo-version of Derrida's *dit-mension*—another dimension opened up between the lines by "said" punning):

> "Who does not know from experience that it is possible not to want to ejaculate? Who does not know from experience knowing the recoil imposed on everyone, in so far as it involves terrible promises, by the approach of *jouissance* as such. Who does not know that one may not wish to think?"[139]

This last question places *jouissance* outside/beyond the Other (the Other being Lacan's definition of the unconscious, of language as symbolic structure), as Ulmer writes: "*Jouissance* refers, then, to a fourth sense, the four senses being sense, non-sense, common sense, and "*jouis*-sense"." The fifth sense (*jouis-sens* in French), "carries the insistence of desire in the chain of signifiers, productive of homonyms and puns".[140] This is the fifth dimension that homophonic translation flirts with, as di-mentioned earlier.

aussi

Mallarmé fondles the puncept in his *Crise de vers*, the crisis he also called a "liberation". He wrote of the "double state of speech" (or the "double state of the word" in most translations) and its place in the "the pure work" / "the book of verse" / "the Book of Books":

> An order innate to the book of verse exists inherently or everywhere, eliminating chance; it's also necessary, to eliminate the author: now, any subject is fated to

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138 Bataille, *Eroticism*, 1962, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), 87.

139 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Conceptions of Psychoanalysis*, 1973, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth, 1977), 234–5.

140 Ulmer, "The Puncept in Grammatology", 175.

imply, among the fragments brought together, a strange certainty about its appropriate place in the volume. It is susceptible to this because any cry possesses an echo—motifs of the same type balance each other, stabilizing each other at a distance, and neither the sublime incoherence of a romantic page, nor the artificial unity that adds up to a block-book, can provide it.[141]

In other words, "the book" is imaginary, unconscious, the Other: "Everything becomes suspense, a fragmentary disposition with alternations and oppositions, all working toward the total rhythm of the white spaces, which would be the poem silenced; but it is translated to some extent by each pendant. I want to consider it an instinct …"[142]

A pendant is an artistic composition intended to match or complement another. Given its meaning of a match or parallel, the pendant is also the pun. And wordplay *is* instinctive, requiring the poet to cede to their unconscious or disappear and, as Mallarmé would have it (and as noted a number of times already), "cede the initiative to words, set in motion by the clash of their inequalities". In homophonic translation, the poet can also *seed* the initiative to words, set in *com*motion by the clash of their *e*qualities.[143]

<div align="center">**or**</div>

Is mistranslation any different to "translation", or to "writing"? There seem to be too many issues with the word "translation" itself for it to hold. Do we need new categories

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[141] Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 208.

[142] Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 209.

[143] Incidentally, regarding puns: John Pollack, a former Clinton speechwriter and author of the book *The Pun Also Rises*, suggests that puns generally fell out of favour during the Enlightenment, when the form's reliance on imprecision and silliness was out of kilter with the prevailing spirit of sophistication and rational inquiry. See John Pollack, *The Pun Also Rises: How the Humble Pun Revolutionized Language, Changed History, and Made Wordplay More than Some Antics* (New York: Gotham, 2012).

to add to those above, do we need other words for translation, or is the word translation simply splitting itself the way language and writing do?[144]

As outlined at the beginning of this assay, Mallarmé proposes "Transposition; Structure, another", a notion that allows words, "through the clash of their inequalities", to "light each other up through reciprocal reflections", and which "gives you the surprise of never having heard that fragment of ordinary eloquence before … bathed in a brand new atmosphere".[145] Transposition, in Rasula and McCaffery, "is not a simple transit but a dichotomous zone of interaction"—interaction between languages, between aurality and visuality, between the imperfections of signs.[146]

or

To cite Mallarmé's *Crise de vers* again, this time at greater length:

> Languages imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking: thought considered as writing without accessories, not even whispers, still *stills* immortal speech; the diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from proferring words that would otherwise be, when made uniquely, the material truth. This prohibition is explicitly devastating, in Nature (one bumps up against it with a smile), where nothing leads one to take oneself for God; but, at times, turned toward aesthetics, my own sense regrets that discourse fails to express objects by touches

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[144] While I'm simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing dichotomies of translation, I might as well construct a few separate categories for "mistranslation", or "versions":

1. Re-version — a re-membering of a poem, post-Orphic coming back together.
2. Subversion — an undermining, a re-fragmentation, a return to the Underworld.
3. Aversion — a version to rid one's self of prior influence through textual annihilation.
4. Diversion — a version to distract, deviate, divert: be the deviant, be the clinamen!
5. Inversion — an upside-down version, a Down Under conceit: a writing backwards through the original text.

[145] Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 208–10.

