Hilary White

THE VISUAL NOVEL

Christine Brooke-Rose, Ann Quin, Brigid Brophy

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And then there is the desire nay the absolute need to transgress all the
forms of the carefully built model.
– Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Self-Confrontation and the Writer'

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Introduction: Models of Indiscipline: The Necessity for Visuality / Narrative against Mastery

Thirdly, the framing of life, the need that a picture exist in its frame, remain in its frame was over. A picture remaining in its frame was a thing that always had existed and now pictures commenced to want to leave their frames and this also created the necessity for cubism.

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　– Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*

Forms forming themselves.

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In 1964, Susan Sontag called for 'more attention to form in art' in one of her most well-known essays, 'Against Interpretation' (12). In this essay, she proposes reasons for the prominence of (innovative) form in the early 1960s, how abstraction in the arts or movement towards non-art or anti-art could be ways of evading interpretation, which is an excavating and aggressive process. Her essay ends famously with a call for 'an erotics of art', in place of the previous 'hermeneutics' (14), an attention to perception that would counter the 'steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience' (13). To replace hermeneutics with erotics suggests greater attention for the processes of art and reading, a shift of emphasis away from ends or goals (or uncovering the deeper meaning beneath the surface of the work of art, or other such spatial metaphors). Throughout this book I will explore how making the novel more visual, an endeavour which intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, satisfies this need to move away from answers, endpoints and finality, to evade the linguistic impulse to explain. My focus is on formal, specifically visual, experimentation in novels from

the 1960s and 1970s, as exemplified in the work of Christine Brooke-Rose, Ann Quin and Brigid Brophy. Writers in this era explicitly stated their intentions to find new forms to better represent contemporary existence: as Samuel Beckett put it in 1961, to '[accommodate] the mess' (Driver 23).[1] Quin stated: 'Form interests me . . . I want to get away from the traditional form' (qtd in Gordon xii). Brooke-Rose, in the epigraph to this book, outlines the necessity of transgressing 'all the forms of the carefully built model' ('Self-Confrontation' 134). While Beckett's statement implies some mimetic intent – to accommodate the mess of reality – Quin's ambivalent want and Brooke-Rose's compulsive transgression reveal desire only for change: they outline what they are running away from, not where they are going.

Focusing on Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy allows me to make a case for the generally heightened visual experiment in this era, while simultaneously positioning women writers at the forefront of visual experimentation with the novel form. While not operating out of anything like a coherent group, all three were key members of the British avant garde, though not always receiving as much attention as their male contemporaries. Brooke-Rose was Swiss-born and tri-lingual, did linguistic decoding work at Bletchley Park during World War Two, studied English at Oxford University and was a prolific author, theorist and literary critic. She published four realist novels before her 'experimental phase' which spans the period of focus of this book, that is the 1960s and 1970s, and which followed a serious illness. Brooke-Rose moved to Paris in 1968, excited by the interdisciplinary intellectual atmosphere, to work at the experimental university, Paris VIII. Brophy studied classics, also at Oxford, though she was expelled after four terms for disciplinary issues. Outspokenly bisexual, Brophy was also an activist for author rights and animal rights. Her work is more generally realist in form than Brooke-Rose's and Quin's, though the wildly experimental *In Transit* and her life-long interest in the visual arts would make her a difficult omission from this book. Quin is of a slightly younger cohort to the other two, from a less institutional background, though she did secretarial

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[1] The full quote from Tom F. Driver's 1961 interview with Beckett is: 'to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now' (23). Considering Beckett as an apt reference for some of these authors' experiments, Brooke-Rose wrote self-reflexively about Beckett's mathematical style in 'Samuel Beckett and the Anti-Novel' (1958), while Quin shared a publisher (open to innovative work) in John Calder, and Brophy is sometimes placed in an Irish literary lineage (as in the Dalkey Archive edition of *In Transit*, published in 2002).

work at the Royal College of Art in London and shared an interest, certainly with Brophy, in the contemporary visual arts, as well as myriad other art forms. A working-class writer from Brighton, she published four extremely original novels in her short life, engaging with a huge range of European and US influences, artistic, filmic and literary alike.

Opening with questions of desire in both the epigraph by Stein and quotation by Sontag helps cut straight to my central concern: how these works of literature propose continuity between abstract and material forms, or, put more concretely, between literary form and social formations. While these forms do not necessarily map directly onto one another (although as we learn from Caroline Levine's 2015 study, *Forms*, they might intersect with or disturb one another), a desire for social and structural change can be played out at the level of form. Like the pictures of Stein's epigraphs that want to leave their frames, these writers, not normally grouped together except by periodisation or geographical location, seem to express dissatisfaction with both formal and social (usually gendered) constraints, and these dual constraints become inextricable in their work. The formal experiments studied in this book break with imposed frameworks – of literary realism, of the literary discipline itself via visual techniques, as well as of gender or at least gendered authorship, that is, the conventional expectation of what women will, can or should produce – becoming themselves difficult to frame or categorise by conventional means. That they do this formally is itself important: as Lisa Robertson writes, '[s]tyle is desire' (*Anemones* 52), which I take to mean that formal and stylistic choices carry in them desires to do things differently (if they do not desire to maintain the status quo), even if that is to see an imperfect world in sharp, minutely attentive focus. This is not to suggest the desires of these books are consistent or even very clear, though they do consistently feel constrained, seem to want to break free of what it is that constrains.[2] The desire itself can of course be contradictory: these novels, on my reading, advertise their dual desire for freedom and constraint, for a structure which supports but does not confine, simultaneously desiring the possibility and lamenting the impossibility of change. There is a knowing sense of cruel optimism (to use Lauren Berlant's phrase)

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[2] For a historical study of constraint in poetic form, including the consideration of whiteness and lyric constraint, see Andrea Brady's *Poetry and Bondage: A History and Theory of Lyric Constraint* (Cambridge UP, 2021).

in the works, an inbuilt supposition of the futility of their desires for change, though this perhaps suggests too coherent an outlook across works – the close readings which follow in the chapters will highlight their ambivalence and complexity. And of course, as Berlant writes, '[i]n ambivalence, we want and we don't want what we want' (*Inconvenience* 36).

Situating these works in relation to developments in the visual arts, in Europe and North America as well as in the UK, I focus on close reading the novels in order to tease out the effects and implications of their visual experimentation. My book is more concerned with thematic or stylistic resonances between works rather than with direct links based on geographical location; it is more of a conceptual than a historicist study, and therefore its references are not limited geographically or informed by patterns of influence. This allows me to add something new to the conversation already underway amongst scholars in the field: most relevant to the current study are Natalie Ferris's *Abstraction in Post-War British Literature, 1945–1980* and Adam Guy's *The nouveau roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism*, both of which historicise post-war experimentation, exploring influences on British literature from visual fields (art and film) and European sources. The work of situating these authors in a social milieu has also been done elsewhere, notably in Joseph Darlington's recent book, *The Experimentalists*, which traces the chronology and connections of 1960s–70s experimental writing in Britain, and the various overlaps between the writers on which I focus.[3] I concentrate on the novels with something of Sontag's unwavering 'stare', as opposed to the less intense 'look', which is to say my readings are very close, attentive to minute aspects of the texts – sparse, difficult work, as Sontag writes, of course invites the stare ('Aesthetics' 15–16), for better or for worse. I think, in the chapters that follow, about how Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy all turned, for various reasons, to visual experimentation, because it allowed them to do or say things that language on its own would not.

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[3] For instance, Darlington considers Brooke-Rose's relationship to Quin, whose *Berg* Brooke-Rose reviewed somewhat unfavourably (in *The Spectator*, 12 June 1964). Darlington notes the difficulty Brooke-Rose must have faced having come through the establishment 1950s, starting to write experimentally before it was in vogue and subsequently finding herself on the outside of the 'trendy' Calder circle, of which Quin was part (*Experimentalists* 101). From my own experience of reading through Brooke-Rose's archive in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, I found that Brophy and Brooke-Rose were friends, exchanging letters in the early 1990s (often about the tennis).

This book is organised according to forms which recur in the works: the frame, the circuit, flesh or anti-form, and the chiasmus. Most explicitly in Brooke-Rose's work, but notably also in the work of Quin and Brophy, these forms are structural principles shaping the books – that is, they occur at the level of the 'whole' narrative as at the level of syntax. I will give thought to how these novels emerged in the era of structuralism and poststructuralism, whether consciously in conversation with these ideas or not (again, this applies most overtly to Brooke-Rose's work) but I also think about more contemporary (to us) ideas about form and structure, and the ways these works might participate in those conversations today. Berlant's work on the provisionality of structure (and on infrastructure) in *On the Inconvenience of Other People* will be especially pertinent. There they describe infrastructure as 'the lifeworld of structure', stressing that to focus on the relations that make up infrastructure is not to disregard the materialism associated with structure, but shifts attention onto 'the living mediation of what provides the consistency of life in the ordinary' (20). A focus on the actual workings of the structural thus makes structures themselves seem less immovable. Caroline Levine expands the concept of form to 'mean all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference' (3), so that '[f]ormalist analysis turns out to be as valuable for understanding sociopolitical institutions as it is to reading literature' (2), thus merging 'insights into social and aesthetic forms to produce a new formalist method' (3). Where others see a total disconnect, in that literary form does not directly affect the social world (as will be discussed regarding the critical field of experimental women's writing later), Levine offers a route by which we might consider their continuity – as forms of different kinds meet, 'each striving to impose their own order' (16), potentially disturbing or interfering with one another. Erin Manning's work on the minor is useful here too. She conceptualises the major as 'a structural tendency that organizes itself according to predetermined definitions of value', and the minor as 'a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards' (1). She thus outlines the potential for the minor to unsettle or disturb the major, offering more ways of thinking about structures as unfinished, not definitive. Putting these theorists in conversation with this work from the 1960s–70s opens up the contemporary conversations to alternative lineages, with the potential of reinvigorating recent discussions of form and structure, as well as the category of visuality in literature. These literary works, all in their own ways, think about processes of

formation, of being in relation. Berlant's way of addressing this most recently has been to conceptualise infrastructure: 'Infrastructures do not honor such distinctions between the productive and the reproductive because they follow the elastic logic of cluster, of assemblage. Rules are stretchy and norms are porous' (23). If it can be said that these novels want anything in particular, I think it is for rules to be stretchier, norms to be more porous. When they're not, the novels might appear constrained, tired, ambivalent, but they're never finished, fixed, closed off to change – and this is part of what makes them so relevant to current discussions of form and structure.

Contexts: Visual-Literary Crossovers; Liberation-Constraint; Conceptualism in Art and Literature

The ambivalent position I have thus far been outlining for these novels, between possibilities and impossibilities for change, is at home among recent readings of the sixties. Here I follow Jenny Diski in conceiving of 'the Sixties' as an 'idea', and in thinking of the sixties as ending in about the mid-1970s (Diski 3): 'the latter third of the twentieth century we know as the Sixties was one of those particular periods that was an idea to many before it became the past' (Diski 1). Diski's memoir-account captures the youthful disaffection and individualism of sixties Britain, the anti-establishment sentiment pervading cultural as well as political spheres, as well as retroactively diagnosing a 'failure of thought' which did not see where the growing libertarianism of the decade would lead (8), in a time she characterises otherwise as 'full of promise' (29). On attempting to live in new ways, she notes that she and her contemporaries 'acted in the shadows of the Beats and the Existentialists', and despite multiple forms of radicalism seemingly available to sixties youth:

> We recreated the old divisions in what only seemed to be new forms. It was just a matter of time (and our later readings of Foucault) before it turned out (to our unacknowledged relief, perhaps?) that the overarching structures had been built to survive our (or any) assault on them, and the world remained unrocked (6–7)

It is this retroactive portrayal of the sixties as simultaneously radical and conservative that I wish to evoke for my readings of the novels which follow in the chapters, readings which attend to how the

novels convey 'the over-arching structures' Diski writes about, and the ways the novels 'assault' them. Patricia Waugh's *Harvest of the Sixties* also captures 'the pervasive economic and political pessimism of the period' (7) and alongside Diski's account provides a detailed counter to more wholly optimistic evocations of the sexually and socially liberated 'swinging sixties' which are the lasting if shallow after-image of the decade. Waugh further evokes the national uncertainty of the period, the 'confusion' about British 'imperial identity' in this era of 'accelerating' decolonisation following the fall of empire (*Harvest* 3). While Brooke-Rose's *Out* most obviously engages the postcolonial context, the broader implications of national, political and social uncertainties are felt throughout the works. This uncertainty pervades the artistic realm too, as I begin to elucidate in Chapter 1, with the loss of faith in the frame, in the capacity not only to represent accurately but to see clearly.

Waugh also conveys the transformational aspects of the sixties 'in attitudes to authority, sexuality, censorship, and civil liberties':

> Relative affluence; a new consumerism feeding off technological innovation; the rise of youth subcultures around varieties of popular music, philosophy, and fashion; the massive expansion of education; increased arts funding; television; and a marked development of the genre of political satire, all helped finally to bring to an end the more deferential and consensual culture which had been gradually eroded since the early fifties. (*Harvest* 5)

Transformations to social attitudes in the sixties, including the politicisation of categories like gender roles increasingly within the mainstream (Diski 3), provide a backdrop for the will to experiment artistically, which seems entangled with the decade's openness, socially, to change and the new. However, Waugh's evocation of the 'perspectival disconnections' describing different experiences of different social groups, for example, those of feminists (*Harvest* 13), is especially relevant to my readings. These texts are fixated on perspectival disconnections, especially Brooke-Rose's *Out* which describes something like a relativity of seeing, Quin's *Berg* which portrays a warped individual perspective and Brophy's *In Transit* which fantasises about dualistic vision which can conceive of two ideas (see two things with equal clarity) at once. Links between seeing and understanding recur, and it is my contention that mostly in these books, there is not so much a desire to see clearly as a desire to recognise that clear sight is impossible, and to revel in the process of

imperfect seeing, of partial vision, to delight in mystery, unknowing and the impossibility of mastery.[4]

With the work in this book, I highlight an alignment between what Lucy Lippard identifies as the 'dematerialisation' of the art object in the visual arts, specifically through conceptual practices, and the loosening definition of what constitutes a text in the literary arts, focusing on experimental fiction writing. Experimental writing too becomes more conceptual in these decades, albeit with – as I argue – consistent attention to its own materiality. In the visual arts, the auratic art object is being replaced with art based on ideas, concepts or processes, shifting the emphasis away from the skill and craft of the individual creator, away from traditional materials and institutional importance. Lippard's definition of conceptual art is 'work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or "dematerialized"' (*Six Years* vii). In becoming less material and more ideas-based, conceptual art's move away from the art 'object' (towards work which is often more process-based) takes place in the same context as the delimiting of the text in the field of semiotics: which is to say, the term 'text' is no longer restricted to the printed page, but the concept opens up to include almost anything – so that the image can be a text, or approached, 'read', like a text, as can artworks, or the body, or popular culture, and so on. Roland Barthes captures the contradictory nature of enquiries into the image in 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964): 'from both sides the image is felt to be weak in respect to meaning: there are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness' (*Image* 152). Debates like this go some way towards explaining the focus on formal innovation and the breaking of formal conventions in artworks and literature of the period: the way that meaning is conveyed through various media is being overtly called into question.

