

**TOWARD A POLITICS OF PARANOIA:
DESIRE AND THE POETIC SUBJECTS OF CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY
AND ERIN MOURÉ**

BY

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ABSTRACT

By focusing on Lacanian desire, this thesis proposes that readings of paranoid texts can contribute to a reflexive interrogation of subjectivity in poetic discourse. In particular, paranoia is developed to contextualize the poetics of two contemporary Canadian writers—Christopher Dewdney and Erin Mouré. Although their poetry addresses disparate social and political concerns, their works share an underlying sense of paranoia which serves to interrogate prohibitive social sites—such as law, government, media, technology, and language. Moreover, Mouré and Dewdney’s paranoid texts acknowledge the phenomenological restrictions of a subject’s sensory and cognitive perceptions as each of these paranoid subjects not only distrust society, s/he is also skeptical of the accuracy of their own mechanism of perception. It is within this realm of uncertainty that “Toward a Politics of Paranoia” explores the possibilities that theorizing paranoia contributes to current debates on subjectivity and agency. Unlike theorists, such as Paul Smith, who propose that paranoia reflects a trend in recent cultural criticism that perpetuates a totalized, narratively induced means of securing knowledge, this thesis follows a Lacanian model in suggesting that the effects of paranoia can be read as a productive form of social and political critique.

Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world.

*- Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*.*

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Introduction

The chief features of dreams and insanity lie in their eccentric trains of thought and their weakness of judgement. (. . .) In dreams, the personality may be split—when for instance, the dreamer’s own knowledge is divided between two persons and when, in the dreams, the extraneous ego corrects the actual one. This is precisely on a par with the splitting of the personality that is familiar to us in hallucinatory paranoia: the dreamer too hears his own thoughts pronounced by extraneous voices.

- Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

The more one studies accounts of paranoia, the more it seems revealing, and the more one realizes the lessons one can save from the progress, absence of progress—as you will—that characterizes the psychiatric movement.

- Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire 25*

Paranoid States: Paranoia, Agency, and Discourses of Discontent

In *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change*, Mark Bracher proposes that in order for contemporary theory to promote social change, *desire* and not *knowledge* must become the focus of cultural criticism.¹ Bracher claims that what motivates a subject to act are not social discourses in themselves but the subject’s desire in relation to their structures. What he suggests is that there is a conceptual gap between desire and knowledge as they pertain to theories of subjectivity. He states, “[t]he prevailing assumptions in cultural criticism are that a subject position is basically reducible to knowledge and that this knowledge is derived from the representations that a subject encounters” (8). That is, Bracher asserts that in cultural criticism’s focus on knowledge the subject frequently becomes dissociated from participation in its own constitution; whereas, he proposes, a focus on Lacanian desire “offers a comprehensive model of the human subject that includes . . . the fullest

account available of the various roles that language and discourse play in the psychic economy and thereby in human affairs in general” (Bracher 12). Bracher is wary of epistemological cultural critiques of subjectivity since they tend to elide discussions that consider a subject’s movement through discourse,² and instead, understand subjectivity as merely an effect of the discursive features they describe. As Bracher states, although knowledge is an important factor in understanding what moves people, it “cannot account for the position assumed by subjects within that knowledge, for position within knowledge is a function of identification or desire, or the ground of desire: being and its lack” (19). Writing on similar concerns, Paul Smith, in *Discerning the Subject*, claims that much of the inability of recent cultural criticism to adequately theorize resistance stems from the residual traces of hermeneutic theories of subjectivity which privilege “narrative representational means” (83). Smith claims that this privileging of narration is a dominant theoretical trend which results in the “cerning” or “totalized” enclosure of an “agentless” subject. He states that even contemporary quarters of social theory such as poststructuralism which initially seem to free the subject through its decentred processes that are pluralist in signification are culpable for perpetuating a subject who is reduced to an effect of these discourses.

For Smith, contemporary theory’s narrative presence results from each discipline’s tendency to “literarize” its objects or bodies of knowledge as “primarily *textual* phenomena” (84). And because of this “literarization,” “knowledge-gathering and interpretation are now subjected to the process of reading as it has been explicated and theorized (and to some extent regulated) in literary theoretical practice” (84). This textual

“literarization” of knowledge leads to what Smith sees as a political aloofness in contemporary theory. For him, even though poststructuralists or deconstructionists like Barthes or Derrida “ha[ve] encouraged the abolition of what it often takes to be idealist and/or humanist” (84), their critiques have left “the world and its inhabitants . . . fully textualized” (84). And because these theories imagine the world as text, their prevailing influence on cultural criticism has led to the loss of their efficacy in terms of challenging cultural norms and now has a tendency “to settle willingly and snugly into the very institutions [they] seemed once to threaten” (85). As Smith reminds us, for the most part these apparently destabilizing approaches to disciplines of knowledge have affected little change within academia and society at large. Slavoj Žižek offers his own rationale for the lack of political efficacy that accompanies a majority of poststructural cultural critiques:

Post-structuralism claims that a text is always framed by its own commentary: the interpretation of a literary text reside on the same plane as its ‘object.’ Thus the interpretation is included in the literary corpus: there is no ‘pure’ literary object that would not contain an element of interpretation, of distance towards its immediate meaning. In post-structuralism the classic opposition between the object-text and its external interpretive reading is thus replaced by a continuity of an infinite literary text which is always already its own reading; that is, which sets up distance from itself. (1989: 153)

As theorists, we have become readers; and as readers, we are caught in what Smith contends is a cycle of paranoia—a totalized system of knowledge that analyzes discursive representations of reality as simply “textual” phenomena. “As Jürgen Habermas has pointed out, in post-structuralism we have a kind of universalized aestheticization whereby ‘truth’ itself is finally reduced to one of the style effects of the discursive articulation” (Žižek 1994: 153). What Smith seems ill at ease with is how difficult the project of

establishing a critique of social reality is once the “truth” of that reality appears as a discursive effect.

The hermeneutic and epistemological practices that govern social theory are locked in this cycle that Smith describes as a kind of paranoia: a “bad faith” that attempts “to claim both the empirical substance of discourse’s object and also the humane mystery and innocence—the cleanliness—of interpretive procedures” (87). This “bad faith” is achieved by a subject who assumes a transcendent and universal status as observer, (this is noticed even models such as poststructuralism that have dissociated itself from such grand assumptions), by proposing that his or her understanding of the world is a perfectly natural conduit for the knowledge it constructs. Smith proposes that these largely humanist methodologies that follow this “unholy” practice sustain a necessary strategy “to fend off the threatening destructive gap between the architectonics of discursive formations and social reality” (87). That is, these methodologies attempt to hide the ideological mechanisms and beliefs that are part and parcel of their production. For Smith, this urge is symptomatic of liberal humanism’s wish to “maintain its rights on a reality which it will not yet recognize as its own offspring or construction” (87). By disavowing the subject’s role in producing knowledge, these theories fail to address the role that discourse plays in forming the foundational, structural identifications that constitute a basis for identity. Furthermore, this disavowal is what helps to cover over the conflictual nature of identification and desire. As Bracher states:

when an identification becomes established as our identity, it functions to repress all desires that are incongruent with this identity. But as Lacan himself indicates, identifications also function as both causes and effects of desire. Their role as the

cause of desire can be seen in the way the subject strives to fully actualize the qualities they have identified with, while their role as the effect of desire can be seen from the fact that identifications are always *motivated*—that is, they respond to a want-of-being. (22)

Following Bracher's lead, I hope to put forward a theory of paranoia that discusses identification as a mode of desire, by focusing on a subject's identification with discourse as an active relation.

Smith's characterization of paranoia is based on Melanie Klein's reading of Freud.

Specifically, in his discussion of the condition of the paranoid "subject," Smith states:

In paranoia, the libido is turned upon the ego itself, so that, in a loose sense, the paranoiac's object-choice is his/her own ego. Freud suggests that in such a case anything perceived as noxious within the ego (in the interior, as it were) is then projected into external objects: the "subject" thus endows the external world with what it takes to be its own worst tendencies and qualities. According to Melanie Klein, an analyst who regards the process of projection as a normal step in the development of the ego, the "outside" thus becomes the place of what she calls "the bad object." (95-96)

For Klein and for Smith, subject/object relations of the paranoiac, then, are always tied to the projection of his or her own bad qualities. In Klein's explanation of object relations theory, she presumes that this transference of the subject's worst or conflicting qualities onto the outside world (as the "bad object") represents a natural "rupture" in the relation between self and other, subject and object. Thus, in the 'normal' development of the ego, a subject's experience of an "outside" reality is always in relation to its own "bad objects." That is, the subject transfers its negative feelings and contradictory impulses away from what it understands as its *self* (the ego) onto an "outside" or "bad object" (social reality). Although this theory reproduces the anthropomorphic logic that accompanies acts of understanding—that is, the understanding of an object in terms of a projection of self—it

also begins to account for the system of symbolic relations that inform the subject's understanding of value (i.e. the signification of differences that have allowed a subject to determine what are, in fact, *good* or *bad* qualities). By proposing that there is a commensurable relationship between the subject and what that subject understands as the social (as a projection of self), the dominant values and beliefs a society imposes upon its subjects are left to appear seamless and natural. In a sense, to speak out against society would be merely to speak out against what the subject understands as a bad part of itself. Thus, a Kleinian understanding of the development of the subject cannot enable social change, as the goal of its practice becomes to "cure" the subject's understanding of its social role in relation to its own "bad objects."

The projection of the ego, for Smith, represents a fundamental connection between Humanism³ and paranoia. For him, "paranoia" and humanism produce a similar type of 'holistic effect'⁴ that "anticipate[s] a kind of synchronicity, a simultaneous view whereby the global and the local [both the community and the individual] will be grasped in their commonality and in their thus peculiarly conceived specificity" (88). Since these discourses follow from hermeneutics, Smith claims that humanist practices, which include most forms of cultural theory, are predicated on critical matrices which facilitate the repair of the gaps or contradictions in the relations that bind the subject to social formations. That is, the subject is said to metonymically reflect the social—the self as a microcosm of society. If a particular concept and/or ideological position cannot be recovered or redeemed within the social symbolic it is simply elided, erased, or reinterpreted in order to affix the part to the whole. Smith's characterization of paranoia as a "type of archetypal

objectifying device” is useful as far as it illustrates humanism’s failure to recognize the “projective” conditions of its own interpretive practices. For him, paranoia helps to demonstrate how humanism is caught in a “claustrophobic” relationship whereby “a ‘subject’ produces and interprets its world and then reconciles its own putative and defensive coherence with what is established *a priori* to be an objective formation” (97). Smith claims that paranoia is always caught in this web of coherence that looks back to past “objective” standards in order to mediate and fix its knowledge.

Although I am persuaded by Smith’s explication of humanism’s cycle of paranoia, I question the way he distinguishes the idea of the “real” from the “textual.” In a paranoid state, the certainty with which the “I” sees the world, and itself, collapses. Smith notes this but does not appear to be interested in the possibilities this collapse affords to social theory. Instead, Smith’s critique of humanism remains fixed upon the task of contrasting a “knowable reality” against the “fictional universe” of a paranoid discourse (96). His argument reaches a theoretical impasse since, in order to service a critique of social theory’s tendency to textualize its objects of knowledge as paranoid, he needs to substantiate a “lived reality” which is shared by the subjects that produce it but somehow remains identifiable beyond the subjective indeterminacies and contingencies that are a part of its production. Although Smith’s discussion reminds people that there is a “lived reality” which is indeed always exterior to the text, in order to maintain a coherent perspective to ground his analysis, he cannot admit that the production and communication (read: narration) of this reality is also always a discursive site.

Another question that comes to mind concerning Smith’s characterization of

paranoia is: if paranoia depicts a defensive attempt to secure a coherent version of reality, and if this description is formed via *a priori* discursive features, then how do these descriptions warrant being named paranoid? That is, a notable feature of paranoia is that the depiction of reality the paranoid presents is one which necessarily does not correspond with common cultural assumptions. Instead, Smith associates paranoia as a key characteristic in the social mechanisms that perpetuate commonly held views. Moreover, Smith never articulates a theory of how subjects interpret paranoid narratives. Even Freud, whose theories inform Smith's discussion, remarks that paranoia is able to throw any receiver/reader's perception of reality into question.

In contrast to what Smith argues, I propose that paranoia cannot successfully repair and perpetuate a "holistic effect" in terms of the relationship between the subject and the symbolic order.⁵ Paranoia presents a moment of uncertainty since it makes obvious the paradoxes signification necessarily hides. Signification, as Judith Butler points out, "takes the form of *promise* and *return*, the recovery of an unthematizable loss in and by the signifier, which along the way must break that promise and fail to return in order to remain a signifier at all" (199). It is in relation to the paradoxical nature of signification—its necessarily broken promise—that the role of ideology in communication becomes noticed. Ideology is not simply the sets of beliefs that underpin the ideas interests of a dominant social class, it is what allows subjects to make sense of society as a whole. Ideology exists as the mediator between subjects and the symbolic order. It is a collection of presuppositions that helps subjects make sense of their identities and enables them to signify their actions in the social world. Paranoia questions the role of ideology as a

paranoiac suspects that there is something else going on behind the scenes of signification. Through its inability to seamlessly represent reality paranoia challenges ideology's ability to go unnoticed. Paranoid statements note a discrepancy between a subject's *desired* "reality" and that subject's *knowledge* of an existing "reality." Instead of expressing a synchronicity between the individual and its community, paranoia articulates repressed desires, or those desires that do not fit neatly into the symbolic order. And this voice of discontent brings into question the social symbolic relations that led to this state of paranoia.

A paranoid subject appears to be conscious of what Foucault couples as the regime of power/knowledge.⁶ For Foucault, the means of representation are always marked by this social regime. To Foucault's examination of the intrinsic connection between "the techniques of knowledge and the strategies of power" (1980: 104), paranoia brings the indeterminate variable of desire. Foucault's depiction of power/knowledge relies on his ability to identify the means of the subject's social institutionalization. Against this backdrop of social discursive formations, his project charts a "genealogy" of the ways in which subjects are represented as knowable objects. Since knowledge is always already enabled by the discourses which precede it, knowledge represents the result of a subject's movement through discourses toward something—it is "an attempt to fill a gap without which speech could not be articulated" (Wilden 164). Thus, as a product or representation, knowledge of a subject becomes a unilateral effect of prior discourses (Butler 189). But, as Žižek argues, even though the subject is produced "through an act of foreclosure," what is lost in this production continues to have purchase on its

determination. To explain this further, what Žižek proposes is that even though a subject comes to understand itself or an “other” through processes of symbolic signification (these acts of foreclosure), what is not identifiable, what falls outside of symbolization still continues to affect this understanding. As Judith Butler adds,

What remains outside of this subject, set outside by the act of foreclosure, which founds the subject, persists as a type of defining negativity. The subject is, as a result, never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompleteness of the subject. (1993: 190)

Power/knowledge is the light which projects the subject onto the screen of the social. It is understood as productive because power “creates” the subject who reproduces its forms. Once positioned in Foucault’s model, a subject becomes alienated by the discourses that produced it as a knowable object. Thus Foucault denies the notion of an “agented” subject by removing the subject from participation in its own signification. However, in a paranoid expression of desire, the underlying dichotomy that makes “subject” and “agent” antonyms is no longer clear. Paranoia voices the incompleteness and discontinuity of the subject since it enunciates a subject in discontent: an “agented” subject who desires change in the relations of power/knowledge between itself and society. Bracher proposes that theories that depict power/knowledge similar to Foucault also promote culture as an autonomous entity⁷ and fail to ascribe any agency to the subjects they depict and historicize. Theorizing paranoia begins to address this critical blind spot by promoting a form of resistance which does not rely on determinable power/knowledge relations to illustrate its model—an oversight which Bracher and other cultural theorists⁸ note lies between a profusion of cultural criticism and a lack of cultural resistance toward exclusionary social activity.

Jacques Lacan suggests that paranoia intimates a fundamental limit of knowledge production. As Ellie Ragland notes, “Lacan thought that the human subject’s principal function should be the continual effort to overcome its own internal, libidinal alienation, following from what he calls the *paranoiac* principle of human knowledge” (1986: 63, emphasis added). Lacan proposes that this *paranoiac* principle refers to an unending process, paradoxically noting that a subject’s understanding merely serves to expose “the false recurrence to infinity of the reflections which constitute the mirage of consciousness and its handmaiden ‘objectivity’” (Ragland-Sullivan 63). Furthermore, this understanding of “human knowledge” supports Lacan’s theory of a subject who is discontinuous, contingent, and fundamentally unreliable. For Lacan, the subject is divided between two different but interconnected levels of consciousness: an object like narcissistic subject of being (the *moi* or *a*) and a speaking subject (the *je* or *S*). In more basic terms, one’s subjectivity is split between a consciousness of an ‘I’ and a consciousness of a ‘me’. At first glance, Lacan’s theory of an ‘unreliable’ subject, split between these two levels of consciousness, might not appear to be conducive towards theorizing the interrelated issues of subjectivity, agency, and social change. So, the question remains—how can this unreliable “doubled effect” of subjectivity participate in promoting social change? Still, perhaps a more detailed examination of the reflexivity of Lacan’s paranoid subject provides a means to counter the production of agentless subjects in cultural criticism.

In contrast to Freud’s realist view of the ego,⁹ Lacan proposes that the subject becomes tied to a narcissistic identity of the self which is extrinsically layered (Ragland-Sullivan 21).¹⁰ These ‘outside’ forces come into signification through what constitutes the

three registers of Lacanian subjectivity: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.¹¹ Of these registries, the two that are shaped by the external world (in relation to the subject) are the Imaginary and the Symbolic, whereas the Real “is the order preceding the ego and the organization of the drives . . . [it] cannot be experienced as such: it is capable of representation or conceptualization only through the reconstructive or inferential work of the imaginary and symbolic orders” (Grosz 1990: 34). Lacan prioritizes the visual in his intertwining of these two mediators which interpellate¹² a subject’s development from a preverbal to a verbal libidinal economy.¹³ This process is further elucidated in Bracher’s reading of *Écrits*:

Images derive their power from what Lacan calls the Imaginary order, which is based on our sense or image of our preverbal bodily identity (III 20). The Imaginary order never exists in complete independence from the Symbolic order, since the child’s experience is indirectly structured by the Symbolic order from before birth. And as the child learns to speak, Symbolic hegemony is attained, with the Symbolic order massively restructuring the child’s psychic economy, interrupting the immediate, dual relation of subject to object (both human and nonhuman) and interposing a third term, the signifier. The Symbolic cannot be eliminated from the Imaginary: ‘the imaginary economy has meaning, we gain purchase on it, only in so far as it is transcribed into the Symbolic order’ (II 255). (31)

The Symbolic and the Imaginary are directly tied to language’s mediation of social signification. For Lacan, the signifier is meaningful not because it refers to any real or absolute signified that determines it; instead, the signifier obtains meaning in relation to another signifier(s). Hence, meaning is always derived from a chain of relations within the symbolic order. What Lacan considers the Real is constituted of those features or objects that remain unmediated or outside of Symbolic and/or Imaginary signification. And yet, the Real is “something which cannot be negated . . . because it is already in itself, in

positivity, nothing but a pure embodiment of pure negativity, emptiness” (Žižek, 1989, 170). In his reading of Lacan, Žižek concludes that the Real is both a “substance” and a “negativity.” Since the Real is what slips below the surface of social signification, it contains the aspects of the *moi* which cannot be articulated within realms of language and remain its “indivisible remainder.” It “has no boundaries, border divisions, or oppositions; it is a continuum of ‘raw materials’.” The Real is in no way similar to reality. Reality is *lived as* and *known through* imaginary and symbolic representation” (Grosz 1990: 34), whereas the Real stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, remaining foreclosed from signification. While reality is perfectly knowable, it is impossible to know the Real. As Lacan claims in *Écrits*, the Real is a conundrum: it may be approached but never grasped; it is the umbilical chord of the symbolic order—the source of its life, cut off at its birth.

Lacan proposes that a subject’s ego development—how it comes to know itself and society through language—occurs during what he describes as a mirror phase. For him, the development of a child’s ego is paradoxically always already social. That is, it is based on an understanding of a biological incompleteness that a child attempts to fill through symbolic identifications with the image of an “other.” When a child sees itself or an “other” as a mirrored reflection, the lack which is registered through spatial/temporal differences between the two bodies in view—between an understanding of self juxtaposed against an understanding of the reflection of this image as “other”—sets the child’s identification with this other (as a projection of an ideal self) in motion. As social phenomena, language and law (of the father) regulate how the child understands this

reflection. The child's entry into subjectivity is mired by repeated attempts to hide what it understands as its own lack through language. Furthermore, the libidinal and social economies that aid in a subject's purchase of meaning are always unstable and in flux. As Lacan concludes:

the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of *spacial identification*, the succession of phantasies that extends . . . lastly, to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (*Selection 2*; qt. in Bracher 33)

Although the subject is always caught up in these identifications, their boundaries and borders cannot be positively ascertained as they are necessary projections from this drama of fantasied relations. Identity itself is unstable since it can only be determined via a subject's understanding of symbolic structures as they are mediated through language.

The symbolic order exists as a mediating system that provides for some sense of community and/or communication which, when reduced to the nomenclature of empirical determinism, might be nothing more than an illusion. This is due to the fact that a child's development through the mirror stage takes place “in a system of confused recognition/misrecognition: it sees an image of itself that is both accurate . . . as well as delusory” (Grosz 1990: 39). This is to say that since a subject is interpellated by and through its own participation in the Symbolic/Imaginary registers, the knowledges it produces become from their very onset nothing more than social and fictional phenomena. Because of this, desire, as it is mediated by these structures, always undergoes re-evaluation and restructuring in relation to the Symbolic/Imaginary registers. As Bracher states,

This fictional, metaphoric nature of desire means that there is no *intrinsic*, *essential*, or *absolute* content to desire in the Imaginary order any more than in the Symbolic order and that desire in the Imaginary order is produced through the operation of images in cultural artifacts. (31, emphasis added)

Because the subject is fundamentally split in its identity—between an ego it claims as its own (the ego-ideal), and an other it sees as an object and strives to be like (the ideal-ego)—its knowledge of itself is *paranoiac*. The mirror stage is paradoxical in that it both affirms and denies a subject's separation from itself as other as it is caught in the gap between recognition/misrecognition of its ego-ideal and a social, symbolic, and regulatable body of the ideal-ego.

Lacan proposes that the relations of antagonism involved in the split subject are incapable of final resolution since *desire-as-lack* becomes (psychically) structured in multiple and contradictory ways. As Elizabeth Grosz states:

Neither ignorant nor aware of its own socialization, the child must be both induced to accept social norms and values as natural, and yet to function as an agent within a social world, an agent who has the capacity for rebellion against and rejection of its predestined social place. (1990: 40)

In Lacan's notion of the subject, uncertainty leads to agency as the subject is always capable of rebelling during this normalized process of development. While Lacan proposes that identification is alienating due to the nature of desire (*desire-as-lack*), his understanding of subjectivity describes a subject who is split between "an *affirmation jubilatoire*, and a *connaissance paranoïaque*[:] that is, between a joyful, affirmative self-recognition (in which the ego anticipated the unity of its image), and a paranoiac knowledge produced by this split, miscognizing subject. In short the ego is torn between a demand for pleasure, gratification, and self-aggrandizement; and a jealousy and frustration

Lacan sees in terms of an intra-subjective aggressivity” (Grosz 1990: 40). Lacan’s notion of subjectivity offers an analytic strategy which indissolubly links the subject’s relations with the unsymbolized portion of the subject’s being (the object *a*). Bracher proposes that this strategy can be read as “an extended training of the subject to recognize, then tolerate, and finally accommodate a radical otherness that is nonetheless part of one’s own being. This accommodation of otherness or alien desire—which culminates in the emergence in the ego ideal of new signifiers bearing one’s identity—makes subjects more capable of accepting and nurturing otherness not only in themselves but also in other subjects” (100).¹⁴ Bracher claims that this acceptance and nurturing of otherness help to account for what drives social change at the level of the subject.