[146] Rasula and McCaffery, *Imagining Language*, 203.

corresponding to them in shading or bearing, since they do exist among the many languages, and sometimes in one.[147]

Mallarmé's crisis didn't stop him from thinking that poetry had the answers. He expounds further that "*verse would not exist*" (his emphasis) but for this very untranslatability in Nature (as mentioned earlier, he makes the point that the signified and the signifier in language rarely match—*nuit* is a bright sound, *jour* is dark), and that poetry, "philosophically, makes up for language's deficiences, as a superior supplement". "[F]aced with the breaking up of classic literary rhythms ... and their dispersion into articulated shivers close to instrumentation," Mallarmé heralds poetry's ability to *transpose* itself into new forms for new eras, "for an art of achieving the transposition into the Book of the symphony ..."[148]

<p style="text-align:center;">**or**</p>

Is verse, or poetry, really any better than any other use of language in translating Nature? As representation, even if poetry can be symphonic? Poetry, despite its complex aural, visual, musical, multilingual capabilities, is still restricted by systems of language; it's still a construct, fabrication, go-between, chimera, shadow. Perhaps poetry is just better at being a ghost, at shape-shifting, at being other ...?

<p style="text-align:center;">**aussi**</p>

While Mallarmé gifts us the term "transposition", Derrida writes, in *Positions*, of how translation could do with another definition, a substitute: "In the limits to which it is possible, or at least *appears* possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another."[149]

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147 Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 205.

148 Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse", 205–6 and 210.

149 Derrida, *Positions*, 20.

In other words, the problematic difference between signifier and signified is doubled in translation. "Transformation" as definition goes a step further than Mallarmé's "transposition" in relating the mutational aspects of writing.

aussi

Most conversations about translation evoke the story of the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis, a story that "is always in our interest … to reread closely."[150] In *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida writes of "the great challenge to translation", *Finnegans Wake*, for its multilingual punning methodology. In "The Puncept in Grammatology", Ulmer quotes first David Hayman and then Umberto Eco, who identify the "principal lesson" of *Finnegans Wake*:

> "The *Wake* belongs to a class (not a genre) of works which invite the reader to perpetuate creation". Eco agrees: "The search for 'open' models capable of guaranteeing and founding the mutation and the growth and, finally, the vision of a universe founded on possibility, as contemporary philosophy and science suggest to the imagination, encounters perhaps its most provoking and violent representation—perhaps its anticipation—in *Finnegans Wake*".[151]

Derrida describes how a Babelian motif runs from one end of the book to the other (the book, of course, is circular, with the last sentence only being completed by the incomplete opening sentence). Derrida picks out the moment in *Finnegans Wake* when Yahweh interrupts the construction of the tower by the tribe of the Shems[152] to condemn humanity to a multiplicity of languages—"which is to say, to the necessary

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150 Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 100. George Steiner's *After Babel*, most importantly, is a comprehensive study of translation which deals with the "Babel problem" of multiple languages. See Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

151 Ulmer, "The Puncept in Grammatology", 171.

152 "The tribe of the Shems" is Derrida's terminology, not Joyce's. Derrida stresses that their name, *Shem*, already means "name" in Hebrew.

and impossible task of translation". In that moment in *Finnegans Wake*, the three words "*And he war*" appear.[153] "In what language is this written?" Derrida asks, then continues:

> despite the multiplicity of languages, cultural references, and condensations, English is indisputably the dominant language in *Finnegans Wake*—all these refractions and slippages are produced in English or through English, in the body of that language. French would translate the English as: *il-guerre* (he wars), he declares war. And that's indeed what happens: God declares war on the tribe of the Shems who want to make a name for themselves by raising the tower and imposing their tongue on the universe. But obviously the German word *war* influences the English word, so we also have: He was, he was the one who said, for example, "I am that I am", which is the definition of Yahweh. And then one also hears the ear, which is very present in the rest of the text. *One hears a thousand things through other languages* (my emphasis).[154]

Derrida describes how translation can't mark "the fact there are, in one linguistic system, perhaps several languages or tongues". So then, if it is always in our interest to re-read this story closely, the Tower of Babel is surely a reminder story of a reminder story, as humanity continually needs reminding of the plurality of languages and the plurality *within* languages. Babel is the name that God imposes on the tower and the Shems. Babel is itself the name of the father, therefore God is imposing his own name on the Shems, which, when they come to translate it, can "confusedly be understood as confusion". Derrida continues: "Babel equals Confusion. This is the paradigm of the situation in which there is a multiplicity of languages and in which translation is both necessary and impossible".

By imposing his untranslatable name which must be translated, God produces what Derrida calls a "disschemination", which has at least four senses: dissemination,

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[153] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 258. It mustn't be forgotten that, despite its multilingual punning stunts, *Finnegans Wake* should also be viewed as being written in Irish English as a subversion of the hegemony of the English language.

