

**VIRTUAL REALITIES AND CHAOS: THE FICTIONS OF
NICOLE BROSSARD, WILLIAM GIBSON, DON DELILLO,
MICHAEL ONDAATJE AND OTHERS**

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the literary avant-garde in American Fiction and focuses on the uses of narrative disjunction, dialogism, and multi-stability in perception in the works of a handful of authors including Nicole Brossard, William Burroughs, William Gibson, Leonard Cohen, Kurt Vonnegut jr., Margaret Laurence, Don DeLillo and Michael Ondaatje. More specifically, this analysis considers narrative models that re-define “fiction” both as form and genre with direct reference to the inter-face of electronic culture and the creative process, or, *techné* and *physis*. A theory regarding Virtual Reality and the de-stabilization of meaning is forwarded as are comments on theorists of media and culture including McLuhan, Ong, Negroponti, and De Kerckhove among others. The second half of this paper applies Fractal and Chaos theory to the feminist fiction of the award-winning novelist, Nicole Brossard.

“Prose is a dream falling back into reality.”

— Nicole Brossard *Baroque at Dawn* (89).

AUDIO-VISUAL/TIME-SPACE

McLuhan’s theories, as forwarded by Walter J. Ong, deal with three phases in the development of Western verbal communications media. Ong identifies these stages as 1. pre-literate or primary *oral/aural*, 2. chirographic-typographic or primarily *visual*, and 3. electronic or what McLuhan and Ong identify as a secondary *oral/aural* phase. I argue that this third phase, characterized as it is by not only

radio, but also cinema, television, video, internet and so on, is more accurately a *combined* or *integrated visual and aural* period, not primarily an “aural” period as McLuhan and Ong suggest. I agree that we have experienced a greater emphasis on orality during this century, but I also contend that because of the many cross-overs in visual *and* acoustic media, that we have arrived at a period in which visual and auditory responses are relatively *balanced*, perhaps for the first time in *recorded* history. I contend that this historically unique condition of perceptual balancing leads to a sort of multi-stability in human perception. The question of multi-stability in perception can be discussed with reference to a number of epistemological paradigms or world-views including the psycho-linguistic theory of the “Other” which is well-suited for discussions of alterity, perception and identity. The notion of the “Other” was initially forwarded by Jacques Lacan, but was subsequently pursued by thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, among others. The multi-stable notion of the “Other” potentially serves a fundamental intermediary function whether we consider post-modern literature, or post-structural critical theory (e.g.; Bakhtin’s dialogism, Barthes’ sliding or polysemous signification, Jacques Derrida’s deconstructions, Michel Foucault’s genealogies, Umberto Eco’s notions of the “open” text). All of these theories involve a recognition of identity in terms of a polyvalent “Other.” Critics such as Michel Foucault, who have constructed rigorous Genealogies of civilization, have arrived at an understanding of human identity as a fictional construct, or “virtual reality” where “truth” is always provisional, subject to interpretation, relative to the position of the observer, and open to epistemological questioning. Our perception of the past is as much a fiction, as is our perception of ourselves. Post-modern fictions inspired by electronically-based technology re-define western notions of narrative and identity and further alternate our non-traditional perceptions of time/space.

Linguistically-oriented electronically inspired fiction accelerates the re-cognition and re-definition of cultural identity. Marshall McLuhan, Walter J. Ong, Harold Innis and others have reminded us that historically there has been a tendency to develop visual models of the universe formulated through language. Earlier views of physics perceived time/space as being continuous, homogenous, infinite and isotropic (its properties have the same values when measured along any axis). But, visual interpretations of time/space have been proven to be incorrect. Time/space is not continuous but discontinuous, not homogenous, but fragmentary. Nicholas Negroponti (in *Being Digital*) reminds us that the discovery of the linguistic fragments of morpheme and phoneme lead to co-relative assumptions about atoms. More recently, we have discovered the fundamentals of human biology through investigations of genetics, and in the electronic sector we have begun to digitalize. Current investigations of physics as forwarded by thinkers such as Stephen Hawking still seek a grand unified theory. However, in the meantime, the conception of time/space as discontinuous and particular from morpheme to atom to gene to bit, has given rise to disjunctive narrative strategies that integrate visual and auditory perceptions.

The limits of visual models are evident if one considers misperceptions that arise when relying solely on the sense of sight. Since we have entered into a cultural phase that re-emphasizes orality, as I suggested earlier, then acoustic analogues provide alternative systems for communicating figures of thought. If one perceives the make-up

of the universe in terms of what McLuhan called “a resonant field of dynamic figure/ground relationships,” then arguably, acoustic figures such as pulse, melody, rhythm, turbulence, discord and harmony provide alternate rhetorical schemes of construction. These acoustic schemes of construction are not only potentially the language of music, but also the language of literature, and have ameliorated the structure of much inter-disciplinary and electronically inspired post-modern texts. To enter into the linguistic patterns of inter-media texts, is also to enter into an alternate perception or world-view. Whether we are discussing spoken word, performance art, music video, cinema, innovation in live theatre, or contemporary fiction, we can still say that that which constitutes the spatio-temporal event-phenomena known as expression is the four-dimensionality of the field. The flux of time/space is a primary consideration in these plastic arts. With some contemporary North American fiction, this four-dimensional awareness has acknowledged language as technology and has integrated it with the rhythms of human biology to issue a challenge to canonical and hegemonic representations of being. Linguistic and morphemic bits have been inter-fused with genetic atoms to generate an emerging cyber-literature. Ontological, existential, and epistemological questions are related to the artist’s quest for the relationship between media and body. Functioning both as analogue and digital structure, contemporary cyber-literature re-assesses artificial conventions of linguistic representation on the page.

The manner in which space and time are addressed and portrayed is fundamental to these emerging forms of fiction which have responded to developments in science and technology. While these post-modern fictions are as diverse in structure as they are in subject, they do have a number of features in common. First and foremost among them is a narrative pattern which is disjunctive and structured in a way to emulate at least one or more of the contemporary electronic media. The spatio-temporal parameters of radio, cinema, television, computer, virtual reality, and so on are adopted as literary structures. Secondly, these texts feature an erasure of the difference between *Innenwelt* (“inner” world of the psyche) and *Umwelt* (“outer” world of the environment and/or self-projection). The loss of difference between inner and outer layers of consciousness results both in a transparency of style, and an instantaneous mode of communication that reveals several layers of thought simultaneously. Thirdly, there is an integration of human biology with some aspect of technology. This integration carries with it an implicitly epistemological posture that questions more conventional modes of fictional representation. More precisely, in these texts there is an integration of *Techne* (technology), and *Physis* (nature/biology) aimed at challenging *nomos* (convention). Through their challenge to the nomological, these fictions embrace epistemological world views which are provisional, relativistic and anti-hegemonic. This is literature as “virtual reality.” This is the literature of the Other or what Nicole Brossard calls the “alter/native.”