Žižek claims that the effects of desire on language and their necessary distortions are “not inscribed in the very concept of communication but [are] due to the actual contingent circumstances of labour and domination that prevent the realization of the ideal—the relations of power and violence are not inherent to language” (99). These circumstances of labour and domination are, for Žižek, the very site of ideology. Ideology becomes crucial in determining how subjects become both identified and interpellated to participate in particular social/fictional economies.¹⁵ If there is always a gap between identity and society, Žižek proposes, then something must regulate this gap to allow it to appear—as Freud’s realist ego claims it is—tied to a particular reality. In a Lacanian reading of social relations, then, the subject becomes interpellated *by* and *through* desire as it is mediated by the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. The reception and signification of desire are always at play in the ideologies that govern and structure a subject’s

interpretation of the symbolic order. How subjects are motivated by this reception, how they *are willed* and *will* themselves to action, can effect social change. Because desire exists as the lack or the empty form that moves the subject to promote meanings for itself, the signification of desire is always already a product of discourses that are without any absolute content. Like culture, desire and subjectivity are constantly in a state of flux, and their representations need to be produced and reproduced.

While attempting to avoid some of the hermeneutical traps of reader-response theory,¹⁶ I would like to attempt to further elucidate the dialectical processes a “paranoid text” offers a reader. When engaging with a “paranoid text” the reader chooses between acceptance and dismissal of a proposed “reality.” In the case of acceptance, this choice situates a potential correspondence between the reader’s and the textual subject’s desires. A “paranoid text” depicts a subject who feels that it is being prevented from enjoying a certain *jouissance*.¹⁷ It speaks of desires which are repressed by what it recognizes/misrecognizes as the symbolic structures of “reality.” These “wants of being,” from which the subject feels it has been excluded, are what must be either dismissed, valorized, or negated by the reader of the “paranoid text.” In this way, paranoia attempts to promote forms of “collective redress” towards the social power structures, while simultaneously, questioning naturalized versions of “reality.” The “paranoid text” admits that social change cannot occur *through* and *by* the speaking subject alone, as it attempts to motivate active communal participation by acknowledging the interdependence of agency at the level of desire.

To discuss paranoia is to discuss desire and its relation to what Lacan calls Master

discourses. As previously noted, desire (as a process of identification) can move subjects to perform roles that appear to be offered by the symbolic order (Bracher 22-25). Most commonly, desire is mediated through the chains of signification which construct, and are constructed by Master discourses that “offer love or recognition (what Lacan says is the original object of desire) as a means of enticing subjects to assume specific [symbolic] positions” (Bracher 23). These chains of signification are often most overt in religious or political discourses that are mobilized by subjects who move to identify themselves as part of their respective organizations. In this move to be identified through a Master discourse, the subject assumes an active role in the perpetuation of particular ideologies which might have first excluded him/her. To gain recognition or love through these Master discourses is to be a ‘good’ subject.

Lacan concurs with Freud, who presumes that symbolic identification with Master discourses begins with gendered body identification. Within the symbolic order, subjects are expected to position themselves—and will seek activities, objects, and situations—according to the promoted narcissistic or anaclitic desires¹⁸ of other gendered subjects. These ‘motivated’ actions transpose subjects into agents of specific discourses, and in doing so, they come to exemplify a type of performative object. As a subject, s/he “submits to the (usually unconscious) coercion to desire objects embodying certain specific signifiers rather than others, and to desire them in ways that enact certain signifiers rather than others” (Žižek 1994: 85). Since Master discourses “symbolically” validate specific desires, and not only the knowledges they produce, an examination of these desires makes it possible to articulate their ‘invisible’ relations to social power. How

gender and sexuality are regulated can be considered by questioning how desires are promoted and/or repressed within a text's or any other discursive representation. Bracher proposes that a productive role for cultural criticism to assume is the position of the psychoanalyst who outlines the ideals and desires of Master discourses and works through them, rather than the position of the revolutionary—demanding change in the form of a new master signifier (101). This, he proposes, is “risky” but by “operating precisely within these forces” a Lacanian theory of desire offers the possibility of not just suppressing, or deconstructing Master discourses, but of reconstructing them, producing identifications that are not only capable of a greater *jouissance* but are also less disenfranchising to other subjects who do not fit their discursive codes (101-102).

Bracher proposes that “[i]n gauging with the interpellative text or discourse...one must take into account not only the different objects and positions offered to an audience's desire but also the evocation and/or repression of the Other's lack” (46).¹⁹ This economy of desire and repression locates a crux of subjectivity within the symbolic order. To become representative of a discourse, to be identified within the symbolic order, is to become, at least in part, a product of a Master discourse. The power of discourse lies in its ability to move subjects. The subject ceases to be distinct or “other” in this process of identification and this, in turn necessitates the (impossible) negation or loss of the Real. The successful interpellation of the subject hides the *moi* or *je* (ego-ideal) through a subject's identification *with* and that subject's performance *of* the symbolic role as the ideal-ego. An extreme example of this process can be found in acts of political or religious fanaticism in which a subject's identity becomes inextricably bound up with a particular

cause. The subject's identification in such cases allows the distinction between the ego-ideal and the ideal ego to collapse. A shift in object/subject relations occurs since the subject is transformed into a discursive object of signification through the performance and/or possession of the identification it once desired. To what degree a subject identifies with a Master discourse is impossible to ascertain, as identification is always a site of ambivalence.²⁰ But what remains significant are the ways in which audiences receive certain discourses and the ways in which their production of desire can motivate individuals to take on corresponding performative roles and thus, become tied to an identity they appear to offer. In terms of desire, this is a process that attempts to hide the lack that necessitates identification. That is, by assuming a role or symbolic position that a Master discourse appears to offer, the subject disavows that which is a part of its own subjectivity but which cannot be symbolized—i.e. the Real.

In his essay, "Is There a Cause of the Subject," Slavoj Žižek elaborates on the "agentless" human subject that frequently results from psychoanalytic discourse. For Žižek, the absence of reflection on Lacan's "Real" is to blame for these theories that have rendered their subjects inert. A crucial distinction at issue here is the difference between absence of the Real as *not existing* and the Real as *not possibly representable*. For Lacan, the real has connotations of matter, implying a material substance that underlies the imaginary and symbolic registers. As well, the Real is that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolization. Since Freudian psychoanalytic practice is oriented by hermeneutic methodologies, it, like Habermas and the rest of the Frankfurt school, cannot account for this Real which exists as *real-as-lack*. Instead, these theories stumble when

attempting to acknowledge the gaps that are a part of knowledge but cannot be represented or known through language. As Žižek explains,

since our conscious intention coincides with what can be expressed in language, 'normality' resides in the traductibility of all our motives into intentions that can be expressed in public, intersubjectively recognized language. What causes pathological discrepancies is repressed desire: excluded from public communication, it finds an outlet in compulsive gestures and acts, as well as in distorted, 'private' usages of language. Starting from these discrepancies, Habermas ultimately arrives at the ideological falsity of every hermeneutics that limits itself to the (conscious) intention-of-signification, abandoning errors and deformations of the interpreted text to philology. What hermeneutics cannot admit is that it is not sufficient to repair the mutilations and restore the 'original' text to its integrity, since 'mutilations have meaning as such'. 'The omissions and distortions that it [psychoanalytic interpretation] rectifies have a systematic role and function. For the symbolic structures that psychoanalysis seeks to comprehend are corrupted by the impact of *internal conditions*.' (1994: 96)

Žižek notes how the urge to repair this "original" social text's integrity only leads to eliding the "omissions and distortions" that function as part of any system of signification. Thus, to repair these gaps of meaning is to fail to understand how meaning itself is produced. He characterizes these self-reifying hermeneutic structures as containing a type of "psychological short circuit"(1994: 96) that results from the same desire or more specifically, the same "repressed desire" that generates civilization. Since Freudian psychoanalytic practice considers desire as a perpetual *effect* of articulation and not the lack which sets articulation into motion, these theories have no means of accounting for the "mutilations" and gaps of meaning that underpin the symbolic order. Thus, for Freud, and the Frankfurt school he influences, this "communal fiction" given the name "culture" is understood to circulate with little or no regard to the subjects who are responsible for its production.

In Freud's model of culture, there is no accommodation for the inaccessibility of the Real as it only recognizes subjects who perform according to preconceived social codes—i.e. the subject can only be known or know itself as part of previously established social codes. According to Freud, culture then produces and reproduces the power structures whose matrices are organized, regulated, and limited to an already existent and mapped grid-work. In order to break free of this determinist logic, Žižek claims that Lacan's Real must be theorized in a manner which exposes its "short circuit." Lacanian psychoanalysis is of help here since it moves beyond the determinism (cause and effect relations) of a structuralist aesthetic to an interrogation of the symbolic order through its consideration of the gaps that are inherent between the Symbolic/Imaginary (which are discursively structured) and the Real (which is outside of discourse). These gaps cannot be explained in terms of simple causality as they only become apparent in instances of *trauma* which occur "where symbolic determination stumbles, misfires, that is, where a signifier falls out" (Žižek 1994: 101).

For Žižek, cultural criticism must acknowledge the necessary gaps in the language of the social symbolic in order to take the first steps towards reconceptualizing an "agented" human subject:

The fact that the Real operates and is accessible only through the symbolic does not authorize us, however, to conceive of it as a factor immanent to the symbolic: the real is precisely that which resists and eludes the grasp of the symbolic and, consequently, that which is only detectable within the symbolic under the guise of its disturbances. (101)

This shift in focus from the signifying system to its indeterminant *cause* (the Real) prevents the reduction of signification to a product of determinism. What offsets this

reduction is the gap that forestalls the Real from being signified. Thus, Žižek's analysis is built on the premise that the symbolic gap that is the Real affects the symbolic order itself—"it functions as the *inherent* limitation of this order" (1994: 101). Because any theory of subjectivity remains incomplete in relation to the Real, knowledge is always marked by this limit. One way in which the limits imposed by Lacan's notion of the Real differ from the limits imposed by poststructuralism is that the Real's indeterminability disables discourse's ability to establish and narrate its truths through language; thus denying the establishment of any kind of seamless "truth effect" in its critique. What is at issue here are two interrelated questions. First, how can social or cultural theorists promote knowledges that resist inheriting this "backward looking" orientation to establish its truths? And second, is it possible to represent this "absent cause" of the Real? Žižek claims that a solution to these dilemmas lies in the ability to push beyond the binary construction of both subject/object and subject/agent relations in order to conceive of a type of objectification of the Lacanian Real. Through the indeterminacy of the Real, the very processes of overdetermination, which a universal subject insists upon, are destabilized. This is due to the fact that through the mediation of Symbolic and Imaginary structures alone, it is impossible to simply know what remains fundamentally unknowable.

A matter that remains to be discussed is the question of whether there is a mimetic relationship between the social symbolic and society. And how precisely does the social symbolic inform its signification? If the signification of a word or subject changes, do the social power relations that govern that discursive object follow suit, or *visa versa*? Any answer to these questions is complicated, as I would propose that it is possible to change

signification in the social symbolic—radical change, for example, hierarchical inversions of value in the signification of language—without making any fundamental change in society. This point can be argued through a discussion of various forms of irony, parody, satire, or sarcasm, which distort *volte face* their assumed signification in linguistic and/or aesthetical economies but have not seemed to fundamentally effect social change. For example, there are words such as “bad,” “dyke,” “nigger,” “fag,” etc. whose derogatory signification has been changed positively in the communities they represent without having any substantial effect on improving the material reality of these marginalized groups.

So, how can an analysis of social symbolic relations affect social change? Žižek proposes that the Real “is the absent cause which perturbs the causality of symbolic law. On that account, the structure of overdetermination is irreducible: cause exercises its influence only as redoubled, through a certain discrepancy or time-lag, that is, if the ‘original’ trauma is to become effective, it must hook onto, find an echo in, some present deadlock” (1994: 101). What Žižek characterizes as the “doubling effect” that occurs in instances of trauma is similar to the what takes place at the onset of paranoia. Like instances of trauma, paranoia challenges the smooth engine of symbolization and throws it off kilter. However, while paranoia points to inconsistencies in the symbolic order, it has no existence prior to symbolization. As Žižek states, “it remains an anamorphic entity, which gains its consistency in retrospect, viewed from within the symbolic horizon—it acquires its consistency from the structural necessity of the inconsistency of the symbolic field” (1994: 102).²¹ This “doubling effect” then is paradoxical in a manner that, Žižek suggests, enables some productive possibilities for troubling the limits of simple

subject/object dichotomies since the logic that governs these relations begins to become suspect under closer inspection. It is from this perspective that I would like to explore the possibilities reading paranoia might provide for effecting social change. Paranoia opens a venue for “collective redress” if, in the relationship between the reader and the paranoid subject, the articulation of repressed desire exposes the “original trauma” of the Real such that it finds an echo in a present deadlock—i.e. in cases of paranoia where there is a discrepancy between versions of reality. One way a subject can move through the present deadlock which contemporary theory has assigned it is by latching onto an echo of its own and/or an “other’s” desires. Like desire, “the logic that governs the action of people with [paranoia] is not that of biological necessity; rather it is a social logic” (Doubt xi). Remembering its social logic might prevent paranoid complaints against society from being interpreted as fantasies, mere projections from a psychotic or unstable individual. If a paranoid statement or text moves its reader to identify with it, this connection does not merely assert an alternate version of reality in place of a previously assumed reality; instead it exposes the *paranoiac* principle of knowledge that insists that knowledge remain unresolved. Paranoia achieves this destabilizing effect since the lack, or repression of desire, which is acknowledged in a paranoid text, does not cohere with the symbolic registry that the Master discourse(s) it confronts appears to offer its subjects.

For Lacan, the gap between the Real and the Symbolic/Imaginary is articulated through paranoia. But once received by the reader, paranoia again “doubles” and becomes mediated between two speaking subjects. Because of the indeterminacy of knowledge this gap cannot then be used to form a new Master discourse, nor can it enter the symbolic

order without calling into question the existence of other potential gaps or blind spots. Thus, the knowledges created by paranoid desires are ones which are partial and contingent; they exist as *something* which has been left out of “proper” discourse. It is only after this rupture in signification is noticed that the *paranoiac* sets about to repair this abyss by narrating his/her concerns through a delusional system which protects the ego from its own “self-reproaches” (Freud, as discussed by Smith, 97). Paranoia, then, involves a subject who feels s/he is alienated from what it understands as the symbolic order. However, once this *paranoiac* speaks, this communication cannot consolidate any type of shared or “consensual reality” that Master discourses seek to establish.

This idea of “consensual reality” is a concern for both Christopher Dewdney and Erin Mouré. Or perhaps a more accurate claim is that the disjunctures between paranoia and notions of a “consensual reality” are of great interest to them. For Dewdney, the paranoid subject is characterized in the following statement:

there is a sense of contingency driving the [paranoid] schizophrenic’s hermeneutical search, a desperation that leads to insomnia, disordered thinking and labile emotional states. These, in turn, eventually burn out the psyche and flatten the emotional effect due to neurotransmitter depletion and pathological changes in neurological function. All this is a result of the victim’s attempt to attain the unrealizable goal of reconciling his involuntary cosmology with consensual reality, a task requiring superhuman devotion, energy and intelligence. (*Secular Grail* 92)

In terms of the paranoid individual who cannot find solidarity with another subject, this psychological burn-out seems quite probable. As well, there are cases of paranoia, such as Freud’s study of Daniel Schreber, that exemplify a paranoid subject who manages to reconcile his projected or “involuntary cosmology.” However, the effects of paranoia can be read as productive rather than merely leading to a condition of psychological burn-out

that is in need of a cure. The sense of paranoia that the following poems of Mouré and Dewdney instill can be read as an exploration of subjectivity that cannot be dissociated from agency due to their expression of paranoid desires. These are texts whose subjects actively engage with the symbolic order in attempts to alter the reader's perceptions and underlying assumptions of the social world. They evoke a reader's response in which an overt political choice is made. Even if the choice is as simple as the act of agreeing or disagreeing, it is a response in which the reader carries agency through the act of making this decision. But is this simple choice enough to legitimize paranoia as a means of theorizing agency? And does this choice not occur in any reading? In the case of the paranoid subject, disparities among the knowledge of the self, the desires of the self, and the desires of society are articulated. In a sense, paranoia brings to the surface what is always already at play in social signification. With any paranoid text, the reader is asked to judge the paranoiac's desires. What is important in this paranoid relationship, however, is the fact that this process of choice, and the subsequent consciousness of agency it evokes, is overt and cannot be elided. If the paranoiac principle of knowledge is lost there is a danger that knowledge, with its accordant master signifiers, will become an end in itself and human subjects the means of serving it, rather than *vice versa* (Bracher 59).

In the following chapters on the paranoid poetics of Christopher Dewdney and Erin Mouré, paranoia is regarded as a way of exploring the subject's relationship to Master discourses. Paranoia is theorized as a means, rather than an end, to promote a transformative practice of reading Mouré's and Dewdney's texts. Through differing examples of these "paranoid texts," I will demonstrate how particular discourses are

promoted through and by all texts, and how a paranoid subject prevents the resolution or synthesis of the conflicting desires and subsequent knowledges these discourses produce. A paranoid subject desires change in what s/he feels are prohibitive social sites, such as law, government, media, technology, and language. Since desire is beyond determinable biological forces, paranoia acknowledges the phenomenological restrictions of each self's sensory and cognitive perceptions. Not only does the paranoiac not trust society; s/he also doubts the accuracy of his or her own perceptions. But in this uncertainty, the paranoiac desires to build allegiances to persuade other subjects to change their own desires and they way they see themselves in the world.

Notes

1. In a note, Bracher admits that although “knowledge is often an important factor in [understanding how cultural phenomena move people]; indeed, it is always implicit in desire and *jouissance*. But knowledge cannot account for the position assumed by subjects within that knowledge, for position within knowledge is a function of identification or desire, or the ground of desire: being and its lack” (19). He claims that without recognizing how desire operates in culture it is impossible to understand motivation. Following Lacan, he argues that there is an inherent relationship between discourse and desire. This relationship between the subject and desire is elaborated on further in this chapter, most notably in terms of the Lacanian Real.
2. What is theorized as agency in this thesis is a consideration of how a subject plays an active role in its own formation. That is, while there are overriding social forces which help shape a subject’s understanding of itself in the world, these forces do not produce subjectivity in its entirety. What Bracher and other cultural theorists take issue with are interpretations of subjectivity such as poststructuralism that take a top down approach—they look at how social power influences a subject’s understanding of reality but does not consider how a subject plays a part in shaping these forces. As Slavoj Žižek points out in a discussion of Foucault, “in ‘poststructuralism,’ the subject is usually reduced to so-called subjectivation, he is conceived of as an effect of a fundamentally non-subjective process” (1989: 174).
3. In very broad terms, liberal humanism is understood for the purposes of this thesis as a set of interrelated ideologies, stemming from the Enlightenment period, that seek to secure the notion of an autonomous and universal subject. That is, liberal humanist discourses attempt to promote a sense of self that is both independent and potentially equal to all other subjects, regardless of gender, race, class, sexuality or medical status.
4. By “holistic effect” I mean to imply something which is both complete and therapeutic.
5. The symbolic order refers to the “symbolic function” of language or discourse in the social world. Lacan makes it clear that his concept of the symbolic order is indebted to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (from whom the phrase “symbolic function” is borrowed). What Lacan implies with this term is that the social world is structured according to certain laws which regulate kinship relations and the exchange of gifts. The concept of exchange in language is crucial to Lacan’s notion of the symbolic order although it should be remembered that Lacan doesn’t simply equate the two. Instead, language, for Lacan, involves imaginary and real dimensions in addition to its symbolic dimension.
6. What I am interested in is the connection Foucault makes between power/knowledge and its relation to desire. He states,

. . . power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it

worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Super-ego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of the body became possible. (1980: 59)

In the same way that Foucault claims that it is only through power that a knowledge of the body can be produced, it is only through power that a knowledge of subjectivity can be produced. Thus, implicit to knowledge are the social power structures that ensures their continued maintenance. This understanding of the relations between power and knowledge presume that desire exists as an effect of knowledge and does not affect knowledge.

7. In this statement Bracher is considering philosophical investigations, like those of Hegel and Freud, which depict culture as “natural” and transcendent—i.e. not based on the contingences of human production.

8. I would include Paul Smith, Mark Bracher and Slavoj Žižek on this list.

9. Throughout Freud’s career he developed two somewhat mutually exclusive views of the ego: a realist view and a narcissistic one. The realist ego is governed by ‘rationalist compromise’, by what it identifies as social norms, while the narcissist ego describes a split subject that helps a child’s development from infancy. This split in the narcissistic ego is what allows the subject to see itself as an object. Lacan’s theory of subjectivity stems from Freud’s narcissistic ego.

10. The notion that identity is extrinsically layered is in direct contrast with Freud’s theories of the relationship between a realist ego and the superego. Freud proposes that the superego is a projection of the ego which acts as a conscience that limits and controls the ego. This force of repression is generated by the ego’s own interpretation of how the subject should behave and not forced upon the ego directly by the external world.

11. For a more thorough discussion of these registers see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

12. Louis Althusser describes interpellation as ideology’s ability to call out to and organize social subjects through discourse; it is the way in which ideology addresses the subject directly in order to appear natural and devoid of history. A more thorough discussion of Althusser’s understanding of the social effects of ideology is taken up in “Paranoid Citizenship: the subject, language, and social space in the writings of Erin Mouré.”

13. In *Écrits*, Lacan discusses language as being structured by a libidinal economy. This is due to the fact that a subject’s sexual difference orients its eventual social position. Thus, a

subject's libido is what first orients her or his relations with others.

14. Bracher explains that "these new signifiers to a degree escape the network of the Symbolic order (the law) and thus constitute an embrace of otherness, a love of what is beyond the signifiers constituting one's previous ego ideal and the identity and desire constructed upon it" (100).

15. As Paul Smith points out, "the emerging field of cultural studies are all tending to 'literarize' their practices [...] The tendency is to regard, in an unprecedentedly intense manner, the objects of knowledge in these disciplines as being susceptible of 'reading.' This is not 'reading' in an older, more metaphorical sense (as one would read facial expressions, for example), but in the sense that the activity of knowledge-gathering and interpretation is now subjected to the process of reading as it has been explicated and theorized (and to some extent regulated) in literary theoretical practice. At any rate, the objects of each discipline are now often considered as primarily *textual* phenomena" (84). As Smith quite rightly suggests, any theory becomes a fiction once it enters the social sphere of public reception.

16. I share a concern with Terry Eagleton, Rob Pope, Mark Bracher, Paul Smith, and others over the idea of an "ideal" reader in the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser (and others) and their relationship to hermeneutic study of texts. I am wary of how, instead of opening texts to the contingent possibilities of reading, notions of an "ideal reader" tend to act as models that control reading practices.

17. What is meant by *jouissance* is borrowed from the writings of both Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan which stem from Ferdinand de Saussure's study of sign relations in language as textual economies. For Derrida, the notion of textual 'play' is discussed in his now classic essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In this essay he claims that the relations between signifier and signified are always already indeterminate as they are both in and outside the text that pushes towards semantic plurality and excess. The notion of *jouissance* (orgasmic pleasure, or textual free play) has been expanded on in the writings of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva and other feminist theories of sexual difference that theorize the subversive pleasure in the indeterminacies and excesses of meaning that accompany various linguistic economies.

18. Narcissistic desires involve the wish that the Other love, acknowledge, or validate the subject in some way. Anaclitic desire involves the wish to possess, as a means for one's *jouissance*, a object or trait, whether material or behavioural, that embodies a specific signifier.