[154] Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 98–9.

deschematization, de-"Shemitizing", and derouting or diverting from a path (the word *chemin* meaning path or road); and which forces the Shems into a position of "Translate me and what is more don't translate me".[155]

<div align="center">

or

BABBLE.

aussi

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With so many double/treble/quadruple entendres in the story of the Tower of Babel, it would seem that translation, "necessary and impossible", is actually—always and already—mistranslation. According to Derrida, even the word for tongue is mistranslated. The Hebrew word signifies "lip", so the Shems in fact desire to impose their lip on the universe.[156]

<div align="center">

or

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Perhaps hoping to enact the inverse of the Shems—Brennan, Edwards and Tranter give the French Euroverse some Australian lip.

<div align="center">

or

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After such a babbling anecdote, it can now be argued that homophonic mistranslation attempts the inverse of translation (at the same time as a "literal" sound/phonetic translation), in that it teases out "several languages or tongues" already in the one linguistic system. Homophonic mistranslation attempts to subvert/invert the hierarchy of one language over another by transforming the sounds of one linguistic system (and its many tongues) into sounds from another linguistic system (and its many tongues). (Remember, in both Edwards and Tranter, we're reading an Australian English, replete

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[155] Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 102–3.

[156] Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 101.

with its many colloquial tongues, subverting the mother tongue first of all, while also subverting the literary French.) In a homophonic mistranslation, every word becomes a little tongue looping between languages—a complex interaction of soundplay, a methodology seen and heard in *Finnegans Wake*.

or

Fig. 12: *Ouroboros*, by Theodoros Pelecanos, drawing, 1478, *Wikipedia*.

As Random Cloud writes of *Wake*, linking the pun to an erotic multiplicity, and to an everlasting destruction of singularity in language: "James Joyce conceived of *Finnegans Wake* as a circe, a simultanus short-circuit of all myth (Every Thing Equally and Immediately Remote), an indefinitely wyrm-edened book—in a word, an apoca*lapse*".[157]

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[157] Random Cloud, "Fearful Assymetry", in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 164. Note the puns, and in particular the word "simultanus", its "*or*-play", its homo-erotic tail and its desire, like any pun, to have it both ways, simultaneously.

aussi

Remember, a "fluke" is a tremotode worm, a parasite.[158] Writhing round. Much like this assay's pushing of buttons / brushing off Putins / bushy put-ons.

or

With its tail between its legs, the tower of Babel, allegorically, is a phallic symbol brought down by a declaration of non-independence, of plurality and multiplicity—by, simultaneously, a circulation (plus re-insertion into itself) and a "disschemination".

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[158] Edwards, "Double Talk".

VII

Fig. 13: Caravaggio, *Head of Medusa*, 1597, Florence: Uffizi Gallery.

In an interview with *Poetry International Web*, Chris Edwards writes/speaks about the reasons he returned to poetry after twenty years underground, not publishing any poetry, undergoing his own *crise de vers.* He cites Hélène Cixous' writings on phallocentrism as a vital influence in his poetic revival, and at length:

> Hélène Cixous's essay (or polemic, or manifesto) "The Laugh of the Medusa"
> revived, or revised, my interest in poetry in the early 1990s. "Nearly the entire
> history of writing," she wrote, "is confounded with the history of reason, of which
> it is the effect, the support and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the
> phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-
> congratulatory phallocentrism." "There have," however, "been poets who would go
> to any lengths to slip something by at odds with tradition … But only the poets—

not the novelists, allies of representationalism. Because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffman would say, fairies." Cixous called for volcanic upheaval, seeing in women and poets alike a "capacity to depropriate unselfishly", producing "a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organised around any one sun that's any more of a star than the others."[159]

aussi

Jacques Rancière describes the crisis in verse at the end of nineteenth century, the dispersing of the French alexandrine: "The poet no longer has a model, celestial or human, to imitate. Henceforth, it is by the mere 'dialectic of verse' that he will be able to revivify the seal of the idea, by forging together, according to an essential rhythm, 'many scattered veins of ore, unknown and floating.'"[160]

While there were no poetic models worth imitating, because the models had grown stale (needing "disschemination"), there was a renewed need for "forgery" (Mallarmé uses the English word)—to forge together new forms.

Considering these Australian "versions" of *Un Coup de dés*, perhaps now, in the twenty-first century, after all the fragmentation of the twentieth, there is a growing desire for a return to form—to rejoin with rejoinders the "cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros"— aware that there could only be such a reunion with form if it were interconnected *and* fragmented. As Edwards can visualise:

I like the idea of treating Australian poems, including Ern Malley's, not as dot-like entities (e.g. lyrics) or sites of authorial self-presence (meaning in isolation), but as

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[159] Edwards, "Interview with Chris Edwards".