The term “technology” with its etymological root in *Techne* can be defined as “art” or “craft.” In his *Metaphysics* I.1 Aristotle defines *Techne* as a skill based on knowledge of universals and causes; something that can be taught. *Techne* is often thought of in contrast to *Physis* which can be defined as “nature” or the essence of life (defined by Aristotle in *Physics* II.1 as a kinetic process). *Physis*, because it is often chaotic, can be also considered in contrast to *nomos* or convention, a law-like

generalization. The nomological can be predicted and must satisfy deductive reasoning. Hence, the nomological is in contrast to chaos or the accidental which is ultimately unpredictable. Peitgen, Jürgens and Saupe discuss physics and the universe in their study *Chaos and Fractals: New Frontiers of Science*:

Since chaos (= breakdown of predictability) has become fashionable in the sciences, there has been literally a flood of papers demonstrating that chaos is more like the rule in nature, while order (= predictability) is more like the exception. (52)

It is this lack of predictability that has been adopted by an emerging field of authors. By turning to narrative models that exploit dialogical, polysemic and epistemological strategies, they succeed in moving towards a literature of chaos that embraces the anti-nomological condition of *Physis*.

A variety of thinkers including Innis, McLuhan, Ong, Dave Godfrey, and Derrick De Kerckhove have reminded us that language was one of our first *technologies*. Language, because it is directly engaged with human development, is also engaged with our biology, and is in a state of evolution. Language is a kinetic and emerging process sometimes predictable, sometimes apparently chaotic. De Kerckhove comments on the artificiality of language in *The Skin of Culture*:

The evolution of human intelligence keeps pace with the evolution not only of language, but of technologies supporting and processing language. First among these is writing. While it is conceivable that the origin of language could be found in the practice of associating sounds with daily survival activities, it is writing that stored these sounds for enduring uses. By being written down, pertinent and selective oral practices achieved enough consistency and reliability for linguistic coding to develop over and beyond common usage. (194)

De Kerckhove comments on thinkers such as Innes, McLuhan, and Eric Havelock, and states that they forwarded the view that communications systems have shaped social orders and have contributed to the establishment of particular patterns of human behaviour. But a number of writers have taken the posture of the alter/native by situating their fictions outside of the *status quo*.

Diverse authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Ben Okri, Jeanette Winterson, José Saramago and others have challenged conventional or nomological perceptions of spatio-temporal relations. Márquez's satirical works including the much-celebrated *One Hundred Years of Solitude* feature disjunctive plots and fabulatory visions that do not distinguish between the technological and the mystical. Marquez's epistemological works challenge conventional perceptions of time/space and simultaneously launch attacks against hegemony and autocracy. Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* examines the effects of pharmacological super-drugs on the social order. Okri's vision features extensive ruptures in the nomological perception of linear or sequential time/space. Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* presents alternate views of time/space that have much in common with contemporary post-Einsteinian physics as well as ancient views of the Hopi aboriginals living in the South-West of the United States. Winterson ex-

plores time/space as a flexible but singular moment in which all things can happen simultaneously. José Saramago investigates the loss of sight in his Nobel Prize winning novel *Blindness* and in doing so, brings his audience from a visual conception of time/space into an acoustic realm where communications and perception become Protean, provisional, simultaneous, resonant, and multi-locational. All of these novelists undermine perceptions that are rooted in conventional views of time/space as linear, sequential, homogenous, hegemonic, monological, and static, in favour of a model that is lateral, associative, diverse, heterogenous, dialogical and kinetic.

The novels of a number of contemporary North American authors emulate technological patterns. Among the most successful of these are works that feature narrative structures that exemplify their electronic subject. A masterful union of electronically-inspired structure and subject is rare but evident in a small front of contemporary works. Among those in North America, are authors of speculative fiction such as William Gibson, who have succeeded in inter-facing fiction with computer-inspired patterns in order to generate a fictive cyber-space. Earlier writers such as William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut jr. and Kathy Acker, have pioneered this emerging field by adopting narrative patterns that emulate technological forms. Others worthy of note include Margaret Laurence, Leonard Cohen, Don DeLillo and Michael Ondaatje. Among those currently at the forefront of North American fiction who are integrating technologically-inspired stylistics with the structuring of what might be termed the post-modern "anti-novel," is Nicole Brossard. More acutely than any of the other writers discussed here, Brossard is concerned with narrative strategy. In her essay, "The Textured Angle of Desire" she comments; "To sum up, we could say that by finding a solution in narrative, the agonistic tension allows us to catch a glimpse of the polysemic images from which the scope of our choices and our presence of mind in the body of language follow" (111). For Brossard, fiction is a "virtual reality" which integrates *techne* and *physis*. I will return to Brossard's writing in greater depth momentarily.

William Gibson's much-celebrated novel *Neuromancer* (1984), and his shorter fictions in the collection *Burning Chrome* (1986), including "Johnny Mnemonic" (which was eventually made into a film by the same title), have much in common with the 1980s film *Bladerunner* (based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*/screenplay by Hampton Fancher, David Peoples). These texts establish a link between technology and human biology. The representations of time/space that link human psyche and techno-scenarios embody many of McLuhan's discussions and prophecies regarding the "Global Village," technology as an extension of the human mind/body, and the establishment of what might be termed a techno-psychology. New computer media amplify cognitive patterns of Gibson's protagonists resulting in an near-instantaneous electronic and global consciousness. This excerpt from "Johnny Mnemonic" serves to illustrate the conjunction of *techne* and *physis* as the protagonist enters cyber-space, which he describes as being akin to the mind-state of an idiot-savant:

Transition to idiot/savant mode is always less abrupt than I expect it to be. The pirate broadcaster's front was a failing travel agency in a pastel cube that boasted a desk, three chairs, and a faded poster of a Swiss orbital spa. A pair of toy

birds with blown-glass bodies and tin legs were sipping monotonously from a Styrofoam cup of water on a ledge beside Molly's shoulder. As I phased into mode, they accelerated gradually until their Day-Glo-feathered crowns became solid arcs of color. The LEDs that told seconds on the plastic wall clock had become meaningless pulsing grids, and Molly and the Mao-faced boy grew hazy, their arms blurring occasionally in insect-quick ghosts of gesture. And then it all faded to cool gray static and an endless tone poem in an artificial language. (13)