At the same time as these debates were underway, the artistic scene in London was also 'a tightly-woven nexus of art, music, poetry, theatre, fashion and film – with no real distinction between these

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[4] See Julia Jordan's *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (Oxford UP, 2020) for an account of the period's literary experimentation in relation to chance and the aleatory, and in terms of wider modernist propensities for not-knowing and uncertainty. See also Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke UP, 2018), which interrogates the concept of mastery in multiple intellectual and political contexts, finding it inextricably bound to legacies of power imbalance and violence.

disciplines as ideas, styles and personnel criss-crossed in-between' ('New Situation').[5] Disciplinary boundaries were broadly and noticeably being broken, across the art forms. In both the visual art and linguistic contexts, a softening of medial boundaries happens, so that the transition – of the 'idea', or information, as it is variously rendered – between them is made smoother. If we can read an image in the same way we read language, the likeness and commonality of the forms emerge: their continuity, rather than difference. For Lippard and her contemporaries, this dematerialisation of the artwork held democratising potential, would in theory render the work 'unpretentious' and accessible to everyone. In practice it was rather the opposite, as conceptual art housed or produced in institutional spaces is not necessarily any more accessible than more traditional art forms. The two issues of the *Times Literary Supplement* on the avant garde published in 1964 bear out this perception of the new forms of innovation underway in literature at the time, and several of the authors are notably sceptical about experiments in the visual arts, not wanting to be 'duped' in the way art audiences had supposedly been: 'We certainly do not want to become as gullible by writing as we currently are by the visual arts' ('Island View' 695).

This book begins with work published in 1964 (although one earlier text is covered in Chapter 3, Brophy's *Flesh* from 1962) – which is a significant year in the development of verbal-visual interest across literature, art and theory. Aside from the publication of Quin's *Berg* and Brooke-Rose's *Out*, and the two aforementioned *TLS* issues on the avant garde (more on those below), 1964 was a year in which the image was being much discussed in theory (Barthes's 'Rhetoric of the Image' dates from 1964); significant innovations were also being made in film, with the French New Wave having emerged in the 1950s, and Jean-Luc Godard's iconic *Bande à Part* released in 1964.[6] Dom Sylvester Houédard's 'chronology of concrete poetry'

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5   Where no page numbers are given in parenthetical in-text citations, this is because the source is unpaginated (including online sources and e-publications). I use the convention 'n.p.' when there is no alternative information required in parentheses.

6   Quin's work in particular has a lot of stylistic overlap with the New Wave, especially Godard's films and Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), scripted by Robbe-Grillet, a mysterious and deliberately ambiguous narrative which is visually striking and highly stylised. Godard's *Bande à Part* features a triangular relationship between three societal outsiders, multiple generic influences in its tribute to the 1940s pulp crime movies of Hollywood and its thriller/noir aspects – all typical of Quin's narrative style as well. Robbe-Grillet's filmic experiments, much like his novels, have visible overlaps with Brooke-Rose's work, largely through the repetition of specific images to convey (suggestively, rather than concretely) a narrative – the repeated image of the woman reclining in *L'Immortelle* (1963), for instance.

came soon after, claiming that 'all writing originates in painting (writing is painting words)' (143), as a response to the 1965 concrete and visual poetry exhibition, *Between Poetry and Painting*, at the ICA in London.[7] This somewhat eclectic list is intended to convey the simultaneous explosion of visual theory and avant-garde art, as well as the plentiful (overt and acknowledged) overlaps in literary and visual experimental work underway at this time.

Shortly afterwards, in 1966, the major conference usually cited as the inaugural event of poststructuralism and deconstruction, The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, took place at Johns Hopkins University (USA), notable here for its interdisciplinarity, having approached the issue of structuralism from a number of different disciplines.[8] In the following year, 1967, the visual arts group Art & Language was formed, with the group Fluxus having been formed in the late 1950s.[9] The list goes on, with several visual arts exhibitions interrogating the verbal-visual divide being held in the late 1960s and 1970s, including *Language to be Looked at and/ or Things to be Read* (1967); *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (1969); *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969); *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* (1970); *Information* (1970).[10] At the same time

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[7] An exhibition of work which 'crosses the frontier between two quite clearly defined fields of creative activity – poetry and painting. [. . .] [Visual poetry] serves to examine what happens to language through a certain type of visual presentation, and what becomes of an abstract image simultaneously endowed with a literary meaning', as Jasia Reichardt writes in the Exhibition Catalogue (9). This exhibition is considerably attuned to artistic and disciplinary crossings, one of the bases of Chapter 4 in this book.

[8] Structuralism itself emerged as inherently interdisciplinary, as John Sturrock tells us: 'Structuralism was well calculated when it arose to assist in the erosion of obsolescent boundaries between adjacent yet seemingly independent academic disciplines' (24). The conference brought together work by critical, cultural and literary theorists including Barthes, Todorov, Lacan and Derrida.

[9] Fluxus was a group of interdisciplinary artists active in the 1960s and 1970s (although with its roots in the 1950s) which engaged in process-based practices and experimental performances. Art & Language emerged as a formal group of conceptual artists in the late 1960s, dedicated to an intellectual and ideas-based art. Like Fluxus, their work was interested in process: 'In the representative activity of Art & Language [. . .] primary attention should be accorded to the discursive processes of production. It was assumed that these were the "work" on view' (C. Harrison, *Essays* 51–2).

[10] *Language to be Looked at . . .* (Dwan Gallery) was an exhibition of Robert Smithson's drawings, influenced by concrete poetry, which took its title from Smithson's press release for a show on language in 1967. *Anti-Illusion . . .* (Whitney Museum) featured conceptual and process-based work more focused on its own conception and construction than on the finished objects. *When Attitudes Became Form* (Bern, Switzerland) brought together an eclectic range of work incorporating conceptual practices and the burgeoning field of soft sculpture (a focus in Chapter 3 here), featuring artists such as Eva Hesse

as the commonality between experiment in the visual and literary arts was being widely recognised, the literary fiction of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy was becoming more visual (and there are other examples of a 'visual turn' in literary fiction from this period).[11]

Visuality

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) opens with the statement: 'Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak' (7). Visual perception comes chronologically before speech, as language is a system which must be learned. One does not need to learn to look, but there are inescapable ways in which the visual field is also shaped by education and by power, as Berger's series interrogated, ways which might appear more natural simply because of the pre-linguistic status of vision. The works studied here interrogate vision in a similar vein. This book identifies intersections between the visual arts, visual theory and philosophy, and the experimental fiction of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy in the 1960s and 1970s. It does so through close readings of the visual aspects of their novels, from the thematisation of vision and visuality in the early works to more typographically innovative techniques in the later years. The incorporation of visual themes, concerns and materials into their literary works invites consideration of the era's wider artistic interdisciplinarity and the ways form comes to the forefront in experimental work of the period; Sontag's quotation with which I opened this Introduction offers one explanation for this phenomenon. I am less interested in explaining the heightened visuality of the

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and Bruce Nauman. *Conceptual Art. . .* (New York) featured work by those who could now be conceived of as the canon of conceptual artists, including Adrian Piper, Christine Kozlov, Jan Dibbets and On Kawara. Finally, *Information* (MoMA, NY) included work by many of the aforementioned conceptual artists as well as the Art & Language group.

[11] Examples include Anna Kavan who was a painter as well as a writer – her fragmentary novel *Sleep Has His House* (1948) forms a precursor for this era's interest in visuality, including cinematic panning techniques and a surveilling microscope; Eva Figes whose later novel *Light* (1983) features a day in Monet's Giverny; J. G. Ballard's work which synthesises elements of Pop and Abstract Expressionism – Natalie Ferris writes about Ballard and visuality in *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the Sixties*, edited by Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams; B. S. Johnson's texts are highly experimental with typography and materiality, especially *Alberto Angelo* (1964) and his 'book in a box', *The Unfortunates* (1969). The first book in a box was Marc Sapporta's *Composition No. 1* from 1963, also extremely inventive with design and typography.

period than I am in observing it, and the ways in which the visual novel breaks with notions of disciplinarity, specialism, even the concept of discipline itself. I use the term 'indisciplined' to describe the particular brand of experimentation underway, which might seem especially suited to the 'idea' of the sixties (borrowing again from Diski) as youthful and iconoclastic, though I am using it more to highlight the ways these works are both inside and outside their discipline at the same time: how they are breaking disciplinary rules at a time when everyone was breaking disciplinary rules (certainly those outside the literary establishment in any case).

Nonetheless, these writers are outliers as much for their uniqueness as for their marginalisation (less so now, as the academic and literary worlds catch up). The term 'indisciplined' encompasses a dual refusal: firstly, to remain within the boundary lines of the linguistic and literary disciplines, specifically through the incorporation of visual material into their works; secondly, to perform the gendered roles expected of them, of 'feminine' passivity and conformity. This gendered restriction (and their refusal of it) applies both aesthetically in their work and more generally to their statuses as writers, where the label 'woman writer' is perceived to be a confining one. Some of the aesthetic strategies these writers share with artists of the period are tendencies towards impersonality and abstraction, and away from ideas of mastery: authorial, narrative or linguistic mastery in literature; formal mastery of, say, sculpture or painting in the visual arts. The concept of anti-mastery encompasses a disavowal on the part of the authors, unwillingness to conform to traditional forms and expectations, or to 'control' language or material – a preference for the 'minor', perhaps, and certainly an acknowledgement that language is not an adequate, transparent or unproblematic means of describing the world. Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy take these questions – of adequacy and transparency – into the realm of the visual, too.

In a departure from previous critical work on these authors, I focus on visuality in their oeuvres, offering a sustained exploration of formal as well as thematic manifestations of this interest in the visual and situating them in the context of aesthetic developments in the visual and conceptual arts. Furthermore, I tie together concerns with form and visuality, and gender and embodiment, to think about the ways their work challenges divisions between the abstract or structural and the material: sometimes these novels perform formal and aesthetic rebellions at the same time as depicting feminised subjects experiencing material restrictions. Aspects of materiality and

embodiment are connected in the work of these authors because, for them, vision is always an embodied sense, and perspective is determined by subject position – by who is allowed to look at whom, and in what ways. As the works become more overtly visual – playing with typographical layout and page space – they also become more concerned with the body and its materiality, a dual trajectory I will investigate in the chapters which follow. Bodies, as well as forms, are subject to discipline and are difficult to contain; several of these works concern themselves with the regulatory attempts of the disciplinary gaze, attempts to make bodies and subjects visibly conform.

I read these writers partially as a case study of the generally increasing interdisciplinarity across art forms in these decades, as the visual and verbal arts become more intertwined.[12] Following the trajectory of increasing visuality in their work allows this book to take a basically chronological format, ending with a consideration of each author's retreat from such visually experimental techniques, attending throughout to the novels' conceptual conflictedness between a need for rule-bound structures and a need to break from them. The study of visuality in these novels is revealing for several reasons: depictions of sight, seeing and vision are tied up with power structures, conveying something of the power disparity between subjects looking and being looked at (in the analyses that follow, the power disparity is usually gendered); the choice to represent visually over linguistically suggests problems with the linguistic, ways in which it might be inadequate as a system of representation; experiments with form and visuality convey attitudes about discipline and structure, the relation of subjects to systems, often carrying a desire for the loosening of restrictions – and the attitudes conveyed in form and in content do not always agree with each other. Sometimes the form 'fights' the content, or the authoritative (often authorial, especially in the case of Brooke-Rose) interpretation, which can produce a generative tension. Visuality provides a challenge to the supposedly inherent impulses towards mastery and possession embedded in the linguistic

[12] See Natalie Ferris's *Abstraction in Post-War British Literature, 1945–1980*, whose Introduction outlines a history of verbal-visual experimentation in post-war Britain, based on a modernist lineage and influx of foreign influences on British art in terms of abstraction (5). Ferris has also outlined a lineage of abstraction in British experimental writing which includes the influence of abstraction in the visual arts, the cross-influence of visual and linguistic/literary art and a brief history of hybrid form that allows me to zone in on the visual-material and gendered aspects of these textual experiments quite sharply, while being in conversation with her research on how abstract/non-verbal works communicate.

system, as vision is a method of perceiving the world which is more geared towards observation than definition. The refusal of mastery in these texts is partially an acceptance that mastery is unavailable; it is a false category, an imagined position of omnipotence which simply does not exist. It is also a gendered refusal, for good or for bad – often applied derogatorily in hindsight, by reviewers or critics, who deem these authors to be minor, or as having failed to achieve what they supposedly intended to achieve in their work; or sometimes more ambivalently by the authors themselves, as in Brooke-Rose's advice to women authors to 'slip through all the labels' ('Illiterations' 67) – to stop participating in a structure which is exclusionary, to exist outside of it.

The connotations of rule-breaking, as well as interdisciplinarity, associated with the term 'indiscipline', imply (over and above the connotations of 'experiment') a specific refusal to remain within pre-determined categories, with the possibility of those categories being either aesthetic or societal. Brooke-Rose's multilingual anti-novels splice together contemporary critical theory (especially narratological theory, debates on the Author and Derridean deconstruction), scientific language and concrete prose to make unfamiliar – and defamiliarising – sorts of narrative, which call into question how meaning is discursively made. Quin's highly innovative work integrates influences spanning Pop Art, beat poetry, detective fiction, film noir, classical myth and anti-psychiatry quite seamlessly within narratives, blurring the boundaries between categories of all kinds. Brophy, activist and classicist alike,[13] wrote several books of nonfiction on literature, the visual arts and classical music, alongside her fiction which is often structured according to musical or architectural principles, subtly perverting literary forms from the inside. The work published in these decades is strikingly original and surprisingly under-studied, although there does appear to be an increasing critical interest – and, indeed, a growing popular interest – in these three writers.[14] They

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[13] Brophy campaigned for animal rights and was instrumental in securing the UK Public Lending Right (1979) for authors. While women's rights are often included in this list, Brophy's relationship towards any kind of formalised feminism was contentious, as Carole Sweeney details in her book chapter, 'The Dissenting Feminist'.

[14] There are several recent books and journal issues on these authors: Victoria Walker's *Anna Kavan: Mid-Century Experimental Fiction* (Edinburgh UP, 2023); Nonia Williams's *The Precarious Writing of Ann Quin* (Edinburgh UP, 2023); Natalie Ferris's *Abstraction in Post-War British Fiction, 1945–1980* (Oxford UP, 2022), including work on Brooke-Rose; a special issue of *Women: a cultural review* on Ann Quin, edited by Nonia Williams (2022); Joseph Darlington's *The Experimentalists: The Life*

appear with increasing regularity in critical work focusing on the 1960s and 1970s, although no sustained comparative study of them, or of their contributions to interdisciplinary developments in the experimental novel in these decades, has yet been attempted.

My focus on the increasing use of visual devices in the work of these authors throughout the 1960s and 1970s takes in their use of visual techniques borrowed from concrete poetry (such as iconic arrangements of prose), the incorporation of illustrations, unusual typographic layouts and any way in which they convey their meaning visually. While most critical work on these authors mentions the visual devices only briefly, if at all, a few critics have paid more attention to the visual aspects of the work.[15] As before, Ferris's work on Brooke-Rose's visuality within her wider study of post-war visual-verbal experimentation provides a historicist complementary to

and Times of the British Experimental Writers of the 1960s, which includes all three authors (Bloomsbury, 2021); Hannah Van Hove and Andrew Radford's edited collection, *British Experimental Women's Fiction, 1945–1975: Slipping through the Labels* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Julia Jordan's *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (Oxford UP, 2020), including work on Brooke-Rose and Quin; Carole Sweeney's *Vagabond Fictions: Gender and Experiment in British Women's Writing, 1945–1970* (Edinburgh UP, 2020), with chapters on Brooke-Rose, Brophy and Quin; Richard Canning and Gerri Kimber's edited collection, *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist* (Edinburgh UP, 2020), and a special issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing* on Brigid Brophy (2018); Adam Guy's *The nouveau roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism* (Oxford UP, 2019), including work on Brooke-Rose; Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams's edited collection, *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the 1960s* (Edinburgh UP, 2019), which has chapters on all three authors; a special issue of *Textual Practice* on Brooke-Rose edited by Natalie Ferris (2018); Jennifer Hodgson's edited collection of Quin's short stories, *The Unmapped Country: Stories & Fragments*, with And Other Stories (2018), as well as reprints of Quin's novels with the same publisher; and a special issue of *Women: a cultural review* on Anna Kavan, edited by Victoria Walker (2017). One third of *Music & Literature* no. 7 was devoted to Quin in 2016. Brooke-Rose has been coming back into critical interest for perhaps slightly longer: a symposium on her work was held at the RCA in 2013; Ferris and Stephanie Jones set up the Brooke-Rose Society at Oxford University in 2015; several monographs on Brooke-Rose have been published now, mostly in the 1990s, but more recently Karen Lawrence's *Techniques for Living* (2010). A critical celebration of Brooke-Rose's work, *Verbivoracious Festschrift Volume One*, edited by G. N. Forester and M. J. Nicholls, was published by Verbivoracious Press (named after a Brooke-Rose pun) in 2014.