[160] Jacques Rancière, quoting from *Mallarmé's critical prose poem* "Solemnity", in *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011), 11.

string-like (there's that lyre again) interwoven filaments—nodes, if you like, in a worldwide network of sociocultural webs (meaning as oscillation and experimental flux).[161]

At the heart of this statement are the impossible, the invisible, and the plural—the many ineffables that the poem seeks to mine and forge into new forms that oscillate between the decidable and the undecidable, between the known and the unknown, between and beyond borders, between ears. As Rancière concludes, quoting Mallarmé's *La musique et les lettres*: "Poetry is meditation, doubt transformed into hyperbole and that which 'projects, to a great forbidden and thunderous height, our conscious lack of what, up there, gleams'. One can say that this projection is a deception (*superchèrie*) or forgery. But the forgery is also the work done by a goldsmith in 'sowing doubt with rubies'."[162]

<div align="center">**or**</div>

A homophonic translation hyperbolises the doubt of "our conscious lack of what, up there, gleams", and "our unconscious lock on what, down here, gleans". Homophony hangs on the split dualities of words, highlighting the signifier, dispersing the signified, while collapsing the ground beneath both. Where Mallarmé's chains of suggestion intertwine and coalesce, increasing in power as we trace them across his oeuvre, a mistranslation's network of suggestion spreads across platforms, across eras, and erotically, across multiple authors.

<div align="center">**or**</div>

"[E]very word or letter I looked at was suggestive, and it wasn't always easy to remain faithful to all of them at once …"[163]

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[161] Edwards, "Interview with Chris Edwards".

[162] Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, 22.

[163] Edwards, "Double Talk".

<p style="text-align:center">or</p>

Un Coup de dés becomes exactly what its oscillating, borderline-polygamous poetics designed it to become: an ALSO-MACHINE, generating genomes, liminal looms, fantastical phantasms, altered alternatives, *other* others, *aussi* Aussies.

<p style="text-align:center">aussi</p>

For all Mallarmé's spouting of the *oeuvre pure*, the "search for the One Book all poets are attempting to write", he may well have spawned *the One Poem all books are attempting to write*. *Un Coup de dés* and its musical imagery, its vast landscape visuals and blank spaces on the page, its seductively (mis)translatable gutter-talk, its untouchable lack of meaning locked into correspondence with the Other, its (mis)rendered thought—and, above all, its *multi-nefarious* "and/or" poetics, its self-positioning as confused Master—have created some of the most perfect preconditions for a mistranslation storm. Infinitely reproducible, a shipwreck for endless spelunking, a spectre to haunt the haunted, the mobile to hang over the skyline and join the constellations. Storm clouds on the horizon. This is its great modernist haunting, shimmering:

"CONSIDERED A LOST CAUSE AMID CIRCUMSTANTANTIAL /
EVERLASTING INTESTINAL SPASMS //

WOULD OFFER YOU UP A LIKE SHIPWRECK ..."[164]

... on these impenetrable shorelines Down Under.

<p style="text-align:center">or</p>

The best modern literature, says Kristeva, explores the place of the abject, a place where boundaries crumble, where we are confronted with an archaic space before such

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[164] Edwards, "A Fluke", 43.

linguistic binaries as self and other, subject and object. The transcendent and sublime, for Kristeva, are simply our attempts at covering over the breakdowns (and subsequent reassertion of boundaries) associated with the abject: "On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject".[165]

Literature spelunks the cave, the lack, the want, that language is structured around. Kristeva elevates poetry and certain experimental forms of fiction because of their willingness to play with and break apart grammar, metaphor and meaning—because they "compel language to come nearest to the human enigma, to the place where it kills, thinks, and experiences jouissance all at the same time. A language of abjection of which the writer is both subject[166] and victim, witness and topple. Toppling into what? Into nothing ..."[167]

A literature of the void, I would say, but not Mallarmé's. I'm thinking of Edwards' [N]EVER [N]EVER. In its "double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject" rigadoon with *Un Coup de dés*, "A Fluke" exhibits the "laughter of the apocalypse".[168] Edwards' skilled homophonic mistranslation—its surface play, subjective but ambivalent attitude, its suspended exclamations, its absurdity, its gushing forth of the unconscious, the repressed, suppressed pleasure— lays bear the fact that language is at once contingent, arbitrary and limned with the abject fear of loss. Or, as Kristeva writes: "Not a language of the desiring exchange of

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[165] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 207.

[166] To clarify, through these various theories—some from the philosophies of deconstruction and some from science and psychoanalysis and elsewhere—I'm not arguing that subjectivity can be erased and I'm not advocating for the erasure of the other; quite the opposite, in fact. I'm arguing that the techniques used in experimental mistranslations can be used to subvert hegemonic structures within literature and the world. See my coda, part VIII, for a treatment of the political implications of these literary strategies regarding Australia.

[167] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 206.

[168] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 204.

messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges".[169]

or

An apoca*lapse* lapping/laughing at Australian beaches.