The acceleration of time and space, the transparency of the digital environment, and the physical dis-embodiment which erase difference between *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* are typical of Gibson's cyber-vision and Virtual Reality. The integration of language and technology as artifice or *techne* with the *physis* or natural biology of the human mind and body, give rise to a unique fictional structure and an alter/native conceptual pattern. *Neuromancer* won the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Philip K. Dick Award in the United States, as well as Australia's Ditmar Prize. It contributed to the concept of "cyber-space" and helped define an emerging literary style recognized as "cyberpunk." Along with his later novels *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), Gibson and other writers of speculative cyber-fiction helped to contribute to a broad range of electronically inspired narrative forms. Some critics such as Arthur and MariLouise Kroker (*Hacking the Future*) have already announced the demise of Cyber-punk with the making of the film *Johnny Mnemonic*, which they argue abandons the libertarian anti-nomology of cyber-culture and instead offers a "hyper-rational (hyper-marketplace) technology" (50-51).

Of course Gibson was not the first to explore spatio-temporal distortions in post-World War II North American fiction. William Burroughs's highly disjunctive narrative patterns, inspired by Canadian author, Brion Gysin's cut-up method, investigate the *technos* of writing itself. Relying on ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, disruptions of the narrative flux, and a conception of language that integrates biology and technology, Burroughs forwards an apocalyptic vision that through its textual fragmentation argues satirically for alternate behavioural models, including gay rights, heightened spiritual awareness, and the recognition of all historical writing as a form of artifice or "virtual reality." While books such as *Junky* and *Naked Lunch* broke the ground for Burroughs's unique stylistics, one can find in the novel *The Western Lands* a significant reference to both social order and literary stylistics:

These magical visions are totally devoid of ordinary human emotion and experience. There is no friendship, love, hostility, fear or hate. There are no rules, no series of steps by which one can be in a position to see. Consequently such visions are the enemy of any dogmatic system. (241)

Burroughs's attack against the dogmatic applies equally to hegemonic forms of society and literature. It is typical of these innovative fictions to conjoin social and literary criticism. Burroughs's texts anticipated many of the post-modern stylistics that followed from authors such as John Barth, Raymond Federman, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, Kathy Acker and others.

Like Burroughs, Leonard Cohen establishes a link between textuality and sexuality. The structure of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966), emulates the heightened "information-overload" typical of commercial mass-media barrage. Cohen's *jouissant* and highly disjunctive form incorporates, newspaper, radio, television, cinema and other patterns of mass communication to portray the psychic dysfunctionality of the novel's narrator/protagonist "I." Cohen's fragmented narrative makes the world of the sexually-obsessed "I" as transparent and public as commercial advertising. There is a resulting convolution of "inner" and "outer" spatio-temporal experiences. *Beautiful Losers* celebrates social alter/natives of liberated sex, drugs, revolution, and the virtues of the Mohawk Saint Catherine Tekakwitha. Not surprisingly, this book became a cult-classic during the 1960-70s. The disrupted flux of the narrator's stream-of-consciousness monologue, satirically reduces all experience to the ceremonial patterns of mass-media advertising and thereby erases boundaries between the narrator-protagonist's inner and outer world. This erasure through the disjunctive patterns of *techne* allows the protagonist to escape from the emotive and biological restraints of *physis*, or mind/body. In true electro-mass-media form, the protagonist finally dissolves ego and identity by disintegrating and entering a movie, and thus abandons selfhood for the anonymity of a secular but universal "sainthood."

Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut jr. is a worthy example of speculative or science fiction which features a high degree of narrative disjunction and successfully evokes an unconventional awareness of time/space as an associative and singular moment. Using a cinematic structure, this novel serves as social satire, and the awareness of time and space expands until the protagonist's awareness of all of existence becomes a universal moment which includes his own birth and death. Vonnegut also portrays this spatio-temporal awareness through multi-layered and fragmented plot-lines, and a more aggressive rupture of the *technos* of language in later texts such as *Breakfast of Champions*.

Similarly, Margaret Laurence's perception of time as universal moment flowing simultaneously forward and backward in *The Diviners* posits an alternate world view. Laurence portrays mnemonic function through what she terms "memorybank movies." This interpretation of memory through the medium of cinema permits Laurence lateral freedom to explore the associative and disjunctive workings of the human mind from a detached technical viewpoint. Like the other authors discussed here, she combines *techne* (in this case the form of cinema and fiction) with *physis* (the flux and ebb of unfixed human memory as subject). Laurence's ruptured narrative form features mystical acts of divination, intertext, intra-text, deconstructions of archetypal texts, meta-fictional forms, extensive lists or patterns of seriation, all channelled through a heteroglossic and polyphonic mix of inner voice, outer dialogue, dream, fantasy, and representations of actuality. The fluctuating manipulations of time/space in novels such as *The Diviners* employ a narrative method that is given a flexible montage form through the "memorybank movies" which deconstruct mnemonic experience and re-combine bits of present, past and future events within a larger process of ruptured conceptual flux. The epistemological position in this and other novels by Laurence, remains as a challenge to conventional literary form.

The novels of Don DeLillo (*Libra*, *White Noise*, *Underworld*), explore the hyper-reality of mass-media culture as a simulation of actuality. In keeping with notions of

“virtual reality” DeLillo’s focus on human inter-actions with mass tele-communications media, including radio, television, microwaves, ultrasonic devices, electronic banking systems, and so on, results in the transparency of being that I discussed earlier. DeLillo’s fictions emulate patterns of tele-matics and/or electronic communications systems and reveal multiple layers of human thought and experience simultaneously. DeLillo’s style parodies codified simulation or “virtual reality.” The following passage from *White Noise* about an electronic banking card illustrates the integration of codification and human behaviour and is reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard’s theory of *simulacra* (i.e.; electronic or “virtual” hyper-culture as a semiotic code featuring imitations of imitations of imitations, etc.):

PLEASE NOTE. In several days, your new automated banking card will arrive in the mail. If it is a red card with a silver stripe, your secret code will be the same as it is now. If it is a green card with a gray stripe, you must appear at your branch, with your card, to devise a new secret code. Codes based on birthdays are popular. WARNING. Do not write down your code. Do not carry your code on your person. REMEMBER. You cannot access your account unless your code is entered properly. Know your code. Reveal your code to no one. Only your code allows you to enter the system. (295)

This passage not only serves to satirize the electronically enhanced post-modern condition, but also addresses a form of meta-codification. The electronic code for automated banking, within the linguistic code of the text, challenges the absurdity of human behavioural codes. DeLillo investigates immersion within the mass-media information over-load which generates a form of turbulent “white noise” that contributes to a fragmented and undifferentiated consciousness. In DeLillo’s fiction, differentiation between *Innenwelt* (psyche) and *Umwelt* (environment) dissolves and individual identity melts into a collective hyper-consciousness not unlike that at the conclusion to Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*. In his essay “Baudrillard, DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative,” critic Leonard Wilcox offers a Baudrillardian interpretation of codification in DeLillo’s fiction in reference to what he calls a “technologico-semiotic regime.”