[15] Brophy's engagement with the arts has been addressed by a few, but usually in article-length works. Annegret Maack and Sonya Andermahr offer illuminating introductions to Brophy's incorporation of the visual (in 'Concordia Discors: Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*', 1995, and 'Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art and Language in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*', 2018, respectively); I will engage with both further in Chapter 4.

the current study; in contrast to earlier work on the subject, Ferris aims to 'redirect attention from the typographical impact of Brooke-Rose's texts, [. . .] towards an understanding of their relationship to visuality on broader terms' ('Preferred it abstract' 227). Alice Butler has written illuminatingly on visuality in the work of Quin, considering her a writer of 'artist's novels' and exploring her correspondences with the visual arts in 'Ann Quin's Night-Time Ink: A Postscript' (2013). Glyn White explores typographical experimentation in Brooke-Rose's *Thru* in *Reading the Graphic Surface* (2005), arguing 'that there is a point [in Brooke-Rose's career] at which [her] conceptual play becomes graphic' (124–5). Considering these three authors in tandem with a focus on the visual aspects of their work, the present book offers a more conceptual angle on experimentation with the visual. Foregrounding the relationship between visuality and gender in considering indisciplined strategies in the work of these authors results furthermore in a complexification of the category of the 'visual' in its application to literature.

Anti-Disciplinarity / Interdisciplinarity / Indiscipline

The category of the visual is generative for thinking about the ways in which language is deemed inadequate in the work of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy, and implies a measure of self-critique – that is, a means of addressing the incapacity of language to represent, to encompass, and offering a route, at least aesthetically, past that. Sontag, in the 1967 essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', poses that:

> Most valuable art in our time has been experienced by audiences as a move into silence (or unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility); a dismantling of the artist's competence, his responsible sense of vocation—and therefore as an aggression against them. (7)

In fact, she states: 'The art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence' (12), so much that silence and emptiness are 'new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc' (13). As art moves toward anti-art in her earlier essay with which this Introduction opened, the move towards unintelligibility is widespread ('noisy') across the arts, a reaction against presuppositions of mastery ('competence'). Moreover, formal innovations towards the unintelligible necessitate new ways of perceiving or understanding the work. During this era, poststructuralist notions of a universe constructed through discourse challenge

the capacity of language to represent reality, as Brooke-Rose notes in denying the implication that 'the real exists independently of our systems or ways of looking at it' ('Illiterations' 64). Noteworthy is Brooke-Rose's visual way of putting the point that the world itself is shaped by our looking (as well as our language). Brooke-Rose's suspicion about the workings and capacities of language is typical of post-structuralist thinking and seems to be part of the impetus behind her propensity for wordplay – shared by Brophy, whose *In Transit* begins with a disintegration of language, or 'linguistic leprosy' (11). These texts recognise the supposed, or proposed, 'impotence' of language in their favouring of visuality, and the silence that attends it: a more questioning approach which favours observation over definition.

The poet Rosmarie Waldrop put forward one such theory of the impotence of language, in her 1971 critical work *Against Language? 'Dissatisfaction with Language' as Theme and as Impulse Towards Experiments in Twentieth Century Poetry*, which lists 'methods of borrowing' as one of poets' options of dissent, including borrowing from art and music, as well as mathematics. Waldrop identifies a heightened interest in the 'limits of language' as reason for visual, musical and mathematical experiment:

> If we look far enough, language is accused of being inadequate in relation to almost anything: to thought, emotion, intuition, reality, life, art, the numinous, etc. The preoccupation with the limits of language has certainly grown to unprecedented proportions in this century. (10)

More recently, in a 2015 study of visual experimentation in contemporary fiction, Simon Barton writes:

> It is the fundamental inadequacy of linguistic representation that often results in these experiments and disruptions to the graphic surface of the page. The image often represents more directly and more effectively than the word. When the words on the page also present an image, both forms of representation are improved. (175)

Both Waldrop and Barton pinpoint a descriptive or representational inadequacy in language as causation for these types of visual experiment, with Barton insisting that when image and language are combined, both modes are improved – as if each contains the potential to compensate for the other's failings. The implicit suggestion in both accounts (although Waldrop's is less solution-oriented than Barton's) is that visuality can somehow correct the faults in the linguistic

system, allowing for a more successful 'capturing' of experience. This stance, while useful, does not account for the sometimes purposefully disorienting effects of communicating in two modes at once, because sometimes the aim – particularly of the novels I will analyse – is not clear and masterful communication at all.

As such, Carole Sweeney writes in a recent article on Brooke-Rose's *Between* and Brophy's *In Transit* that '[i]n similar ways, each (anti) novel enacts what Brooke-Rose described as "groping inside language and forms" to find, not mastery, but a thoughtful exuberance and a will to variability' ('Groping' 302). This 'thoughtful exuberance' Sweeney identifies implies a sort of restrained energy, which seems to describe the trajectories both epistemological and plotted alike in these novels – in their preference for exploration over result. I argue that it is specifically through the use of visuality that this 'thoughtfulness' emerges, through a focus on observation rather than explanation within the narratives. In the second Introduction epigraph, the phrase '[f]orms forming themselves' refers (obliquely) in Quin's *Passages* to the physical forms of objects in space (27). Yet there is a sense in which it applies to these narratives which are often 'narratorless' – in some ways guided by a central consciousness or (decentred) consciousnesses, but lacking coherence or self-identification, offering no commentary on the material as it appears in the consciousnesses. In a contemporary article on Quin, John Hall states: 'She doesn't select a form, or even a content for a book; if the emotion is there, the energy takes over, and the form and content follow' (8). Without the kind of narratorial mastery that would shape these impressions into a plotted story, the material in a sense shapes itself, assumes a shape supposedly more random than determined, or is shaped by the productive disturbance arising out of unlikely juxtapositions of ideas and disciplines. Brooke-Rose even says that 'the idea is formed out of the writing, the text *is* (generates) the idea, perfect or imperfect' (*Stories* 13–14). The equation of 'is' and 'generates' makes it clear that the text cannot but be generative; Brooke-Rose claims to allow the idea to emerge from the material, rather than forcing it to fit a preconceived shape.

Visual culture theorist W. J. T. Mitchell describes 'forms of "indiscipline"' as 'turbulence or incoherence at the inner and outer boundaries of disciplines', 'moment[s] of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and the practice comes into question' ('Interdisciplinarity' 541). Mitchell's depiction suggests there is always turbulence or incoherence at the edges of disciplines, that in effect they are never exactly stable – and furthermore, that this instability is fruitful. Thomas Kuhn's

book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, published in 1962, made the case for routine cycles or periods of 'normal' science, occasionally interrupted by revolutionary periods, or paradigm shifts. This might also describe a period like the 1960s–70s in art, a time when a general impulse towards breaking with 'model problems and solutions' can be perceived (Kuhn viii). The necessity for visuality in this era combines the necessity for revolution (Brooke-Rose's impulse to 'transgress') and the necessity for not mastering / not speaking (Sontag's account of the move towards anti-art). The kind of disciplinary self-critique implied in Mitchell's words, 'the practice [coming] into question', can be seen in movements or phenomena like the 'anti-novel' (which Brooke-Rose writes about in 1958, in 'Samuel Beckett and the Anti-Novel'), the techniques of which are direct questionings of or challenges to the conventions of the novel: stable and developing character, coherent place and time and structure, linear plot progression and so on. Experimental work often contains some measure of self-critique, or implicit critique of the traditional forms; Sontag's account of the move towards silence or unintelligibility captures the trajectory of 1960s–70s art toward anti-art. Using the work of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy, my book identifies a similar impetus towards inter- or anti-disciplinary experiment – that is, experimentation not wanting to be bound by specific disciplines but to be open to others. Alice Butler describes 'marginal literatures' like Quin's as 'forms discharged from discipline' ('Night-Time Ink' 42), noting how '[w]riters and artists have always trespassed each other's boundaries [. . .] [b]ut history-makers prefer taxonomies' (44–5), suggesting that disciplinary bounds can be made, or imposed, retrospectively, and that writers – if willing to accept a marginal status, perhaps – need not be confined by the rigours of discipline.

The novels discussed here break disciplinary bounds, as it were, in becoming visual: in incorporating the techniques of another art form into their own. Sometimes they also rebel against societal norms – especially those of binary gender, especially constructions of femininity – suggesting dissatisfaction with the strictures of both the aesthetic and the social. While their societal rebellions are not consistent, unambiguous or even always very progressive, it does seem that these three authors consistently use experimental forms to express or explore something that is limiting in their contemporary society: Brooke-Rose's *Between* perceives femininity as a category which is constructed, ungrounded, floating somewhere between the theoretical and the material; Quin's *Passages* can be read as an interrogation of binary constructions (most ostensibly of gender) which conveys something of the complex relationship between the abstract and the

material; likewise Brophy's *In Transit* is simultaneously liberatory in its politics and constrained in its adherence to the formulations of binary thinking. These novels think about structures, and sometimes think about breaking out of structures, and almost always depict characters acting in complex and contradictory ways – when their motivations can be discerned or presumed at all, that is. The aptness of the term indiscipline stems from its connotations in both the artistic and social realms: the breaking of normative formal literary rules, as well as the exploration of breaking structural rules in a social context.

In the age of structuralism and poststructuralism, these writers demonstrate the contemporary interest in construction and constructions, and they equally share a taste for the blurring of categorical boundaries, for a sort of generic or formal 'undoing'. Brooke-Rose refers specifically to the disintegration of structures in discussing the writing of *Thru*:

> I play with the notion of holding on to a structure until you fall through empty space. The structure is like a diagram or a structuralist scheme. Life of course is much more complex than that. [Deleuze] says you can't just deal in structures. But of course we are all the time having little structures in our life, every time we deal with a situation we are restructuring it already. We are structuring the chaos of the real and everything that happens, and we couldn't live if we didn't do this, and then the structure goes and it's like falling through the emptiness and you have to build a new one. So I try to deal with this lack and this emptiness, but it's very difficult to write about, to write about nothing. (Garbero and Brooke-Rose 161)

Brooke-Rose thus refuses to let go completely of 'structure', claiming in fact that it is impossible to do so and directly referencing the space between the abstract or theoretical and the material – the difference between a diagrammatic rendering or structuralist scheme and the real, or life which is 'much more complex'. In the way she maps structural thinking onto life in this interview, where the structure is a sort of model or diagram placed over reality in order to make sense of it, to '[structure] the chaos', so these novels can be perceived as models which chart the possibilities of rule-breaking (or stretching) in both formal and social terms (to varying degrees of 'success'). Brooke-Rose's attribution of difficulty to writing 'about nothing' or about the 'empty space' between structures comes back to the idea of inadequacy, to the disciplinary or formal revelation of inadequacy which prompts renewal. Brooke-Rose's difficulty stems from trying to find

a form to fit the 'emptiness', the unformed and unformulated space she conceives of as being between structures. Her sense of the 'nothing' between structures is like Mitchell's moment of indiscipline, or 'moment before the routine or ritual is reasserted' ('Interdisciplinarity' 541). For both, this space between (structures or disciplines) is an area of interest, somewhat unknown and indescribable, somewhere exciting or productive, which is potentially fruitful or generative in its own right – and, importantly, fleeting.[16]

Brooke-Rose thus characterises structure in a more everyday sense (whereas the structure she says we cannot 'deal in' might be the major or more hegemonic sense), though her interest seems primarily in the spaces between: in what happens between the collapse of one structure and the building of another, and its effect on the individual in freefall. This brings us back to Berlant, who writes about the 'experimental let-downs' of the 1960s: for all its openness (she is writing specifically about sex in this context), these were the 'self-evident disasters that destroyed normative forms without offering stabilizing scaffolds for occupying the openness and the loss of confidence that inevitably come during a transition' (*Inconvenience* 59). I am interested here in Berlant's approach to the 'failure' of 1960s experimentalism and optimism in a social sense, and the ways this relates to what we might think of as structure – forms of ordering life, in Brooke-Rose's terms (which sound a bit like Levine's terms now too) – or sometimes lack of structure. Berlant's earlier *Cruel Optimism* was also addressing the 'threatening dissolution of life-confirming norms' (9), what keeps us tied to forms which are ultimately harmful or obstructive. All three writers studied here are attuned to the precarity between structures, their books optimistic on some fronts and pessimistic on others, though as I see it they are attuned to the potential in the unformed and unfinished.[17]

These kinds of in-betweens proliferate throughout the novels. The protagonist of Brophy's *In Transit*, in the times they deem their

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[16] In the introduction to *The Structuralist Controversy* (a collection of essays from the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man conference), titled 'The Space Between – 1971', Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato write that, in the current theoretical climate's absence of identity and origin ('the lost presence of a center [for] the reader'), '[w]e are left with the necessity of articulating what Said has called "the vacant spaces between things, words, ideas"' (xiii). This statement also shows a striking shift from the linear teleology of origins (and ends, or meanings) to the more lateral spatiality of 'spaces between things'.

[17] See Karen Lawrence's *Techniques for Living* (2010) for a critical approach to Brooke-Rose's work which addresses precarity and loss.

gender to be indeterminable, frantically searches for confirmation from interlocutors; the narrative voice, however, seems to delight in the indeterminacy, taking pleasure in the game of perpetually deferring definition. Likewise in Brooke-Rose's *Between*, that which lays between definable terms is a space of possibility; the 'uncertain loyalties' of the protagonist grant her a certain mobility within a system which expects her to 'commit yourself to a single idea' (445, 457). Brooke-Rose's *Thru* deals with the empty space between constructions; *Between* and *In Transit* situate their narratives in airports and on aeroplanes, sites of indeterminacy and multiplicity (which are effectively in between countries and languages); Quin's *Passages* fragments conventional narrative structure, dissolves distinctions between literary, artistic and musical form, as well as between the identities of its main characters and the geographical locations of its narrative. Indiscipline provides a fruitful way of thinking about what these novels are doing with their diverse ranges of material, in its concerns with boundaries and turbulence, with the inchoate edges of disciplines where they threaten to unravel or become something else. As will be seen from Brooke-Rose's *Thru*, this type of novel does not completely break with convention – even the most basic convention of reading from left to right – but disrupts it, adding acrostics, images, anything which causes us to read in a different direction. A text about the 'fictionality of fiction', in Brooke-Rose's words (*Invisible* 17), *Thru* blurs the boundaries between theory and fiction, as it situates itself formally at the borders of the verbal and the visual. It is perhaps this liminal positioning which contributes to Brooke-Rose's and the others' critical neglect. As Brooke-Rose says, '[t]he best way, in my view, for any writer – but especially for a woman writer – is to slip through all the labels, including that of "woman writer." The price, however, is to belong nowhere' ('Illiterations' 67). In reimagining this 'nowhere' as the generative interplay at the edges of different disciplines, I suggest that these writers are not easily categorised specifically because they occupy so many different positions at once.