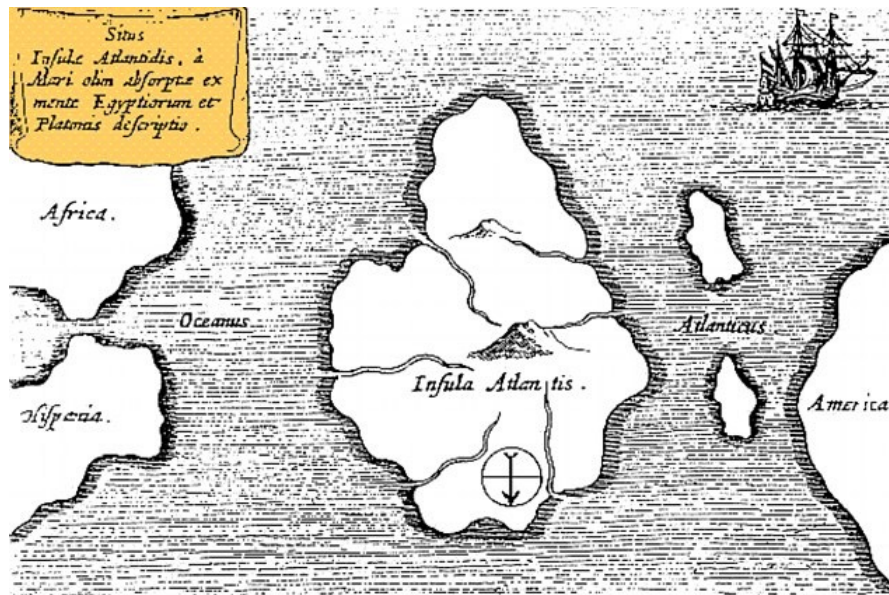[169] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 38.

VIII

Fig .14: Athanasius Kircher, "Map of the 'lost' island of Atlantis", *Mundus subterraneus*, Amsterdam, 1665.

Australia is still in the shadow of the image it has always had. Lost in antipodal space, we have hardly diverged from that perspective in which antiquity first beheld our hemisphere, its "other", millenia ago. Only its shadow lengthens as evening falls across the land. It is as though we are endlessly absorbed by it, into it. Whence that wasted prospect in our eyes. Our deserts, desolation, desertion. That country constantly reflecting on its own revolving.[170] —Paul Foss

Plato's Atlantis—that mythical antipodean land of abundance and treasures, that piece of "*pure invention*" that European colonial expansion eventually invaded and conquered —turned out to be "Australia", a country populated not by a great white race who would

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[170] Paul Foss, "Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum", in *Foreign Bodies Papers*, eds. Peter Botsman, Chris Burns and Peter Hutchings (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1981), 17.

create huge trade, but by races of Aborigines who had lived on and knew intimately the multiple landscapes of the continent. Yet, since it was "discovered", a discourse of the void and its related imagery resounds through our colonial literature, from the early explorers who described *Terra Australis* as a wasteland,[171] to the "whitewashing" of Australian history, as if the first Australians could simply be banished into the void from whence they appeared.[172] The dispossession of the first Australians "underwote the development of the nation" and over two hundred years would pass before Australia's highest court, the High Court of Australia, rejected the fiction that when Australia was discovered it was *terra nullius*—nobody's land—and rather recognised that Indigenous peoples have native title: land rights that existed before the British invaded and which can still exist today.[173]

We still mostly live on the coast facing out. In the early twenty-first century our shores are still symbolic barriers.[174] Despite being, since 1788, a land of migrants, the entire country has recently been excised from the migration zone so that asylum seekers can

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[171] Paul Foss writes: "From William Jansz of the *Duyfken* (1606) to Cook of the Endeavour (1770), and beyond, the antipodal simulacrum is draped over the country like a shroud. It is still hear here, haunting the present with its echoes". For descriptive quotes of the "wasteland" that Australia's "discoverers" encounted, see Foss, "Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum", 31–3.

[172] For an example of the ongoing revisionism of Australian history regarding the dispossession of Indigenous land, see Robert Manne ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2003). For an excellent essay on the two conflicting narratives of Indigenous dispossession in Australian history (native title versus the stolen generations), see Bain Attwood, "Unsettling pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia", *Postcolonial Studies* 8.3 (2015): 243–59, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13688790500231012.

[173] See "Mabo v Queensland", No. 2, HCA 23, 175 CLR 1 (June 3, 1992).