Michael Ondaatje blurs distinctions between literary form in a number of his narrative works including *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which combines photographic sensibilities with a narrative long-poem form; *Coming Through Slaughter*, which combines representations of jazz music within a disrupted narrative pattern; *Running in the Family*, which mixes fictional strategies for an autobiographical portrait; and *The English Patient* which employs both cinematic and disjunctive narrative patterns. Like Laurence who relies on the device of “memory-bank movies” Ondaatje makes use of photographic and cinematic patterns in his fictions. Ondaatje’s texts are arguably influenced by the cinematic stylistics of Louis Malle’s accelerated motion (in *Coming Through Slaughter*), Sergio Leone’s “spaghetti westerns” (in *Billy the Kid*), and Alfred Hitchcock’s camera work with its close proximity and sudden zoom-shots (in *Running in the Family*). *The English Patient*, which won the Booker Prize, turns to a more conservative vision, and offers an integrated sweeping sense of time/space that inter-mixes textures of word-scape, land-scape and mind-scape. This fictional form is less innovative and lies closer to the post-colonial romantic vision of

film-makers like David Lean (see: *Dr. Zhivago*, or, *Lawrence of Arabia*), although there is still an admixture of the violent technology of war with the sexual biology of the primary characters thus maintaining the link between *techne* and *physis*. However, any challenge to *nomos* is more under-stated than in his earlier works. It is this apparent pro-*nomological* posture that sets Ondaatje apart from the other authors discussed here who portray violence but oppose it. Close readings of Ondaatje's novels will reveal an implied critique of brutality, but this never seems to outweigh his romanticization of violence and his fixation on a Thanatonic patriarchal order.

BAROQUE AT DAWN

The techno-violence of authors such as Gibson and Ondaatje is abandoned by Nicole Brossard. In Brossard's remarkable novel *Baroque at Dawn* violence gives way to erotic sensuality. In her response to technology she puts aside older forms such as cinema and replaces them with high-tech informatics and telematics systems such as holography and virtual reality as informed by chaos and fractal theory. Brossard never forgets the role of language itself as *techne*. She is less concerned with mimetic representation than with examining models of mimesis, and more concerned with the diegetic flux of mind rather than plot. Of special interest to those studying narrative form is Brossard's post-Einsteinian and self-reflexive portrayal of space/time or what she calls "double-time." To emphasize this sense of double-time, Brossard introduces many selves and alter-egos who serve to underscore the artificiality of the textual construct. Gesturing to the different levels of narration, Brossard fragments and integrates versions of the self, author, narrator, and protagonist into ever-expanding fractal-like patterns which represent a chaotic *flux* that is beyond the conventional and nomological. Her fractal patterning integrates the *techne* of electronic telematics and the natural chaos of *physis* including passion and sexuality. True to fractal and chaos theory, the text embodies the principles of this patterning from the smallest linguistic level, to intermediary discursive patterns, to the largest narrative and structural features of the book. Brossard's anti-nomological posture discards patriarchal heterosexual social rituals (e.g.; marriage), in favour of a universal and sybaritic lesbian feminism that intersects physical, mental and psychic dimensions. Brossard's anti-novel does not adopt the conventional product or end-oriented quest pattern of "master" narratives of western literature. Instead, it embraces a process-oriented pattern in which the experience of the journey itself is given privilege. Hence, the text depicts the alter/natives of a feminist utopia to be found in a dimension that co-exists with, but also transcends any patriarchal order. In her essay "The Textured Angle of Desire," Brossard discusses the influence that electronically enhanced expression and holographic imagery has had on her writing as a feminist:

I have always been interested in everything that has to do with the eye and the gaze. When I first saw a hologram, in New York in 1979, I was absolutely fascinated by it. I started to read about holography and was totally taken by some of the vocabulary relating to it: real image, virtual image, reflection, wave length, holographic brain. Also by the fact that all the information about the image is contained in every fragment of the holographic plate. I related that information to the fact that sentences might also contain the whole of what is at

stake in a novel. For me, the hologram became the perfect metaphor to project the intuitive synthesis that I had in mind of a woman who could be real, virtual and symbolic. By symbolic I mean she who, by being other than the mother symbol, could alter the course of meaning, value and patterns of relationship. The hologram is tied to the idea that somehow we women have to invent our own idea of woman in order to enjoy being a woman and to proceed as a creative subject in language. (117)

Since her discovery of holography, Brossard has continued to investigate various electronic media, including computers, fractal programs, virtual reality and so on in order to develop what she calls the “intuitive synthesis” of “real, virtual, and symbolic” in her writing. Brossard’s writing has affinities with the *simulacra* theory of Jean Baudrillard. More importantly, her writing is influenced by the theory of Maurice Blanchot. Critic Lynne Huffer discusses Brossard’s concept of fiction in her essay “From Lesbos to Montréal: Nicole Brossard’s Urban Fictions” and discusses Brossard’s concept of literature as a subjectless space of dissolution. This definition of literature concurs with Blanchot’s *The Gaze of Orpheus*, where he posits a *metonymic* understanding of literature as a spatial realm where language negates or displaces the world in order to preserve it. Blanchot’s theory of literature is in keeping with contemporary views of “virtual reality.” Brossard’s proclivity for electronic media (holograms, etc), and her application of the metonymic function of literature, become synthesized in her “virtual” fictions. Brossard has developed an approach to language that permits this synthesis. The linguistic dimension in Brossard’s fictions serves as a kind of “skin” or point of first contact. This linguistic “skin” is influenced by structures of electronic media, and is subjectively/virtually inspired by often unpredictable emotive and cerebral responses from within. The resulting texts combine the aspects of *techne* and *physis* to create an anti-nomological fiction.