Brooke-Rose places discipline in a relationship with mastery (if not completely aligning the two): 'But mastery, though it cannot master the mystery, is indispensable to it, like Plato's ladder or any other discipline, and discipline means discipleship' ('Self-Confrontation' 133). Mastery is impossible, but 'indispensable' seemingly to the existence of 'mystery', with the relationship predicated on a circular logic; discipline too helps to preserve mystery, because it cannot master it, and in Brooke-Rose's formulation discipline means to follow. For Michel Foucault, discipline is as much a method or framework as an act in itself: 'a procedure [. . .] aimed at knowing, mastering and using.

Discipline', he writes, 'organizes an analytical space' (*Discipline* 143). Regardless of the type of discipline under discussion – whether punitive or educational – the aim encompassed is the same and involves knowing or seeing the totality of the structure: 'The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly' (173). The definition of the disciplinary in terms of the gaze highlights the entwinement of visuality and discipline, for the greatest example of effective discipline is to see everything at once. Bodies too are subjected to disciplinary procedures – made docile, in Foucault's terms. In these texts, questions of embodiment arise directly as a result of their interest in the visual – because this incorporates connotations of being looked at, of being hyper-visible – and their challenging of disciplinary restrictions, in terms of both gender and aesthetics. Still following Foucault, '[d]iscipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony' (*Discipline* 141). I will think about enclosure in more detail in Chapter 1, with the motif of the separating frame, but these other terms – 'specification', 'heterogenous', 'closed' – encompass the idea of an unchanging discipline, protected in its enduring sameness, even protected because of its unchanging-ness. It follows that the protection is needed in order to prevent the kind of outside influence that might provoke a change to the 'disciplinary monotony'. Discipline, then, has a normative function: 'The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes' (Foucault, *Discipline* 183). Discipline seeks to normalise; it does not matter whether it is an artistic/literary discipline aimed at reproducing its own procedures, or disciplinary social gazes seeking to suppress forms of difference. Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy are important to study within the context of indiscipline, interdisciplinarity and a general resistance to 'disciplinary monotony' because of the formal rebellions they consistently perform in their 1960s and 1970s work, which in many ways seem like rebellion against the very ideas of normativity and normalisation (rather than specific rebellions against identified loci of power).

Levine's *Forms* (2015) addresses the contemporary interest in the formless, arguing that while such work fixating on 'indeterminate spaces and identities' is politically and critically important, 'too strong an emphasis on forms' dissolution has prevented us from attending to the complex ways that power operates in a world dense with functioning forms' (9). Like Brooke-Rose in the quoted passage above, Levine acknowledges that there is no escaping forms,

the 'little structures' (Brooke-Rose's words) or 'organizing principles' (Levine's words) which make sense of our world and make our world work – like the relational infrastructures Berlant theorises which are the 'lifeworld of structure'. Levine advocates 'thinking strategically about how best to deploy multiple forms for political ends' (17): in a world full of unavoidable forms, perhaps the most politically useful thing we can do, she argues, is study and understand the complex ways they interrelate, how they 'organize and disorganize our lives' (23). Without claiming too much political motive for the writers I study here, I suggest it is useful to look back to this work of the 1960s and 1970s for the ways it presents and theorises form(s), for the ways it might help us to think about both aesthetic and social forms today; these authors' close attention to form (and the way it shapes both narrative and life) alone is edifying. It is a de-naturalising attention, probably in large part because of the structuralist discourse of their contemporaries that they may be implicitly or explicitly challenging, but a thoughtful and observational (as opposed to didactic) attention also.

Methods: (Very) Close Reading, Attentiveness, Juxtaposition

As artworks become more interdisciplinary, so criticism which makes recourse to multiple disciplines can pull more from the work, or take discussions in new directions. Such is my aim in mixing some art criticism with the literary, although this remains very much a literary critical project overall. Perhaps more accurate than mixing, the term juxtaposition describes my method most clearly: I juxtapose works by authors not normally considered side-by-side, as I juxtapose the literary with the visual, in order to get at new points of comparison or interchange, to make things visible which otherwise might remain unseen. Juxtaposition itself is a visual term, meaning to view side-by-side, with a strong visual history: the surrealist impulse towards 'radical juxtaposition' encompassed in the 'collage-principle' can be traced forward to assemblages and then Happenings in the 1950s–60s, as Sontag notes in 1962 ('Happenings' 269). She attributes even the layout of modern cities and objects to an 'involuntary collage-principle' likened to the aesthetics of 'disrelation' (270, 274). For William Burroughs, life is composed of cut-ups, or 'juxtaposition[s] of what's happening outside and what you're thinking', comparable to the juxtaposition of text and image without any of the connective material we might have been led to expect by traditional literary forms, as in the literary cut-up (n.p.).

Foucault, in 1986, said 'we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed' ('Of Other Spaces' 22). What these varied sources have in common is how they compare artistic, abstract or theoretical forms analogously to aspects of modern life, which is to say they move between the social and aesthetic in identifying propensies for seeing things in a certain way. The fixation on juxtaposition, most relevantly for the current study, replaces what we might think of as a more linear, causal, narrative way of conceiving relations between events with a visual, non-linear, unexplained, potentially disconnected, relationship between things. Cut-ups, collage and assemblage will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3, on anti-formal movements in art and literature. For now, it suffices to say that juxtaposition is as important to the works I study as it is to my enquiry and methodology, and it employs the visual logic of looking: we might think of this as immediacy, intuitive or unspoken connection, ineffableness.

The 1960s and 1970s are particularly fruitful decades in which to make such an enquiry because of increasing cross-fertilisation between art forms and disciplines in these decades. In the chapters which follow, I closely read the visual themes, forms and techniques of the novels, highlighting the differing attention to the visual in each. Alongside these readings, I include examples from the visual arts which shed light on the visual themes or techniques being used by the authors. 'Reading' artworks, with their different way of conveying meaning – non-linguistic, more oblique in terms of transmitting any verbal(isable) message – can help us to better discern the anti-masterful, sometimes even anti-formal (that is, rebelling against strict and categorisable form), techniques in the experimental fiction of these three writers. As I am using artworks primarily as a means of understanding the visual themes and forms of the literary works, and as a means of opening up the analysis of the literary works, I have not limited my selection to a particular geographical location or any such categories. Many of the artistic examples I use in this book come from the US, though this work would have been known in the increasingly globalised (although still largely Anglo- and American-centric) art scene in the UK,[18] and Quin, for one, travelled in the US

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[18] Furthermore, as Kaye Mitchell points out in the Introduction to *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the 1960s*, 'writers of this period looked beyond these shores, taking inspiration, in a deliberately piecemeal and partial fashion, from a disparate range of "foreign" and/or radical sources, including, but not limited to, Dada, Surrealism, the *nouveau roman*, concrete poetry, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, Beckett, jazz, and visual and performance art' (12). The 'piecemeal' adoption is important here – deliberately partial, not whole, suggesting a purposeful refusal to conform to rule.

during her career.[19] I have selected artworks which thematise vision, visuality, looking, seeing and framing, many of which are also concerned with issues of (gendered) embodiment and embodied theory, often surrounding the gaze. Furthermore, all of the artworks chosen also refuse to stick within the disciplinary, formal and medial bounds of their respective art forms. In these works, the body is also presented as something which cannot quite be contained; therefore, the 'indiscipline' functions both in the sense of their refusing disciplinary boundaries and as a reflection on particularly feminised bodies as objectified and subject to discipline, and the works push back against those restrictions. The first chapter examines the thematisation of vision and the motif of the frame in texts; the second considers the feminised body as image in text and artwork; the third traces overlaps between experiments with embodiment and materiality in fiction, and soft sculpture in the visual arts; and the fourth attends to experiments with typography and visual layout of the page within narrative works. A lot of attention is paid in these novels to the visual aspects of perception, to looking as a means of recognising and representing the world. Alongside this shift away from a primarily linguistic ordering of reality comes a reaction against form, or at least strict conventions, forms and frameworks, on the part of these authors (who tend to favour disintegration, avoid the normative).

Experiment

Experiment, for Brooke-Rose, is 'really not knowing where you're going and discovering' (Friedman, Fuchs and Brooke-Rose 31). The spaces between structures – evoked especially by Brooke-Rose – carry this same sense of (promising) uncertainty. The category of the 'experimental' has a certain familiarity now, although one which is so broadly applied as to have little descriptive meaning.[20] While I do

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[19] Where she spent time with the Black Mountain College poets and artists, especially Robert Creeley and Robert Sward; much of their correspondence is held at the Olin Library at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri.

[20] As Natalia Cecire opens her book *Experimental*: 'There is no such thing as experimental writing, and this is a book about it' (vii). In this work, she addresses how the term has evolved to describe a particular lineage (and who is excluded from that) and the question of '[w]hen [. . .] experimental mean[s] aesthetically good, epistemologically good, politically good – and when does it mean making one kind of goodness a proxy for, or guarantee of, another?' (viii), beginning from the context of 1970s–80s recoveries of early twentieth-century writers as 'experimental'. Among investigations of other writers, Cecire tackles the 'resolute anti-visuality of Stein's objectivity' (xi). Cecire's interrogation of the term raises different connotations surrounding the experimental, particularly regarding its esteem, to those evoked by 1960s and 1970s practitioners who received it pejoratively.

not disregard the term (in part, because of its familiarity), my focus within the broad category of experimentalism is on formal rule-breaking with an emphasis on hybridity, and forms becoming more interdisciplinary, more integrated, less separate. Brooke-Rose discusses in 'A Writer's Constraints' the 'unidentifiable category called the experimental novel, a ragbag of anything so far uncategorized or unfamiliar, undefinable because its constraints are either unperceived or different in each case' (*Invisible* 41). The term experimental is recognisable even today as a catch-all term for anything which looks a bit different to the norm. However, as Rita Felski puts it, 'the breaking of conventions itself becomes conventional' (*Beyond* 159). And so, the experimental might become the norm or, having once been oppositional to another term – realist, conservative, conventional – it loses meaning as the boundaries of those terms shift in critical thinking; all this is to suggest it is a relative term, with little stable meaning. Whatever that norm looks like, however, the experimental seems to be safely positioned in/as the minority, and – as commentary from the 1960s and 1970s indicates – was often met pejoratively, or even with critical hostility. Writing in 1973, B. S. Johnson claims: '"Experimental" to most reviewers is almost always a synonym for "unsuccessful"' ('Introduction'). And Brooke-Rose, in 1989, writes: 'the prejudice against the unfamiliar affects all who experiment' ('Illiterations' 64).

Against the conservativism of British establishment literary culture, critics including Julia Jordan have undertaken to represent the extent of radical or experimental work being produced by British artists in the 1960s–70s: 'Far from being the generation that abandoned modernism, British novelists of the sixties initiated a return to its concerns, once more made anew; amid post-war realism, an exciting new experimentalism was taking hold' ('Introduction' 2).[21] The reception of these 'new' techniques was not always warm, as is particularly the case for Brooke-Rose, Quin and sometimes Brophy. Brooke-Rose was

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[21] Aside from Jordan and Martin Ryle's edited collection of essays, *B. S. Johnson and Post-War Literature: Possibilities of the Avant-Garde* (Palgrave, 2014), quoted here, other recent work on the 1960s avant garde not previously mentioned includes Sebastian Groes's *British Fictions of the Sixties: The Making of the Swinging Decade* (Bloomsbury, 2016). An interest in experiment amongst contemporary practising writers has also emerged, epitomised by Isabel Waidner's edited anthology, which identifies a politically minded and queer contemporary avant garde, *Liberating the Canon: An Anthology of Innovative Literature* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2018). Recent editions such as the *Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, edited by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (2012) show the renewed interest in the term and the types of literature it encompasses – although with a dearth of women experimenters considered.

considered difficult and was not widely read – 'received with almost complete indifference', as Sweeney puts it ('Groping' 304). In fact, Brooke-Rose spent much of the 1980s (after publishing her most visibly experimental work, *Thru*) trying to secure a wider audience with the Manchester-based publisher Carcanet.[22] Quin's publisher (Calder and Boyars, also publisher to Samuel Beckett and W. S. Burroughs) was familiar with experimental (and European) work, but Quin's work was often read autobiographically, as a reflection of her troubled life, which her publishers never seemed to discourage.[23] Brophy's novels were less formally experimental (except *In Transit* in 1969), and so her reception was a little smoother, although she was notably an outlier.[24]

A look back at the *Times Literary Supplement*s devoted to the avant garde, published in August and September 1964, reveals something of the tenor of British literary culture at the time. The opening to the August issue, 'The Changing Guard', grapples with issues of frivolity and exclusivity, calling for a more critical approach to the avant garde but an acknowledgement that at least some of the vaguely delineated group must be doing something important: 'The avant-garde must not be romanticized. The avant-garde must not be dismissed' (676). These issues make no mention of Brooke-Rose and Brophy (unsurprisingly their examples are nearly all men – Ginsberg, Burroughs, Creeley, McLuhan, to name a few), although Quin gets a positive, if slightly patronising, mention in the September issue in a feature on John Calder's publication list: 'Miss Quin emerges as a sure and original writer capable of handling difficult subject matter with an instinct for humour and erotic fantasy that is always certain' ('And the Future?' 797). Dom Sylvester Houédard

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[22] Pitching her new novel *Amalgamemnon* to Carcanet in 1983, Brooke-Rose writes: 'There just might be something in it for a brave publisher who would be willing to help me make a comeback. Agents won't touch me, and the atmosphere among conventional publishers is such that I don't even feel like trying another big house to get the same answer "it won't sell"' (Letter to Michael Schmidt 20 Dec. 1983).

[23] In fact, Quin's books seem to have been used as a method of mental health diagnosis. In a 1970 letter to a Dr Härnjd, Marion Boyars writes: 'I think that these books will tell you a lot about Ann since she tried to work out many of her problems in her writing', speculating that '*Passages* is, I think, an attempt at a record of her relationship with [Robert Sward]' (Boyars).

[24] As Len Gutkin writes, on the reasons for Brophy's outsider status, 'Brophy's form of minorness was, explicitly and self-consciously, a species of high camp' (73), suggesting she positioned herself purposefully outside of the mainstream, or at least with a level of self-awareness, with subject matter outside the realms of acceptability (usually concerning sexuality) and references outside the popular (usually classical or baroque).

is invoked as a representative (in Britain) of the concrete poets and visual experimenters ('Changing Guard' 675), and there seems to be some acknowledgement of the increasingly widespread visual experiment among the avant garde, although the writers of 'The Changing Guard' also suggest that these experiments are appealing mainly in their flashiness, especially within the field of advertising: '[television and media] are glad to feature any new and surprising development in the arts, particularly if it can be conveyed visually, and if the personalities associated with it are intriguing or impressive' (675). The tone taken in this opening article is primarily sceptical – 'This avant-garde has long been one of Western culture's great myths: one of those dynamic but ill-defined concepts which drive men to attitudes if not to action' (675) – but open to recognising the merits of contemporary experiment (or at least what the editors and authors of the issues deem to be meritorious).