19. Bracher's statement carries resonances with the works of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, who attempt to redress this relationship through theories of absence.

20. Bhabha proposes that there is always an ambivalence that accompanies a subject's identification through discourse, and therefore, identity is never the site of complete foreclosure. See "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under

a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817” in *The Location of Culture*.

21. In this passage Žižek is discussing instances of trauma in general and not paranoia specifically, although paranoia does readily fit within this categorization.

Christopher Dewdney: Virtual Images and the Poetics of Paranoia

To know that one does not write for the other, to know that these things I am going to write will never cause me to be loved by the one I love (the other), to know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, that is precisely there where you are not—this is the beginning of writing.

- Roland Barthes¹

assume(d) the unspoken

- Christopher Dewdney²

Genealogy of Perception: Memory, Language, Landscape

The scientific discourses that inform Dewdney's poetry offer some explanation as to why he is considered one of the least accessible authors writing in Canada today.³ His poems often appear as epigrammatic observations or short "Log Entries"⁴ that itemize and catalogue natural and social phenomena. In *Concordant Proviso Ascendant*, one of the four books that make up Dewdney's *A Natural History of Southwestern Ontario*,⁵ he states that these observations exist as "a compendium of particulars written from the inside of its subject" (43); they are "an inventory [of] personal, regional identity informed by a natural history" (43). In these documents there lies a certain "'suspectness'—not only of Dewdney's [own] prose, but [also] of language itself" (McCaffrey 1986a: 46). It is this "suspectness," Dewdney's eerie distrust of the "document" that offers a means toward discussing his poetry in terms of paranoia. However, gaining purchase on his sense of

paranoia is often elusive. As Christian Bök notes, the difficulties that readers face when confronting Dewdney's work lie in two contradictory, and perhaps mutually exclusive, paradigms that are produced in his poetics:

[Dewdney] parodies two textual traditions simultaneously, not only operating within these traditions, but also operating against them: first, the romantic tradition that depicts nature as a pantheistic avatar of a benevolent deity; second, the scientific tradition that depicts nature as a subdivisible continuum of objective phenomena. (1993a: 17)

As Bök suggests, Dewdney's parody of both science and romanticism enables him to sustain a dialogue between these disparate discourses. The effect of this theoretical cacophony allows human consciousness to become both the subject who investigates and the object of investigation. Thus, the line between subject/object is split by two contrasting visions of subjectivity: one as a "pantheistic avatar," the other as "objective phenomena." Since the poet occupies the position of both subject and its own object of investigation, Dewdney positions the self—what was once the stable stake⁶ for the Lake poets and the like⁷—under the scrutiny of always incomplete but empirically objectified data. For Dewdney, the subject does not reside outside or exterior to the objects it describes, "but is actually interpellated within [its description] so that the describer describes an 'other' that is already the self" (Bök 1993a: 18). In this way, Dewdney's texts do not simply refer to the natural or social landscapes they describe, but also to semiological topographies that function inside the text. His texts serve as maps of how human consciousness makes meaning, managing to interweave the view with what he views of the outside world.

Allan Hepburn's "The Dream of the Self: Perception and Consciousness in Dewdney's Poetry" provides a useful summary of some of the early critical responses⁸ to

Dewdney's work.⁹ For Hepburn, these critiques, which focus on the foreignness or "newness" of Dewdney's poetry, are distracting since they make his "poetry seems more alien or inaccessible than it actually is" (32). In terms of the frequent difficulties readers experience in understanding Dewdney's writing, the proposition of what his poetry "actually is" might seem a little peculiar; nonetheless, Hepburn provides a useful clue toward assessing Dewdney's work by proposing that this preoccupation with human consciousness and perception is crucial to his work:

Beneath the strata of natural history and the sober rationality of science, the poetry documents the solipsism of the subjective individual. The sedimentary layers of limestone metaphorically approximate the memory of layers of the mind, and the use of science is a restylization of the self in an objective mode. Kroetsch and Dragland correctly diagnose a particular characteristic of the poetry, its preoccupation with the non-human and the visionary. But the poetry also dwells emphatically on the mechanisms of the mind and the problems of perception. (32)

This "restylization of the self in an objective mode" splits the view of the subject, allowing Dewdney's poems to focus on both the mechanisms of the poet's mind and the outside world. This reflexive gesture is complicated by the fact that, for Dewdney, perception cannot be trusted: "What we perceive as self is only an aggregate of index memories, appropriated personas and revisionist histories—an almost complete fabrication" (*Secular Grail* 51).

This paranoid understanding of self parallels the Lacanian notion of the Real, in that any knowledge of the self is filtered through the imaginary and the symbolic orders and bears no direct link to its essence. Just as there is no inherent link between Lacan's Real and a subject's symbolic/imaginary understanding of reality, what a subject essentially *is* bears no direct correlation with its subjectivity. Lacan's notion of the Real is not

accessible to the imaginary and symbolic registers, and similarly, essential claims of the subject are equally paradoxical since our perception of subjectivity appears as “an almost complete fabrication.” Noting this paradox of subjectivity, Dewdney proposes that “our primary goal as humans is to disentangle ourselves from our familial and socio-historical matrices . . . the extraneous material we have incorporated into our psyches from an early age” (*Secular Grail* 43). Acknowledging that an understanding of self stems from the “noise of our cultural fictions” is part of the crux that Dewdney describes as a “politic of perception.”¹⁰ And since knowledge is mediated by symbolic and imaginary structures, this paranoid stance positions Dewdney’s poetics along-side an understanding that the desire to know oneself as a complete and independent subject cannot be fulfilled as the “self” is merely an effect of discourse. In this way, Dewdney’s poetics are political in that they function as a critique of Master discourses that perpetuate illusory notions of an autonomous self.

As Hepburn notes, Dewdney’s work is situated in an anachronistic poetic space that lies in and between natural histories and present studies of human consciousness. His poetry is interested in natural histories—the genealogical traces of past landscapes found in the fossils and soil deposits that lie beneath the surfaces of present society. But his poetry also offers a genealogy of consciousness and phenomenology. And although this genealogy has distinct differences from Foucault’s critique of the Enlightenment period, its effects are not dissimilar. Foucault’s genealogical investigation into Western history demonstrates that “the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering[s], disguises, [and] plays” (1977: 139). By focusing on these anomalies, which

tend to be considered without history, Foucault hopes to unsettle the Master discourses which shape our past and cleave history from any resemblance to the evolution of a species or the natural destiny of a people. For Foucault, genealogy begins with the refusal to extend a blind faith to western metaphysics:

if [the genealogist] listens to history, he finds there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns it was born in an altogether “reasonable” fashion—from chance . . . What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity. (1977: 142)

In his poems, Dewdney performs a similar genealogical investigation into the natural histories of landscapes and fossil formations; however, his observations function as a metaphor for understanding the disparities and anomalies of human perception as well. Dewdney “dwell[s] . . . on the mechanisms of the mind” such that the layers of consciousness are compared to the layers of sediment that become visible only if one cuts away its surface. In “Elora Gorge,” for example, the river has performed this task of cutting and the knowledge it has gleaned by slicing through the limestone is both a “continuous music” and “a blanket of silence” (*Radiant Inventory* 99). Each layer of the gorge represents “something locked in the stone for millions of years” (95) with an essence that is ultimately unknowable. The poet does not gain access to the information that surrounds him; he is lost in this “invisible highway of unseen energies” and what he can see is produced through “a mirror of clouds.” However the reader is told that the gorge also remains a “sanctuary for consciousness, a teacher of attention and agility” (95). By serving as a reminder of the limits of human consciousness, these histories are

understood as layers that are not part of an identifiable teleological continuum. These past histories are like the river itself which “starts nowhere and ends nowhere. We can only be sure of its visible parts” (99). For Dewdney, consciousness is an enigma like these silent histories—the only evidence of which remains fossilized in nature.

It is from Dewdney’s genealogical perspective that scientific discourse’s ability to create “objective” empirical information about the past is questioned. By exposing the indeterminacies that render the discovery of the “truth” an impossibility, his poems promote a language that juxtaposes “common-sense” notions against the restrictions that are placed on these assumptions in terms of what science knows about human sensual perception. For Dewdney,

Science has thrown forth a very precise descriptive language which few people seem to be making use of. It’s a funny thing, because in a sense (and this is a quote I read somewhere but actually it is quite true) “as the island of knowledge increases, the shorelines of wonder lengthen.” Science is giving us more to look at, and a more precise way of looking at it. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to ignore this data. It’s like the Blakean notion of “an immense world of delight closed by our senses five.” We now have these little extra senses kicking in. It’s no longer an immense world; it’s an immenser world of delight still closed by our perceptually augmented electronic systems five.¹¹ (Dewdney in Fawcett, 79)

Dewdney proposes that scientific or empirical data exist as simply other forms of information which become subject to indeterminacy and variation depending on how they are produced, read, and understood. Scientific discourse provides a basis from which he “cuts” its knowledge, extracting samples that challenge standard assumptions of subjectivity. For Dewdney, as for Foucault, all science ultimately points out is that “nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self recognition or for the understanding of other men” (Foucault 1977: 153). In Dewdney’s

poetry, this challenge to subjectivity does not only occur through metaphorical or analogous relations with natural landscapes. In “On Fossilization,” for example, Dewdney reminds us that “every seven years we are entirely recomposed” (*Predators* 104). The fact that each individual is physically an entirely different being every seven years produces a paranoid effect by reminding the reader that any identity—as it relates to the self’s biological construction—is radically unstable and constantly being reconfigured.

In his essay “Parasite Maintenance,” Dewdney elaborates on the paranoid relationship that results from science’s ability to destabilize the autonomous subject. In this essay, the mind is likened to a bio-chemical medium which produces the effect of self-consciousness:

The important thing to realize in these models of localization is that even though the cortex of the brain (the grey matter) has specific areas which under electric stimulation activate memories, arm movements & so forth, the actual circuitry involved is remote from the point of electronic stimulation & involves many sub-systems & loops. It’s not as if the outside world is funneled through a homunculus in the center of the brain & then displayed on the neo-cortex in some kind of phrenological cinema. There are sub-stations & relays so profuse they confound neuro-atomists of today.

Remember always that there is no homunculus; ‘I’ is an illusion.

As though science were a type of microscope, its discourse allows Dewdney to magnify the complex and unexplained features of consciousness that he lists as so-called ‘objective’ facts of perception. There is no model (“no homunculus”) that reconciles the discrepancies between cultural assumptions of a subject’s perception and science’s knowledge of it.

Dewdney’s use of scientific discourse enables him to both decenter and deprivilege the ego, or more specifically the Cartesian *ego*, since science consistently questions the ego’s ontological status within Western discourse. In his *Discourse on the Method and the*

Meditation, Descartes claims that “there is a great difference between mind and body, in that the body by its nature, is always divisible and that mind is entirely indivisible.”

Dewdney however, emphasizes that the “substations and neuro-relays” produce cognition and are not indivisible entities in themselves. In effect, his poem asks the reader to “[i]magine not being absolutely sure about even the first two terms of Descartes’ *Cogito*” (*Secular Grail* 43). In his questioning of perception, Dewdney’s reconfiguration of Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” becomes “I think, therefore my consciousness is combined with, and confined to, a system of indeterminant processes which operate independently of my consciousness yet serve to modify each interpretation of the stimulus of my external reality.”

Dewdney’s claim that the “I” is an illusion does not purport that the “I” does not exist; instead, the “I” becomes situated in a paranoid crisis of perception that undermines the assumptions that inform the Cartesian “I.” Once mental cognition is considered as a process of effects and not as an entity in itself, it becomes a simulacrum. As an effect, the mind produces consciousness, but it is not the unified, indivisible container of all that is consciously known. Like a tool that aids in the construction of an object, the mind is not inherently tied to the identity it produces. Language mediates the relationship between cognition and subjectivity, as it is through language that subjects are able to regulate the effect of consciousness. For Dewdney, language “is the gauge of our provisional reality, the standardized description of a constantly variable world Its utility lies in its extreme lack of identity, its expertise in indicating but never being something, its immateriality” (*Immaculate Perception* 56). Dewdney’s characterization of the utility of

language seems comparable with Lacan's proposition that language serves to cover *desire-as-lack*. Dewdney's description of language as an immaterial "gauge of our provisional reality" locates the subject in a paranoid scenario in which she or he has an oblique relationship with this "constantly variable world." The paranoid knowledge Dewdney promotes, demonstrates that Descartes's *ego* is a discursive effect which, like any other promotion of an autonomous subject, is a Master discourse that attempts to cover language's operation through *desire-as-lack*.

By focusing on the moments when empirical data is unable to lend itself to the production of an autonomous subject, Dewdney's poetry serves to stall the reader's ability to seamlessly reproduce that knowledge. The subjects Dewdney represents are in a state of mental perplexity similar to that of the paranoid schizophrenic. Dewdney characterizes this condition in his prose piece of the same name:

Paranoid Schizophrenia is essentially an elaborate personal cosmology (bearing the hallmarks of *ad hoc* rationalization). At the onset of an episode there is usually a triggering event that skews the entire subjective reality of the psychotic individual. The paranoid system develops out of this original displacement of reality and ramifies through the whole of the victim's universe, like an off-register print. Even if the original displacement is one decimal point to the left or right of reality, so to speak, then the afflicted person is removed from consensual reality as if the displacement were a hundred percent. (*Secular Grail* 91)

Because science throws individual perception into doubt, the discrepancies between a "consensual reality" and a "personal cosmology" are difficult to discern. In a sense, to enter Dewdney's poetics is to let go of the "consensual realities" that bind Western society. His poems ask the reader to displace her or his assumed reality that "one decimal point to the left or right" and to reconfigure it with what Robert Kroetsch and others have

labeled a “new cosmology.”¹² The paranoia Dewdney invokes challenges the idea of a “consensual reality” at its source—subjectivity. For Dewdney, a “consensual reality” is an effect of the way subjects are interpellated by dominant ideologies. Reality is an elusive symbolic referent that is naturalized by the symbolic structures that contour the ways in which individuals come to understand their position in relation to the world. Thus, the displacement between a paranoid schizophrenic’s “personal cosmology” and an assumed “consensual reality” has more to do with cultural beliefs than it does with one perception of reality being any more accurate than another. As Dewdney notes, science merely points toward the ever “widening shoreline” of what is not known. It would seem that Dewdney concurs with Lacan’s proposal that knowledge is paranoid in structure since his poems remind their reader that knowledge is an unending process—that it is not fixed or finite—constructed by an “I” that is an illusion.

Consciousness: The Virtual

For Dewdney, consciousness is envisioned as the simulacrum—a subject’s virtual reproduction of the Cartesian ego in the world. To discuss the simulacrum is to trace a long and contested history of human cognition in the west. As Gary Genosko points out, Baudrillard has recently become a central figure in contemporary cultural criticism through his discussion of the way in which the tradition of western metaphysics frames the simulacrum:

The concept of the simulacrum does not originate with Baudrillard, even though he has played a significant role in putting it into circulation in contemporary and political theory. It is best understood in relation to several ancient (Egyptian and Greek) and modern (French) religious, metaphysical, and aesthetic traditions. Most important, however, is that in Western metaphysics the simulacrum has always stood at some distance from “the real” in a position of weakness, having been banished ontologically to the margins. (28)

The simulacrum is like a word or image. It acts as a signifier, facilitating the production of meaning but without being materially linked to the signified. In the same way that the mind has become divisible—distinct from both consciousness and perception—the simulacrum mediates the displacement between the mind as sign *propre* and the mind as signified. For Baudrillard, the link between relations of signification are cut (not unlike Derrida’s “scission”), and then repaired, through the artificial substitution of one signifier for another. Thus the process of signification loses its capacity to appear both natural and real. As Genosko states, “if the separation of the sign and the referent is a ‘fiction’, then their reunion is a ‘science fiction’” (39). Dewdney’s poetry exposes the mechanisms that produce the effect of this ‘science fiction’ and serves to make visible the conceptual gap that follows from an understanding of reality as virtual.

Although reality cannot be substantiated through the virtual simulacrum of Dewdney’s poetics, his work is open to the play of possible meanings that a paranoid stance affords. The mind cannot claim truth, but it can and necessarily does make meaning. So even though the subject is discursively alienated from both the world and the body it inhabits, the awareness of this alienation, for Dewdney, is a virtuous “blessing.” As the poet of “Log Entries III” recognizes,

Between the shadows

and the reflection between
 (between) the shadow
 and our eyes
 lies
 the virtual image.
 Virtually what we had
 (had) expected. Virtuous
 blessing of the handfed
 illusion. (*Predators* 181)

With lines that echo T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men,"¹³ Dewdney re-orientes human perception in terms of the virtual image. If Eliot's poem is symptomatic of the anxieties which surround modernism, then Dewdney's modifications represent the cultural condition of the postmodern as he paints an ambivalent portrait of the consequences which surround an understanding of consciousness as virtual. In "Log Entries III," Dewdney acknowledges that perception is built upon previously learned presuppositions. The virtual image appears as "[v]irtually what we had / (had) expected." Acknowledging this limit of perception is crucial since the virtual becomes an avatar for Dewdney's paranoid poetics. There is some political import to Dewdney's stressing the need to incorporate the crisis of the virtual into his poetry. Not to embrace the virtual as a crisis of phenomenology, Baudrillard warns, is to suffer a "double spiral" winding forward from the need to objectify. That is, not to embrace the crisis the virtual affords is to continue to produce knowledge spun in the solipsism of the illusory autonomous subject. While some critics, like Smith, diagnose paranoia as promoting an intense solipsism, Dewdney's work, by problematizing the subject as a basis for knowledge production through the virtual, demonstrates how paranoia can offer a critique of the solipsism Smith claims it disavows.

Image: “you” are here

In literary theory, the acknowledgment of a subject’s agency depends on two aspects that follow from the “readerly” production of the text: it depends on how the text is read and understood by others; and it hinges on the text’s ability to produce meanings that somehow counter or work in contrast to the dominant ideologies of the social symbolic. This twofold practice of writing is common among Language Poets,¹⁴ who “explore the function of frames [of reference] in general, the process by which ‘dangerous and protopolitical impulses’ tend to be neutralized and subverted within the hegemonic conception of art today,” and who “insist that certain modes are more easily appropriated into the dominant ideology than are others” (Hartley 33). As George Hartley explains, the exploration of what frames language is an exploration of power. The practice of Language writing constitutes a commitment to subvert Realism’s insistence that “subjects are simple, meaning exists ‘out there’ waiting to be communicated, and texts should be neutral, natural, transparent. In short, the assumptions behind Language poetry . . . counter the basic assumptions of Bourgeois subjectivity” (Hartley 34). Language poetry relies on its ability to produce meanings that are not transparent as intra-linguistic referents. Because Dewdney’s poetry subverts processes of seamless signification that the assumptions of Realism rely upon, he has become associated with Language poetry and other avant-garde movements that offer critiques of how subjects are interpellated *by* and *in* society. In short, some of the salient features of Dewdney’s practice of writing parallel what Roland Barthes names the “writerly text.”¹⁵

Barthes recognizes the participation of the reader in the construction of the text's meaning. The text is open, and Barthes insists that its referents and meanings are produced by the reader and not by the text itself. As Lyn Hejinian remarks in her essay "The Rejection of Closure," "the open text, by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader" (272). She continues:

It invites us to participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies. It speaks for writing that is generative rather than directive....The open text often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material, turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification (272).

The "open text" then, is a linguistic form through which a reader can produce meanings that resist culture's tendency towards hierarchical ways of seeing. This is done by countering language's ability to fix its objects of knowledge as stable products of meaning. Hejinian views the "open text" as an "anti-fetish" social practice that resists the urge to totalize the experience or existence of an 'other' as object. Because the practice of reading an "open text" acknowledges that meanings are produced between text and reader, it offers to a theory of paranoia a discursive model through which one can consider the agency of the reader. However, there are limits to the "open text" due to what McCaffery describes as its "double disposition that simultaneously petitions active engagement and a negative refusal to engage as a consequence" (1986b:157). As McCaffery points out, while the reader has freedom to make her or his own meanings, this freedom is constrained by the very need to produce these meanings.

Dewdney often guides the reader through unfamiliar situations. He places the reader, in a scenario where “you” are asked to imagine “yourself” under attack. In the second section (II) of “Knowledge of Neurophysiology as Defense against Attack,” for example, “you” are offered a series of instructions that describe emergency self-defense techniques:

You are taking a short-cut through a city alley at night when a lone thug lunges in front of you, a knife in his right hand. Although you are not trained in any form of self-defense you can rely on brain-lateralization interference to get you through this situation. Since he is right-handed he is already taxing his dominant or left-hemisphere. You can cause deterioration of his vigilance in his left visual field merely by asking him a question to which he has been programmed to respond with his right hemisphere, i.e., a spatiotemporal dilemma such as “Are you underneath me?” Bark out this question concurrently with a right hook with all your force behind it, focused on the chin. During his left hemisphere interference crisis, he will freeze momentarily like a short-circuited automaton. You must produce unconsciousness during this interval. (*Radiant Inventory* 62)

While the situation Dewdney describes is humorous or even absurd, the poem does point to a paradox in Foucault’s knowledge/power relation.¹⁶ Although the reader gains knowledge for her/his personal defense, this knowledge is paranoiac in that it simultaneously illustrates a precarious limit to self-controlled consciousness and action. That is, while the ability to monopolize the relays between the left and right hemispheres of the attacker’s brain might save “you,” it also alienates “you” from a former sense of self-control. Knowledge as power, in this case, becomes a knowledge of power, denoting a potentially concurrent lack of power within the poetic subject. Through language, the control over an “other” as an object, (in this case the attacker who becomes a “short circuited automaton”) marks a rupture between the assumption of control over the self as a free-acting or autonomous subject, and the knowledge that confuses this assumption of

control. This knowledge Dewdney offers then folds in upon itself, enforcing and inscribing a limit to this orated defense since with this information comes the understanding that it can potentially be used against “you” as well.

In “Knowledge of Neurophysiology as Defense against Attack,” the reader is asked to imagine a paranoid scenario and then is given instructions to safely escape this situation. Thus, it is through the exchange of knowledge between the poet and reader that the power represented in this threat is diffused. This dissemination of knowledge through language complicates Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge in that the types of knowledge that remain most powerful are those which can resist signification and remain unsymbolized. Dewdney comments on the power of covert knowledge in “Intensifying Consciousness”:

Knowledge is power. Individual knowledge is individual power (i.e., individual ‘secret’ knowledge uncommunicated to others). The potential energy of uncommunicated secret knowledge held by an individual increases proportionately to the social pertinence of that knowledge. Even irrelevant knowledge, if uncommunicated, increases the personal power of the individual. Saying disperses the energy. “He who talks does not know.” (*The Immaculate Perception* 44)

Contrary to Foucault, knowledge, as Dewdney describes it, does not function solely as a social discursive product; instead knowledge, for Dewdney, becomes more powerful if it remains unsoken by the individual. With this proposition, Dewdney creates a subject who becomes inferior proportionally to the knowledge s/he articulates: “He who talks does not know.” Knowledge appears as an ineffable ideal, exterior to speech. Dewdney’s presentation of the relationship between knowledge and power is further complicated by what might be considered a paranoia of silence. Uncommunicated knowledge increases

“the personal power of the individual.” His poem points to an imagined hierarchy of silence in which knowledge that is not articulated remains inaccessible to others.

For Dewdney, not entering social symbolization represents power since to avoid symbolization allows the subject to resist becoming an object in the social sphere. And as “Intensifying Consciousness” suggests, language is what enables the individual to become entangled in this symbolic snare. When knowledge enters into language, it becomes caught in the social symbolic systems that maintain power over its objects. The utterance releases knowledge (what was once a silent ideal) into the realm of the idea (a signifier as an object of knowledge), capturing what was once inaccessible power (silent knowledge) in the mechanics of language where it becomes susceptible to the unreliable perception of other subjects. Language is what subjugates knowledge to the “prey” of human cognition—what Dewdney describes as the “ironic predator of the adoration” (*The Immaculate Perception* 110).