LANGUAGE/FRACTALS

Brossard is acutely and self-consciously aware of the patterns of her text. Throughout her fiction, there are references to notable authors and theorists such as, Roland Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges, Lewis Carroll, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, James Joyce, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Benoit Mandelbrot, Gertrude Stein, Ludwig Wittgenstein, to name only a few. Born in Montréal, Brossard is a well-known author, film-maker, translator, literary critic, and editor. In the mid-sixties, she was the founding editor of highly influential literary journal *La Barre du Jour*. Her awards include the Governor General’s Award (1974, and 1984), the Toronto Harbourfront Festival Prize (1991), and the Athanase-David Prize of the Government of Québec in recognition of her literary achievements. Most of her texts blend writing with literary theory. Given this background, it is not surprising to see that she uses language as a form of subversion while indulging in a variety of linguistic plays such as syntactical shifts, plays on meaning, deliberate grammatical infelicities, elisions, gaps and ruptures.

Appropriately, the title of this anti-novel is a pun. The word “Baroque” can be read/heard as also implying “Broke” a condition of loss and a gesture to the death of Occident des Rives, one of the principle characters in the book. The dawn following

her death brings no revelation, but extends the Baroque meta-fictive inter-play of text within text. To understand Brossard's polysemic and subversive fiction with reference to the integration of language as *techne* and body as *physis*, it is worth beginning with the tongue. In Brossard's fictions the tongue is a primary source of pleasure both in the literary and physical realms. The conjunction of these two realms through the lexeme "linguistics" brings us to an inter-face of tongue-ing and coming in contact with surfaces of skin or paper. The admixture of sense, and sensuality, text and sex, reading and touching, results in an experience of the act of writing as a textual/sexual pleasure that is in keeping with Roland Barthes' discussions of the *jouissance*. *Baroque at Dawn* begins with a graphic scene of oral sex:

In Room 43 at the Hotel Rafale, in the heart of a North American city armed to the teeth, in the heart of a civilization of gangs, artists, dreams and computers, in darkness so complete it swallowed all countries, Cybil Noland lay between the legs of a woman she had met just a few hours before. For a time which seemed a coon's age and very nocturnal, the woman had repeated, "Devastate me, eat me up." Cybil Noland had plied her tongue with redoubled ardour and finally heard, "Day, vastate me, heat me up." The woman's thigh's trembled slightly and then her body orbited the planet as if the pleasure in her had transformed to a stupendous aerial life reflex. (5)

Brossard's opening scene features the rhythms of the circadian cycle, and the fluctuating frequencies of love-making set against the unpredictable turbulence and sudden violence of the big city. The plays in meaning, ("Day, vastate me, heat me up") and the plays of the tongue, conjoin to engage the reader in a text that aims to spin off into a fractal vortex of "aerial life reflex." This erotic linguistic play of this aleatory utopian and sexual alter/native world is juxtaposed with a patriarchal order of potential violence featuring gangs roaming a city "armed to the teeth." The collocation of teeth and tongues establishes one of the fundamental conceptual patterns in Brossard's text. If one recalls McLuhan's principle of understanding technology as an extension of the human body, then in bio-technological terms of "bites," "bits," and "bytes," the extensions of the teeth can contribute to communications but are potentially violent, whereas technological extensions of the tongue relate to communications, as well as to consumption, and sensuality ("eat me"). Where the patriarchal order of violence threatens with an apocalyptic devastation of life, here, the utopic feminine idea of devastation involves an erasure of self-awareness, and self-consciousness, as well as a release into the fluctuating rhythms of a vortex of sensual delight characterised throughout this work by images of liquid. The *flux* of this pulsing liquid world is contrasted with the mechanized manifestations of *Thanatos* (staccato of machine guns, sudden explosions of nuclear weapons, etc.), generally associated with the masculine world through mineral imagery. Brossard's play with phonemes, morphemes, syntax and other elements of language, serves to deconstruct and re-define the technical power of language, thereby appropriating it into a feminine dimension of *Eros*.

Brossard's attention to the linguistic caress of both physical and textual bodies is evident throughout this anti-novel. The narrator/protagonist, who also happens to be an author, describes the body of "La Sixtine," the youthful lov/her, as a semantic

collage, a mysterious hieroglyphic language to be deciphered at her leisure: "In the mirror, La Sixtine's eyes change to oblong shapes: the Udjo eye persisting in Cybil's eyes. A majestic parade of other hieroglyphs: a bird, foot, scarab, mouth, hare, like a semantic blend, an admirable and sensually genial proportioning between animal and human that occidental writing would never achieve" (34). The acknowledgement that western modes of writing cannot represent the subtleties of the young woman named "La Sixtine" also render her as a "text" that can never be fully deciphered. The narrator moves self-consciously from acts reading/writing to acts of gazing, but explains that neither literary nor visual space is fully readable. Nonetheless, the infinitely regressing images of eyes gazing and observing other eyes in the mirror offer tantalizing hints of meaning, and are pursued shortly after with a comment on polysemic interpretation. In the act of trying to read La Sixtine's surface the narrator discovers a transparency between her own "inner" and "outer" worlds. She notes that differences between self and environment become invisible. This invisibility leads her to epistemological questions concerning the nature of the Other:

Taken in the heat of the present day, the question stands. If life has no direction because day and night are circular, in what direction does its meaning point? Is meaning only in the question as a desire to decode lives that advance the story of the world by ramifying acts and intentions? Was meaning totally hidden in the means of survival, the tools and strategies devised for facing up? A dream-face versus the sur-face of daily life. (34-35).

Cybil, the narrator/protagonist finds herself torn between a reading of broader visual signifiers and specifically linguistic ones, but they both lead back to herself. She realizes that meaning becomes indeterminable because she is projecting her emotions onto the "sur-face" she intends to "read." La Sixtine's face is a "sur-face" not only because it is masked behind cosmetics, but because Cybil reads the "face" in a narcissistic way. Cybil's "reading" of La Sixtine arises at least partly from within herself. Hence the "sur-face" of La Sixtine's face, includes a face, laid over a face, laid over a face, etc. Through the act of gazing, Cybil discovers that there are meanings within meanings.