The concrete poets' offerings, as might be expected, make up the most striking pages in the issues – and also the most fun, being some of the only features where humour is foregrounded. The first predominantly visual page proclaims 'O Pioneers!', a repetition from the cover collage, while at the top of the page the title of the publication has been rearranged in the anagram 'This Elementary Purist Temple', perhaps a sly remark about the hallowed pages in which this work is featured (thus being recognised as meritorious by some of the culture's gatekeepers), joyful in both its irreverence and discovery, the serendipity with which the anagram represents the 'true' or hidden contents or meaning of the words it rearranges ('This Elementary' 686). On the following page, the anagram forms one in a series of *TLS* anagrams which make up a poem by Edwin Morgan (687). But on page 686 where the anagram replaces the paper's title, the work pervades the fundamental architecture of the newspaper page, as if the anagram were a code designed to infiltrate the linguistic system of the paper; in these pages, where everything is made of language, the anagram can do precisely that. Featuring several visual contributions interspersed within the text, these two pages appear as somewhat chaotic outliers to the rest of the work, representing in multiple modes at once, forcing the reader to decode (visually) the work of several different artists in a confined space – a situation moved on from quite quickly to return to text-based work and articles. The writer of 'Island View' offers up some potential reasons for this level of representation:

> All the same we remain a conservative country, and where the kind
> of avant-garde writing represented in this number is concerned we

rather tend to shrug our shoulders. It is a very different reaction from that which we nowadays show to the visual arts, where we seem to be agog for novelty, often of a quite extreme sort. (695)

Summing up the differing attitudes to literary and visual experiment in Britain, this article also perhaps highlights one reason why frustrated writers might tap into the visual arts to reinvigorate literary forms – if innovation is to be prized more in the field of visual arts.

Focusing on women authors has added an extra dimension to this enquiry for the complexity it brings to the consideration of visuality in terms of gender and embodiment. I will turn before finishing to the critical field of experimental women's writing, which had an active resurgence in the 2010s.[25]

Brooke-Rose commented on the double exclusion experienced by experimental women writers:

a woman writer must use traditional forms or, if she dare to experiment, she must be imitating an already old model. [. . .] [W]omen are rarely considered seriously as part of a movement when it is 'in vogue'; and they are damned with the label when it no longer is, when they can safely be considered as minor elements of it. ('Illiterations' 65)

She thus summarises the ways in which women's experimental writing is conventionally handled: either they are dismissed, or they are seen as imitative – as long as the movement they are imitating is out of fashion. Another reason for invoking the field of experimental women's writing is for the attention it gives to consideration

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[25] See the 2015 special issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing*, edited by Kaye Mitchell, which grew out of a 2013 conference on experimental women's writing at the University of Manchester. More recent work on experimental women's writing includes Andrew Radford and Hannah Van Hove's edited collection, *British Experimental Women's Fiction, 1945–1975: Slipping through the Labels* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Kate Aughterson and Deborah Philips's edited collection *Women Writers and Experimental Narratives: Early Modern to Contemporary* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Jennifer Cooke's *Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing: The New Audacity* (Cambridge UP, 2020); Ellen E. Berry's *Women's Experimental Writing: Negative Aesthetics and Feminist Critique* (Bloomsbury, 2016). Anthologies of experimental work by women include: Caroline Bergvall's edited anthology *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women* (Les Figues Press, 2012); Lisa Pearson's edited anthology *It's Almost That: A Collection of Image + Text Work by Women Artists & Writers* (Siglio, 2011); Maggie O'Sullivan's edited poetry collection *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK* (Reality Street Editions, 1996); Emily Critchley's edited follow-up to that collection, *Out of Everywhere 2: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK* (Reality Street, 2015).

of experimental form and structural change. Friedman and Fuchs, writing in 1989, suggest that experimental form provides a space for possibility, but they too closely align traditional forms with 'patriarchal mastery' and experimental forms with equally 'the feminine', radical politics and 'the feminist project' (4). Since then there has been much push-back on tendencies to align experimental form with radical politics, but even contemporarily to Friedman and Fuchs, Rita Felski was denying any 'necessary connection between feminism and experimental form', and by extension any links between radical form and progressive politics in general (*Beyond* 5).

While the argument in the late 1980s seems to generally be about the way in which literary form might or might not have a direct effect on the world, or experimental form have any direct link to radical politics, Levine's current work shows us the legitimacy of thinking across the structural and material, the artistic and the social. Her focus is more on how forms operate as organising principles in both artistic works and the world. So while an experimental work of art might not change how gender operates in the social world (though of course Friedman and Fuchs are arguing on a larger scale, about a collective artistic challenge to normative forms), it might give us ways to think about form – as being stretchy, for instance, to come back to Berlant's formulation – that might be useful in a social context. Levine is ultimately proposing a method for reading across social and literary forms, a 'pluralizing' approach which argues 'that no single form dominates or organizes all of the others', thus moving 'us away from one of the deepest political convictions in the field: that ultimately, it is deep structural forces such as capitalism, nationalism, and racism that are the truly powerful shapers of our lives' (17). She is not denying the ways these forces shape our world but rather arguing that if we can understand how forms function, we might be able to think more strategically about how they can disturb and disrupt each other. I contend that the thinking in these novels from the 1960s and 1970s could help with this understanding.

I am considering women authors together for the ways in which considerations of gender as a social category (subject to disciplinary procedures) come out in the work and pervade the usage of visuality. Patricia Waugh has argued that 'women's writing, feminist or not, has largely existed in a highly contradictory relationship to both the dominant liberal conception of subjectivity and writing and to the classic "postmodernist" deconstruction of this liberal trajectory' (*Feminine* 10), thus suggesting why women's writing might look different in this period without uniting women under the banner of

feminism, or problematic recourse to a biological sense of gender, or any shared aims or political stance, or anything like a 'feminine aesthetic'. Waugh thus writes:

> for those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner 'essence') has been a major aspect of their self-concept long before post-structuralists and postmodernists began to assemble their cultural manifestos. (3)

As will be seen in the novels I analyse, their attention to power structures is specifically tied to visuality, with operations of subject formation and gender being visible to but beyond the control of subjects, and the ways in which the ordering function of the gaze positions subjects both looking and looked at.

Referring to the content of Friedman and Fuchs's seminal anthology (the introduction to which I have quoted from above), Kaye Mitchell writes:

> In these diverse instances of women's experimental writing, we find examples of the *repudiation* of narrative authority (a perhaps disingenuous disavowal of narrative mastery) in favour of more 'spontaneous,' 'unconscious,' and 'impressionistic' modes of writing; but we find also a quite deliberate (willed and authoritative) *manipulation* of linguistic and generic forms, alongside overtly confrontational, politicized statements. ('Gender Politics' 3)

The disingenuity of the disavowal that Mitchell names here suggests, broadly, the potentially performative nature of these anti-authority and anti-mastery stances taken up by a range of women authors (those listed include Stein, Richardson, Woolf and Nin): disingenuous because at the same time these experiments are highly controlled and wilfully manipulated, thus requiring themselves a sort of mastery. This is not to deny their indisciplined status, for mastery itself could be seen as a form of indiscipline for the woman artist, in overstepping her mark, as it were, comparable to Brooke-Rose's statement that '[n]obody likes a woman to know' (Garbero and Brooke-Rose 148).

The recourse to visuality that I will foreground in this book stems from the inadequacy of language as a system of representation, which includes its incapacities to adequately represent the material experience of subjects who do not fit the remit of the 'universal' humanist (white, heterosexual, cis-male) subject. Experimental form provides

– or can seem to provide – a means of expressing oneself outside of the dominant structures, although I propose no direct link between linguistic structures and societal ones, much less between linguistic structures and material effects. However, experimental art and fiction can express (as well as theorise and think with) a want or a need for changed structures, even if it does not impact upon those structures directly. In the analyses which follow, I focus specifically on challenges to the disciplinary operations of gender, the status of woman as object or image, and the position of women in society. Reading these writers' attitudes towards rule-bound structures and restrictive frameworks – one of which is the gendered expectation of what the woman writer will produce – provides a means of drawing together their indisciplined bodies of work.

Outline of Contents

Chapter 1 ('The Limits of Looking') investigates the use of frame motifs in novels by Brooke-Rose (*Out*, 1964) and Quin (*Berg*, 1964), as part of the wider reconceptualisation of the frame in 1960s visual artwork and, I argue, experimental literature, according to which the frame comes to be thought of as less masterful a structure of containment, isolation and presentation than in its traditional incarnations. This chapter entails rethinking the frame as a strategy, or series of strategies, of intellectual, disciplinary and social containment. Using works by Phillip King and Eva Hesse as my main examples from the visual arts, and drawing on theorisations of the frame from Jacques Derrida (*The Truth in Painting*, 1978) to Judith Butler (*Frames of War*, 2016) – as well as conceptions of the frame's function as early as 1435, with Leon Battista Alberti's systematisation of single-point perspective for painters – the chapter closely reads frame imagery in the novels as a means of interrogating the ways they look at looking, at representation, and how the use of frames in these novels leads to a means of theoretically bridging the gap between aesthetic and social realms (the frame having a function in each). Indeed, the novels attempt to address the politics of positioning, especially Brooke-Rose's *Out* with its reversal of western racial hierarchy, though there are limitations to this representation too. I read these novels as a type of theory, thereby offering the potential for reading other experimental fiction (novels which in some way investigate their own construction, suggesting methods for investigating linguistic constructions of all sorts) in this manner, loosening

the bounds by which these experimental fictions – especially those by women – have been categorised in the past.

Chapter 2 ('Closed Circuits / Open Legs') focuses on images and forms of circularity alongside depictions of feminised sexuality in Brooke-Rose's *Between* (1968) and Quin's *Three* (1966). Both novels figure their central female characters as passive and objectified, images or objects to be looked at and consumed; at the same time the characters perform minor resistances, through absence, or slipping between categories and locations. This chapter highlights a parallel reassertion of the body in conceptual art and experimental fiction, investigating the novels' presentations of gendered power imbalances in terms of circularity, repetition and resistance. These novels both present narratives which effectively depict the process of normalisation of gendered roles, how certain norms of behaviour become embedded and expected: such as the expectation for women to be passive and open (to the desires and demands of their interlocutors). Neither novel presents a very positive situation for its central female characters: Brooke-Rose's simultaneous translator is in a position of continual non-belonging, floating between countries and languages, relaying the messages of others with no input of her own; Quin's S is immobilised, without any expectation for change, in being actually dead throughout the entire novel – we are relayed her narrative through tapes and diary entries. Both *Between* and *Three* depict specific embodiments of femininity as objectified, passive and under the control of others within the narratives, though their circularity supports ambivalent readings which deflect from any knowable centre or core.

Chapter 3 ('Indisciplined Bodies') furthers these considerations of embodiment and materiality alongside visuality, and the gendering of aesthetic categories in Brophy's *Flesh* (1962) and Quin's *Passages* (1969), using examples of soft sculpture and cut-up to investigate how art and literature of the period figure the erosion of boundaries between subject, object and environment. The novels which provide the focus of this chapter emblematise the breakdown of subject boundaries (and the falsification of the myth of singular, whole subjects) and the various uses to which that is put: Brophy's *Flesh* is often read as a parable, a comedic warning against the consequences of sloth, but it is also an argument for the desirability of exceeding boundaries. Quin's *Passages* is similarly optimistic on a formal level but darker in tone, as the fragmenting subjects seem to disintegrate one another, at times merging and challenging readerly expectations of singular, separate characters and bodies. Both Brophy and Quin

use the Pygmalion-Galatea myth to explore gendered roles with a particular focus on materiality and embodiment – as fittingly the myth concerns a (male) sculptor who brings his (female) sculpture to life. Brophy twists the genders, feminising her male character Marcus in making him the object of desire (both for himself and his partner Nancy). Quin uses the myth to suggest physical and psychic violence in the relationship of these two characters, the brutality with which one subject forms (and unforms) another. The consideration of soft sculpture and cut-up allows for a deeper investigation of these associations of softness and hardness, cutting and forming, and the genderings that these processes (in their relation to art practices, modes of epistemological enquiry, even politics) routinely undergo.

Chapter 4 ('New Rules of No Rules') presents the culmination of these coinciding lines of enquiry into gendered representation, embodiment and materiality (textual and bodily), visuality and experimental form, featuring each author's most typographically experimental work: Brophy's *In Transit* (1969), Quin's *Tripticks* (1972) and Brooke-Rose's *Thru* (1975). Alongside the focus on an overtly visible indiscipline, this chapter investigates the various 'crossings' these novels make: between aesthetic as well as social categories (specifically gender binaries), forms, genres, subjects and disciplines. I suggest that the chiasmic forms underlying the novels are emblematic of the tensions they exhibit between the need for rule-bound structures (to make meaning) and the need to break from them (to make change). In many of these novels, gender binaries are a model through which they play out the implications of all sorts of binary thinking – the simultaneous restriction by and freedom within the set framework. Crossing is particularly useful as an area of investigation, for its suggestions of hybridity (cross-fertilisation, crossing boundaries, borders and edges) – indeed interdisciplinarity or indiscipline – as well as chiasmus (a crosswise arrangement – perhaps of a thing and its opposite). Emblematised by the 'X' (a symbol of both everything – as the algebraic 'x' which can be substituted for any value – and nothing, if used to elide material) crossing can also be crossing out, and these connotations of erasure will themselves prove fruitful. The 'X' provides the final form in a series of chapters which are characterised by forms and formal concerns (Chapter 1 by the frame or rigid enclosure, Chapter 2 by the circle or circuit, Chapter 3 by formlessness or anti-form). Subtle but ever-present, these underlying forms reveal the tensions within the novels between necessary structure and the imposition of enclosure.

Conclusion

This book poses links between indiscipline and visuality in the works of these writers, drawn out through their refusal to conform to disciplinary restrictions: both of the conventional novel and concerning the allowances for what women writers will produce and how it will be received. Furthermore, their works resist the disciplinary operations of binary gender, questioning the constructions of these categories, and the disciplinary functioning of the gaze which positions women as objects, images or bodies to be looked at and consumed. The concept of indiscipline, as I present it, through the incorporation of visual techniques into the literary framework of the novel, produces a consideration of formal experimentation intimately linked to the novels' content, their conflicted attitudes towards rule-bound structures (as somehow both necessary and untenable). Through the multivalent study of indiscipline in these novels, I identify a dual trajectory in the work of these authors, towards increasing use of visual devices and increased concern with gender, power and the body. These authors' dual interest in visuality and embodiment suggests continuities between the material realm of the text and the material world of the body, and a desire to break down boundaries – to be indisciplined in both.

The Limits of Looking: Conceptualising the Frame in Brooke-Rose's *Out* and Quin's *Berg*

Thinking the frame teaches us that everything is framed, visibly or not, even thinking itself – all the more thinking the frame.
  – Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, 'Starting Out from the Frame (Vignettes)'

Introduction

This opening chapter situates Brooke-Rose's and Quin's literary experiments with the frame alongside the emergence of conceptual art. As Caroline Bergvall puts it in her introduction to *I'll Drown My Book*, an anthology of conceptual writing by women: in conceptual art, 'Ideas aimed to replace form' (19), meaning physical form, presence or materiality. Bergvall's brief history of 1960s conceptualism in the arts makes clear – by not separating artists on the 'visual' side (Art & Language, On Kawara) from poets and writers (OULIPO, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, the *nouveaux romanciers*) – that conceptualism was not limited to the visual arts. Here, I will take a close look at two novels by Quin and Brooke-Rose, with the implicit acknowledgement that their interrogation of framing, the field of vision and visual perception is representative of a wider enquiry across the arts at this time of the mid-1960s. As groups like Art & Language highlight, and as my investigation of the concept of the frame in experimental works of fiction underlines, there was considerable openness in both fields to the techniques and affordances of the other, if it even makes sense to separate the fields of visual and literary arts (and certainly the more experimental, indeed conceptual, branches of poetry and fiction) during this period of intense cross-fertilisation. There is consistent tension in the work of Quin and

Brooke-Rose (and Brophy, who will come in later) between the conceptual, abstract and ideational, and the formal or material, which is to say their conceptual play remains tied to material reality.