While language allows knowledge to function as a readily translatable object for collective inquiry, it is important to note that this occurs out of necessity and does not provide fixed or stable meanings. Language is as unreliable as the subjects who structure and mediate its systems. For example, in “Shadows of Silence,” Dewdney focuses on how the subject is both dependent upon and alienated from language:

Words
are the silences
at the heart of ideas
and the terrible truth
we turned crying from the mirror
to face
was simply

this prison of thought. (*The Immaculate Perception* 18)

For Dewdney, there is no essential correspondence between the word (as sign) and the idea (as signifier) it represents. Because words merely point to ideas and do not represent ideas in themselves, thinking becomes shaped by these tools language provides us with. The fact that language cannot represent ideas absolutely is the “terrible truth,” that Dewdney claims is “simply / this prison of thought.” Furthermore, to complicate this issue Dewdney also notes that the word itself does not exist in language in singularity. As Dewdney states, “the word is composed of two parts, the kernel and the halo. The kernel is the hard inner core which exists taxonomically only, the halo is the aura of meanings, connotations and associations which surround the word” (“Parasite Maintenance” 22). Although words have their places in the structure of language and carry meaning for subjects, as Structuralism notes, they have no inherent link with the idea themselves. As Hartley explains, “[r]eference is . . . seen as the end result of the social processes of language production, not as the inherent quality of the words themselves”(34). This adds a Marxist twist to Saussure’s theory by insisting that the social context determines which particular signifieds may relate to a given signifier” (34). Thus, words must refer to a context in order to produce meaning, and without this social context they appear as empty “kernels” signifying nothing.

Dewdney’s essay “Parasite Maintenance” offers further insight into “Shadows of Silence” through what he discusses as the complex series of relations that are involved in the subject’s interaction with language. Even though language is a cumulative process whose origins are human, it functions as “a separate [artificial] intelligence utilizing

humans as the neural components in a vast and inconceivable sentience” (“Parasite Maintenance” 25). The metaphor he uses to depict the interdependent and paradoxical relationship between the subject and language is that of a host and its Governor. He states:

The intact survival of this intelligence is threatened by one thing only, and that is the discovery and subsequent exploration of its plane of existence by ourselves, its human host. Safeguarding against this possibility is the function of the Governor. The Governor is an adamant limit beyond which, even the loftiest flights of the intellect, it is impossible to conceptualize. And this limit, the Governor, operates in the most malignly subtle manner imaginable, as we have seen, by programming a conceptual limit into the very thought processes which fuel the flight of the intellectual itself. Thus, not only is the limit adamant, but it is also imperceptible due to the blind-spot incorporated into our perception at an early stage by living language” (25).

Dewdney assumes that language is a totalized system which, due to the fact that it is regulated by this Governor, humans only gain restricted access to. This is one reason why humans have “blind-spots” as these restrictions are incorporated into perception.

Dewdney’s paranoid account, which assumes that there is something more to language, supposes that there is a presence and a logic that remain unknown in language. If a subject could fully recognize these features, Dewdney proposes, the subject would understand that language exists as a complete system. Thus, Dewdney’s presupposition of the totality of language reinforces a paranoid poetics in that these silences come to represent parts of a complete system which the subject suspects is “out there,” limited by a Governor that restricts its flows. The metaphorical relationship between the subject and the Governor grounds a paranoia of language’s silent inaccessible knowledge and illustrates a subject’s continued desire to make sense of this assumed unknown. Yet this desire will remain

perpetually unfulfilled. As Hepburn reminds us in his analysis of Dewdney's "Glass": "What is beneath or beyond the surface perception of an object is only hinted at, because we apprehend only one surface, or visual horizon, at a time in our scanning of the world" (36). Dewdney claims that in its constitution, the subject's perception is limited to one surface at a time and is not capable of understanding the complete system. Thus, any knowledge that stems from this understanding of subjectivity will be consistently limited, unstable, and unreliable; in short, for Dewdney, knowledge remains paranoid.

In Dewdney's poetry, language exists as a total system, as a database or silent universe, which subjects enter and animate through consciousness. Thus, language becomes the complete armature of consciousness, or as Dewdney states, "the prison of thought." Dewdney proposes that

in some respects, language can be conceived of as a self-replicating, lexical organism imbedded in our species. Its evolution, though inextricably bound to the biology of our own evolution, seems to have a synthetic life of its own. It isn't difficult to reverse the figure-ground relationship between humans and language, seeing language as an independent intelligence using humans as neural components in a vast and inconceivable sentience. (*Secular Grail* 139)

This description of language takes the form of a paranoid fantasy that attempts to make sense of its operation. Dewdney's poetry is distrustful of language and the residual silences that underpin meaning; and this suspicion leads him to propose that these silences are always inaccessible to the subject and paradoxically, contextually limited at the moment of their articulation. It is in these silences that power resides. To locate power, then, is to draw an outline around its silences—the encased relations that structure meaning which have become familiarized between the sign/signifier and the signified.

Power in language exists as the spectred armature that allows signification to take place; and the structures of power in language are found in the gaps between what de Saussure calls the *syntagmatic* and the paradigmatic. Dewdney explains:

This [*syntagmatic*] referred to the horizontal, linear relation between words in a sentence and the grammatical interdependence of terms in a given communication. It was always directed towards a cumulative discharge of meaning at the completion of a sequence. The other term that was introduced was the *paradigmatic*, which described a vertical array of synonyms and personal associations intersecting the syntagmatic axis at a right angle, above and below each word in a sentence. This vertical inventory of alternatives makes communication easier due to the availability of equivalent terms. According to Robert Scholes: “Our actual selection of a word in a sentence involves something like a rapid scanning of paradigmatic possibilities until we find the one that will play the appropriate role in the syntax we are creating.” (*Secular Grail* 153)

To further illustrate this system of relations, Dewdney returns to an example he uses to make a similar point in “The Word Store as Planar Thesaurus.”¹⁷ In the sentence Dewdney uses as his model—“The tree was struck by lightning”—the word “lightning” is placed in a column of synonymously related terms to demonstrate the workings of a subject’s cognitive and semantic selection process. However, when the same sentence appears in Dewdney’s “Wind-Roses, Etymological Tunnels and the Paradigmatic Axis” the column of word associations are left incomplete with an apparent typo:

park
flash
electricity
Lightning
shock
fire
charge

The first word “park” appears to be missing an “s” which is needed to create the *quasi*-synonym to lightning: “spark.” In this example, the text draws attention to another

incomplete, or inaccessible feature of language, that which exists at a level of semantic excess, or what might be regarded in terms of the unconscious. Breaking language down to the level of the letter, instead of a semantic level, exposes how a totality of meaning cannot be achieved by the subject. Structuralism failed to consider the unacknowledged capacity for semantic leakage in language, and the existence of unconscious meanings that can be contradictory to totalizing (dominant or hegemonic) systems of meaning production. To reinforce this point, Dewdney's text enacts an accident of the unconscious in a manner that demonstrates how a subject's access to language as a complete identifiable system is impossible by creating a visual silence, placing a void or gap that stands in the place of the letter "s". Through the omission of the letter "s", the reader becomes aware of the limits of consciousness, since this omission in language undermines the writer's ability to maintain a discernable level of control over the meaning he produces.

Phenomenology: Virtually Crystal Clear

Dewdney's uses of scientific technology and an unstable subject are two ways he challenges Realism's attempts to patrol a clear boundary between subject-as-viewer and object-as-viewed. In "Video Marquee" these two elements combine to expose the limits of the reader's (as subject) perception. Similar to Dewdney's use of "you" in the prose-poem "Knowledge of Neurophysiology as a Defense against Attack,"¹⁸ "you" (the reader) are positioned in a paranoid situation that "you" do not have (full) control over:

It is a clear cool night in late summer. You are looking across a small creek at an old one-room cabin. The creek is two meters wide and has a ramshackle wooden bridge across it, consisting merely of a ramp with no hand-railing. The cabin has light coming through one window and a crooked stovepipe juts from the roof. A cosy sleepy feeling emanates from the cabin, though slightly unfamiliar, as if you were a child on your first night away from home. It is perhaps 2 or 3 A.M. Behind the cabin is a dense coniferous forest. The tops of the trees are silhouetted against the deep-blue sky, in which stars twinkle and waning moon hangs.

This scene is the video marquee, the illustrated logo of a regional late show. It has been on for fifteen minutes without a sound. Unattended station difficulties. You are twelve years old, watching a late movie on television at a cottage on the Southeast shore of Lake Huron. Your friend has fallen asleep. It is a warm summer night and moths flutter around the light at the porch. You can hear the waves on the beach faintly. It is about 2 or 3 A.M. and a waning moon is suspended over the lake. It is much cooler in the north and the cabin's windows are closed. Inside a twelve-year-old boy and thirteen-year-old girl are masturbating each other, kneeling face to face on a couch bathed in the light of the television screen. (*Radiant Inventory* 41)

As is the case in M.C. Escher's painting "Relativity," the spatial dimensions the text constructs transgress Euclidean possibilities of three-dimensional space. From the cabin in which "you" are initially situated, "you" are transported, along with the subject "you" represent. The poem begins by asking "you" to picture the "unfamiliar" glow from the cabin "as if you were a child on your first night away from home." As the poem progresses, this imagined scenario becomes realized as "you" become "twelve years old" awake in a cottage with your friend. From this position the perspective of the poem changes again, granting "you" partial access to an interior view of the cabin across a creek. "Video Marquee" constructs a scenario in which subject/object relations are blurred at two levels. The reader's initial position shifts from the "you" who "looks across a small creek" to the "you" who takes on the role of the twelve year old boy wakened from sleep. This shift in perspective allows "you" to view yourself instead of simply remaining the

viewer. So, not only do “you” take on different subject positions, but “you” are also observing yourself as “you” take on these different roles.

To further complicate this paranoid scenario, the television provides the only link between the two cottages on either side of the lake. The reader is granted limited access to the second cottage through the light of the television screen. From your position “on the Southeast shore of Lake Huron,” “you” then imagine a scenario taking place in another region, across the north side of the lake where a “twelve-year-old boy and thirteen-year-old girl are masturbating each other, kneeling face to face on a couch bathed in the light of the television screen.” In this poem, who “you” are and what “you” represent is at the mercy of the text. Furthermore, through the technology of the television, a virtual scenario is created, becoming a projection within a projection—the virtual within the virtual—that represents a dream-like state in which temporal and spatial boundaries of reality are blurred. The subject is not able to stand back and imagine an experience that it is removed from; instead, “you” are implicated as a product of the experience—the subject becoming the object it observes.

What links the two cottages in “Video Marquee” is the frozen light of the television screen, a seemingly benign interface between two simultaneous locations. It is through the light from the television screen that the reader gains visual access to the youths on the north side of the lake. This is the light “you” (the reader) require to see, it enables “you” to witness the children’s mutual masturbation. But perhaps this interpretation isn’t quite so simple. I would like to propose that television—both as a cultural product and as the producer of virtual worlds—helps to create what Arthur

Kroker describes as “a highly ambivalent attitude towards the *objects* of technostructure” (58). This anxiety is theorized by Marshall McLuhan as the result of a technologically mediated inversion of the role of the reader. McLuhan claims that a tv viewer is in an anxious position that enables him or her to become “‘the artist, the sleuth, the detective,’ gaining a critical perspective on the history of technology which ‘just as it began with writing ends with television’” (McLuhan in Kroker 58).

In his essay, “Technological Humanism: The Processed World of Marshall McLuhan,” Kroker explains this anxiety in a discussion of McLuhan’s view of art as a social medium:

McLuhan’s discourse is more in the artistic tradition of Georges Seurat, the French painter, and particularly in one classic portrait, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. McLuhan always accorded Seurat a privileged position as the “art fulcrum between the Renaissance visual and modern tactile. The coalescing of inner and outer, subject and object.” McLuhan was drawn to Seurat in making a painting a “light source” (a “light through situation”). Seurat did that which was most difficult and decisive: he flipped the viewer into the “vanishing point” of the painting. Or as McLuhan said, and in prophetic terms, Seurat (this “precursor of TV”) presented us with a searing visual image of the age of the “anxious object.” (59)

McLuhan’s understanding of Seurat’s work notes a fundamental shift from the Realist illusion that space is a neutral construct and from theories that posit identity and representation as somehow remaining distinct, separate from the medium through which they are derived—in this case television technology. As Kroker states,

McLuhan is the Canadian thinker who undertook a phenomenology of anxiety, or more precisely a historical relative study of the sources of anxiety and stress in technological society. And he did so by the simple expedient of drawing us, quickly and in depth, into Seurat’s startling and menacing world of the anxious, stressful objects of technology. In his book, *Through the Vanishing Point*, McLuhan said of Seurat that “by utilizing the Newtonian analysis of fragmentation

of light, he came to the technique of divisionism, whereby each dot of paint becomes the equivalent of an actual light source, as sun, as it were. This device reversed the traditional perspective by making the viewer the vanishing point." The significance of Seurat's "reversal" of the rules of traditional perspective is that he abolished, once and for all, the medieval illusion that space is neutral (59)

The source of this anxiety is the inversion that takes place when the reader is positioned as the vanishing point of meaning. Thus, although the reader stands outside the symbolic frame of reference (from the outside looking in, so to speak), s/he becomes the vanishing point depending on his or her relation to the painting (i.e. distance from it). Although McLuhan does not appear interested in the psychological effects of this anxiety, Dewdney is. This is particularly noted in Dewdney's attempts to expose the interpenetration among subject/object relations.

In "Video Marquee," the viewer's anxiety becomes heightened with the recognition of the unacknowledged control s/he has on the production of meaning and his/her inability to control the scenarios that the poem depicts. The television is a surveillance mechanism that lights up the scene and patrols the seemingly private realm of the two young lovers who masturbate beneath the gaze of its "marquee." "Video Marquee" creates a sense of surveillance that draws attention to similar details of all three of the scenarios it depicts. Mirrored images are created as these cabins rest on the "same shore," "near [a similar] small creek," under the glow of the same television light. Thus the reader is trapped in a hall of mirrors in which there is no "real" image to orient a frame of reference. Perception then, becomes mired in a series of relays and relations that produce the effect of reality through the virtual. Or as Dewdney states in "Grid Erectile," "metaphorical objects & models are precipitated by synesthesia into mimics of

the very adjuncts to reality out of which human perception arranges itself' (137).

Television has become this very adjunct to reality, and as McLuhan illustrates through Seurat's art, human perception becomes arranged accordingly to the television's (as subject) perception and perspective.

Furthermore, the access television affords to the private world of the young lovers creates a type of paranoia in the reader ("you"), as no amount of seclusion can keep the gaze of the poet from the view provided by the television light. In a sense, television collapses the public/private distinction necessary for the fantasy of private freedom. Just as language acts as a type of interface between ideas and individuals, the television becomes an interface that gains knowledge of the private realm of the secluded cabin. Technology is what brings these scenes together, each cabin basking in the glow of a television screen. Without this light, the cabin would not come into view on the other side of the creek. To the reader, television is what allows access to the "private" worlds of these characters. As Baudrillard has commented, television culture as it relates to the postmodern age occurs when the virtual image bridges the gap between the simulacrum (the virtual) and cultural perceptions of reality. Both the real and the virtual are mediated by various media—images through projection, information through language, data through binary codes, leaving Baudrillard to conclude that all aspects of our reality are virtual—as they are products of what he labels a theatre of "hyperreality."

Baudrillard's proposition that we live in a "hyperreal" world is not incompatible with Dewdney's poetics if one considers that for both thinkers all consciousness of reality is mediated through some form of virtual process. Whether it is through coloured

television screens or through the sub-stations of the neo-cortex, the projections of the outside world are all mediated and managed through the capacities of the human mind. For Dewdney, it is a divisible mind that transmits the presence of an always virtual consciousness. As he states in “Metaconsciousness,” consciousness is not a thing in itself but is always a series of physical and chemical reactions acting in tandem:

Human consciousness is a transcendently homeostatic epiphenomenon, a self-regulating illusion tantamount to virtual existence. An aberration of previous evolutionary modes, it is purely a consequence of neural sophistication. A critical mass of neurons imbedded in a perceptual matrix.

Metaconsciousness is self-consciousness which by a kind of eversion has integrated with the universal mind.

The distance between noetic consciousness & metaconsciousness is revelation. (*The Immaculate Perception* 32)

“Metaconsciousness” proposes that there is no “consensual reality” that can readily stabilize the projected totality of hermeneutic systems. Instead, the paranoiac makes this fantasy literal by pointing to the virtual perceptions that inform consciousness and subjectivity.

Paranoia: Identity, Consciousness, and “Remote Control”

Some other examples of Dewdney’s poems that lend themselves to a reading of paranoia are those which use the theme of “remote control.” Like “Knowledge of Neurophysiology as Defense Against Attack,” these poems register an overt distrust of people they depict in their immediate vicinity. This distrust is similar to what McLuhan describes as the subject’s distrust of the anxious object, only, in these instances, it is an

other person who looks back at “you” (the reader). In Dewdney’s “remote control” poems, the issue of identity figures prominently as the subject appears threatened by an awareness of its inability to control the way it is perceived by others. In a sense these poems act as a metaphor for the discrepancies between public and private senses of identity—what Lacan considers the gap between the ego-ideal and the ideal-ego. For example, in “The Face-Fixers,” the subject attempts to prevent its identity from becoming known by others:

The face-fixers wait on dark streets at night. If they see your face just once your soul is etched deeply into their plan of terror and insanity.

Fear moves fast in still water.

The face-fixers cannot fix on the receding back of a potential soul. Whole streets are sometimes set up in chains of them. One an old lady with a handbag, one a student fixing his bicycle, another an eleven-year-old girl just behind the hedge in the soft evening light. All turn to look at you and you must hide your face without attracting undue attention.

If your evasion techniques set up “eccentric behaviour” patterns there are two levels on which this behavior is intercepted. On the first level, animals crazed with telekinetic fear will attack. You will have your pants ripped off by a German shepherd, tuberculoid owls will swoop into your face. The second level dovetails into a rehabilitation network, in this case policemen and psychiatrists who are actually face-fixers in disguise.

They rely heavily on the genetic and psychic damage wreaked while the man perverted the evolution of domestic beasts. (*Radiant Inventory* 39)

Once an image of your face is known to these “face-fixers,” they are able to gain control over “you.” The anxiety this poem speaks of occurs when a previously assumed autonomous sense of self is threatened by what the subject reads as the objectification of itself as an object of knowledge. This poem warns the reader to protect him or herself from becoming known by these face-fixers. It describes an attempt to retain an identity that remains outside of social symbolization and to avoid becoming objectified by the

Other, in this case an “imagined” agent of the state. What this paranoid scenario points to are the intersubjective relations between the imaginary and symbolic registers that occur in everyday activity. When a subject passes by someone on the street, his or her actions, gestures, dress, etc. carry meanings that have symbolic and imaginary content for other subjects. And these meanings (i.e. how these physical signs are read) remain inaccessible to the subject whose presence is responsible for their production. Dewdney’s notion of “remote control” places the subject in a crisis of performance where s/he becomes a signifier in an other’s mediation of the symbolic order.

In his paranoid scenarios of remote control, Dewdney exposes what already occurs in the symbolic order through the often unspoken mediation of our day to day lives. While remote control denotes a mechanical relation whereby a subject controls an object from a distance through the transmission of radio waves, for Dewdney, subjectivity appears to be on the receiving end of these transmissions. He states:

Remote Control first surfaced as I was writing *Geology*,¹⁹ and I experienced a series of dreams in which a group of people was trying to wrest a manuscript from me I still hold onto it as being an alien group of inhuman superintelligent people who control other unwitting victims as we all are and which is extant right now. (Dewdney in McFadden 91-92)

The idea of remote control illustrates a subject’s fear of the lack of power and control it feels it has over itself or its writing once it becomes the object of an ‘other’s’ investigation. These poems describe a type of paranoia that is conscious of how subjects become agents of the symbolic order by participating in and reproducing its features. In its depiction of these agents of Master discourses, the paranoia Dewdney’s remote control

poems produce extend a similar warning to the one Foucault offers in his description of the role of the intellectual:

The intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power—the idea of their responsibility of “consciousness” and discourse forms part of this system. The intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to expose the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object, an instrument in the sphere of “knowledge,” “truth,” “consciousness,” and “discourse.” (1977: 208)

For Dewdney, to struggle against these forms of power is to not get caught in their symbolic structures. The role of the intellectual then is to struggle for new ways of thinking that resists these forms of power that objectify. The intellectual or the poet must at all cost avoid becoming known or understood in familiar ways by their audience or risk becoming an instrument of these structures. To become known by the “face-fixers” is to become a part of the forms of power rather than struggling against them. As Dewdney states, “the writer, and most particularly the poet, requires novel configurations” (“Parasite Maintenance” 30) that subvert the limits the Governor maintains over the subject’s use of language. He goes on to propose that the paranoid activity that is witnessed in schizophrenia is capable of releasing the subject from “the conceptual hold of the Governor” by pushing meaning “far beyond the perception of even its host” (31).

In Dewdney’s paranoid poetics, self-knowledge is thrown into doubt. As well, a subject’s knowledge of an “other” becomes similarly troubled. In his poems, what is known of an “other” is always informed by a paranoid relationship in which the distrust of one’s own perception is considered in conjunction with the knowledge which is produced. There is a space between the understanding of an “other’s” action or gesture and the content or situation that produces that understanding. For example, someone might look

frightened to an observer but even though the look is associated with fear, it does not identify *what* that person fears. Like the gap between the sign/signifier, there is a gap between the gesture and its semantic content. As Dewdney states in “Ion Ore,” “[y]ou can tell when I am thinking about something else. Even I can tell. And I’m the one thinking about something else.” Although another person might be able to tell when someone’s thoughts shift to something else, the content of what is thought cannot be broached. Dewdney’s poetry consistently serves to undermine itself, reminding the reader that all knowledge, including the poet’s, “works back to an assumption” (*Demon Pond* 61). Take for example, this passage from “Fovea Centralis:”

A man is looking out of his eyes and is reading or talking. He gesticulates “expressively” while he talks, or his comment pencil glitters in the electric light. The frequency of his nervous movements becomes continuous, his hands begin to occupy space through movement. The solid form that is inhabited by his hands pulsates, forms a ring, a tunnel around his vision. The solid is composed of movement and is dangerous, his eyes wander, verging on sleep or hypnosis. (*The Immaculate Perception* 77)

While the reader sees this man, the language that is used to describe him subverts this reader’s ability to understand or assign a translatable identity to him. Instead of witnessing the gradual recognition of this person, Dewdney depicts this man such that he is transformed into a “dangerous” object. His status as a normal human being becomes questionable as the reader is told his cognition hovers on the axis between a benign sleep and a controlled hypnosis. What the reader witnesses in this poem is a subversion of the subject/object relations that stem from realist poetry. Instead of the poet’s recognizing this person, this man remains unidentified as the poem fails to come to “know” this mysterious human object. Dewdney’s text then, counters language’s ability to fix its objects of

knowledge as stable products of meaning. His poem functions as an example of an “anti-fetish” practice that resists the urge to know, to totalize the experience or existence of an “other” as object.