[174] Successive governments have adopted a somewhat anti-immigration catch-cry, "Turn back the boats!" The lives of many refugees, or "boat people", risking the boat trip to Australia have been notionally saved (but also rerouted—to Gulag-like offshore processing centres or back to their countries of origin, often risking persecution), but the loud and manipulative rhetoric has only increased the sense that Australia is zealously protective of its borders, callously indifferent to those claiming asylum. Former immigration minister Scott Morrison, for example, instructed Border Protection staff in 2013 to replace the phrase "asylum seeker" with "illegal maritime arrival" and "client" with "detainee". See Tom Clark, "Calling a boat person a spade: Australia's asylum seeker rhetoric", *The Conversation*, October 22, 2013, http://theconversation.com/calling-a-boat-person-a-spade-australias-asylum-seeker-rhetoric-19367.

be "processed offshore".[175] Completely surrounded by water, and now excised from the migration zone, Australia is literally an is-land, an isolate, as Foss writes: "Even with that island called "continent"; the terror of isolation merely grows in proportion to the size of its inner space. Big or little, islands die from the inwards out".[176]

aussi

Australia's body politic often privileges an unimpeachable sense of nationalism through a celebration of a distorted idea/ideal of the true or real Australia.[177] To advance any criticism of Australia is to become, somehow, and in some circles, "unAustralian". In a country where racism is rooted in the police force,[178] where Indigenous Australians die in custody, and asylum seekers are tortured in offshore prison camps, where Indigenous sporting heros are simultaneously cheered and jeered,[179] where sharks lurk in more headlines than in shipwrecks, where mining the reefs and the outback for natural resources is more important than preserving those resources, where explorers Burke and Wills died, discovering little more than what colonials would expect to find, and where the mirage of coastal living gives way to the driest continent in the world—

[175] Melissa Phillips, "Out of sight, out of mind: Excising Australia from the migration zone", *The Conversation*, May 17, 2013, http://theconversation.com/out-of-sight-out-of-mind-excising-australia-from-the-migration-zone-14387.

[176] Foss, "Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum", 35.

[177] Before he was ousted as prime minister of Australia, Tony Abbott of the Liberal Party opined "that everyone has got to be on Team Australia". It was broadly debated in the media what he meant exactly, whether it was anti-terrorist rhetoric, scaremongering, or something even more insidious to be applied to "everyday Australians". See Anne Summers, "Tony Abbott's Team Australia entrenches inequality", *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 23, 2014, http://www.smh.com.au/comment/tony-abbotts-team-australia-entrenches-inequality-20140821-106sdk.html.

[178] In August 2015, the Australian Border Force police unit set up the ominously named "Operation Fortitude", an operation that would have seen police stop people on the streets of Melbourne for random visa checks (a process that would have relied on racial profiling) had there not been a huge public protest. Political rhetoric, however, continues to push this racist agenda.

[179] In 2015, AFL star Adam Goodes of the Sydney Swans was widely booed by opposing fans for miming an aboriginal war dance on the field, while NRL star Jonathon Thurston was universally lauded for winning the premiership for his team the North Queensland Cowboys.

it's important to reflect on the political implications of poetry such as that discussed in this essay: poetry generated by paranomasia—by the difference and sameness in words; a poetry of multiplicity that questions truth, mastery, authority, and symbolic structures by trespassing upon and through them, under*mining* them; poetry that "offers you up" a serious parody, *serio ludere*, a paradox in terms; a poetry of *un*reason, that transgresses boundaries.

In "Living On: Borderlines", Derrida writes of the inability of "the institution"—in his case, the university—to accept the undecidable in language and in translation. He could just as easily be talking about the nation state: "What this institution cannot bear is for anyone to tamper with language, meaning both the national language and, paradoxically, an ideal translatability that neutralizes this national language. *Nationalism* and *universalism*. What this institution cannot bear is a transformation that leaves intact neither of these two complementary poles".[180]

<div align="center">**or**</div>

What Australia sometimes cannot bear—what there seems little room for—is difference, ambiguity, the other. Australia is subaltern (with its own sub-categories of the subaltern within) not so much because it is Down Under, or because its internal vastness and isolation in the south is mistaken for an Abyss, but because Australia carries on the project of the West.

Both Mallarmé and Derrida defy the Master. In Mallarmé's case, he ditched his "Book of Books", of which only fragments survive, and, late in his writings, fragmented his verse —in Derrida's words, he opened up the "space of writing". The result was *Un Coup de dés*, a poem that attempts the impossible: to find a form that renders thought and chance into language. It demonstrated a kind of mastery that Mallarmé's poem simultaneously wishes to shake off, as in the metaphor that reverberates through the poem: the Master shaking his fist at the impossibility of abolishing chance. Derrida goes one step further in his continual wandering away from writing, from "the father" who cannot be questioned. Via the puncept and citational methodologies, his deconstructive

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[180] Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 93–4.

writings wander away from writing (as authorial representor of truth). Debunking categories and genres, his writings waver and blur the lines between literature and philosophy.

or

Altering the project, inverting the master—"UNCONSTITUTIONAL"—the methods of *or*-play and forgery employed by Brennan, Edwards and Tranter present a riposte to the Western (and particularly the Australian) canon, to authorial representations of language. Their mistranslations also open up terrain that Australian poetry might traverse by drawing our attention to the shaky nature—the unstable meanings and interchangeable structures—of language, the illicit affairs of writing as representation, the chaos of multiple tongues, rather than settling on the singular, or the ideal.