While Brooke-Rose and Quin are very different writers, there are considerable overlaps in the two works from 1964 which are this chapter's focus: both feature white male central characters of insecure employment, with *Berg* depicting a run-down seaside location (which Quin's hometown of Brighton likely inspired) and *Out* depicting a displaced population reliant on social welfare and state-supplied 'unemployment pills', albeit with the realities of western racial hierarchies reversed. Situated in a fictionalised location known as Afro-Eurasia, the white characters – or the 'colourless' – have fallen ill in the wake of a nuclear disaster and are facing economic hardship, forcing them to take on lower-income jobs (we hear throughout about the white characters' former professions), while the Black characters of African descent form the upper classes and are the employers of the colourless. My primary focus in this chapter is how these two novels conceptualise the frame, a focus which encompasses considerations of visuality and visual perception more broadly, necessitated in part by the range of these complex novels, and the ways they take considerations of vision into the realms of science, philosophy and politics. It also begs consideration of the whiteness of their frames (and gazes), even, and perhaps especially, in the case of Brooke-Rose's novel where she is ostensibly interrogating white supremacy. While *Out* features racialised descriptions that implicitly position whiteness as the norm or the unmarked, and inverts racial hierarchies by emptying them of historical specificity, my intention here isn't just to point out the things Brooke-Rose could not see. Indeed, *Out* has been praised for its anti-racist intentions: Joseph Darlington calls it an 'anti-racist fable' (*Experimentalists* 83) and Adam Guy calls it '[a]n allegory of the persistence of racism and racial segregation across the globe in the wake of the end of empire' (*nouveau roman* 158) – though he also remarks on the novel's complicity with 'malign' systems (161). Placing these writers in a lineage with Stein's and Picasso's modernisms, via the epigraph to my Introduction, raises the issue of these earlier forms of primitivism, and their legacies within sixties avant-garde circles. As Natalia Cecire describes experimental writing and its criticism as a 'white recovery project' (29), so the way these works by white writers position whiteness (usually as the centre, foreground or norm) is a prominent part of their construction, as is the way characters of colour, when present, are framed.

As this chapter will make clear, the frame is a structure, in that it is a construction, which is mobile, portable and flexible, and works by Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy in the 1960s and 1970s are interested, more or less explicitly, in structures, shapes, forms and the ways in which these human-made structures can be an imposition to the types of subject (and specifically the embodied existence or experience of subjects) that don't fit the frame, or the norm. In short, these works remain open (though in many cases with limited vision) to the material conditions and experiences of embodied subjects, which always temper the tendencies towards abstraction, de-personalisation and the ideational qualities of their contemporary artistic environment. While characters in their novels never really have the option of leaving their bodies behind, which is to say they are met regularly with the consequences of their embodiment, both novelists depict, unthinkingly, a 'white world', to use Sara Ahmed's term (which, she tells us, is a world made white by colonialism) (153). There are limitations to Brooke-Rose's reversal because she still depicts blackness through a white lens, as deviant from the conditions of whiteness, highlighted through the regular racialised descriptions of the Black characters.

As a means of drawing together ideas about looking at and representing reality, and of comparing the visual arts and literature, I focus in this chapter on the concept of the frame – which is used as a motif in both novels under investigation and, more generally, is being widely rethought in various disciplines during this era. Conventionally, a frame separates, isolates, sections off (or limits) some element within the visual or discursive field, at the same time presenting that element, focusing the viewer's vision on it, designating the element as in some way important. This is the frame at its most straightforward, its most transparent: 'What's inside is art, what's outside is not', as Vona Groarke writes, questioning the simplicity of that traditional formulation (12). My investigation of the frame draws on Jacques Derrida's and Judith Butler's accounts of how the frame constructs meaning as it presents images or ideas. As Butler puts it, '[t]he frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality' (*Frames* xiii).[1] Her phrasing, 'strategy of containment', allows

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[1] Butler's text concerns the media presentation of war, how this controls what comes to be seen as 'grievable life' and ultimately services US participation in wars by garnering public support. My conversations with Butler's text are therefore somewhat removed from her book's primary focus and concern mainly the theoretical work surrounding the frame.

for a more conceptual grasp of what a frame is and what a frame does. Alongside this I consider Derrida's exploration of the frame, via Kant, in *The Truth in Painting* (1978). Derrida's passe-partout, theorised at the beginning of this work (as an addition to the nomenclature covered by Kant), enacts the necessity, or inevitability, of framing – *se passe partout* means 'occurs everywhere'.

To question the frame, in visual or linguistic representations, becomes a means of questioning the act of representation itself and, because of the normative character of the frame, a means of questioning convention – or, as Jean-Claude Lebensztejn puts it: 'Interfering with the frame means interfering with Art' (130). This brings us to the revolutionary potential of 'breaking the frame', of interrogating the conventional structures and frameworks of presentation, in the post-war period. As Lucy Lippard writes:

> it was usually the form rather than the content of Conceptual art that carried a political message. The frame was there to be broken out of. Anti-establishment fervor in the 1960s focused on the de-mythologization and de-commodification of art, on the need for an independent (or 'alternative') art that could not be bought and sold by the greedy sector that owned everything that was exploiting the world and promoting the Vietnam war. (*Six Years* xiv)

Lippard thus draws together quite explicitly the ideas of 'breaking out' of the artistic frame and political rebellion against forms of authority – whether cultural, institutional, social or economic. Lippard writes about America, though anti-war protest, liberation struggles and anti-establishment sentiment pervaded the British context too, and these writers for the most part would have had a vested interest in or at least experience of institutional processes: Brooke-Rose moved to Paris in 1968 to work at the experimental university Paris VIII, having been invited by Hélène Cixous; Brophy attended and excelled academically at Oxford University but was dismissed after four terms 'for disciplinary problems' ('Brophy, Brigid'); in 1959 Quin started working part-time as a secretary at the Royal College of Art. In Lippard's account, the frame stands in for ideas of control, of dominance, and – especially pertinent in the 1960s with the rise of semiotic theory, the intense scepticism of post-structuralist thought, as well as paranoia surrounding surveillance in the Cold War era and other means of controlling society – forms by which thought itself might be controlled, influencing how a population thinks, through advertising or propaganda. For many, Lippard

included, formal experiment meant direct questioning of conventional structures – aesthetic, social and political. Lippard also draws attention to why formal experiment is so important and notable in this period: because experimenting with form meant – in theory – questioning the structures by which art (and, by extension, reality) was ordered. Thinking of the frame itself as a form – which shapes or forms that which it contains/presents – helps us to explore continuities between literary forms and social forms, where the frame restricts, presents, sways in both.

   In this chapter I consider how attention to aspects of visuality manifests as a thematic and structural focus in early novels by Brooke-Rose and Quin (early within my focal period of the 1960s and 1970s; Brooke-Rose had published four novels before *Out*). I examine how *Berg* and *Out* thematise looking, seeing and issues of representation, prior to the more extreme experimentation with typography, graphic devices and page layout in their later work (Quin's *Passages* and *Tripticks*, Brooke-Rose's *Thru*). My interest in the ways these texts become visual stems from the degree to which this allows them to leave language behind, which is never fully, but the addition of visual techniques allows them to tap into the immediacy and the obliqueness necessitated or afforded by visual modes. As John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), 'seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled' (7). Both *Out* and *Berg* show a profound interest in the gap between seeing and knowing. They also both meditate on the embodied nature of visual perception, the positioning of whoever is doing the observing (whether social or physical), how that observer is not just looking at the world but is in it, continually in relation to objects and others also in it: more unusual in third-person than in first-person narratives, perhaps, and especially in the case of *Out*, which Brooke-Rose proclaimed to be 'narratorless', in the fashion of the contemporary *nouveau roman*. The ways of seeing in these novels are part of the characterisation, as idiosyncratic to the protagonists as their manners of speaking. Explicit awareness of the limits of looking and seeing add to the comedy of both.

   Having said these novels are not typographically experimental, *Out* does feature some visual material (images of identity cards, a line of upside-down text). Both devices are read by Natalie Ferris in her 2018 article '"I think I preferred it abstract": Christine Brooke-Rose and Visuality in the New Novel'. Ferris interprets the upside-down

text as a potential challenge to the reader's own capacity for accurate vision, noting that '[t]he attention paid [in *Out*] to the means by which a vision of reality is crafted places a question mark over the human faculty of sight' (237). I add to this reading an expansion of how Brooke-Rose is in conversation with multiple disciplinary discussions of framing and vision, how she distinguishes between human-made and 'natural' frames (with the idea that the distinction is not so neat), and a focus on her ambivalence surrounding limitations of vision, for these limitations are fundamental to every act of vision, so not necessarily a cause for anxiety.[2] *Berg* signals shifts between past and present, or between Berg's physical surrounds and his reading of his mother's letters, typographically (despite making no moves to delineate interior or exterior realities, different speakers and so on in the main text). As the field of semiotics expanded the parameters of what was to be considered a text in the 1960s, literary works also routinely took on aspects of the visual arts – most overtly in the body of concrete poetry developing from about the 1950s onwards – to become, themselves, like pictures. I read *Out* and *Berg* alongside visual artworks as a means of highlighting the commonalities between the two fields in this period, the mutual interdisciplinarity which places literary and visual artworks in such close conversation with one another; the movement of visual art into the conceptual realm (art composed of ideas) is another means by which this cross-disciplinary conversation is established. Juxtaposing experimental novel writing with the contemporaneously emerging field of conceptual art is critically illuminating,[3] not least because of overlapping aesthetic strategies in both fields: those aimed at impersonality, abstraction, breaking formal boundaries and, specifically here, those interrogating and reinventing the frame. Experimental fiction was turning conceptual at the same time as the visual arts, a move allowing both to critique the conditions of their composition, that is the 'rules' of fiction and more traditional art forms as well as the institutions making art increasingly exclusionary and commodified.

[2] See also Ferris's *Abstraction in Post-War British Literature, 1945–1980*, Chapter 4, for an alternative (and complementary) reading of visuality in the work of Brooke-Rose. While Ferris also starts from Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, her analysis focuses on 'the ways in which the reader was increasingly understood as a catalytic agent of sight' (141), whereas mine focuses on the portrayals of fictional observers.

[3] Following Anne Rorimer in noting that the year after these two novels were first published is considered to be the birth date of conceptual art: '[1965] serves as an historical marker for the beginnings of Conceptual art as opposed to the beginnings of Fluxus, whose methodology and goals were first defined in the late 1950s' (7).

More generally, reading artworks alongside visually inclined novels can help in unpacking the visual strategies and themes in the literary works.

This chapter takes a recurrent image from each of the novels, both images which are (or which contain) frames. In *Berg*, the image I explore is most pertinently that of a window frame, the window of Berg's cramped room in temporary lodgings, his view out onto the streets of the seaside town in which the narrative takes place. In *Out*, the framing device employed is one which exemplifies the text's interest in complexity, combination and interwoven patterns: a 'natural' frame formed by the overlapping branches of trees (variously mimosa, plane and fig trees, depending on the location), characteristically viewed from several angles, sometimes simultaneously, some hypothetical or based on prior knowledge (as opposed to direct vision). Through close attention to passages in which these images occur, I will draw out the assumptions made by – as well as those dismantled by – the novels about sight and seeing. The passages I close read are often not the most narratively significant but feature fairly mundane imagery and occurrences: it is in these passages that the fundamentals of each novel's politics of sight, seeing and positionality can be discerned most strikingly, for they indicate how the world is structured and read. Through considerations of perspective in both texts, the importance of positioning for the formation of images will become clear – positioning both physical and social. In fact, the detailed depiction of physical positioning is usually suggestive of the implications of social positioning, more obviously in *Out* because of the ways in which it attempts to upend the naturalisation of a class structure based on racial difference. As Donna Haraway writes, 'an optics is a politics of positioning' (qtd in Mirzoeff, *Introduction* 5), a statement which denies any supposed innocence or objectivity associated with the perceptual process of seeing, of the images which are seen – a process that these novels in some way enact or dramatise.

Quin's *Berg* and Brooke-Rose's *Out* form a complementary pair in terms of thinking through issues of perspective. *Berg*, with its egotistical protagonist, central to the narrative world, calls up associations with single-point perspective, a system of pictorial representation highly convincing in its accuracy, devised for painters by Leon Battista Alberti in 1435. As Berger highlights, the system of perspective developing during the early Renaissance was 'unique to European art' (*Ways* 16); it is tied up with western philosophical ideas about individualism and sovereignty as well as ideas about art and looking. Especially pertinent is the fact that the techniques

of this representational system – naturalistic, 'truthful' and mon-ocular – were historically reserved for important figures like kings. *Out*'s fractured, multi-perspectival narrative similarly invites con-siderations of multiple technologies of vision, from camera technol-ogy in the camera-eye/camera-I perspective central to the *nouveau roman*, to microscopes, telescopes and all manner of invented scopes that allow observers to see deeper into internal and external worlds. *Out* does this, however, from a more impersonal position: not totally impersonal, as the narratorless *nouveau roman* purports to be, because it remains tied, even in the more mock-scientific, mock-objective sections, to its central character or focaliser (who is unnamed). If something is seen in *Out*, it later becomes clear that he is present, even if the sight is never attributed explicitly to him: the acts of vision narrated are explicitly embodied, even if the body doing the looking is, at the point of narrating, ambiguous. The per-spectival situation in this novel can usefully be compared to that of cubist art, not unified in any idea of a coherent singular subject with a straightforward monocular viewpoint – and the 'frame-breaking' nature of this type of representation (where a frame connotes a singular perspective) – but also resonates with the clipped editing techniques and repetitious imagery of New Wave cinema, as well as drawing on twentieth-century scientific developments (relativity and frames of reference; quantum physics and the observation of quantum phenomena; early developments in chaos and complexity). Both *Berg* and *Out*, in varying ways, suggest the difficulty – even the impossibility, and certainly the undesirability – of remaining within predetermined frames. At a fundamental level, this difficulty sur-rounds isolating a particular image within the visual field, or clarify-ing individual impressions within the complexity of any moment of experience. However, these visual concerns form the basis for philo-sophical questions about visible and invisible reality, the relation of aesthetic structures to social structures, and the links between disci-plinary and socio-political rebellion, questions pervading the work of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy, which this opening chapter will begin to unravel.

In the novels I read in this chapter, the frame functions as short-hand for issues of presentation, representation, vision and the way that sight fails us – when we fail to account for positioning, for how that alters our perspective, for instance. *Out* reveals and inter-rogates the ideological as well as aesthetic consequences of fram-ing and positioning, and the novel has an inbuilt awareness of its own limitations, in denying the possibility of objective vision and

acknowledging that every act of vision is informed by prior knowledge, experience and prejudice; the field of vision of the novel's protagonist is compromised, of course. Quin's *Berg* makes clear the limitations of any individual's perspective, utilising long-running associations with the frame and the window, sight and seeing, to create a situation in which Berg's expectations of his own vision and his actual short-sightedness are farcically exaggerated. The language of vision, visuality and even the visual arts (with the motif of the frame) are thus used in both novels to highlight issues around perspective, subjectivity and contingency to the reader, and ultimately to undercut the very idea of seeing clearly in these narratives. The ease with which this visual language conveys information about characters and environment shows just how embedded these ideas about art, truth, appearance and reality are in our collective cultural bank of imagery. Fundamentally, both novels show the frame up to be a construct and an imposition, failing to contain what it is seeking to contain, more so for any extra assertions of mastery.

The Frame in 1960s Visual Art

As Berger's *Ways of Seeing* makes clear, the frame was explicitly under discussion in the 1960s and 1970s, across art forms and theory. The period is full of examples of visual artists who were rethinking the concept of the frame, what constitutes art and reality (and what – if anything – separates them), from painters to sculptors to land artists making site-specific artworks. While slightly more unusual to do so in a literary work, perhaps, it makes sense with the cross-fertilisation across fields at this time that they would share themes and examinations, and the frame is after all a discursive as well as a visual structure. Art historian David Mellor writes:

> The period was already framed by the TV screen and, to a lesser extent, the cinema screen. Whether it was possible to gain access to an actual world beyond this media 'spectacle', an access to the lifeworld and the ground of existence, concerned several artists. At times the metaphoric media frame became a literal one.