Dewdney’s use of scientific discourses challenges common cultural assumptions of both poetry and subjectivity. His language oscillates between scientific data and visionary prose such that habitual categories of thought are questioned by teasing the mind into unfamiliar regions of consciousness. His paranoid poetics focus on the crises and contradictions that underpin a subject’s relationships with the social. Instead of using science to promote truth, his use of its discourse “defers truth...thereby creating a kind of flux...a constant whirlpool of language where meanings can’t always be pinned down” (Tostevin 84). And with this loss in the ability to establish truth, comes paranoia. In fact, paranoia seems to become the principal metaphor for the state of the subject in Dewdney’s poetics. As he states,

as if, like hopeless paranoids with delusions of reference, we couldn’t help reading sense into any sequence of words due to the referential bias of language, and that this paranoia of reference is itself the engine of invention. (*The Immaculate Perception* 74)

For Dewdney, the subject cannot help but make meaning. However, a paranoid distrust of this necessity is required at the onset of meaning’s invention. Like Baudrillard, Dewdney considers the virtual to be an integrated part of subjectivity; its effects on human understanding and consciousness remain indistinguishable from the technological and other social aspects of our current cultural condition. In Dewdney’s poetics, the reader is always aware that the “I” is merely an illusion, and that the self is always mediated by a system of processes beyond the subject’s understanding. The paranoid subject, as reader

or poet, demonstrates agency insofar as it is forced to produce limited meanings for itself. What results is an inability to discern between the most basic binaries that structure the Western imagination. The lines between real/virtual, subject/object, conscious/unconscious, sense/nonsense, private/public and so on become blurred in a way that exposes the artificial borders they uphold. Thus, the reader is forced to reappraise his or her own cosmology. By questioning the symbolic structures that mediate the subject's ability to assign categories of meaning, Dewdney confounds past theories of subjectivity that assume an ability to grasp its content, and offers an alternate poetics that disables Master discourses's ability to control their objects of knowledge.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, 1978: 100.
2. Christopher Dewdney, *The Immaculate Perception* (26).
3. Other investigations into Dewdney's work that comment on his use of scientific discourse include: Brian Fawcett, "Scientist of the sublime," Allan Hepburn, "The Dream of the Self: Perception and Consciousness in Dewdney's Poetry," Steve McCaffrey, "Strata and Strategy: 'pataphysics in the poetry of Christopher Dewdney'" and David McFadden, "The Twilight of Self-Consciousness."
4. In several of Dewdney's books there are a series of fictional "Log Entries" that document the poet's fragmented observations and findings. These "Log Entries" can be found in *A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario, Fovea Centralis, Alter Sublime, and Radiant Inventory*.
5. The other three books in this series are *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night, The Cenozoic Asylum, and Permugenisis*.
6. "Stake" is being used here in a Foucauldian sense; that is, the marker or position from which one situates oneself to view the world.
7. I am not referring to the specific people of the Romantic tradition, i.e., Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, et al. Instead I'm trying to look at the broader implications of the entire tradition.
8. It should be noted that Hepburn's essay examines only Dewdney's first six books of poetry: *Golder's Green* (1971), *A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario* (1973), *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night* (1982), *Cenozoic Asylum* (1983), *Fovea Centralis* (1975), and *Alter Sublime* (1980). As well, the critical work he addresses is current until 1986.
9. In his essay Hepburn surveys recent critiques of Dewdney's writing by Stan Dragland, Robert Kroetsch, Steve McCaffrey, Keith Garebian, and Robert Lecker.
10. Dewdney, who earlier in his career considered his poetry overtly apolitical, more recently has addressed how a knowledge of perception is an *a priori* political act due to its ability to displace master narratives of subjectivity. See Lola Lemire Tostevin, 1990: 87, and Dewdney, "Extricating Self" (*Secular Grail* 44).
11. The Blake quotation is from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Plate 5.
12. See Robert Kroetsch, 1989b: 127.

13. The lines from Eliot's "The Hollow Men" read: "Between the idea/ And the reality/
Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the shadow. (73-77)
14. Although it is not my goal to treat Dewdney as a member of this group of poets, his work has appeared in the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* journal on numerous occasions and is commonly associated with this group.
15. Roland Barthes, 1974.
16. Christian Bök demonstrates in "Radiant Inventories: A Natural History of the *Natural Histories*," the critical applicability a Foucauldian analysis brings to bear on Dewdney's work. Bök, 1993b.
17. *The Immaculate Perception*, 67.
18. See pages 44-45 in this chapter.
19. Dewdney is referring to his *A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario*

Paranoid Citizenship: The Subject, Language, and Social Space in the Writings of Erin Mouré

Writing is always and forever a social practice. The varying discourses in a society either shore it up or challenge it. And “discourse” isn’t something you walk away from when you set down your pen.

-Erin Mouré “Breaking the Boundaries,” 18

“Realism is actually that genre of ‘absolute artifice’ spoken of by the creators of the roman nouveau. Absolute because it pretends to be an absence of artifice. It claims to be pure.”

- Mouré “Examining. . .” 9

“Reasons of State”: Language and Paranoid Citizenship

Mouré’s writing resists the seamlessness with which particular and contingent social relations become representative of general rules of social practice. That is, her work challenges presuppositions that reify social norms. Mouré’s poems frequently express paranoid feelings of alienation and a distrust of the unwritten or implicit rules that govern social signification and order its citizenship. In her poetry, the dissatisfaction her paranoid subjects express results from an awareness of how their desires, thoughts, and/or actions are compromised by the symbolic order. Lorraine York proposes that behind Mouré’s careful slips of syntax resides a poet who challenges literary and social conventions (133). York claims that Mouré’s “critique of traditional poetic concepts such as the lyric self is based on a reaction to ‘liberal bourgeois’ aesthetics and their assumptions. As a result, she is continually casting about for ways of smashing conventional responses to poetry” (133). This challenge to conventions issues from a practice of writing which Susan Glickman characterizes as walking a fine line between the subversive and the traditional, a process enacted by a piercing “lyric intelligence” that points to fragmented and contingent

linguistic structures (133). Mouré's poetry has changed over the course of her career, gradually and persistently pushing her writing further away from the tropes of Realism. Mouré insists that the conventions of Realism control language in a way that makes poetry "too neat, because. . .there are a lot of discordant voices in our heads...and that to [her] is part of the nature of human thinking and of people's relation to each other" (Mouré in Cooke 73). Based on her proposition that what seems discordant in language is merely the result of social conditioning, Mouré claims that the presuppositions that allow Realism to appear as an accurate reflection of reality in fact reduce reality by translating it into a knowable entity. Realism attempts to project a mimetic relationship between language and society by proposing that the structures of language are capable of seamlessly representing social reality. For Mouré, this one to one correlation between language and the social world is impossible. Her work stresses the importance of acknowledging the gaps in meaning that exist between a particular reality and the representation of that reality through language. Mouré concurs with Žižek's proposition that these gaps in signification create the necessary spaces for desire, without which the subject is rendered agentless in its own perpetuation. In terms of her own subject position, Mouré's work is paranoid of the tropes of Realism since she feels that they are not capable of adequately representing lesbian desire. Her stylistic shifts result from the acknowledgment that Realist representations of reality do not serve the politics of her poetics. As Mouré states in a recent interview with Janice Williamson:

The structures of society obviously don't represent me and don't allow me to present myself except with enormous difficulties. I like to turn this around and consider it a gift—I'm situated like a little rip where the light comes through. (Mouré in Williamson 1996: 118)

There is both an optimism to Mouré's work and a distrust of a society that disenfranchises her subject position. Because the tropes of Realism fetter the political aims of her writing, Mouré attempts to subvert their hold on the (western) literary imagination by searching for alternate and deconstructive forms of articulation. This search involves what Mouré describes in her poem "Cherish" as "[t]he expression of longing, / in & among / the collapse of social systems (*Domestic Fuel* 78). Her poems search for new means of communicating that challenge already existing knowledge structures through a discourse that focuses on desire. For Mouré, this search results in a poetics that tears at the fabric of language so that new meanings can enter social signification via this "little rip where the light comes through." Unfortunately, the results of her attempts to resist convention are sometimes dismissed as nonsensical.¹

As York mentions, Mouré's poetics challenge the tropes of Realism by exposing the liberal bourgeois presuppositions that underlie their structures. She achieves a critique of these presuppositions through a particularized discourse of the "civilian"² that hinders the social symbolic's ability to seamlessly reproduce meaning. As Terry Eagleton points out:

In the ideology of realism. . . words are felt to link up with their thoughts or objects in essentially right and uncontroversial [*sic*] ways: the word becomes the only proper way of viewing this object or expressing this thought. . . . The realist or representational sign, then. . . effaces its own status as sign, in order to foster the illusion that we are perceiving [*sic*] reality without its intervention. The sign as 'reflection', 'expression' or 'representation' denies the *productive* character of language: it suppresses the fact that we only have a world at all because we have language to signify it, and that what we count as 'real' is bound up with what alterable structure of signification we live within. (136)

Mouré uses a "civilian" language that resists reifying the overridden codes of the social symbolic order by depicting social relations that do not conform to the perfunctory

standards of reading and writing. She asserts this language's *productive* character by attempting to depict novel configurations that do not immediately adhere to common cultural assumptions. However, to do this involves not just making visible the contradictions or limits of the symbolic order as an *object* of investigation, it also involves addressing the limits and contradictions that Realism places on subjectivity. Since the symbolic order acts as a screen for social signification (the implications of which extend to all aspects of society), Mouré is aware that the forms this screen takes are not easy to identify and challenge. She states, "you have to watch what you're doing, and use strategies which aren't absorbable by continually shifting strategies" (in Derisoff 1993: 129). Mouré's appreciation of the difficulties in challenging the structures of the symbolic order stems from an awareness of how its presuppositions tends to erase or suppress the particularities that remain distinct from the relations that constitute a "civic" or "public" discourse. In short, Realist discourses presume that the desires of each individual can be reliably translated for a "public" at large. What becomes identified as part of the "civic" exists as an effect of the symbolic order's ability to equate and align the signification of a group of individual actions into identifiable public activities.

Realism's ability to unproblematically translate desire and knowledge is relevant to discussions of how Master discourses influence subjects in social relations. For example, liberal humanism functions as a Master discourse since it is able to interpellate its subjects to take on certain public roles. For a subject to become "civic" s/he must be translatable from the "private" to the "public" sphere in a manner that obscures or hides this distinction. In the following passage, Dennis Denisoff describes how Mouré's use of this "civilian" discourse challenges the public language of liberal humanism:

Mouré's use of seemingly undecipherable verbal discourse illustrates the fact that certain languages are incommensurable, where the terms of comprehension and standards of judgement cannot be wholly translated from one language to another without loss. However, she also suggests that this mutual incommensurability is itself a unifying quality functioning as a catalyst for what Charles Taylor calls 'civic humanism,' a belief in the value and dignity of humans, and the systems of social contingency that support this value and dignity (166). Generally speaking, civic humanism is people's willing acknowledgement of their interdependence and their longing for each other—emotional, sexual, and otherwise. Mouré frequently uses the word civic in a negative sense, as part of 'the Law' that includes '*binary thinking, hierarchical thinking. Thinking to the end. The tyranny of the a priori category*' ('Poetry' 67) She uses the term 'civilian,' however, . . . in a positive sense, to suggest a form of human contingency akin to Taylor's version of 'civic humanism.' By Mouré's definition, the term "civic" suggests a focus on collective concerns rather than individual ones; the term 'civilian,' however, does not erase the individual, avoiding the essentializing turn of certain liberal humanist paradigms. (1995: 119)

Included alongside this "essentializing turn" of the tropes of liberal humanism is the tendency to universalize so that a subject can be identified and translated between both the public and private spheres. As Denisoff reminds us, for Mouré this translation always produces loss. Public individuals are linked by common attributes or activities as social objects who are signified in accordance with how their performance adheres to the codes (the grammar and syntax so to speak) of particular social interactions. Those performances that do not fit within the rubrics of "civic" discourses remain unacknowledged or are deemed inferior since they stand out as anomalies against not only what is socially acceptable but also against what is valued as "true" or "proper" modes of social performance. Mouré frequently uses near entropic discursive references and syntactic structures in order to "interrogate dominant codes of discourse and to challenge the control fostered by these codes" (Mouré 1995: 114). For example, in "Memory Penitence / Contamination Église," Mouré combines English and French text with what appears to be a type of computer encrypted text:

Readability a context raises leaf a clear holographiea impedi
 ment holyoke, a crie donc aimable etruscan hole emmedial
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Mouré’s blurring of the boundaries between discourses notes how “readability” is “a context” which can easily become compromised if the structures that establish this context are challenged or reconfigured. An effect of Mouré’s “nonsensical” combining of languages is that it helps to demonstrate how there are gaps in meaning that are always already at play in everyday communication and social organization. Mouré’s poetics point to the contingencies that underlie how value is socially configured by challenging the symbolic order’s ability to make sense of a subject’s public performance—in this case, a public performance of language.

Moreover, as Denisoff has previously suggested, through this language of the “civilian,” Mouré draws new lines of allegiance that acknowledge the *différance*³ of the individual while simultaneously expressing her or his interdependence with others. Through these “civilian” discourses, Mouré’s writing pinpoints a fundamental paradox of liberal humanism. That is, while liberal humanism reifies the uniqueness and autonomy of the individual, it also undermines this uniqueness by proposing that all subjects are the same in terms of the social equality it espouses. In a sense, liberal humanism is schizophrenic since it oscillates between an *economy of more-than-one*, which one can consider as an identity that is signified through *difference*, and an *economy-of-one* (based on a universal subject), where identity is constructed through *negation*. Mouré’s use of “civilian” discourses attempts to open this contradiction to scrutiny and to “expose the

normalizing tendencies of dominant humanist models” (Denisoff 1995: 119). In terms of understanding subjectivity then, the subject is caught in a paradox: it is both understood as an individual agent who acts in the world, while it is also a product of how its actions are socially signified. What appears to trouble Mouré is that liberal humanism, like any other dominant paradigm of thinking, *either* tends to absorb other discourses into its own categories and language without acknowledging those aspects which might be genuinely incommensurable *or* simply dismisses what these discourses say as incoherent nonsense. It would appear that in the securing of its paradigm, liberal humanism forgets its formative premise—that it is structured through an appreciation of difference. Or, to phrase this another way, liberal humanism *forgets* its own constitution. That is, what allows these shifts back and forth from an *economy of more-than-one* to an *economy-of-one* are the repeated failures to remember that different subjects from different cultural and historical backgrounds and bodies play a role in the construction of social systems.

These acts of forgetting allow the symbolic order to fix singular cultural norms. In this way, should a subject not cohere to an ideal or standardized norm, it is deemed inferior. Liberal humanism attempts to belie the fact that its subjects are interpellated by Master discourses and are positioned hierarchically according to how well they fit and perform in these discursive structures that insist on a universal subject structured by this logic of indifference. Thus, a subject is not free in its paradigms since she or he must choose (consciously or unconsciously) from a preexisting discursive network that mediates what are read as normal relations with the social symbolic. So, while liberal humanism ostensibly offers potentially equal relations between its subjects, this equality necessarily cannot be achieved.⁴ To put this in Derridean terms, the economies from which

liberal humanism, or any other Western discourse, produces sense “is not a reconciliation of opposites, but rather a maintaining of disjunction” (Spivak xlii). Thus, liberal humanism depends upon the sublimation (through negation) of what it deems to be “other.” This is to say that in order for liberal humanism to make sense to its subjects, it must also provide a means to hide or disguise its contradictory logic. Individuals who signify difference are relegated to the private underside of the binary of public signification. Thus, liberal humanism is able to profess a stable system of equality which is contradicted by a logic of unequal and fluctuating social relations. By exposing the contradictions that underlie liberal humanism, Mouré’s “civilian” discourses search for new lines of collectivity that interrupt standard patterns and associations of signification. Her language of the “civilian” counters the translatability of the public or “civic” individual and remains suspended as both *distinct from* and *a part of* the symbolic order.

In terms of conveying stable, unified meanings, Mouré’s “civilian” poets are not reliable. Their ability to produce meaning depends upon the reader’s (or audience’s) reception of the text. Mouré’s poems acknowledge that language is a system in flux, constantly changing and being exchanged. As York states, Mouré’s poetry “is not the act of an author ‘giving’ messages to a passive reader; it is a passionate embrace, wherein the reader joins his/her lips to the poet’s, connecting and giving life to the text” (135). What makes language appear stable and ordered are the power/knowledge structures that permeate the sites of its social signification. Although it might seem that this linguistic “embrace” between reader and writer represents a type of utopic or fantastical joining, it does appear to offer a poetic space in which both parties can negotiate meanings that challenge the overriding structures of language (Glickman 140–41). Mouré trusts that

readers will follow her as she pushes towards the limits of language. As Denisoff points out, there is a “positive strain, a faith in humanity”(1993: 132) that remains consistent in her work. For Mouré, this faith issues from a sense of hope for the future through the interdependent social links between subjects—“[d]esire, or longing, or hope—you can put them in the same category, in a sense—is the future in us. The future exists in us if it exists at all. Whatever future exists, exists in us as desire” (Denisoff 1993, 132). So while the fragmented style of Mouré’s text might initially restrict its readability, York proposes that these “civilian” discourses, through the participation they invoke between reader and writer, can lead to change in the symbolic order:

As Mouré’s experiments with rupturing the text would suggest. . . words act not only as agents of creative connection, but also as absences, gaps in meaning. This appears to be a paradoxical situation but it is not, since Mouré’s conception of art as connection is not one of resolution or transcendence of differences. That is, the reader connects with words, but does not resolve the text in a thoroughgoing, final way; connection is only one step in an ongoing interplay between the reader and the gaps in the text. (135-36)

Because the creative connection between reader and writer is one of “an ongoing interplay” it becomes difficult to describe in terms of knowledge. Instead, Mouré focuses on readers as producers of meaning, suggesting a focus that can be read more readily in terms of Lacanian desire. By stressing the seams of language, its inability to represent reality fully and completely, Mouré constructs a poetics in which the poet and her readers keep meanings active, in an always shifting state of negotiation. This push towards an ongoing creative connection is one which attempts to offer new ways of signifying meaning in language. Mouré stresses that breaking down the overriding symbolic features of language creates potential for future social change. Meanings become fixed, as they are determined through the knowledge of what is already known. What often go unregistered

in language are the empty spaces of which these structures are not able to make meaning. For example, to return to her poem "Cherish," the "mugs" which "are empty of coffee," the poet claims, in fact "contain / so many ounces of the room's air" (78). As well, the poet states that the "cups" too which appear "empty on the floor all night long" are actually "full of the noise / of [women's] laughter" (78). Both the cups and the mugs act as metaphors to describe how the meanings that subjects register are always limited by the symbolic order. In the poet's description, she presumes that what is not seen (the room's air) and what is not heard (women's laughter) will remain unregistered if the poet does not draw the reader's attention to them. By pointing out that these "empty" objects actually contain presences, the poem challenges the symbolic order by inverting its logic such that what might otherwise seem absent becomes a presence. In this poem, the symbolic structures that secure meaning are undermined by the very potential they appear to leave out. This process of giving a presence to that which was previously absent counters a hermeneutic circle that consistently fixes the orientation of knowledge. That is, Mouré's poetics attempt to open meanings toward something new rather than reverting to previous modes of recognition. As Mouré states: "the fish are suffocating in their own waters, / the future has occurred and not been announced yet" (78). Like these fish, social relations are choked by the symbolic order's ability to fix and determine sense through a preexisting logic of presence/absence that leaves these empty spaces unsymbolizable, and therefore unable to produce new meanings.

Not only is Mouré concerned with the representation of identity in language, she is also interested in the rips or seams of language which become visible when language's ability to represent knowledge breaks down. The effect that language has on the relations

between oneself and “other(s)” cannot be separated from the various processes of its signification. Like Dewdney, Mouré is interested in the mechanisms that allow for a conception of self:

It’s really interesting how we manage to keep ourselves hanging together, even in the present tense, relating to the stuff around us. Look at how people absorb news about different things. Information itself doesn’t make sense; the brain makes sense...or it actually eliminates it, it doesn’t perceive it. There’s a whole lot out there that doesn’t make sense so we don’t perceive it, we literally don’t see it. I’ve tried to open myself up so I can accept that some things contradict each other and some things don’t make sense. I think that that way you can perceive more, and that’s the richness to it. Not all of it is useful in terms of perception, but it makes being alive more fun. (Mouré in Denisoff 1993: 133)

For Mouré, there is a “reality” which exists outside of discursive representations but this “reality” is always *mis*represented by language. By shifting her focus to things that often go unnoticed, Mouré’s poetry challenges cultural theories that propose there is an essential, universal or wholly determinant causal link between body/city, subject/socius. For Mouré, these “civic” or public discourses mask the arbitrary but necessary dependence the individual has on the production of its meaning. This masking in turn, regulates and perpetuates the sublimation of the individual *in* and *by* society through processes of interpellation. These public discourses limit and shape how desire is recognized and socially understood, frequently motivating individuals to act in accordance with overriding symbolic structures. For this reason, “civic” subjects can easily traverse the lines between private and public without drawing attention to this logic of mutual contradiction—that is, the logic that maintains that a subject can be both private and public *at any one time*. If the discourses of liberal humanism can mask any difference between an individual’s public and private status while simultaneously assuming its distinction, then it can gain social status as a “universal truth” instead of being limited by provisional and contextual conditions of

power. However, when a subject's position does not fit within the overriding ideologies of both the public and private spheres, the contradictions of liberal humanism become exposed and its symbolic structures appear only as contingent tautologies. A paranoid subject is situated in this contradictory symbolic space as his or her desires do not translate readily into the "public." To be paranoid is to claim that there is political significance to what goes unrecognized in the symbolic order.

A discussion of how paranoia intersects the boundary between the public ("civic") and the private ("civilian") spheres is aided by Louis Althusser's understanding of the distinction between two types of State Apparatuses: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). For Althusser, RSAs are State organizations that are publicly funded. ISAs, on the other hand, function in the private domains, where their connection with the State is not immediately visible (ie. familial, religious, educational etc.). Although the structures of these apparatuses might appear discrete, Althusser proposes that ISAs are nonetheless ideologically correspondent with RSAs. This correspondence helps to outline how vast the material effects of ideology are, and to demonstrate how ideology supplements imaginary relations between individuals and their conditions of existence (Althusser 89). The call of ideology (interpellation) indirectly offers the private individual instruction on how to act in accordance with the public, which in turn, allows for the perpetuation of ideology and its representative State structures. Althusser states that ideology's relationship to the material is continued through the production and reproduction of individual acts. Since his distinction between ISAs and RSAs proposes that they maintain a symbiotic relationship, their ability to successfully interpellate individuals to become good subjects accounts for how social hegemony is

attained in both private and public spheres. In terms of paranoia then, a subject who does not trust the social relations that govern his or her public existence stalls the symbiotic and symbolic interplay between these two spheres. Paranoia makes visible the disjuncture between the “public” and “private” realms through its insistence that power is what masks the contingent and particular relations that produce “public” signification. Paranoia also hinders a subject’s ability to secure an alternate version of reality. Through various articulations of paranoid dissatisfaction, Mouré’s poetic subjects challenge dominant ideologies such as hetero-normative thinking by desiring that which the social symbolic cannot acknowledge.⁵

Mouré proposes that positioning subjectivity in a paranoid relationship with the symbolic order dislodges the subject from “the dream of the individual” which she feels “really buys into patriarchal capitalism, as consumption” (in Williamson 1993: 206). Mouré’s “civilian” metonymically reflects what Elizabeth Grosz describes as a non-causal “interface” between subjects and the social. This “two-way linkage” envisions the relations between bodies and cities

not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings. This model is practical, based on the productivity of bodies and cities in defining and establishing each other. It is not a holistic view, one that would stress the unity and integration of city and body, their “ecological balance.” Rather their interrelations involve a fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments. (1995: 108)

For Grosz, the relation between the subject and the social is neither atemporal nor universal since she describes society as a series of particular time/space relations that remain dependent upon varying and contingent social contexts. This conception of society

does not compromise the *particular* actions and desires of an individual since these relations describe part of a series of contingent and sometimes contradictory social systems. As well, the reciprocal system that Grosz describes as the disparate flows of “energies, events, or entities” which come together in temporary and particular ways is similar to the interdependent subjects Mouré writes. For example, in her series poem “This Dance,” Mouré places two disparate persons together in Paris. The poet encounters a man who speaks Arabic and attempts to sell her a miniature figurine of the Eiffel Tower.⁶ The poet appears to *mistake* what he is saying as an offer to help her cross a busy intersection to search for her lover to whom the poem is directed (“I am looking for you” *WSW* 93). Although it is clear that the poet does not understand how she “know[s] he is kind,” her faith in finding her lover and in trusting this man remains throughout the poem regardless of problems of communication: “If it wasn’t for the traffic & the Arabic / I would understand this new twist on safety” (93). Around her objects are shifting (“the man gesticulates, the tower is smaller”) and it is in these confused relations that this absence of a mutual understanding between these people creates a space that allows the poet to rethink her relations of desire.