The notion of the "gaze" which is discussed meaningfully by Jacques Lacan in his *Écrits*, establishes a psychic division within the subject (observer), because even though the gaze may be returned by an other, there is no co-incidence of the two. This lack of co-incidence occurs because the other can not gaze at you from the same place where you see the other. A split between eye and gaze results, and in Brossard this contributes to the multi-layered "sur-face" of the Other. In Brossard's text, these surfaces split and spin-off in fractalized patterns. This fractal patterning also leads to questions of feminine identity. Lacan has explained that in some situations, the division of eye and gaze, or, the division within the subject which results from the act of being gazed upon, can lead to a potentially antinomic relationship. Brossard discusses this relationship in her essay "The Textured Angle of Desire:"

Man's gaze—the father's gaze—certainly legitimates a woman writer; it might even inspire her to excellence, as long as the writing stays within the bounda-

ries of patriarchal meaning. It can even allow her to challenge literary tradition, or to write pornographic texts; she can try, if she so choose, to compete with Henry Miller or the Marquis de Sade. But in regard to disobedience to phallogentrism, Man's gaze has proven to censure and silence women. It promises to retaliate.

I believe that a woman's gaze is the only one that can legitimate and challenge a woman writer to go beyond the description of her social experience. The gaze of the other woman is vital because it induces recognition, complicity and possibly desire. The gaze between women breaks the line, the fluidity of a system where men and women are trained to direct their eyes on the capital M of man because we are taught to believe that M is humanity. (119)

The experience of gazing in the mirror as discussed above, escapes the confines of capital "M" masculinity and permits a "fluid" and perhaps unpredictable recognition of "complicity and possibly desire."

However, it is important to remember that in the mirror episode, the eye imagery is visual, and a second regressing pattern of auditory meaning happens in Brossard's fiction through meaning within meanings within language. Thus, a *double*-fractal pattern emerges which features both visual and auditory signifying regressions. At the beginning of this paper, I discussed differences between reception of visual information and auditory information. At this stage in the book, the narrator has discovered that decodification becomes problematic when one cannot resolve differences between visual and auditory communications. Such communications are made more complex when the visual contradicts the auditory, leaving Cybil asking "will the visuals or the words win out?" Cybil's reading of La Sixtine's "sur-face" becomes an exercise in dialogism, and following her application of cosmetics, the "sur-face" of La Sixtine comes into contrast with "dream-face" (the face with which Cybil narcissistically identifies). The instability of meaning, and the ultimate irresolvability of meaning in Brossard's text, renders figures such as La Sixtine as multi-stable in significance. This multi-stability and multi-layering of meaning has much in common with Fractal patterns and Chaos Theory. H. M. Rosenberg, Reader in Physics at the Clarendon Laboratory (Oxford University), provides a succinct and lucid definition for "Fractals":

In physics, mathematics and in nature there are shapes and structures which although they appear to be irregular and random, nevertheless have a special pattern of regularity in their "randomness." This regularity, called *self-similarity*, derives from the fact that at whatever magnification these systems are viewed they still look much the same. An example, given by the inventor of the term fractal —Benoit Mandelbrot— is the shape of a coastline of a country with its inlets, bays, peninsulas, etc. This [coastline] looks much the same from a high flying aircraft, from the top of a cliff, or close to the sea shore and, unless there was a person or a building in the picture to give some idea of size, it would not be possible to deduce the scale. (329-330)

The principle of "self-similarity" is one of the fundamental functions in Brossard's fiction. As I mentioned earlier, whether considering her writing on the smallest level

in regard to linguistic devices (e.g.; plays on meaning), or on the intermediary or episodic level (e.g.; sliding significance of certain situations), or on the largest structural level (e.g.; “open” and anti-telotic structure of the narrative as a whole), the fundamental patterns or *leit-motifs* of epistemological questioning, polyvalence in meaning, feminist discourse, self-reflexivity, spatio-temporal layering, and sensual flux, recur randomly throughout the text. This random recursion typical of fractal patterns can be found in the dimension of *physis* or nature and can sometimes be seen in vegetation (rhizomatic patterns of plants), geology (irregular coastlines), liquid (random wave-patterns), acoustics (sound of explosion or waterfall), music (no two renditions of a piece of music are ever quite the same), and so on. Because the structures of fractals are irregular and unpredictable they can also be discussed through chaos theory. H.M. Rosenberg provides a helpful definition:

In physics and mathematics there are phenomena and expressions for which it is not possible to predict how the situation or the calculation is going to develop when the starting conditions only change very slightly. A simple example is the uncertainty in the result of spinning a coin. A more complex problem is the development of turbulence in a fast flowing fluid in which the behaviour depends very critically on the shape of the channel or on how the flow was initiated. In mathematics there are expressions which when evaluated give results which vary in an unpredictable way when the value of one of the initial quantities is changed even by a very small amount. These are all examples of chaotic behaviour. Chaotic processes can be simulated by electronic circuits and these are being used to investigate the behaviour of these complex situations which can be quite unwieldy and time-consuming if they are evaluated with a computer. (118-19)

Brossard has emulated chaos in her narratives much in the same way that some physicists have tried to do so with mathematics and electronic circuitry. That is, she has emulated the “turbulence in a fast flowing fluid in which the behaviour depends very critically on the shape of the channel or on how the flow was initiated.” For Brossard, this “fast flowing fluid” is the narrative of the text, and the “channel” in which the “flow was initiated” is herself.

Brossard’s use of multi-stable signification is in keeping with Chaos theory which, as Peitgen, Jürgens and Saube explained above, breaks down predictability or fixed meaning. In *Baroque at Dawn*, Brossard collates the notion of unfixed meaning and language with liquid images of turbulence and flooding. In the section titled “The Dark Future” several men and women have a discussion about Noah’s Ark and the idea of a global flood:

“You know,” said the doctor, “today the flood would be inconceivable. We have enough scholars, engineers and computers to pull us through the flood.” “Yes, but chaos is still with us,” Cybil put in with the verve of a she-wolf. The doctor muttered some misanthropic observations and then fell silent, thinking that this woman who claimed to write novels belonged to another age. Which one?

Irène's knee touched Cybil's leg and Cybil, driven suddenly by an unfamiliar mechanism, felt a pressing urge to declare, "*Nobody knows what lies in the human body.*"

"*Only the lonely,*" Lemieux replied with a smile.