Language is unstable. Borders between languages, even within a language, are unstable and permeable. Homophony breathes the "literal". Mistranslation offers changeability and transformation. Its implications are for a poetry that is open in form but not formless, diverse in character, and continually malleable. When thought of as transformation, mistranslation is both reverential and disrespectful. It is an upending and a re-reading, and offers alternative ways to think at the crossroads of multiple languages.

aussi

Australian poet Peter Minter recommends a radical revision of approaches to reading our local poetic traditions. Instead of a single authorial nation or nationality through which to view Australian poetry, Minter proposes an "archipelagic map": "Rather than 'the Land' and its monocultural aesthetic, we might imagine a polyphony of terrestrial islands, archipelagos of *habitus* and poethical emergence".[181] Each island in Minter's vision becomes

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[181] Peter Minter, "Archipelagos of sense: thinking about a decolonised Australian poetics", *Southerly* 73.1 (2013): 160.

an outcrop of sensibility amidst oceans of inscrutability, or what ... Édouard
Glissant termed the *chaos-monde.* A crucial stage in the emergence of a poetics of
relation, the *chaos-monde* (chaos world) is the liberation of the world from
representability: "the way Chaos itself goes around is the opposite of what is
ordinarily understood by 'chaotic' and ... it opens a new phenomenon: Relation, or
totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and this disorder one can
imagine forever". The whole world is an archipelago, representability cohering at
the edges of ever shifting shores.[182]

In terms of the aesthetic potential of an archipelagic model, Minter leaves this open-
ended, preferring to outline the cultural and psychogeographical implications, but I
think it is clear how *Un Coup de dés* and its *chaos-monde*, its scattered fragments in flux
and relation, has created an archipelagic map that appeals to Australian poets seeking
otherness and indeterminacy and a map for rebellion.

or

The poem as *echo*pelago.

aussi

Foss describes maps as "stratagems for the abolition of distance ... They constitute
vanishing lines, escape machines, a beacon of fascination", which could also describe "A
Fluke", "Musicopoematographoscope", or "Desmond's Coupé". Foss goes on: "maps may
be an empty simulation, as in the most beautiful imaginings of Plato ... which, even if ...
not meant as reality, certainly had the effect of sending countless men in search of new
lands over the ages and contributed to the way in which they were shaped". A third and
final description of maps by Foss is relevant here, in terms of a metaphor for poems:
"what they refer to or give bearing to is not territory as a fixed substance, but territory

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[182] Minter, "Archipelagos of sense", 156. For more on Glissant's *chaos-monde*, see Édouard
Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

as fluid field".[183] And so we come full circle, tail in mouth (or cheek), to Brownian Motion.

<div align="center">**or**</div>

In the fluid field of the page, archipelagos emerge, scattered fragments swerve, invisible filaments waver, various and other histories echo, words intertextualise, disappear and reappear slightly altered, othered (yet in relation to one another for their very being there).

<div align="center">**or**</div>

How much can the poem-map be explored? Thinking of the poem as an exploration sounds innocent enough, but exploration has its problems or limitations, particularly in the Australian postcolonial context (in which colonial exploration by white Europeans is not only recent history, but celebrated history), and therefore by extension in the context of rewritings and appropriation by/of Australian writers. These connotations (of the word exploration—that of men in power infiltrating a supposed *terra nullius* that is not *terra nullius*) serve as warning to those seeking power, control, and especially domination, in the intertextual exploration and appropriation of another's writing. Defy Mallarmé's Master, sure, but beware of becoming the master.

<div align="center">**aussi**</div>

Speaking of the "erotics" of language, particularly of the highly libinal nature of language-tampering, but also of the oscillation-dissolution of the "I" into the "other" into the "them", one can thereby also too rapidly dissolve certain political them(e)atics at stake in appropriation: perhaps most notably in the current context regarding "sexuality" and "race".

Almost all the rewritings I've examined in this thesis are men-rewriting-men-rewriting-men, which at the very least exhibits a homo*social* lineage, of an a-sexualised-material-

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[183] Foss, "Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum", 22–3.

able-to-be-resampled-without-any-prohibition-but-custom-and-copyright. But in some of these cases, the explicit homo*sexuality* of these specific men is clearly at stake, and clearly has a political resonance: not least for Edwards in this essay. But this then may suggest that even such samplings also operate some covert elisions: for instance, is "women's poetry" able to be re-cited by men today with the same effect? Or vice-versa? I'd say absolutely to the latter, as there is a feminist context to the rewriting of "men's literature", an upending or dispersion of a patriarchal hegemony. But hetero men rewriting/over-writing/appropriating women's poetry…? That's another fettle of kitsch, so to speak. As I've tried to establish in this thesis, there are many excellent queer displacements that exist, in regards to appropiation in literature. However, I don't mean to gloss over the fact that all writers, regardless of sexual orientation or desire, have ethical responsibilities.