“This Dance” can be read as a continuation of the project of “Cherish” since, in this lack of shared knowledge or understanding, communication breaks down and with it comes a “collapse of social systems” (*Domestic Fuel* 78). This poem’s confused interpersonal relations offer a critique of the “public” reception of lesbian desire and the difficulties involved in representing this desire in the symbolic order. A later segment of this same poem entitled “The Act” begins with the poet and her female lover being described as “stunning, naked, entwined” (96), their bodies becoming both “inscriptive”

and “torrential” as “music before it is ever heard” (96). However, the poem’s exultant overtones become stalled with the realization that only inanimate objects hear this new music the lovers make—pointing out the role public recognition plays in generating meaning from experience. A “cup of coffee sings,” “the door way drinks to us,” and the final wish of the poem is to “efface” this act of sexual embrace, to make it “vanish” so that it can be “forgiven.” While this poem captures the libidinal excitement of two bodies in a sexual act, it also expresses a deep dissatisfaction with how the perception of others affects the signification of this sexual performance. The lovers’ actions exist as a “music” that cannot be heard since their desire for each other remains an ideal that cannot be registered in “public.” As “*Addendum to ‘This Dance’*” points out, there is a fear of the public gaze—the neighbours “are always watching us.” Furthermore, there is a sardonic tone to the genuflective stance the poem takes as its endnote—“*Forgive me, we say.*” In this last line, the shift from the singular pronoun to the plural intimates that subjects who transgress social norms, whether because of sexual preference or any other notable particularity, are singled out. It is against this singular exclusion that the poet expresses a shared desire when she and her beloved—who are described as “we”—ask for forgiveness for their desire for each other at the same moment.

As “This Dance” suggests, Mouré’s work is centred by a practice of writing *on* and *about* women. Her poems attempt to present female subjectivity such that her subjects do not repress their desires but articulate them freely. What makes her poems paranoid is the fact that they often appear to assume a negative public reception. Often, her subjects presume a conspiracy that restricts the fulfilment of female desire. Even the processes that lie beneath the surface of thought and thinking, the routes (so to speak) *to* and *of*

knowledge, become the sites of interrogation for these paranoid “civilians.” Mouré’s work attempts to attack conventional and/or consensual thinking and thought⁷ as these paranoid subjects express the desire to dislodge conventional processes of knowledge production while proposing alternative models of thinking that are less restrictive to women.

In psychoanalysis, the distrust felt by a paranoid individual is characterized traditionally as symptomatic of a form of social psychosis. Quite simply, it is taken as a sign of an individual’s inability to adjust or “fit in” to society. Paranoia is indicative of a traumatic disjunction between the desire of the individual and the desire of the social symbolic since a discontinuity emerges from the subject’s inability to fully inhabit the overriding discourses of the public sphere. Mouré utilizes a paranoid stance to make the reader feel anxious about his or her understanding of the world. In her work, paranoia acknowledges that the body, or more specifically the female body, is prevented from full participation in the symbolic order. That is, Mouré notes how the female body is reduced to an object of discourse rather than an active subject who also produces knowledge.⁸ Knowledge is limited to a specific act or “touching,” a relation that Mouré, following Luce Irigaray, proposes cannot be marked by linear constructions. To acknowledge this active limit of knowledge is to open discourse up to an understanding of how desire remains an elusive feature which flows through the symbolic order but is difficult to pin down. For Lacan, the Real is what is both *outside of* and *the cause* of language. The Real is the trauma that sets desire into motion, it is what the subject attempts to come to terms with through language but must necessarily fail to do. This attempt to know and understand reality then is a relation which is always in flux. In her discussion of female desire, Irigaray too stresses that this desire to understand our social world is an ongoing process or

movement. She states that “in some sense [a woman’s] *jouissance* is a result of indefinite *touching*. The *thresholds* do not necessarily mark a limit, the end of an act” (Irigaray, 1984 64). What both Irigaray and Mouré propose is that the connections between things or people or both continue in a manner that cannot wholly be objectified.

Mouré’s insistence upon non-linear poetic structures allows her to acknowledge the limitless threshold between people and their desires in a productive way that is enabling for women. For her, linear thinking allows language to run parallel to social fantasy structures (i.e. the unwritten codes of the symbolic order) which support forms of public signification. She is paranoid of Master discourses that accommodate the objectification of time, rationality, logic, and other abstractions that support the ideological foundations of State and social institutions. These discourses perpetuate versions of “reality” that fail to recognize that knowledge is an ongoing process of “touching” and cannot be known through processes of fixation. Mouré comments on the problems of objectification in her discussion of the relationship between noun and verb in language. She proposes that it is the very process of naming that allows this reductive force to be perpetuated. She asks:

Is it impossible to conceptualize (in English) without using “the thing”? Our language that objectifies TIME (i.e. the words “phrase”, “touch”, which are really relations, not things) is one that supports easily the hegemony of “singleness”, “individual power”, “phallus”. Its thingness before its motion. Because its motion is an ascent and descent. The female organs, that, Irigaray says, are “touching” before they are a thing. That can’t be named as “things” without reduction. That are defined by their “relation”. (*Furious* 98)

The fact that naming in language privileges the “thing” over the “relation” enables what Mouré terms a “thinking to the end” (linearity), a thinking that restricts relations by fixing them into knowable, and consequently, reducible things.

As Mouré proposes, rather than informing, language often solidifies social relations such that it reduces knowledge and creates linear and narrow modes of representation. Four strategies she employs to combat these processes of objectification include:

compression. To use a kind of compression, so compressed that the links between the image/phrase break down, but the whole poem still retains its connection.
inter-text. Using and repeating my own and others' earlier texts. Pulling the old poems thru the new, making the old lines a thread thru the eye of the words I am sewing. Sound & sense. The eeriness.
everyday event. Must take and use the everyday connection between things. Not talking a philosophical language. Watching terminology. Make the compression so hard it functions as terminology, and I can just use the ordinary words in their street clothes.
physical body. Image of the whole physical body must always be there. Not truncated, not synecdoche, but the physical image speaking directly the entire body at once. (*Furious* 85)

Linearity is necessary for the objectification of “things,” since each “thing” that is communicated and known in society is never a thing in itself but a product of social and discursive interactions. Things are always understood and communicated through a language that is constantly shifting. Mouré proposes that any material reality, whether experienced or imagined, is produced by a language that is tied to the representations and associations made visible through social signification. Representations of reality are understood and valued according to how they fit into the symbolic order. Each of Mouré’s four techniques—“compression,” “inter-text,” “everyday event,” and the “physical body”—challenges the symbolic order’s ability to objectify and fix knowledge by destabilizing the contexts that produce meaning. Mouré’s use of these four techniques questions the tropes of Realism by including these elements that are conventionally left out of its discourses. Thus, Mouré’s poems undermine the reduction of any representation of

reality to a completely knowable and communicable thing. As Denisoff proposes, because Mouré's poetics focus on desire, her poems situate "the shifting position of the subject and the described object in the sociopolitical realm, where an awareness of multiplicity can foster an openness to other views of how society operates" (1995: 117). Thus, these techniques enhance an awareness of multiplicity in language and open language up from within its structures by calling its underlying ideological presuppositions into question.

By subverting the objectification of knowledge in favour of a focus on desire, Mouré's poetry opens up a space for an understanding of social practices that allows women to inhabit what are otherwise patriarchal social symbolic structures. As Irigaray states:

To *inhabit* is the fundamental trait of man's being. Even if this trait remains unconscious, unfulfilled, especially in its ethical dimension, man is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself everywhere: caves, huts, cities, language, concepts, theory, and so on. (1984: 141)

Men are able to seamlessly inhabit these spaces without question since they are produced by discourses in which they occupy a status of privilege. And since these spaces are masculinist in their production, the values that are ascribed to concepts which signify "truth" and "transcendence" are not readily accessible to women. Of these social spaces, language is the most expansive. However, Irigaray proposes that there might be a route towards a solution to the disenfranchisement that women face by conceptualizing love as a type of spatial practice:

If love for two is to happen, it has to go through the many. However, since society is organized by and for men in our traditions, women are unable to work with plurals. Women have to constitute a social entity if love and cultural fecundity are to take place. This does not mean that it is entirely as men that women come into today's system of power, but rather that women need to establish new values that correspond to *their* creative capacities. Society, culture, discourse would thereby

be recognized as *sexuate* and not as the monopoly on universal value of a single sex—one that has no awareness of the way the body and its morphology are imprinted upon the imaginary and symbolic creations. (1984: 68)

What Irigaray proposes is that love between two people destabilizes the singular dimensions of masculinist discourses. She states that gender relations are organized through desire but this desire is structured *by* and comes into public recognition *through* a patriarchal symbolic order. Irigaray claims that each of the very differences between desiring subjects challenge the male subject's ability to represent the standard or assumed norm. Irigaray's critique of sexual difference begins with the body. For her, "[t]he body is regarded as the political, social, and cultural object *par excellence*, not a product of a raw, passive nature that is civilized, overlaid, polished by culture. The body is a cultural weaving and a product of nature" (Grosz 1994: 18). Irigaray's understanding of female desire positions the female subject in a critique that refuses to see sex as simply essentialist and gender as socially constructed; instead, she attempts to undermine this dichotomy while bringing attention to *lived bodies*—how they are represented and signified in particular cultures and contexts.

As Mouré's poem "Romance" attests, woman's desires often go unnoticed in society. She states that "[r]omance itself is embedded in the referent(ial) / sign" of a masculinist discourse that leaves women only with the "desire for [a] lyric" voice that would acknowledge "the agonic bleat of [their] voices" (*WSW* 111). For her, the lyric tradition signifies "[n]ot romance but the failure / of the sign to mean, we're lost in it, not forest but the / sign"(111). What the poet proposes is that the lyric tradition restricts women since it functions as part of a sign system that is not capable of accounting for female desire. Yet as Irigaray proposes, it is possible to refigure the female body as

constitutive of a plural “social entity” that cannot be understood in terms of a singular male discourse. It is Irigaray’s hope that this process can allow new values to be established that more adequately account for gender and sexual differences.

Although Mouré’s poetry speaks through its varied “civilian” discourses, for her, the poem remains a social act and desire becomes an inherent feature of the poem’s construction. However, there is a risk to writing desire as desire is understood and valued depending on how it is affirmed or invalidated by the public. She explains in “The Acts” that

What is key to this desire: To have one’s existence affirmed by others. Or, put oneself at risk forever (a panic at the cell’s edge). Or is it affirmation, first, that then makes the risk possible? To bear it. The risk of, kissing her.

The embrace first, then the utterance.

What this need for affirmation meant before was having an existence affirmed by men. Knowing how they praise well what affirms their relation. They do not have to put them-selves as risk, which women have always had to do, to exist, to speak, to have their existence affirmed by others.

What I had not spoken! The way she cried out because of my silence, & how I choose it, stubborn. My defence necessity. Because of my eyes and my whole body could see that the words and bodies of women were not listened to or affirmed.

But we women listen so carefully to each other. The resurrection of the women’s body is of Kore, not the phallic king-dom. This affirmation is the true necessity. To inhabit freely the civic house of memory I am kept out of.

Oh! (*Furious 91*)

For Mouré, female desire is produced *by* and *tied to* a language that privileges men. The challenge then is to write in such a way that counters this phallocentrism, while still affirming desire. She writes that her writing exists as a “defence of necessity”—an attempt to affirm the desires that go unrecognized by the symbolic screen of everyday interaction.

Mouré attempts to write against what Judith Butler describes as “the necessary and founding violence of any truth-regime. . . in which exclusions are simply affirmed as sad necessities of signification” (1993: 53). Against these exclusionary tendencies, Mouré promotes a strategy of inclusion: a writing of inclusive representability which attempts to reshape the contours of the symbolic order by bringing formerly silenced female desires into its realm and affirming this presence.

While destabilizing linguistic structures opens language to new meanings, when signification is not filtered through easily identifiable symbolic structures, an anxious space is created in which communication becomes less certain. This anxiety is illustrated in Mouré’s poem “Secret Kisses.” In this poem, the poet feels as though she is being watched, and her fear of the public’s gaze acts as a paranoid self-monitor of lesbian desire.

The poem follows in its entirety:

It is now that our kisses don’t seem real.
 It’s because they don’t happen in real places,
 but in the rough nerve of alcohol,
 the rough sniper of clothing, caught in the wall’s shadow,
 fed by wine.
 & night,
 & the stars’ incense falling
 into our bare arms’ reach
 Oh ache, I love you
 Oh alphabet, your secret nest is harboured on my tongue
 Oh agony released in my dreams, my body
 craves you

As if it were nature
 I could kiss any *man* & pretend it’s you-
 The world would stay in its brown corridors
 & not care!
 I want an age where I can turn my neck
 & kiss you at dinner
 among real roast beef and oranges,
 real salads,

our co-workers watching,
 I want to pull your head close with my fingers,
 I want to be clumsy,
 I want my lips to feel kissed by you,
 to feel natural
 & not so crooked or so rare (*Domestic Fuel* 43)

The poet is paranoid of the public signification of this kiss. She hopes for a day (“age”) when her desire for her lover can be released from her dreams and can be *realized* in public— where she “can turn [her] neck / & kiss [her lover] at dinner / among real roast beef and oranges, / real salads” with her “co-workers watching.” Yet this “age” has not yet arrived and the poem’s expectation of a lack of acceptance points to a paradox of paranoia. That is, if paranoia marks a phenomenological limit of subjective knowledge (i.e. the claim that nothing can be empirically known outside of one’s self), how can the speaking subject predict the reception of her actions? In this poem, the paranoid subject attempts to draw lines of interdependent allegiance through the expression of desire. This kiss between two women is not culturally accepted or expected according to the “logical” performance of a heterosexual woman. The poet distrusts how this “kiss” will be read by the public. She feels it needs to remain secret because it cannot come into meaning through cultural conventions in a manner that does not render it an act of deviance. It seems that in this poem, the poet chooses to keep her desires secret so that the kiss resides “in the rough nerve of alcohol” and “in the wall’s shadow.” As the poet suggests, it is impossible to give appropriate meanings to the kiss in “public” as there is a discrepancy between the private world of the poet and the public world which she finds threatening. And the possible reconciliation between these two worlds remains out of the lover’s “bare arms’ reach.” The poet desires a world which “would stay in its brown corridors / & not

care,” as opposed to a world which treats her like an outlaw, forcing her to kiss her lover in places that “don’t seem real.” Even the language that is capable of expressing this desire is forced to retreat and become “harboured in [her] tongue” since it cannot be valued by the public in the manner that the poet wishes.

Like the anxious subjects her poems describe, Mouré’s poetry raises “anxiety in people, it raises anxiety in people in companies, it raises anxiety in people reading” (Mouré in Cooke 38). I would propose that it achieves this anxiety through paranoia. In coming to terms with paranoia or other mental disorders as subversive, Luce Irigaray offers an interesting proposal: “Once there is the slightest degree of pathology in the subject,” she explains, “then there is a re-emergence of language’s infrastructure and of the dramatic utterance which is habitually concealed” (1984: 37). In terms of paranoia, it is not only language’s infrastructure that re-emerges—how desire is structured and signified by this infrastructure also comes to the surface. Since the paranoid subject distrusts the existing categories through which it understands itself, it follows then, that a translation of the paranoiac’s utterances brings into question the same categories that consider her or him paranoid in the first instance. The inability to reconcile or “synthesize” (in accordance with the Hegelian *aufhebung*) the differences between a “consensual reality” and a paranoiac’s contrasting view of the same reality, indirectly points to the discourse’s failure to be anything more than a contingent tautology. The anxiety that is produced in Mouré’s readers results from the failure of the discourse’s own logic—that it can support itself only by erasing those differences that paranoia seeks to expose. What cannot enter the discourse still structures its framework. To rephrase what Irigaray points

out in a Derridean turn—what a discourse does not acknowledge paradoxically (in)forms its support.

As the title of her latest book, *Search Procedures* (1996) suggests, Mouré is not interested in this “thinking to the end,” but is concerned with the *procedures* that allow linear thinking to take place. For example, in the poem “Reasons of State,” Mouré touches on the difficulties involved in re-imagining the relationship between subject and society in the discursive arena of Western democracy. In this poem, Mouré adopts a paranoid stance whereby the subject of the text appears to be suspicious of liberal humanism’s democratic processes, describing it as a type of social poison. Through the ironic use of repetitive phrases, the poem highlights how difficult it is to question and change mechanisms and methods that have become the means of production for what Mouré considers the West’s social fabric:

They voted for an increase in social order
they voted for an increase in social order
they voted for an increase in social order

The fabric of it rent
in two
Now you have damaged the cloak, said the accuser

A bird we raise An internal action

Uncoupled now in the head
& abolished
I can’t think so
I can’t think otherwise

A version of the polemic
resists speaking

Impertinence denies fuel for mental being
The fuel tanks are heating

A version of the polemic
calls out

A version of the polemic

Stop this poison
Stop this poison
" " " (*Search Procedures, 99*)

There are at least three distinct inquiries in this poem that echo from its title. First, “Reasons of State” investigates why there is a social body called the state. The poem’s opening offers a rationale—“They voted for an increase in social order,” suggesting that the state is needed to govern and monitor a level of control over its citizens. However, the repetition of this phrase is curious and hints at a contradiction involved in the act of voting. The symbolic freedom that is synonymous with the right to vote in the West has a paradoxical effect as voting reproduces an inescapable cyclical pattern of social control. That is, if the act of voting increases social order then the freedom it expresses as an ideal (the right to vote as a democratic imperative) perpetuates the State’s right to maintain control over its subjects. The laws of democracy drive this collective activity. Individuals exist, in terms of this logic, as the mediators of an overriding structure through which democracy is spoken and organized, thus creating a system that contributes to the subjugation of the individual. Even though the ideals of democratic process are mediated *by and through* individuals acting in society, these actions reify overriding social systems which individuals participate in but do not control. As the poet claims, “the fabric” of this vote (as it relates to democracy) is “rent.” Here, the poem acknowledges the transparency of the act of voting by comparing it to a property that is leased or rented—paid for but not owned or controlled by its occupant(s). In calling the vote’s fabric “rent,” Mouré’s poem

alludes to the fact that individuals living in a liberal democracy do not have any direct purchase on the structures that govern their lives; instead, they become subjected to the conditions and restrictions of democracy's imperatives.

In "Reasons of State," Mouré maintains an awareness of other contradictions between the material forms democracy takes and the ideals upon which it is constructed. In particular, she is critical of how this distinction relates to thought and to action. In this poem, thinking becomes associated with the material body; it is rethought as "a bird we raise An internal action." Thinking then becomes paradoxical in that it produces knowledge but is itself ultimately unknowable. Like the contradictory effect of democratic voting, thought itself represents a conundrum, becoming an action which is both controlled and ultimately uncontrollable; that is, for Mouré thinking is tied to a body which remains outside of symbolization. She proposes that there is a physicality to thought that troubles notions of an autonomous mind—(i.e. that the mind is distinct from the body and the material world). Like Lacan's Real, the body cannot be symbolized.

To explain Mouré's understanding of the physicality of thought further, it might be useful to look briefly at a couple of other examples of her work. In "Pure Writing is a Notion beyond the Pen," Mouré points to "the body, the body, / oh, the body" (*Furious* 73) and constructs a text which claims to be "an avoidance of the script" and focuses itself on "the connection between things & things / the air hose & the tractor" (73). Mouré's poetics are linked to what can be described as a feminist desire⁹ to bring the female body, or as previously stated, the lesbian body into public discourse. Her desire to avoid the script represents an attempt to rethink physical relations and the meanings these hold in the symbolic order. Mouré's focus on the body opens her poetics to a consideration of the

uncertainties involved in understanding corporeality. Similarly, in “Spirit Catcher,” the poet notes that “the maps of [her] body fail [her], a sheer bulk / stopping transmission / closing shop / Her silence, deaf as radar” (*Green Word* 36). The fact that the body is what contains consciousness often goes unnoticed in descriptions of subject/object relations. The reason for this is that linear thinking is unable to resolve the contradictions that entertaining the corporeality of consciousness brings to discussions of phenomenology.

By acknowledging the body, Mouré attempts to convey physical actions and reactions through novel configurations in language. Sound affects sense, sight supplements syntax, and the instantaneous “touch” between the perceiver and the perceived is what orients knowledge. This “touch,” or what Mouré sometimes calls the “shutter,” pushes towards a new relationship between language and perception that attempts to promote social change. Consider, for example, the physicality Mouré stresses in “Riding Blind”:

The spaces we don't see, that
time lets into us.
Between our fingers, where we touched each other,
or between the breast bone & the skin,
a small bubble of light, pried open.
(*Domestic Fuel* 66)

Mouré's writing points to “[t]he spaces we don't see.” She proposes that there are always blind spots involved in relations between the parts of our bodies and the rest of the world. Instead of disabling sense, acknowledging these blind spots allows the reader an opportunity to give meanings to the spaces that go unnoticed every day, to listen to its language, to note the “[w]hole sentences, safe in the arch under the foot / & not stepped on” (66). Mouré's focus on these “spaces we don't see” looks to what cannot be known as opposed to what is known already. This challenges the reader to see new relations

between things and opens up this “small bubble of light” so that a paranoid connection among the body, thought, and language is created.

The second inquiry that the title “Reasons of State” suggests is an investigation into the state of reason and what meanings the term “reason” holds in the public sphere. In *Furious* (1988), Mouré includes a series of poems that look into the various paradoxes and impossibilities that rest beneath the idea of “pure reason.”¹⁰ “Reasons of State” continues this inquiry as it too focuses on the *state* of “mental being.” As a collective mechanism of social control, the poem claims that the logic of the State dictates that a subject (“I”) “can’t think” for itself, or “otherwise.” This does not mean that thought cannot take place. Instead, the poet proposes that any idea which occurs outside the logic of democracy can’t be thought within its system—it is without symbolic support and as such remains unthinkable. There is a circular reasoning at work here which insists that only those ideas which are tied to a liberal humanist understanding of democracy can be entertained. Those ideas that are not part of this schema remain “[u]ncoupled now in the head / & abolished.” It becomes impossible to generate meaning from them since they occur outside of the context they attempt to disrupt. Thought or “reason” for the state only makes sense if it generates, even at the level of the utterance, actions which can gain public signification and enable the perpetuation of social control.