Then bedlam set in, language behaving like a certified crackpot starved for dreams surrounded by these fictional characters, it gulped down everything, all stories great and small, rapidly and with relish. Insatiable, it lifted the film of solitude that gives protection from others and siphoned out everything unwritable, unsharable. We would have to learn to handle the abstract, anxious side of language to enable reality to pass through the thread of time through the eye of the needle, to become currents of thought. Language was spinning uncontrolled like a hurricane, a waterspout. Language was drinking a flood of its own making. We would have to give language a lot of love to have it exhilarate us without drowning us in the chaotic spate of words our bodies keep telling us they want more of. (135-36)

The conjunction of body, chaos, liquid flux, and language-personified in this section serves to underline the indeterminacy of meaning. The fact that some things are beyond knowledge and therefore beyond language means that some things are beyond order or reason and cannot become thought, cannot be passed through the "eye of the needle" of communication, cannot become embroidered on the mind as "knowledge" in spite of patriarchal desires to "control" the natural with "scholars, engineers and computers." *Physis* is anti-nomological, and just as nature resists control by *Techne* or technology, so the women in this passage resist the impositions of the masculine order. The notion of language as an unfixable liquid vortex pulsing in shifting frequencies is ideal for emulating both Fractal and Chaos theory with its erratic and ultimately unpredictable patterns.

Brossard has generated what Umberto Eco has called an "open" text, a text in which form is flexible, and meaning is provisional. Furthermore, in Brossard's writing, the polyvalence of signifiers, whether they are linguistic, human, visual, auditory, or some combination of these, serves to de-stabilize the meaning of the text, and thereby de-authorize the supremacy of narrator/author. This de-authorization suits Brossard's strategy because any subversion of author-ity also liberates the narrative possibilities. The fractalized rolling of meaning into meaning that typifies Brossard's chaotic linguistic play is also evident in her narrative patterns.

NARRATIVE/CHAOS

The second last section of *Baroque at Dawn*, features Cybil (the narrator/author), and Irène (a photographer), lured on an ocean-voyage aboard the ship "Symbol" by Occident an older woman who is trying to help her youthful friends re-vitalize their creative energies. Occident's ruse works, but the journey ends with her death. The final section features a self-reflexive commentary about the creation of the book itself along with plans for a future text. Brossard's meta-fictional narrative pattern is as complex as it is unique. She privileges the diegetic (process of thought) over the

mimetic (imitation of action). The book's intersecting narrative layers are rather complex and require some clarification. *Baroque at Dawn* features three Brossards: 1) Brossard an Anglophone novelist and a character in the book; 2) Brossard as a Francophone writer/critic and a character in the book; 3) Brossard the actual author of *Baroque at Dawn*. Added to these three layers of narrative discourse we have two layers to Cybil Noland, a) an aspiring novelist who portrays other characters like "La Sixtine" and "Occident" in her novel-in-progress, and, b) "Cybil" a character in the novel by Cybil Noland. Cybil is portrayed both in the first and third person and serves the dual functions of narrator and author. Shifts in narrative point of view can be abrupt and frequent. At one point, Cybil and La Sixtine are revelling at bar:

Sitting at the back of the room, Cybil is tasting veritable torments of pleasure. There is nothing dreamlike about her well-being. All of it is present, real, and very physical. Inordinately present. Who put this power of happiness in me? Who has made me this happy in a world of horror? The word horror diverts Cybil's attention briefly but the present returns the stronger for it, brings her back to the raw pleasure of sounds and heat of the bar. It's because I'm happy that I refused to give La Sixtine a story. Happiness abstracts me from the world, makes the world abstract for me. (37)

The intersecting spatio-temporal references of the "inner" world of Cybil's mind and the portrayal of Cybil's "outer" world or exterior can be read in a variety of ways. First, Cybil can be thought of as self-consciously portraying herself in her novel-in-progress. Or, the portrayal of Cybil from the exterior view could be written by the character Brossard who is also a novelist whom Cybil often meets at bars and cafés. Certainly, both "inner" and "outer" portrayals of Cybil are by the actual author Brossard. I mentioned earlier, that works of fiction that emulate the spatio-temporal parameters of electronic time/space tend to erase differences between *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*. This transparency of worlds results in an instantaneous communication that reveals several perspectives and layers of Cybil's thought simultaneously. If one were to adopt and modify Gérard Genette's Narratological model (from *Narrative Discourse*), then it could be said that this book includes direct and indirect references to the real author, an implied author, and several "virtual" authors. Further, one could identify an extra-diegetic narrative, a diegetic narrative (portraying flux of mind), and meta-diegetic narrative levels (portraying thoughts within thoughts). Adding to the complexity of any reading is the fact that the book was originally written in French but translated into English (by Patricia Claxton). Furthermore, Brossard has created an un-named character in the novel whom she has identified as the "translator." In the final section, "One Single Body for Comparison," the book directly and self-reflexively addresses act of its own translation (220, 221, 223, 226, 230, etc). Furthermore, the Francophone and Anglophone "Brossards" in the narrative add to the discussion of translation as yet another re-writing of a text, the construction of yet another version or "virtual reality." Thus, two more "authors" or "anti-authors" in the form of Patricia Claxton are introduced, both in her form as the "actual" translator of the novel, and in her "virtual" form as a character in the book who is translating the novel. If one keeps in mind that the narrative of the novel as a whole offers version within versions, then

the translator adds to this pattern of alter/native versions thereby contributing to a recurring pattern which can be thought of “self-similarity” which is typical of Fractal structures. The unfixed perspective of the complex inter-layers of narrative form can also be explained through Chaos theory.

Baroque at Dawn is structured according to a unique spatio-temporal parameters that Brossard has dubbed “Double-Time,” which includes the narrator’s “fictional” perspective and the author’s perspective as she writes the fiction. Because of the way it splits and curves the narrative perspectives, this double-time lends a Baroque quality to the book. Furthermore, true to the title of this book, the depiction of time/space is typical of the Baroque, which is defined as having a dynamic, curvi-linear, extravagant, theatrical and contorted classical form. Interestingly, most of the terms that apply to the Baroque also apply to Fractal theory and Chaos theory.