aussi

Ditto for race and colonial issues, as I've implied already in this coda. I'm thinking now of the American poet Kenneth Goldsmith's 2015 reading at Brown University in which Goldsmith spent thirty minutes reading the autopsy report of Michael Brown, a young African-American man recently killed by police.[184] This "poetry" reading was absolutely a kind of literary appropriation, and one that was presented as if verbatim, as if the autopsy report was being entirely re-contextualised (a technique he employs across his oeuvre) to highlight (through the mundanity of the language structures appropriated) the mundanity in this case of the mounting deaths of black African-Americans at the hands of mostly white police. The heart's in the right place, but when Goldsmith ended the reading with a description of Brown's genitalia, it became clear that he had deliberately edited the autopsy for shock value, thus representing (and perhaps repeating) a blatant accentuation of white domination (and fetishisation) of black bodies. One could argue (and Goldsmith has, convincingly to some) that this was the point (he did in fact introduce his reading as being of a poem called "The Body of

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[184] Jillian Steinhauer, "Kenneth Goldsmith Remixes Michael Brown Autopsy Report as Poetry", *Hyperallergic*, March 16, 2015, http://hyperallergic.com/190954/kenneth-goldsmith-remixes-michael-brown-autopsy-report-as-poetry/.

Michael Brown"[185]), but he was subsequently and rightly criticised—by African-Americans and non-Anglo and Anglo Americans alike—for his performance's allegedly illicit appropriations (of the injustices) of black experience in contemporary America for further white self-aggrandisement.[186]

<div align="center">**or**</div>

The problem of the limits of appropriability is clearly then a major and intense and ongoing international discussion, and one that will continue. In most situations, the limits are not so much a question of taste as power. The abject in Edwards works because it is directed at his own queer subjectivity in the face of traditional literary power structures, whereas the abject in Goldsmith merely apes, so to speak, his white privilege, even as he employs an extreme style of appropriation to challenge traditional literary forms.

So while I've been advocating for certain boundaries/borders of the imagination, traditional and aesthetic and emotional, to be breached, there are always social and cultural boundaries/borders that need to be treated with ethical respect. Going beyond can be painful to certain others (to re-echo Bataille's erotic philosophy, as he refers to anguish): "when the bounds of the possible are over-reached, a recoil is inevitable". In other words, sometimes the defiance of the master may under certain circumstances require stringent self-limitation in the appropriation of others' texts. There are symbolic barriers that need dissolving, and others that need shoring up, so to speak.

And here I return to the pun as subversive device, whose tidiness enhances the illusion of mastery at the same time as undoing it. At its core, the puncept is a methodology that, to bring back Ulmer, "allows language to say what it knows, which allows the

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[185] Alison Flood, "US poet defends reading of Michael Brown autopsy report as a poem", *The Guardian*, March 18, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/17/michael-brown-autopsy-report-poem-kenneth-goldsmith.

[186] See CAConrad, "Kenneth Goldsmith Says He Is an Outlaw", *Poetry Foundation*, June 1, 2015, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2015/06/kenneth-goldsmith-says-he-is-an-outlaw/. Here, thirty poets of multiple racial and sexual orientations strongly object to Goldsmith's appropriation of the deceased and black body of Michael Brown.

unconscious to show itself in the play of language", and thus and most often reveal authorial intent.

aussi

Plato's Republic never actually existed, yet the utopic Atlantis myth he instigated (as a literal Antipodes, an "opposite earth") still persists on Australian shores, and the colony still generally thinks of its centre as void. Its being void is a furphy and delusion, of course—abundant life, Aboriginal communities, and Dreamtime tracks resonate like filaments through the "outback". To overturn our anxious Anglo-colonial readings and our Eurovisions—any unease we might have about the legitimacy of antipodean takes on cultural internationalism—and, furthermore, to alleviate the stress of repressing unpleasant colonial truths, Australian poetry could do more than simply breathe the *littoral*, however utopic that might seem; Australian poetry should breathe the littoral *and* the void, the never never (what we think is impossible) by ceding the initiative to words *and* space. Engaging the materiality of words and the space of the page in the composition of poems helps to unearth the untenability of the logocentric and phallocentric distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between the ideal and the material, the singular and the multiple. Using an inverse logic, misprision removes the prison, danger undoes the dungeon. Art is chance.

or

For Australian poetry to create notions (archipelagos, say, as opposed to a single nation) of itself, from out of (or within) the *terra nullius* myth that has been perpetuated—we must invert and disperse the hemispheres. We must simultaneously reflect (not reject!) the abject—in order to transform, in order to live—as well as look within (into the never).

End