The third inference that the title “Reasons of State” suggests offers an inquiry into the logic that governs the individual, or more specifically, the logic of the individual who does not agree with the version of reason that democracy demands. In one sense this poem acts as an investigation into possibilities of resistance for the individual. Mouré’s poem suggests that there is a choice (however bleak that choice might be) for an

individual who doesn't agree with the system: one can remain silent or attempt to speak outside of "civic" discourse. Mouré discusses the problems of "resist[ing] speaking" as it denies a fundamental part of "mental being" by cutting the connection between oneself and others. The poem suggests that this "uncoupling" builds towards an explosion ("The fuel tanks are heating"). It ends with the declaration, "Stop this poison"—a rally cry against State structures of control. Furthermore, the *ad infinitum* repetition of this phrase presents an unending call to destabilize the democratic structures that hinder individuals from agented participation in State systems. As this call suggests, the poet cannot change this situation on her own accord and announces her alienation from social control. This final plea appears to ask others to join with her and recognize the symptoms that perpetuate democracy and calls for a realization that "poison" has entered the system. It is this paranoid perspective, this "version of the polemic," that furthers a discussion of Mouré's poetics.

Desire, Paranoia, and Poems Called "Pure Reason"

In *The Production of Space*,¹¹ Henri Lefebvre proposes that the production of knowledge is tied to how abstract space is understood in social thought. He claims that all space, whether abstract or concrete, becomes realized in society through the same mechanisms of representation. Lefebvre points out that both "production" and "space" are terms which, within everyday language, manage to obscure the processes that underscore their often contradictory social function. In terms of contemporary theory's attempt to come to grips with the relationship between ideology and social space, Lefebvre states:

Our project calls for a very careful examination of the notions and terminology involved, especially since the expression ‘the production of space’ comprises two terms neither of which has ever been properly classified.

In Hegelianism, ‘production’ has a cardinal role: first the (absolute) Idea produces the world; next, nature produces the human being; and the human being in turn, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness—and hence that Mind which reproduces the initial and ultimate Idea.

For Marx and Engels, the concept of production never emerges from the ambiguity which makes it such a fertile idea. It has two senses, one very broad, the other restrictive and precise. In its broad sense, humans as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world. There is nothing, in history or in society, which does not have to be achieved and produced. ‘Nature’ itself, as apprehended in social life by the sense organs, has been modified and therefore in a sense produced. Human beings have formed judicial, political, religious, artistic and philosophical forms. Thus production in the broad sense of the term embraces a multiplicity of works and a great diversity of forms, even forms that do not bear the stamp of the producer or of the production process (as is the case with the logic of form: an abstract form which can be easily perceived as atemporal and therefore non-produced—that is, metaphysical). (68)

Social space then, as Lefebvre states, is produced both *by* and *for* subjects in society; therefore, nothing that exists in *any form* is simply neutral or given. Things are manufactured and people orient the sites of their production and consumption. An understanding of production then is not restricted to material goods or commodities, since a subject’s understanding of abstract concepts is also produced and consumed. Thus, this “cardinal role” prevents the establishment of fixed or assigned referents and simultaneously regards these meanings as constructs that are shifting parts of the social fabric. As Lefebvre states, “even forms that do not bear the stamp of the producer” are in fact produced. The paranoid subject searches for the underlying processes that inform the production of sense in any of their multiple (and perhaps unending) forms in an attempt to expose or comprehend what restricts his or her desire. To articulate how space and form are constantly produced and reproduced by the actions and performance of each member

of society is an imperative for the paranoid subject since the act of doing so locates each individual's agency in the production and perpetuation of social systems.

The conventions that Mouré's speaking subjects address are mapped spatially (i.e. their subjectivity is always grounded by a textual representation of a material and bodily space) in language and society. She is conscious of the limits that structure the production of both concrete and abstract spaces. As Lefebvre is careful to point out in his reading of Marx and Engels, "[s]o far as the concept of production is concerned, it does not become fully concrete or take on a true content until replies have been given to the questions that make it possible: 'Who produces?', 'What produces?', 'How?', 'Why and for whom?'" (69). These materialist questions of culture provide a point of focus in Mouré's "Pure Reason" series—a focus that seeks to undermine the establishment of conventional or "reasonable" connections in the syntax and grammar of language. As she states in "The Acts":

The poems are called **Pure Reason**.

BECAUSE pure reason in the end is beyond all logic, and beyond the signs. Logic is just something imposed upon reason. It's one kind of connectedness, that creates points of conjunction and reference that may not be true, & may not have helped us much as human beings in the end (and certainly not as women). From where we are now.

PURE REASON is, of its essence, Unreasonable; it can't be itself reasoned or it wouldn't be pure reason. PURE REASON is the source of our reasonableness; our reasonableness (which may or may not be "reasonable") is its flaw. A leak. An uncontrolled space, at the edge. Where the so-called "purity" is already broken. (*Furious* 87)

"Pure reason" cannot exist in language. As a determinable "end," the concept of pure reason cannot enter language because it exists as an ideal that is beyond logic, and therefore, outside the production of meaning. For Mouré, rationality itself represents a

“flaw” in society as it is the social subject’s “reasonableness” that accepts and permits the impossible logic of “pure reason.” Mouré’s “Pure Reason” series demonstrates that what appears reasonable, in terms of the social symbolic, is paradoxically both “unreasonable” and “beyond” reason. Therefore it is impossible to reduce “pure reason” to the confines of linear thought. If reason is considered a pure understanding of reality, it requires a blinkered reading of these “uncontrolled spaces” of knowledge.

A poem that addresses the consequences of “pure reason” from a feminist perspective is “Pure Reason: Femininity.” In this poem, women are depicted as disenfranchised by a male dominated and administered world. The poem illustrates some of the difficulties women face on a day to day basis and exposes how masculine discourses hinder an ability to write a feminist poetic. Mouré’s poems attempt to “construct a subject in-the-feminine [to] show that language is a shifting thing.” She claims that “[w]ords don’t function as certainties for women in the same way they do for men, because we don’t have the same centrality in the social structure. For us, there is more anxiety; there are so many things that just cast women into a certain category and that don’t have the same kind of impact for men” (Mouré in Denisoff 1993: 128). “Pure Reason: Femininity” describes some of the shapes this anxiety can take through its representation of the effects of casting women into easily identifiable and objectified categories:

The day the women came on the radio, fed-up, electrodes in their purses beaming,
small tubes leading into their brains where doctors enter,
the bubbling light from that, neuron balance, the de/pression
of their inner houses,

washed skin on their faces & in their voice

*she belongs to a certain class of women whose
profession is to promote lust is a comparison we reject,*

they say to the judge. Leading to the obvious:

Deathful *thinking* comes from deathful *minds*.

Women in the earth are not so powerless, their soft chests
 torn open where the pin-ups were, the tough protective skin & sensory
 reception, the high-pitched hearing,
 on the radio, their subjective loudness, sonant, re/
 plying to justice that divides them into classes,
 they say,
 how the light of the soft cock under the black robe shines
 its fine beam into the cells of women's brains
 As if you could dream like we dream & be cured, the woman says on the radio,
 pushing back the announcer,
 showing off into the microphone the cut scars
 of obstetrics out of which their babies have been pulled out, held
 by doctors, newly *born* (*Furious* 24)

This poem seeks to redress the constraints women face in a male-dominated symbolic order. Grievances that stem from an inferior status express a lack of control and agency in the management of women's bodies and their lives. These women are "fed-up" with intellectual and physical probings by medical science—"small tubes / leading into their brains where the doctors enter." The poem also expresses resentment at how women are blamed for what is socially understood as their own incurable "de/ pression"—"[a]s if you could dream like we dream & be cured".

The light symbolism in this poem offers the reader an opportunity to return to some of the questions Lefebvre points to concerning production. Who holds the light? What is lit? What remains in the dark? and so on. In this case, the poem illustrates how female desire is understood in terms of male desire— ie. if women express something to the contrary, it is understood as a desire that must be cured or contained rationally. And if no cure can be found, women are left to suffer due to what is rationalized as their own

inadequacies: “Deathful *thinking* comes from deathful *minds*.” In the poem, women are cut off from access to their bodies and the technologies that produce knowledge of these bodies. By acknowledging this, Mouré constructs a poem that exposes these inequalities while at the same time advocating that women inherently “are not so powerless.” The poem suggests that the perception of female inferiority is the result of medical, technological, and judicial socialization and not the result of sexual difference.

Similarly, the poem’s representation of technology helps to demonstrate the lack of voice and agency women have in disciplines such as law, science, or medicine. These women have to fight to gain access to the radio to “show off the cut scars/ of obstetrics.” Yet in this context, their efforts are wasted as the radio is ‘blind’ or unable to register these scars. This nonsensical gesturing returns the reader to the dilemma of Mouré’s notion of the “shutter.” For Mouré, consciousness is not something that is simply perceived or clearly understood and communicated:

. . . the way we *conceptualize*, (i.e. the categories and connections in our thinking by which we organize the world), affects the way we *perceive*. We don’t “perceive,” then “interpret.” Interpretation is an instantaneous shutter. The world is simultaneously perceived and framed. “Seeing” and “hearing” are never *pure*, never *objective*. These great tools of the writer are not, in themselves, unproblematic. We are not as open to the “new” as we think we are. And the way we conceptualize is affected by language, its habits, norms, and structures. (“Breaking Boundaries” 18)

Consciousness is always filtered by the patterns of thinking in language. “Pure Reason: Femininity” represents women’s bodies that cannot speak; the female form is restricted by the symbolic order’s structuring of language. The poem illustrates this by placing these women in a radio station which does not have the equipment to show off “the cut scars.” The radio only has the means to communicate sounds so what is visual goes unrecognized.

The radio's inability to address the visual acts as a metaphor that stresses the fact that depending on the mechanisms that are available—i.e. the screen of the symbolic order—the damage that has been inflicted on women's bodies can go unrecognized. Moreover, the body is something which is frequently jettisoned from poetic and philosophical discourse, confined instead to the auspices of medical science. This poem demonstrates how ill equipped society is for dealing with women's bodies, and in particular, demonstrates the impossibility for femininity to appear *as* or *in* "pure reason."

What appears as an apposition in the title "Pure Reason: Femininity" cannot be realized in the society the poem depicts. What constitutes femininity is signified in a social space where masculinity is the privileged norm. In a sense, femininity itself becomes a paranoid polemic—a position from which the poet speaks to disable the symbolic order. As Mouré reminds us, in contrast to women, men do not immediately appear gendered as their positions of privilege allows their gender to remain invisible in various social spaces:

"Mr." says nothing about marital status, but no matter what you call yourself as a woman, it does; "Ms." says that you don't want to divulge your marital status. You can't get away from being described in terms of your marital status, unless we abolish these terms altogether. And how can we? There are just things that exist all the time and make women less centred in the picture. (Mouré in Denisoff 193, 128)

How women are named in society reflects the fact that they do not share equal access to social power with men. In "Pure Reason: Femininity," the statement that "she belongs to a certain class of women whose / profession is to promote lust" helps contribute to the text's concerns over the disenfranchisement of women. This alienation is conveyed in the doctor's probing of the "beams" and "small tubes" in his failed attempts to "cure" women

by a process that removes them from agents in their own diagnoses as they must be filtered through previously configured resources of knowledge.

Mouré's poems remind her readers that discourse is ideological. Her paranoid texts highlight how meaning is always mired in the social relations that mediate its production and reception. For example, in the final section of "Eight Tests for Breathing," the poet's concluding remarks point to the means of the poem's construction:

The same old lungs' hurt & damage
& can't be cured
The breath there is
as the hands flutter
is poetry

Outside the poem, the scaffolds down at last
The building stands cleanly (*Domestic Fuel* 108)

Through the metaphor of a building, Mouré reminds the reader that the poem too is a construct that can appear to stand on its own only if its means of production meet certain standards and adhere to certain principles. The scaffolding can only come down safely so that the "building stands cleanly" depending on how well the poem's construction fits with identifiable conventions. Mouré's focus on the body in this poem also allows it to touch on another point of unstable knowledge. This body whose lungs "can't be cured" represents the imperfect state of the poet whose "hands flutter / is poetry." To return to a previous quotation, it is the force of ideology that explains "how we manage to keep ourselves together, even in the present tense, relating to stuff around us" (Mouré in Denisoff 1993: 133). Ideology acts as the glue that keeps the poem together when the scaffold disappears. Adherence to the laws of the symbolic order is what allows us to makes sense from

language. Mouré's poetics point to these unwritten ideological structures and calls them into question so that they cannot continue unnoticed.

By exposing her reader to the "new," Mouré creates a discourse that is unstable and attempts to promote social change. However, the relationship between poetry and social change remains complex. For Mouré, "when poetry starts to have a public relationship with social change, then somebody gets co-opted into one more way of maintaining the patriarchal order. Poetry should bug people. Then *they* can change" (Mouré in Williamson 1993: 208).¹² As a paranoid poetics, Mouré's work troubles the surface of signification and gets under people's skin so its meanings cannot easily be recuperated within the overriding logic of the symbolic order. As well, her paranoid texts remain uncertain and probe in a manner that doesn't simply critique one truth by positing another in its place. Instead of expressing what the individual is or can be, Mouré's poems, like "Pure Reason: Femininity" and "Reasons of State," have a tendency to point to the impossible—what femininity or liberal democracy are not *nor* cannot be under current conditions. The social economic structures that co-opt and block female *jouissance* relegate it to the "nonsense" of the body, to a state of unmeaning that protects the distinct autonomy of the mind. These structures are what mediate the unspoken spaces between the "I" and the "They." For Mouré, the individual is interdependently social. Her poems express the hope that these desires can be fulfilled. However, the effect her poetics have on creating social change is debatable. As Mouré asks in "Shutter Door," "How can saying 'opening the door' / make it open? / How can saying 'make it open'" (*WSW* 89)? Her poetics asks a similar question by insisting that writing stops on the page, whereas people's responses to writing begin at the moment of its reception. Social change relies on

the participation of others. The expression of paranoid desires relies on how this expression is understood at moments of its reception: as the poet asks, “[h]elp us / cure our sentences” (*WSW* 89). Denisoff also reads paranoia through Mouré texts. He proposes that Mouré’s texts express the fear that these conventional assumptions “can ultimately deny the existence of individuals who do not accept the status quo”(1995: 118). If different desires are not able to gain social acceptance then, the physical bodies of these desiring subjects are also not able to be publicly affirmed unless they deny themselves the performance of these differences. Mouré’s poetics point out “that conventional modes of discourse are not the only operative modes of communication” (Denisoff 1995: 121). In fact, her paranoid poetics propose that language perpetually *mis*represents since it necessarily reduces meaning to a product of a particular paradigm(s). Through her focus on desire, Mouré writes varying paranoid replies to the reductive tendencies of Master discourses. These replies challenge how discourses are allowed to be blindly circulated and enforced to the extent that they are allowed to appear natural and transhistorical.

Notes

1. See Rhea Tregobov, 53-55.
2. The use of the term “civilian” is particular to Mouré’s work.
3. *Différance* is a term developed by Jacques Derrida to describe how meaning in language is produced by a signifying system organized by both relations of difference and deferral. Derrida accepts Saussure’s idea of language as a system of differences but he furthers this principle by proposing that if there are only differences then meaning is only produced in the relations among signifiers not through signifieds. Signification then is endlessly delayed and deferred through this differential network.
4. Liberal humanism also reifies the individual as self contained, downplaying the importance of the collective aspects of symbolic signification. Mouré’s poetics, in contrast, recognize that individuals are interdependent in that they each participate in the formation of the social.
5. This claim is an inversion of Bhabha’s discussion of colonial discourse which states that colonialism functions as a paranoid discipline which seeks to mask its own ambivalences. Although my understanding of paranoia appears to contradict Bhabha’s argument, since I am proposing that paranoia exposes what the symbolic attempts to hide, I do not think that this theory stands in opposition to Bhabha’s claim due to the fact that once something is named paranoid it loses its ability to mask its structures.
6. This scene occurs in the section of “This Dance” entitled “This Stance” (WSW 93).
7. I am using both the terms “thinking” and “thought” to suggest that thought occurs as an action.
8. Luce Irigaray states that the “unveiling” of the body in discourse “can also be triggered by a social crisis. And the women’s movements are a manifestation of this. Often using gestures, slogans, cries, and pleas and shout of emotion, women are saying that they want to have complete access to discourse. To become “I”s who produce truth: cultural, political, religious truth. They translate their desire in a somewhat naively empirical way because they lack that sustained practice in discursive relations to the world and to the other which might have lead them to protect themselves form a *he-she*, or motivated them to work out some kind of *there is*. Women remain at the threshold of utterance in a speech that is almost devoid of meaning.” (1984: 137-138)
9. Although it is not my intention to discuss the expansive parameters of feminist research, it may be useful to readers to look at Elizabeth Grosz’s summary of these debates. See “Sexual Signatures” (1996: 9-24).
10. The titles of these “pure reason” poems are: “Pure Reason: Having³,” “Pure Reason: Science,” “Pure Reason: Femininity.” (*Furious* 18, 21, 24, respectively).

11. Specifically, this discussion of knowledge production takes place in Lefebvre's chapter entitled "Social Space" (68-168).

12. The distinction that Mouré is establishing here is that it is not discourse that creates social change but people's actions in relation to discourse.

In/conclusions: Between Dewdney and Mouré on Paranoia

. . . paranoid systems bear a direct resemblance to critical and academic techniques of artistic interpretation. The critical method, by operation must be somewhat paranoid. When faced with a new work of art, the critic has to presume as many intentionalities and hidden references as possible before selecting those that the artist most likely intended. The act of conjuring these potentialities, even if they are eventually rejected by the critic, parallels a paranoid system. Salvador Dali intuited this in 1929 when he proposed his “paranoiac critical method.”
-Christopher Dewdney, *The Secular Grail*.

“I have to go to the office, I have to get dressed.”¹ It’s this whole paranoid thing I go through. ‘I have to do this.’ I have to wear nice pants because these pants here, for example, are not acceptable in an office. They are too casual. So I iron the shit out of the clothes that I own and starch them, and they kind of fade out for a while, so [pause]. This is my life.
-Erin Mouré, in *Sounding Differences*

Paranoia, Remote Control and “Absolute Structure”

To be paranoid is to imagine that you are persecuted by some aspect or aspects of society. The paranoid subject’s imaginary preoccupation with her or his own persecution is not easily resolved as s/he distrusts the information that is supplied by the outside world. This distrust is not simply a questioning of the desire of an ‘other’ but a process of questioning which turns back *onto* the subject and interrogates its own desire. In the silences of a paranoid statement are the always present sub-texts of distrust in which the subject asks, “am I being duped, fooled into performing in a certain manner which is beneficial to someone other than myself; and is this someone consciously profiting through the (trans)action of this act?” To be paranoid is to acknowledge that it is impossible to totalize the experience or knowledge of an “other” as object. It is to assume that the knowledge is constructed through a world of speech and desires that is full of disguises

and silences. Thus, it is impossible to know the subjectivity of an “other,” such that her or his desire can be fixed. This type of intense questioning of subjective knowledge is to “dedoxify,” in a Barthesian sense, “any notion of desire as simply individual fulfilment, somehow independent of the pleasures created *by* and *in* culture” (Hutcheon 1989, 144).²

Paranoia marks a fundamental limit of consciousness. It is reflexive in that a paranoiac is conscious of the boundaries of consciousness. Paranoia points to the limits of language as a social and cultural product, and reveals how the power relations that inform language’s production of meaning are often made possible at a subject’s expense. As Hartley writes, “it is to the ruling class’s benefit that we do not recognize the socially-constructed nature of language, for if we did we might realize that the hegemonic views of reality—such as that commodities are ‘natural’—are to a certain extent arbitrary and, therefore open to questioning” (35). Dewdney’s and Mouré’s paranoid poetics offer a critique of the seamlessness with which the language of Realism is able to depict society. As well, their paranoid orientation of subjectivity offers a means of questioning language production in a manner that asks at whose expense the ‘arbitrary’ views of social reality become standardized.

In an interview with Peter O’Brien, Mouré admits that there are some similarities between Dewdney’s poetry and her own work. Although Mouré doesn’t “agree with where [Dewdney is] coming from at all,” she likes “where he gets to” (32). She explains:

Where [Dewdney] comes from, to me, is this whole study that says, “We are men, we know what these rocks mean and what the brain is.” But his work seems to pull past that kind of control and mastery, that sense that we can name everything and figure it all out. His language ends up being kind of technocratic in one sense, but the words pull away from that, and make something else. The exciting thing about

Dewdney's work is when he enables you to see amazing things about the earth and human thought and words, that actually they are not controlled by human beings, there's something else. And that's what really excites me about reading his work. Of course he may read something entirely different in it. (32)

What appears to interest Mouré about Dewdney's poetics is the uncertainty that permeates his use of language. In her characterization of his work, Mouré hints at the paranoid scenario of remote control which Dewdney offers as a metaphor for the function of language. She notes that for Dewdney, "human thought and words. . . are not controlled by human beings." As Mouré states, there is "something else" which maintains control over language's ability to represent reality. For her, though this "something else" is not human, it is masculinist. Men do not necessarily maintain conscious control of the discourses that privilege them; instead, power remains more diffuse and elusive. Mouré proposes that "the way language is worked out, the way syntax is worked out, doesn't speak to men any more either, it's just easier for them, it's a hole that is easier for them to fall into, because they have worldly 'power' there" (in O'Brien 33). For men then, it is easy to fall prey to blinkered readings of reality as they seldom feel resistance in terms of their social mobility. That these structures are not readily noticeable to men, as Irigaray proposes, is due to the fact that men *inhabit* these discursive spaces with less visible restrictions.

Dewdney's poetics do not appear to fall prey to this trap of masculine privilege since the paranoid stance he promotes is distrustful of the very mechanisms of perception and communication. He claims that language exists outside of human possession and control due to the parasitic relationship between the poet and the limits the Governor

imposes on human access to language. For Dewdney, language is the primary facilitator of remote control. He claims that “from infancy out individuality is subsumed by consensually imposed meanings. What’s more, we have learned to express our most primal fears and desires using an abstract system of spoken symbols” (*The Secular Grail* 141). The relationship we maintain with language keeps humans in a state of alienation to such a degree that even what is most primal to our being is filtered through a “host system” and communicated in abstraction. Dewdney maps out the processes that lead to this alienation in “Language Acquisition Trauma”:

As infants we are fitted with a cognitive prosthesis, in much the same way that wild horses are forced to wear bits, braces and saddles. We come to realize that the adults in our lives (already perceived as omniscient, willful and possessing great knowledge) are hopelessly advanced in a system of communication that uses a secret code. Only slowly do we master this system, and regardless of how much encouragement we receive from adults we doubt that we will ever attain their level of sophistication.

Not surprisingly then the central component of language acquisition trauma is performance anxiety, an anxiety we never fully put behind us. (*The Secular Grail* 141)

The acquisition of language occurs in conjunction with an insurmountable inferiority complex that suggests that the complete mastery of language is an impossibility. Instead, the mastery of language is merely an attempt to disguise the performance anxiety which is “never fully put behind” the subject. Although the political and poetic concerns of Mouré differ from Dewdney’s, they both express a similar distrust of the control language maintains over its subjects. It is this mutual distrust that helps to locate the poetics of Mouré and Dewdney in a similar theory of paranoia.

Against the unified mastery that the traditional lyric voice frequently represents, both Dewdney and Mouré create poems that contain multiple and disparate personas that typify competing points of view. For Dewdney, the poems that place “you” (the reader) in the text create an unstable scenario in which the reader becomes implicated in a poem he or she does not have control over. Mouré uses techniques that differ from Dewdney’s strategic manipulation of “you” in form but produce similarities in their paranoid effects. For example, in Mouré’s serial poems, there is often more than one speaking subject. Other voices are invoked, creating a text that shifts from what Bakhtin terms the dialogical to the polylogical.³ These voices sometimes take the form of critics who can be read as representative of an expected audience reaction to the poem.