Brossard has always been (self-)conscious about the Baroque “double-time” engagements between author, narrator, protagonist and so on. She speaks with Lynne Huffer about these engagements in “An Interview with Nicole Brossard Montreal, October 1993”:

I now feel that besides the creative tension of being *une fille en combat dans la cité*, there is also another tension... a double-time where the sensation of slowness of the act of writing and the sensation of speeding among images (virtual, fractal, or numeric) mix in such a way that the writer wonders with a sudden disquietude to what world she belongs; if she is drifting away from the shore or heading back toward the idea of a future, another shore. (121)

Brossard’s references to liquid images of journey, shores, and so on, are well-suited to her fractalized narrative patterns. Her reference to being *une fille en combat dans la cité* (or a young woman in combat in the city) is indicative of her detachment from the masculine order which may be predictable, but only in its oppressiveness. Her alter/native utopic world is that of a literature of process that engages in a kinetic liquid environment of language that is uncertain, fluctuating and unpredictable. Brossard’s engagement with this world is so complete, that she finds it difficult and perhaps pointless to divide the self (including the self-as-author) from the narrative. At the beginning of the above-mentioned interview with Huffer, Brossard says:

Very early on, I said that I saw myself as an explorer in language and that I was writing to comprehend the society in which I live and the civilization to which I belong. Actually, understanding what goes on means trying to process the double-time in which I feel I am living: on the one hand, a historical linear time-space with familiar patriarchal scenarios such as war, rape, and violence; on the other, a polysemic, polymorphic, polymoral time where the speed and volume of information erase depth of meaning, where science proposes itself as an alternative to nature, where reality and fiction manage exaequo to offer proof of our ordeals and of the most dreadful fantasies. (115)

For Brossard, literature remains an act of subversion, transgression and vision and allows her to assert her lesbian and feminist views against the patriarchal system

that has marginalized women in general. Two important aspects to Brossard's fiction are inter-related: 1) a lesbian feminism that is postured against patriarchal modes of marginalizing women, 2) a radical experimentation with literary form that violates conventions of the masculine text or the so-called "master" narratives. Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* is post-modern, disjunctive, polysemic, and features inter-actions of "inner" versus "outer" worlds, *techné* and *physis*, sexuality and technology, in order to form its pro-feminist anti-nomological statement.

VIRTUAL REALITY:/DOUBLE-TIME

I mentioned earlier that the spatio-temporal structuring of this book can be thought of in terms of what Brossard calls "double-time." It is through this notion of "double-time" that Brossard engages with narrative and language-as-technology thereby gaining freedom to explore textuality as *techné* or "virtual reality" through the depiction of "double-time," which emerges when the writer is involved with a double-telling (of self as character and self as author). In *Baroque at Dawn*, the doubleness of this telling leads to the text itself and to the self-reflexive commentary that is integrated with the text. Brossard captures an experiential phenomenon that should be familiar to most writers. That is, while one is researching a topic for a book or novel, one simultaneously feels immersed in more than one dimension or level of awareness including, 1) the "virtual reality" of the fiction itself, 2) the experience of the author who is self-conscious of creating the "virtual reality" of fiction. In *Baroque at Dawn* Brossard offers a self-reflexive parallel to the *techné* or artifice of writing, by depicting Cybil's experience with a computerized virtual reality program.

Near the end of the book, there is a section on where the various characters explore an undersea world by virtue of an electronic "visiohelmet" and data-glove or "*main symbolique*" (167). After experiencing an undersea voyage through the computerized virtual reality program, Cybil the author arrives at an understanding about the artificiality of all "tellings" or "double-tellings." She gains awareness about fictive or "virtual" dimensions:

Reality superimposed itself on reality. There was something heady indeed about the blue, something beguiling, begin to be crossed through. Corals sprang to view, like exploded rose petals to be touched gently. I learned to float with aplomb and with the current, and to resist it hand and foot in order to steer around large lustrous obstacles. Fascinated to have these arabesques assure my equilibrium in the lavish blue, I swam serenely toward the bottom, borne by a state of euphoria the like of which I had never felt before that day. Fluidity of gesture. (170)

A peculiar meta-fictionality emerges in the text at this stage. The mimetic description of the dimension of computerized "virtual reality" is also a depiction of the thoughts of the character Cybil as she encounters this experience. Hence, there is a mimetic representation of "virtual" undersea life, and a representation of the protago-

nist's diegetic process. The portrayal of the artificial world of "virtual reality" becomes an indirect and self-reflexive gesture to the artificiality of any fictional construct. Hence, the text becomes meta-fictive during Cybil's exploration of "virtual reality." More importantly, Cybil, as both protagonist and narrator comes to understand the parallels between "virtual reality" and fiction:

That evening, although I was tired, I fell upon my manuscript as if it held a solution capable of foiling the double time. As if entering fiction were the only way to return to reality. A strange thing happened: the sentences, instead of following sequentially and obediently one after the other, superimposed themselves one over the other, worrisome and transparent like a desire to surf on words, eliminating risk of harm by meaning. Obedience on the one hand, superficiality on the other. Meaning checkmated. The present was never-ending. (172)

Cybil's discovery serves to establish a distinction between implied reader (addressed by Cybil) and actual reader (addressed by Brossard). Further, this section of the text becomes hyper-meta-fiction as the self-reflexive layers become superimposed. As I explained earlier, an experience of being as "transparent" is common to electronic, digital or virtual environments, and this passage in *Baroque at Dawn*, is no exception. In this portion of the text, the sense of double-time affects both author/narrator and reader/implied reader. When the differences between *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* dissolve in this Looking Glass world of Virtual Reality (electronic and/or fictional), it causes Cybil to question her identity. Her experience of the various levels of being, including the dimension of dreams result in Cybil's self-conscious reference to Lewis Carroll and indicate her identification with the fictional "Alice" (179). As the title of the final section ("One Single Body for Comparison") suggests, all of these layers of experience constitute facets of one reality and neither supersedes the others. Here then, is the meaning "check-mated" that Cybil discovered in the previous passage. No meaning is privileged over an other, and all meanings are simultaneously possible. All meaning remains open and provisional because, like the multi-layered "sur-faces" of La Sixtine's face, the significance of any situation is dependent upon other layers of meaning in the text. And, because the layers are mutually interdependent, no final or single meaning can ever emerge. Closure or Telos is defeated through this narrative strategy. The nomological discourse typical of "master" narratives is thus displaced by a discursive feminine/feminist flux that offers an open rather than closed structure.

The indeterminacy of meaning on the largest structural, intermediary narrative, and smallest linguistic levels emulates the *techne* of fractal form by splintering meaning into endless polyvalent bits of information that function according to the previously discussed principle of "self-similarity." At the same time, the liquid-like diegetic vortex of this emotive textual flux embraces the *physis* of chaos. The combined *technic* and *physic* aspects of Brossard's post-modern feminist narrative offer a self-reflexive representation of the artist engaged with the creative process. This anti-Telotic process only ends by leading to a new point of departure, or as Brossard puts it: "Ramification without end, a new opening" (249).

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