He refers to Mark Boyle and Joan Hills's artwork using a repurposed plastic TV frame to frame debris on a bombsite, which then 'became the site of their art work' (61–4), the frame itself becoming the determinant part, and the contents somewhat random. The artists here

utilise the element of chance inherent in the *détournement* method of the Situationists to 'capture' an image, thus producing a material output (the images were then exhibited) but one with a disproportionate (in traditional terms) emphasis on the process of production rather than the 'finished product'. Mellor also writes that '"Situation" aesthetics hinged on the reciprocal meeting of the intimate look of the spectator (and his or her body) with paintings that carried the "visibility of the visible" in a banner-like, spectacular display of the imagery of prosceniums, frames and circular eye-forms' (82). These artworks advertise their frames, whether they are a product of architectural circumstance (prosceniums), artistic choice (frames) or embodiment (eye-forms); as will be seen later, Brooke-Rose also uses the 'circular eye-[form]' to signal the impossibility of keeping the observer out of the frame, and the necessarily embodied condition of looking. The continuity implied by the frame in Mellor's quote above, between classical art and television (alongside a concurrent cheapening of framing materials – the 'plastic fillet' of the TV frame), alludes to how, in a media-saturated age, frames are particularly ubiquitous, invisible through their omnipresence, and consumers continually in danger of becoming oblivious to frames, of taking the view through their TV screen – or through their window – for something natural. In 1967, Guy Debord (also part of the Situationist group) stated: '[w]hen the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings' (Ch. 1 par. 18). In Debord's view then, beyond perhaps the artists Mellor writes about, there is no real 'life-world' to access, for the images are themselves 'the real'.

Marshall McLuhan, writing in 1967, evokes the ubiquity of discussions of the frame in this era – in TV, in film, in art and in advertising. In *The Medium Is the Massage*, a pop-cultural theoretical work which itself combines text and image, he identifies a shift in technology which has impacted widely upon the way society and individuals think about the world around them: from '[t]he fragmenting of activities, our habit of thinking in bits and parts – "specialism"' which 'reflected the step-by-step linear departmentalizing process inherent in the technology of the alphabet', to the situation of his contemporary moment: '[t]he instantaneous world of electric informational media [which] involves all of us, all at once. No detachment or frame is possible' (45, 53). This total integration into the medial environment is like an early version of networked existence, which, even though vastly simplified, is useful for thinking about the blurring of disciplinary boundaries in the 1960s, as a move away from ideas of Greenbergian purity in the arts. The frame, for McLuhan, is

synonymous with separation and isolation, specifically of people from their environment (or of one 'specialism' from another) – no longer possible because of the interconnectedness of subjects in the contemporary world. In an environment where people are constantly connected to each other, constantly influenced by advertising and the media, and in which the humanist notion of a unified, whole individual self has been theoretically undone through a long line of modernist and postmodernist interrogations of the self and subjectivity, frames no longer function as separating devices – if, in fact, they ever did. The method of presentation is being questioned as much as the content of the representation; McLuhan's most famous aphorism is, after all, '[t]he medium is the message' (coined in his 1964 work *Understanding Media*).

Sontag's essay of the same year, 'The Aesthetics of Silence' (1967), explicitly invokes McLuhan in order to disagree with him on the power of images. Describing the multiple factors contributing to their contemporary 'devaluation of language' – including 'the unlimited "technological reproduction" and near universal diffusion of printed language and speech' – she states, contrary to McLuhan, that 'a devaluation of the power and credibility of images has taken place no less profound than, and essentially similar to, that afflicting language' (21). This is essentially the context in which these authors are intervening, with their foregrounded scepticism surrounding the faculty of vision (as well as linguistic communication) stemming from conceptualisations of the frame in both *Berg* and *Out*. In *On Photography* (1977), again in direct contrast to McLuhan although ten years later, Sontag evokes the ubiquity of frames: 'In a world ruled by photographic images, all borders ("framing") seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else, all that is necessary is to frame the subject differently' (22). This statement removes the power from frames (the discussion of Butler will continue in this vein in 'The Frame in Theory' section of this chapter): if frames are arbitrary, can simply be shifted, less reverence is granted to their contents and construction.

While not directly referencing the visual arts through the narratives of *Berg* and *Out*, the authors conduct indirect conversations with visual interrogations of the frame as much as with visual-verbal artworks and image theory, a conversation made visible through juxtaposition of text and artwork in this chapter. From the work of 1960s artists including Sol LeWitt (see *Wall Structure*, 1963), Pauline Boty (see *It's a Man's World I & II*, 1964–5), Jo Baer (see *Brilliant Yellow #9*, 1964–5), Gerhard Richter (see *Window*, 1968) and Jan Dibbets

(see *Perspective Corrections* series, 1967–9), it is clear that the frame becomes a focal point in this period.[4] For now, I will focus on two pieces, firstly Phillip King's *Window Piece* of 1960–1 (Figure 1.1).

King's minimalist sculpture thematises looking, seeing and framing, emptying the frame of content. Alternatively, it makes the content random, arbitrary or replaceable – and necessarily so, as the piece moves between galleries. The frame itself becomes the focus. King opts to include the frame within the artwork – and since arguably the artwork contains nothing but the frame, the viewer has to

Figure 1.1 *Window Piece*, 1960–1/1992, Phillip King. Plaster, 173 x 122 x 38 cm. © The Estate of Phillip King. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage. Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery.

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[4] Not for the first time, of course; Stein comments on the importance of the frame (and of breaking it) for the conditions of cubism in *Picasso*, as in the epigraph to this book's Introduction. Piet Mondrian famously painted his frames to extend the surface of his canvas and eliminate any obvious perimeter around them. In the 1960s, Robyn Denny's paintings of portals, windows and doors, Jeremy Moon's grids and geometric overlays, and specific works like Anthony Caro's *The Window* (1966–7) demonstrate the broad investigation into the parameters of sight within the fields of painting and sculpture – at the same time that conceptual art was being characterised as resolutely anti-visual (see Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, 1968). In both cases, visuality and visual perception are under intense interrogation, whether implicitly or explicitly.

consider the act of framing, containing, isolating the contents, of choosing what is to be contained within the frame. The content of the frame alters depending on the position of the artwork and the position of the viewer, the closeness and the angle from which it is viewed – playing with the idea that what falls inside the frame is important, has been selected (as did Boyle and Hills's work in Mellor's example above); it also grants the power of selection (within limits) to the viewer, rather than the artist. What remains unchanged here (in terms of more traditional pictorial art) is the presence of the frame itself: the convention of framing, the normative function of the framework, the way in which the content of the frame is isolated from the rest of the view, designated as somehow different from what lies outside. However, the sculpture is free-standing, a trait which would seem to relate it more to the frame of a television set than the traditional frame around a painting, in effect modernising the conventions of framing to be considered, lending to them the monumentality of traditional sculpture. Furthermore, the bevelled edges slope inwards towards an interior rectangle which is both part of and separate from the hole through which the framed contents can be seen, reinforcing the visual relation to a television set, although never separating it completely from the appearance as a window. The piece is intensely self-reflexive – interested in the convention of framing, the function and purpose of the frame, and less so in what is framed – a quality typical of conceptual artwork and experimental writing, which routinely question the nature of their construction as well as the conventions of art and language. Eva Hesse's 1966 work *Hang-Up* (Figure 1.2) further develops these questions around the conventions of framing.

Focusing on the possibilities of being 'outside' or 'inside' the frame, or potentially both at once, Hesse's piece skirts the boundaries between painting and sculpture, rendering depth through the emergence of a wire loop from the frame itself, while the canvas remains flatly blank. As with King's piece above, what happens when the content of the frame is eliminated is that the frame becomes a sculpture – it takes its place in the world of material objects, rather than as a signal of the importance of its visual contents. Both pieces demonstrate a sort of opaque humour: King's in monumentalising the appearance of the television set, and Hesse's in what she 'famously described in terms of its absurdity, because of its "coming out of this frame, something and yet nothing"' (Applin, 'This Threatening' 480). This is almost a disciplinary joke about sculpture being something because of its physical presence, and painting being nothing (represented by the blank canvas) because it is an imitation of something which is not really there, and is

Figure 1.2 *Hang-Up*, 1966, Eva Hesse. © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

thus absent. As Rosalind Krauss writes in her 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', '[t]he logic of sculpture, it would seem, is insepa-rable from the logic of the monument' (33). Hesse's haphazard and yet contained wire appendage, surprising in its placement, suggestive and also unresolvable, draws attention to the frame, to the framing of nothing, while the double entendre of the title – hung-up as an art piece, as well as 'hang-up' as a personal problem – alludes to the pos-turing of traditional, seriously minded sculpture, hung up on its own monumentality. Like these two artworks, Quin's and Brooke-Rose's novels question the inherent monumentality of the artwork. The frame signals, or it did once signal, importance, but these works ask: what if there was nothing within it? As will be seen from the readings which follow, Quin dismantles the centrality of the looking subject (specifi-cally the white male heterosexual looking subject), while Brooke-Rose underscores the relativism and contingency of visual perception.

Single-Point Perspective, the Window and *Berg*

Quin's first novel, *Berg*, also subtly synthesises the lineage and asso-ciations of the traditional frame in order to provide a commentary on the processes of artistic representation in a contemporary context.

The novel details a son's return to his Brighton home, in disguise, with a plan to murder his father. The ensuing narrative is a simultaneously theatrical and mundane version of the Oedipus story, which turns on the paranoiac, obsessive and comically inept attempts of Berg to gain control of his situation. *Berg* opens with a frame, that of the '[w]indow blurred by out of season spray' (1). A fitting introduction to the narrative style, itself a mix of first-, second- and third-person narration, a muddle of tenses and agency (sometimes people act on inanimate objects, sometimes vice versa), the opening framing device is 'blurred'. This first sentence thus indicates two things, at least: the narrative which follows, like any artwork, is selective – and self-consciously so. Furthermore, the conventionally transparent framing device, the window, is compromised in its functionality, the images visible through its façade somewhat obscured. The epistemological consequences of this impaired act of visual perception are indicative of what is to follow, and not particular to the sense of sight: the acquisition of knowledge is limited aurally as it is visually in *Berg*.

Berg's capacity for knowing is inevitably restricted, relying as he does on glimpses and overheard conversations for much of his information, as well as occupying a theatrical world in which disguises are fairly common (and windows, or scenes, are framed by curtains). The first sentence in the novel – itself a (narrative) frame of sorts, placed in the position of an epigraph – reveals the linguistic nature of Berg's disguise: 'A man called Berg, who changed his name to Greb, came to a seaside town intending to kill his father. . .' (n.p.). Disguised as an anagram, a simple reversal of his own name, Berg's fictional status (as a linguistic construction) is advertised from the outset; the disguise is lent narrative credibility, however, in that enough time has passed that Berg's father will not recognise his adult son – another indication of how visual perception can be limiting, if one's knowledge of what one sees is also limited. Fundamentally, the linguistic disguise entails a visual disguise, playing on the fact that all visual elements of a novel are, for the most part, necessarily filtered through language, existent only in language. Already in *Berg*, the two modes of representation are completely intertwined.

The window acts as a hinge point around which the narrative turns throughout the first 'chapter' (the narrative is split into sections which are not marked or numbered), serving to focus it momentarily before it diffuses once again into a field of shifting pronouns and tenses. Brian Evenson and Joanna Howard note the opening image, describing it as 'truncated so that it is strictly visual' (57). They seem to be describing the syntax as 'truncated', which I suppose refers

to the omission of definite articles and perhaps a verb. However, this impressionistic rendering of the image is partially rather than 'strictly' visual, which is itself telling of the limitations of imagistic modes of writing overall; no image conveyed in language can ever be solely visual. It is not initially clear whose perspective, if anyone's, is focused by this framing device, and it is a while before this confusion is cleared up. The second sentence, a decidedly blurry description of the protagonist – depersonalised at this point (as 'a body') – follows the first only tenuously:

> Above the sea, overlooking the town, a body rolls upon a creaking bed: fish without fins, flat-headed, white-scaled, bound by a corridor room—dimensions rarely touched by the sun—Alistair Berg, hair-restorer, curled webbed toes, strung between heart and clock, nibbles in the half light, and laughter from the dance hall opposite. (1)

Caught between sleep and waking – 'between heart and clock' – let alone between fish and human, Berg's in-between state paves the way for a narrative which is rife with liminalities, uncertain boundaries, confusions not limited to the visual but impacting on all senses. The lack of delineation between visual and aural impressions and the rest of the narrative reinforces this blurring of boundaries. Seemingly taking the (perhaps, most accurately, filmic)[5] form of an image coming into focus, the description becomes more specific as it moves on – to the point of naming Berg, his profession and his location, albeit vaguely. The word 'overlooking' seems to refer to the position of Berg's 'corridor room' rather than to an act of visual perception, although it is not beyond the realm of sense that Berg's 'body' could be doing the looking; however, the former, more likely, interpretation highlights the positionality inherent in any (necessarily embodied) act of visual perception – the body which looks is positioned both spatially and socially. '[O]verlooking' implies height, and thus an improved vantage

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[5] Obviously there is the physiological 'coming-into-focus' of Berg's eyes as he wakes up, but in many ways *Berg* seems to be already thinking of itself as a film (the novel was in fact made into a film in 1989, retitled *Killing Dad*, starring Richard E. Grant as Berg). The text is full of film noir references and generic conventions (aesthetic and thematic emphasis on shadow and light, secretive characters, limited viewpoint for the reader provided by a first-person narrative) and general filmic techniques (for example, the close-focus technique employed in separating Berg's letters from the rest of the text in the first few pages of the novel – like he is seeing them as visually separate from his current environment).

point, placing Berg – or at least Berg's window – in a position from which he can theoretically see a lot, when the view is not obscured by rain. The 'half light' and reference to lack of sunlight, however, reinforce the obfuscated nature of Berg's more immediate surroundings, as well as the view through his window. It is being signalled from the outset that nothing can be seen quite clearly in this narrative.

The window is one detail – along with the partition – that is recurrently referred to in the narrative of *Berg*, hence seeming to focalise the narrative at the points it appears. It does this most obviously because the amount that can be seen through it is limited, unlike the boundless arena in which Berg's thoughts play out. Thus it both anchors the narrative to a (relatively) fixed point and focuses on a manageable segment of the scene outside. Notably it also extends Berg's vision beyond the walls of his room, to the dancehall and the streets below – extending but simultaneously limiting his scope, an arbitrary selection of what the full street scene has to offer. In Alberti's fifteenth-century system of single-point perspective, the window is symbolic of the transparency with which painting (specifically history painting) accurately represents the visual elements of a scene. Single-point is a form of perspective in which a view recedes to a single vanishing point, designedly, to please the viewer, who resultantly is placed at the centre of an imaginary panorama. As Nicholas Mirzoeff outlines, 'Alberti's famous image of a history painting being the view seen through a window at once suggests a transparency but also fixed boundary to the image' (*Introduction* 28). The window frame or the picture frame decisively closes the image; in the case of the window, the content can alter depending on where the observer is standing – the frame remains fixed in place, however. On another note, Berg is not the artist here, but the viewer. This has important ramifications when considering who would traditionally view paintings employing single-point perspective. As Mirzoeff describes, single-point perspective was historically 'avoided for figures except where it was clearly the King that was to be the viewer' (38), because of the (self-)importance this singular, monocular vision imposed on the perceiver. Likewise, Berger describes how '[p]erspective makes every single eye the centre of the visible world. [. . .] The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God' (*Ways* 16). In Quin's novel, Berg's pseudo-omniscience, entirely by his own imagination, grants him a similar singularity of vision – singularity which is always associated with authority, power and mobility (or lack thereof).