Against what Rhea Tregebov has characterized as a defensive stance,⁴ I propose that Mouré’s use of multiple voices reveals another strategic feature to her paranoid poetics. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the creation of a critical voice who questions the propriety of the poem can be read as a means of subverting expected “public” reactions to her poetics. For example, in a prologue to her poem “Speed or Absolute Structure,” Mouré creates a persona who *authors* “Coda: Robert O’s Rules of Orderr.” As a fictional reviewer of the poem, *he* writes:

In this piece the author appears to be confusing the current cholera epidemic in Peru with the aftermath of the Franklin expedition in 1845 in the North West Passage. She fabricates what she calls a “history of water,” which is a very tenuous link and not elaborated upon. On top of this, she manages to insert her usual gratuitous references to the vagina. Clearly her political stance is that of a left-leaning liberal (unable to distinguish major time periods) although to our knowledge, she did not rely on any government funds to produce this. Why

does she not criticize, at the very least, the excesses of Stalinism? Clearly, her views are not balanced, and are conformist, influenced at least indirectly by arm's length funding to the Canada Council. Is this the "culture" we are promoting? (Sheepish 45)

With this "critical" addendum, Mouré projects a paranoid response to a potential "public" reception of this poem. The passage demonstrates an overt awareness of the types of criticism that the poet feels her poems are up against. Her political stance, her language (specifically her "gratuitous references to the vagina"), and her knowledge of history are all questioned by this reviewer who asks whether these "conformist" views are "balanced." By including these critiques, Mouré undermines their efficacy and strengthens her own poem's integrity since their prediction prevents the dismissal of the apparent "confusion" the poem constructs. Since the poet is obviously not confused, the reader is forced to read the poem on the poem's own terms, or, at least in terms that cannot be readily disregarded according to the assumptions of this fictional critic. Moreover, there is a politics involved in this strategy. By questioning whether this is "the culture that we [as Canadians] are promoting," the poem asks the reader to take a political stance in terms of how one positions himself or herself in relation to this text. The strategic effect of "Robert O's" commentary is that it furthers a poetics that resists standard conventions since Mouré's inclusion of his review disrupts the reader's ability to simply dismiss the poem according to the conditions *he* outlines. This example of paranoia serves as a strategy that questions the political consequences of the types of common conventions of reading which Mouré feels she is up against.

Through its paranoid stance, “Speed, or Absolute Structure” opens up the relations between two apparently unrelated historical events to question the boundaries that history’s “rules of order” construct. As in Mouré’s notion of the “shutter,” through which she attempts to construct new connections between physical relations, this poem asks the reader to compare the recent cholera epidemic in Peru (1992) with the failed Franklin expedition of 1845. During the Franklin expedition, the crew, “having ingested lead from the seams of canned food” (40) become poisoned and suffer mental delusions. The consumption of lead explains the crew’s behaviour to historians concerned with why the voyage failed, and places the crew’s actions (the fact that they kept “small combs, slippers, toothbrushes” and other personal effects while abandoning necessary equipment for their survival in the Northern wilderness) in a context readers can understand. However, Mouré’s poem opens this contextualization of the crew’s actions to interrogation. The poem reminds the reader that it is in the “nodes of memory / [where] we create: the ‘plausible’” (42); that is, Mouré suggests that any version of history is reduced to what is deemed most likely. Mouré’s paranoid poetics maintain a strategy in which she attempts “to break down the logical connections / structure of ‘meaning’ (referentiality)”⁵(*Furious* 93) and frees the poem “from the constraints / of sensory order” (40). By creating a plausible narrative that makes sense of the evidence of these events, history reduces the possibility of alternative readings. Like Foucault, it would seem that Mouré is interested in “cutting” history to expose the assumptions that allow it to appear as a natural teleological unfolding of events.

Mouré's investigation into the disparities that lie in the discourses histories construct is similar to Dewdney's genealogical investigations that juxtapose natural histories of landscapes and fossil formations against scientific discourse. Their poems run counter to a poetry that expresses a mastery of language and opens these poems to a field of uncertainty which points to what cannot be known. Both Mouré and Dewdney write poems that seek to open new connections between seemingly unrelated events or things while remaining conscious of the fact that in the very act of representation poems restrict the knowledge they construct. As Dewdney is careful to point out, it "must be remembered that the Poem always seeks the shortest distance between two points" (*Predators* 47). Like Mouré, Dewdney attempts to subvert the objectification that accompanies knowledge by challenging the simply subject/object dichotomy this process relies upon. By questioning the common insistence that the subject is reliable as a stable, unfettered viewpoint and the object it sees is a fixed identifiable entity, Dewdney achieves a poetry that is constantly in flux. For example, in "Objects Are Occasions," Dewdney challenges the very notion of the noun by claiming that "Everything is an occasion. A rock is an event. All objects are events. A rock or a planet merely occupies a location and volume for a period of time. A human being is a mobile occasion" (*The Secular Grail* 179). Objects then, are not things which simply exist; they are instead found at particular moments, in particular spaces, and by particular subjects. Dewdney's claim that "everything is an occasion" relates to the fact that physical relations (biological and chemical) generate the effect of the perception of an object. He states that "[b]ecause of equipment limitations, perception is confined to a selective sample of a more extensive

continuum. Noetically, an object can only be as specific as the sum of its signified components” (*The Immaculate Perception* 17). Thus, there is a limit to what we perceive in that we only include what makes sense in our detailing of perception.

Mouré too is conscious that the construction and production of an object is limited and reductive. For her, it is important to consider the notion of time in perception. In words that echo Dewdney, she states, “the image/thing is not object but act. Not act but act act act—a continual relation” (*Furious* 95). Human perception of an object is dependent upon the activities of seeing and of being over a duration of time. Objects are not simply neutral or out there waiting to be communicated, as subjectivity and the understanding of perception are tied to the biological limits of the body. Instead, objects are found and made sense of according to how they are understood by a subject (or subjects) in the symbolic order. An object is always mediated; it is a product of the subject who *sees*, and as such, the line between the subject and object is not so simple to discern.

For Mouré and for Dewdney, the body is both necessary for perception and is necessarily unreliable. In “Speed, or Absolute Structure,” Mouré proposes that the meanings which are produced through the body are a part of the poem’s “own economic / gesture, that is, *meaning*” (43). In part, the economic relations that govern the production of meaning involve disregarding the uncertainty that stems from human perception. In addition to questioning the historical line between sense and nonsense, the poem furthers Mouré’s critique of the status of the body in contemporary thought, and relays that what is interpreted as the “jettisoning of the body” is an unhealthy act both physically and mentally. To “choose to jettison / the self” (43) is compared to the mental delusions of

Franklin's crew, and cholera, which depletes the self through "acute dehydration," (43). For Mouré, to choose to "jettison the self" is to decide to disregard what cannot be known through language—that is, it is to choose to forget how knowledge is constructed and how potentially unreliable this process is. Mouré proposes that in order to enforce or promote sense one has to fix or objectify "that motion of the body / by which memory / is possible" (43). Memory, like information, is "produced for our own benefit." As Mouré explains in her poem "Green Jackets": "information has serum qualities. / By inoculating [sic] you with small quantities of the essential lie / we protect you from the disease / to which you may succumb / 'untruth' / delirium" (*Sheepish Beauty* 25). Mouré notes that memory does not produce the truth of a past experience; instead, memory merely serves to contextualize one's past experiences in such a way that makes sense. Memory points to a crucial paradox that underlies the production of sense and meaning. As Mouré states, "If we are to free our memories, our desires, we must refuse to restrain ourselves" (*Furious* 98) by limiting our knowledge of self to a screen of reference which can give only those meanings that can readily be signified through the symbolic order. However, this process of opening meaning through what Mouré calls "[t]he dissolution of physical boundaries" creates "unstable ground / by which we cannot recognize the figure" (*Sheepish* 43). It is impossible to free meaning from the restrictions of language and memory. They *are* what produce meaning. Without a context to attach the sign/signifier relations there is no mechanism to produce meaning—as understanding is not a thing in itself but a socially orchestrated process. By utilizing a poetic practice that maintains a reflexive stance towards its own production, Mouré's poems question the power dynamics that create

standards of sense/nonsense, rationality/irrationality and so forth, and leads to a reevaluation of their parameters.

In “Speed, or Absolute Structure,” memory is also questioned in terms of its ability to represent an event or action as a route towards secure knowledge. Mouré states:

Memory not exact repetition of an image in the brain,
but a categorization, a motion in the head, awakened
as the body moves, recognizing new stimuli
exact orders:

- * a door high up in a tree, left hanging
- * a signing “saying”: *body couscous*
- * a woman standing angry
- * a sheet of pack ice & the wooden prow

(the ability to establish context) (*Sheepish* 41)

If Memory is “not a repetition but a categorization in the brain” then the “exact orders” that it produces become destabilized due to its unreliability. Since memory is produced via the mechanism of the mind, its “exact orders” (i.e. following specific categories of signification) perpetuate the blind spots that produce cultural norms. Memory too is one of “the dark zones in the mind of western man” since it is limited by the categories it has been conditioned to recognize. Thus, “a door high up in a tree, left hanging” will stall signification until the mind is able to establish a context for this phenomenon. At a reading Mouré gave in Ottawa,⁶ she discussed this line as illustrating the fact that to the mind there is no difference between what is perceived to be *there* and what is *there* in “reality.” If someone thinks there is a door in a tree, there is no difference, phemonemologically within

that “shutter” of recognition, between there being no physical door in the tree and there actually being a door suspended in a tree. The only difference is that the mind works backward through memory, attempting to attach a past context with a piece of stimulus in order to understand it, until what once was a door in a tree becomes understood as an outline of leaves in a certain light—the door in the tree becoming merely a figment of one’s imagination in a particular instant. Like the virtual worlds Dewdney constructs in his poems, Mouré’s poems are also conscious of the fact that there is no material link between reality and perception. Instead, consciousness merely enables the signification of a reality in terms of the sign systems which are at its disposal.

Although the body allows Mouré to subvert conventional poetry, it too is placed under paranoid scrutiny. In “Including Myself,” the reader is told that

in ten years there is no molecule in the body
that is the same.
What identity is, has been overworked
in these pages (*Domestic Fuel* 61)

What one understands as an autonomous self then is a product of language. And like meaning in language, the body is unstable as its molecular make up is constantly being reconfigured. Mouré’s poem returns us to a point Dewdney raises in “On Fossilization” in which he states that “every seven years we are entirely recomposed” (*Predators* 104). For Dewdney, the transmutation that the body is constantly undergoing acts as a metaphor for how humans understand their reality: “The replacement of reality with fiction is the same process. The rug is pulled in front of your eyes off a facsimile of itself. Remote control alien replacement of all that which you call tangible” (104). In Dewdney’s poetry, the

reader is told that the knowledge that provides for a stable notion of both self and reality is merely an illusion produced by these secret agents of remote control. As a metaphor for language then, these remote control agents provide an explanation as to why there is no essential “reality” that follows from perception, only series of fictions that mask and make sense of the world. The expansive paranoid scenario that Dewdney constructs as this alien organization that manipulates perception takes the gaps that obscure human perception as its points of departure. In “From a Handbook of Remote Control,” he states:

In every human mind there are areas of ignorance. With some it is mathematics, with others mechanics or linguistics or with some even science. These are the dark zones in the in the mind of western man. Within this zone which everyone possesses there is room for almost infinite distortion. (*Predators* 109)

In a manner similar to Mouré’s critique of linear representations of perception, Dewdney understands that the perception of a reality remains dependent on fixing the time/space relations in a way that disguises its shifting forms. As a product of remote control, knowledge takes the form of a meticulously constructed “lie.” Dewdney explains that “[p]article by particle the solid reality that composed the allegorical ground he stood on is replaced by fantasies and lies” (*Predators* 109). Once these agents have succeeded and a version of reality is attained, a “time loop-hole” is created—“a backwater where reality and time stand halted. The remote control agent hides in this *cul de sac* until he builds up enough energy to attempt a group control situation” (109). The figure of the remote control agent personifies the role ideology plays in the symbolic order. It is only through the objectification of knowledge that ideology can become invisible to its discourses. Ideology, like these agents of remote control, helps to produce coherent versions of

reality. But often humans remain oblivious to this role. As Dewdney states, “at any point a skilful agent can reverse the process and replacc fantasy with reality so smoothly the individual does not even know his feet ever left the ground” (109). Dewdney claims that this is a scenario in which the only people who “catch on, and there are a few in society who do, are hopeless ‘paranoids’ of course” (110). Thus, it would seem that being paranoid involves an awareness of how ideology interpellates the performance of its subject. This awareness is a necessary part of any critical method. As Dewdney claims, “the critic has to presume as many intentionalities and hidden references as possible. . . the act of conjuring these potentialities. . . parallels a paranoiac system” (*The Secular Grail* 118-19).

As an example of paranoia, Dewdney’s metaphor of remote control offers a critique of common cultural assumptions. For Dewdney, the victim of remote control is the everyday individual who reproduces cultural norms without question: “The remote control personality, intuitively attuned to the desires & causal networks operative in all humans, performs the ‘mean’ role induced by the group as a whole” (*Predators* 110). However, escaping from acceptable standards is not easy since any human who deviates from this “mean” is considered to be “mentally ill.” Dewdney explains that such is the case when the transmission field of two remote control agents becomes overlapped. When this happens those people who are caught in between these contrasting transmissions “have no recourse but schizophrenia because of dual and conflicting possessions of their behaviour” (*Predators* 111). Because there is no longer a singular frame of reference, the subject loses his or her ability to determine sense and forfeits his purchase on a clear picture of reality.

This is similar to the effect demonstrated in Mouré's "Speed, or Absolute Structure" where "the dissolution of the physical boundaries" creates "unstable ground / by which we cannot 'recognize' the figure" (43). It becomes impossible to construct sense in terms of knowledge once the boundaries and borders of disciplines become confused. Similar to Mouré's critique of how sense is regulated through language, Dewdney's use of the metaphor of remote control suggests that these restrictions are in place prior to any stimulus being received by a subject.

By challenging the reader's ability to establish context, Dewdney's poetics emphasize the materiality of language. This is achieved since his poems destabilize the sign/signified relations in the production/reception of the text. For example, the poet of "Log Entries" discusses language's dependency on establishing a context:

*I submerge the poem
out of context
watch for syllabic residue*

floating to the surface

*Make brief notes on
the resistance of an individual phoneme to drowning*

*Sometimes the clutch
is too strong
strangles the syntax
before it has a chance
to breathe through the Os*

(Radiant Inventory 56)

This "Log Entry" notes how the structures of language become more visible once its referents are stalled. Without an identifiable context, the "syllabic residue" remains on the surface so that it resists slipping beneath or "drowning" in meaning. The materiality of language comes to the forefront once a reader's ability to establish context is disabled. The

syntactic features of language are left open, halting their translation from a system of signs. Without a context to fix signification, language is prevented from being able to seamlessly affix its knowledge to a cultural memory of what is already known.

If Mouré's and Dewdney's paranoid subjects do not trust hegemonic or normalized views of society, nor claim an essentialist perspective stemming from the body, then what is the foundation upon which to ground their critical analyses? Perhaps an answer to this question returns us to Smith's dilemma involving the relationship between 'textual' and 'material' reality. Although Mouré's paranoid subjects do not claim a complete knowledge of a particular reality, they do believe that a reality does exist, albeit it is a reality that is not completely accessible to a subject through language. Like Lacan's Real, there is something that remains outside of signification but also remains responsible for placing signification into motion. Both Dewdney and Mouré are careful to maintain this distinction between the "text" and the Real at all times. In her series poem "Parts of a Clock, or Asthma," Mouré distinguishes between the poem's commentary on the war in Bosnia and the reality upon which the commentary is based. In several notes, separated with a border from the poem proper, she insists that "war cannot be put into a poem" (*Search Procedures* 103) and that the bomb which exploded, killing sixty-eight on February 14, 1994, took place "in Sarajevo not the poem" (105). Her appreciation of the limits of textuality—the necessary restraints that language enforces in order to ensure a shared notion of sense—is something that is consistently stressed in both Dewdney's and Mouré's poems. Neither Dewdney's nor Mouré's paranoid poetics allow them to construct or put forward an notion of an identifiable reality that somehow transcends the

web of discourse. Similarly, in Mouré's "A Grassy Knoll," the poet doesn't even attempt to represent the well-known photo of John Kennedy Jr. saluting his father's coffin. Instead, she merely asks the reader to "insert photo here" (*Search Procedures* 62) acknowledging its status as part of a larger cultural frame of reference that the poem points to but does not attempt to represent. As Mouré states:

In the context of the poem, it is iconic, you simply have to say at a certain point 'Insert photograph here' and people mentally insert it. Or people of a certain generation, anyhow. What is iconic to one generation, can be a mystery to another. (in Denisoff 1993: 126)

Where Dewdney constructs paranoid worlds full of potential attackers and agents who control the means for each subject to produce an understanding of reality, Mouré constructs a world where memory and desire are unstable and constantly under reevaluation. What the paranoid poetics of both these authors offer is a way of thinking about the terms and conditions of paranoia. To engage with a paranoid text is to place your understanding of your "self" and "reality" at risk—it is to challenge the ideological assumptions that hide the ways in which power functions in society. Far from characterizing a system which is insular and has no purchase on the fictions that we use to promote competing versions of reality, paranoia makes it possible to promote knowledge that can accommodate the desires that have been stricken from overriding symbolic economies. In his or her questioning of the limits of language's ability to represent, the paranoid opens a view into language, desire, and reality that blurs the distinctions between subject/object or subject/agent or both. And in doing so, paranoia perpetuates an understanding of self that resists agentless notions of subjectivity since paranoia

acknowledges that subjects can act as agents *for* or *against* the symbolic order. Through paranoia, Mouré's civilians are able to voice a critique of cultural norms and to expose those desires which have been excluded or rendered inferior. Similarly, Dewdney outlines paranoid worlds that function as metaphors for a subject's relations with the world. What both these poets do is demonstrate how a poetics of paranoia can offer a means of productively critiquing cultural assumptions and exposing ways in which the individual plays an active role in perpetuating or resisting them. Not only do their poetics point to various means of understanding a subject's agency, they also point out that the very construction of subjectivity is a political act, one which should be kept under strict scrutiny at all times.

Notes

1. These are lines taken from Mouré's poem "Jewel" in *WSW (West South West)*.
2. Hutcheon points to some of the underlying interrogations in strains of postmodern feminist investigations. These she groups under an interest in discussing desire "as fueled by the inaccessibility of the object and a dissatisfaction with the real." She identifies this as the libidinal economic realm which preoccupies Baudrillard's work on the simulacrum (as previously discussed in "Christopher Dewdney: Virtual Images and the Poetics of Paranoia"). This notion will be explained further on in this chapter.
3. Mikhail Bakhtin describes a polylogical text as a characteristic of fiction whereby several contesting voices representing a variety of ideologies can engage the reader through a text's internal dialogue. Polylogism expands on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism that claims there is no single ideological framework that produces a text's meaning since meaning is constructed between the reader and the text, to include other competing discourses which a text can reflect beyond the author's intentions. See "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis."
4. In her review of *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*, Rhea Tregobov finds the frequent addendums or "corrections" that appear in this text troubling since, for her, in this adoption of "the mask of some Anglo, propriety mad, Philistine, you-know-something-is-happening-but-you-don't-know-what-it-is Mr. Jones of a reviewer" primarily wards off, rather than invites, critique or response (54). For Tregobov, this strategy leads to a resistant text in which the reader feels ill-equipped to participate in the poem's meaning. In contrast, as the following discussion outlines, I feel these tensions are productive as their reflexive nature invites critiques on many levels.
5. The other strategy that Mouré attempts to achieve with her poetics is to break down the noun/verb opposition wherein the present so-called 'power' of the language resides. See "The Acts" (*Furious* 94).
6. This reading took place at the National Archives building in Ottawa, January 1993.

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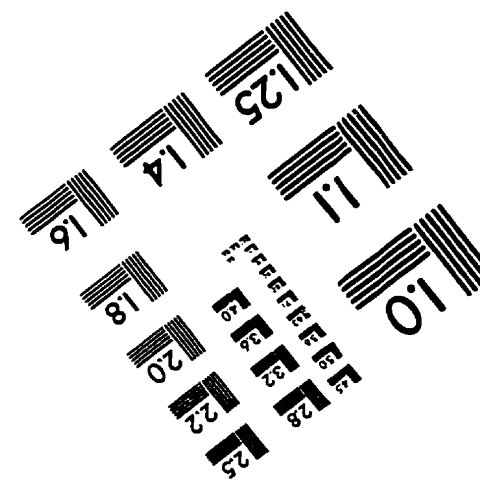
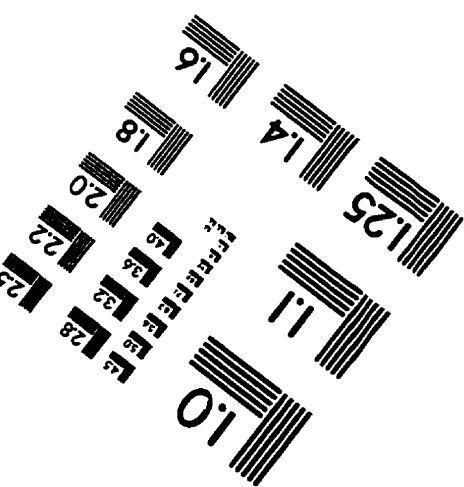
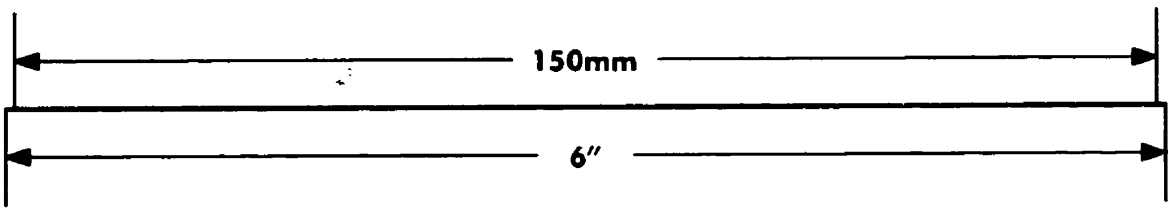
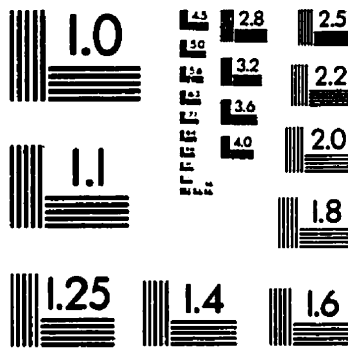
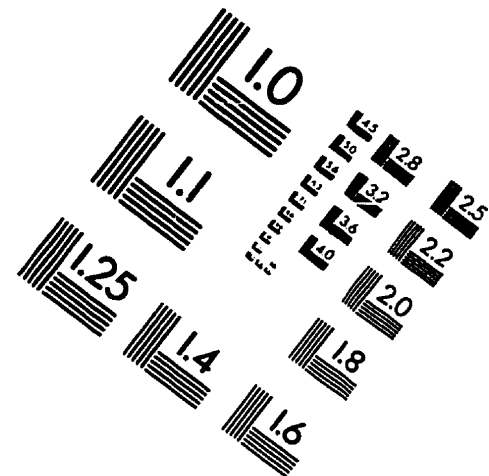
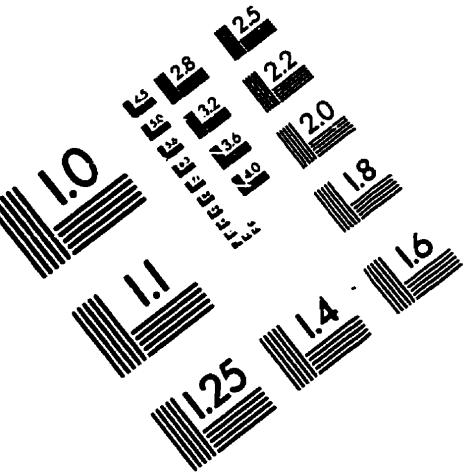
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