The text consistently undermines Berg's authority, however, by showing Berg's reading of events to be false. He certainly imagines himself in a position of centrality, of significance, most obviously of importance – sort of like a central figure in a panopticon arrangement, a figure of whom Foucault writes: 'He is the individual who looms over everything with a single gaze which no detail, however minute, can escape' (*Discipline* 217). Berg assigns himself this central position, notably also the position of the important viewer in the system of single-point perspective; the long-running associations (in western thought) between centrality, individuality, vision and power are clear. Ultimately Quin shows this positioning up to be a false presumption on Berg's part: the superior power he derives from his supposed position of importance is totally imagined. And, characteristically of Quin's humour, it does change depending on his mood:

> He yawned, stretched; the music distracted, he went to the window. A microscopic eye upon a never-changing scene, except perhaps the weather. Youths nonchalantly leaned from the windows, behind them twisting shapes of couples could be seen, and as from a umbilical cord Berg strung himself through their weaving arms and legs. An eye, then two, stared across. He pulled the curtains, and leaned against the wall, choking over a cigarette. Gradually he calmed down, and pushed his face against the window. Another eye gazed as through a telescope, held his own, then fell. He faced the room. Why get into such a state, just because someone had seen him, surely there was nothing to fear, nothing to be ashamed of? (5–6)

The 'never-changing scene' goes some way towards explaining why the appearance of the window tends to focalise and order Berg's thoughts, while the 'microscopic eye' suggests that Berg assigns himself the larger macroscopic scale, carrying associations of a superior importance and power. While from Berg's perspective he is of course the larger figure, the very reference to the microscope actualises (in language only, admittedly) the scale discrepancy that in reality is only perspectival or positional. Later in the passage, '[a]nother eye gazed as through a telescope', maintaining the scale discrepancy assigned by Berg's earlier analogy, even though imagining the other eye's point of view, Berg assumes the planetary position, is still the larger body. The scale discrepancy is naturalised for Berg here, as he comfortably assumes the position of the larger, more significant or important, body. Berg's concern about being seen is explicable within the narrative: he has arrived undercover, intending to kill his father. This response of Berg's suddenly switches the power relations: even

though it is unclear who exactly is looking at Berg, and irrespective of what they might intend by that looking, the situation of being looked at is enough to place Berg in a position of weakness.[6]

These shifts in scale are quite characteristic of Berg. Normally he positions himself at the centre of the universe (or even as the universe itself), narratively and spatially, an observer-god who, in his supposition, can see more than everyone else around him: 'then nothing mattered, because everything comprehended your significance' (11); 'Snatch the stars, pull out the moon for my navel' (10). However, he sometimes occupies positions of miniscule scale, gets decentred or fails to see: 'He leaned out, but failed seeing the pub clock' (9); 'the whole galaxy: a giant's chair, oneself a splinter in the leg' (8). Much of the looking in the first chapter is figured as Berg looking outwards from his claustrophobic environment (through peepholes, especially, spying on his father), simultaneously enhancing the claustrophobia and enlarging his world beyond the confines of his room. Towards the end of the chapter, the line 'You looking for comprehension' (20), seemingly Berg addressing himself, stresses the link between visual perception and understanding, notably followed by the botched result of '[a]pprehension only' (20). Undoing old associations between light and increased visibility, the narrative stresses that light too can obscure: 'Blades of light through lace curtains throwing other dimensions out of place' (20) – similarly to the half light at the chapter's opening. As the light goes down and the house becomes 'quieter, darker', the chapter ends with him 'pressed [. . .] against the partition, listening to the sea hissing in the distance' (21), attempting to gain knowledge of the world outside through any available means. Opening in half light and closing in darkness, the first chapter of *Berg* neatly sums up the challenges posed to information acquisition via the senses, the ways in which perception can be compromised by these and other factors (especially psychological ones, and those imposed by limitations in knowledge about a given situation, the literal and figurative conditions of darkness). The search for knowledge thus becomes a circular, and seemingly impossible, endeavour: knowledge gained through the senses is necessary to interpret a situation, but that knowledge cannot necessarily be trusted, the whole process hopelessly subjective.

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[6] This situation of being looked at also closely resembles Jean-Paul Sartre's classic philosophical account of shame in *Being and Nothingness*, in which a man peering through a keyhole at someone realises they are actually looking at him, and so he becomes the object of their gaze, as Kaye Mitchell discusses in *Writing Shame: Gender, Contemporary Literature and Negative Affect* (4). Shame is, for Sartre, 'recognition of the fact that I am indeed the object which the Other is looking at and judging' (350).

Berg dramatises looking, while alluding throughout to *Oedipus Rex*, a drama which centres on various forms of blindness: firstly an inability to see or lack of recognition (nobody recognises Oedipus and Oedipus doesn't recognise his father or mother), and secondly a self-inflicted blindness (Oedipus physically blinds himself when all is made clear). A more mundane and comedic version of the story, *Berg* is also full of imagined borders – frame edges which do not work to compartmentalise, as everything spills over – mainly in the form of the flimsy partition wall separating Berg's room from his father's and Judith's. Berg watches out his window, spies through his key-hole and listens through the partition. Evidence comes to Berg across these thresholds, but often obliquely, or in some way misinterpreted, because of his limited vision and understanding. The window, which should be the clearest means of acquiring visual evidence, is smudged and blurred throughout. The final chapter of *Berg*, however, consists solely of the following lines:

> A window just cleaned. Above the sea, overlooking a town, a man motionless, bound by a velvet-covered couch, and a woman, whose hands flutter round a butterfly brooch. They stare at a piece of wood, five foot by seven, that shakes now and then—an animal thumping its tail . . . (168)

Now 'cleaned', the window is finally transparent. But the direction of viewing has been reversed: we are now looking inwards, at Berg and Judith, as they stare at the partition between the rooms. The reader/viewer has assumed the position of power – and note the filmic manner in which the reader assumes the position of viewer, because focused on a visual image framed by the window. There is a voyeuristic element to the looking here, as there often is in *Berg*, and by drawing attention to the reader's position of voyeur at the end, Quin provokes a retrospective questioning of the reader's posi-tion – as possible voyeur – throughout. Notably, the power derived from looking in a voyeuristic sense is devoid of interaction, of direct contact with the situation being observed, but revolves around the direction of the gaze: of looking without being seen.[7] *Berg* has been preparing the reader for this kind of crossing from the outset – hence

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[7] Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur* (1955) depicts a similarly distorted observational lens to Quin's *Berg*, with its protagonist frantically remembering minute details about a day on which a girl was killed, blurring the boundary between factual reality and imagination – thus assuming a voyeuristic position in relation to his own history, a situation rel-evant to many of Quin's narratives, particularly *Passages*, which will be a focus in Chapter 3. In *Berg*, the sexual connotations of voyeurism are brought to the fore in

the ease of shifting the narrative perspective, from inside to outside, Berg to reader, and so on – by its lack of fixity of speaking/thinking subject, the divide between speaking and thinking itself, pronoun usage and so on. This lack of fixity provides a further indication that what is seen and how it is interpreted is so much a matter of positioning, of placement within the framework or environment. The clarity of the newly cleaned window does little to clear up the ambiguities of the narrative, which ends with an ellipsis, projecting into an unknown but presumably circular series of future events (Berg's father has seemingly returned to the hotel, in disguise). *Berg* synthesises various types of narrative and imagistic frames, creating a structure of frames within frames (later a fixation for Quin, in her 1969 novel, *Passages*), demonstrating a continual concern for heightened forms of artifice and theatricality within literature, as well as containment, a certain kind of closure: how the frame of the novel seems to contain a finite amount of elements which can be reversed or reshuffled – a technique taken to its extreme in Brooke-Rose's *Out*, which obsessively repeats statements and descriptions, which are reordered to form new syntheses.

Berg introduces us to the limitations of individual perspective and the construction of reality through the motif of the window frame, which, since Alberti's systematisation in the fifteenth century, has been culturally embedded in European philosophy as representative of truth and transparency. The significance of the frame here being fixed should not be overlooked: like the cinema screen, elements move within the stationary parameter of the window, in keeping with the plentiful allusions to conventions of film noir in the text. In *Berg*, there is little veracity to be had by the characters in the narrative, which is a maze of misdirection and misread signals. Berg himself appears ridiculous: figured like a king surveying his lands from his tiny room through his dirty window, he is a parody of the observer-god figure he aspires – and seemingly at times believes himself – to be. Berg's egotism is a significant feature of his characterisation, demonstrated again and again throughout the narrative:

> Shadow that over-ruled cracks in the pavements, a distorted double face in the windows. [. . .] I take, I see, I subject my own mediocre self into something big. Berg walked away from the reflection that threw a superficial slant on the growth that had formed inside. (24–5)

Berg's lascivious behaviour towards his father's mistress, Judith, which is usually also misogynistic. A dramatic reversal occurs in a sexual encounter, or at least an attempted sexual encounter, between Berg's father and Berg who is dressed as Judith, in which the father falls blind drunk to the floor before being able to get under Berg's clothing.

The order of 'I take, I see' suggests Berg's self-centredness, such mastery that allows him full access to and understanding of the world, and also suggests that he takes first, processes later. Subsequently, the use of 'subject' as a verb is telling; Berg's subject formation seems to be built upon this process of projection, of making himself larger, more omnipotent. Grammatically strange, the phrase indicates that Berg deems himself to be in control of his identity. The distortion seems to misrepresent his internal self, the use of 'growth' naturalising it somewhat, although growth has positive and negative, tumorous, associations; his distaste at what he deems to be inside is evident through the terms 'mediocre', 'growth', and his turning away from the vision – skewed, but only superficially, by the distorted, duplicitous reflection. Berg is also racked by self-doubt throughout, represented frequently in terms of looking in the narrative, through his near-constant anxiety about being watched and judged. Quin plays with all the associations with vision and power, using them constantly to undermine Berg, to show how little vision and power Berg has in the narrative. In doing so she undermines the connection between power and vision itself, highlighting the unreliability (and short-sightedness) of the perspective of any one person, underscoring the discrepancy between what one person actually sees and what they think they see: how vision is always an act of interpretation, and frames are never exactly arbitrary. Specifically, the assumed centre of the liberal humanist subjective universe (white and male in any case) has his sense of perspective undermined, and certainly masculinity is underwriting Berg's desires for power and control, from sexual dominance over Judith to the supposed omnipotence that would come with ridding his life of his father's presence.

In a similar theoretical move to Quin, also using the motif of the window, W. J. T. Mitchell in 1984 directly questions the 'view through one's window', relating semiotic scepticism about the production of meaning, the 'imagistic turn' or cultural shift into a media-saturated age, and the philosophical-theoretical idea that what is seen through a window is not 'natural' – that, in fact, nothing is.[8] In doing so,

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[8] The window motif is also prevalent in the video, installation and sculptural artist Dan Graham's work from the 1970s onwards, which often interrogates the relationship between observer and architectural environment. In 1974, a similarly voyeuristic (and doubly voyeuristic, with the possibility for seeing both ways) situation to that at the end of *Berg* is represented in Dan Graham's *Picture Window Piece*, a piece of video art utilising simultaneous live feeds of interior and exterior space hinged in the separating, yet somewhat 'invisible' (because clear, unobtrusive), element which is the 'picture

he demonstrates the cultural embeddedness of the window-as-truth metaphor, and the conventions the metaphor carries with it, silently, whether the receiver knows anything about the history of perspective in painting or not. He writes that:

> suspicion of the image seems only appropriate in a time when the very view from one's window, much less the scenes played out in everyday life and in the various media of representation, seems to require constant interpretive vigilance. Everything – nature, politics, sex, other people – comes to us now as an image, preinscribed with a speciousness that is nothing but the Aristotelian 'species' under a cloud of suspicion. [. . .] How do we transform images, and the imagination that produces them, into powers worthy of trust and respect? ('What Is' 520)

Mitchell is writing in the 1980s, when an imagistic turn in the 1960s and 1970s could be more easily identified, during which scepticism about the nature and use of imagery proliferated among theorists (Barthes, Debord, Foucault and Baudrillard are some of the main contributors to this line of image theory). Because images are increasingly media-produced, and we, as a society, have been trained to question the imagery around us – especially imagery purveyed by the media – the images we see are 'preinscribed' with speciousness. However, Mitchell argues, imagery must not be treated as innately suspicious – no more so than language, in any case.

The 'interpretive vigilance' Mitchell writes of is not necessarily upheld by Berg, despite best intentions; the images that come to him are so easily misread. Within Quin's narrative, it seems very difficult indeed to reach a point where visual perception itself, let alone the image, can be interpreted in a straightforward manner and thus trusted as a valid means of gathering evidence from which to draw conclusions (and not always for reasons of semiotic interpretive uncertainty). The world in *Berg* often presents as unreadable no matter which sense is meant to be doing the reading, hence the recurrent images of blindness, darkness – conventional markers of lack of knowledge, lack of foresight: 'blemished eye' (47); the dummy's

window'. The naturalistic painting as 'view through one's window' is literalised in the modern architectural convention of the picture window, although the frame in this case perhaps takes on new feats of conquest and mastery: containing not just an artistically selected and rendered scene but the actual and continually changing reality that lies outside the homeowner's window.

eyes '[g]lass-staring' (76); even the block of flats is personified with 'square eyes' and 'sewn up mouths' (49), blankly staring and silenced; regular references to *Oedipus Rex* coalesce through statements about what would happen '[i]n a Greek play' (106). In Mitchell's account, as in Alberti's history painting, the 'very view from one's window' represents the most basic reality, the mundane scenes one sees every day. Both Brooke-Rose and Quin exploit this fact that regularity and mundanity can no longer be taken as synonymous with veracity; reality itself, much less art, has to be read (or viewed) and interpreted. In choosing everyday imagery with which to explore the process of perception, they show us just how fundamental these processes of seeing are to informing our attitudes.

Multi-Perspectival Vision and Natural versus Constructed Frames in *Out*

While the window in *Berg* calls up developments in single-point perspective within art history and the narrative focuses on the psychological inflection of images – how Berg's mood alters what he sees – Brooke-Rose's text adds to this the optical side of image-formation, considering how an image is composed in the mind, reflecting on how much the brain compensates for what the eyes cannot see, and how important the position of the observer in space is. While Quin's window frame carries connotations of transparency and therefore veracity (and its opposite), as well as a monocular and highly selective viewpoint, Brooke-Rose's 'natural' frame seems more informed by twentieth-century scientific developments. Brooke-Rose makes recourse to a different systematics of reality and its truthful representation, via science, but with similar purpose to Quin's: to explore the subjectivity of seeing, the exploitation of systems of representation by those in positions of power, and to upend the natural–artificial dichotomy. As well as considerations of optics and the physiology of seeing, Brooke-Rose touches implicitly or explicitly upon the theory of relativity, quantum physics and the sciences of chaos and complexity. Additionally, the frames formed by tree branches (which will be the focus of this section) in *Out* are multiple, 'arbitrary' – although selected by the viewer, and fixed in language – and, unlike Berg's window, are part of the image they frame. In *Out*, Brooke-Rose indicates quite literally the impossibility of keeping the observer out of the frame (and the human scientist out of the interpretation of phenomena), as her perspectival shifts – the point of seeing is often

repositioned within the same description – literalise the relativity of observation: how the experience of phenomena can differ vastly based on the position of the observer. Brooke-Rose applies this relativity of observation and power to the social field by reversing (with somewhat problematic ease) the racial hierarchies of the West within the narrative, which is set in an indeterminate location in 'Afro-Eurasia'. The 'colourless', left sick by an event called 'the displacement' (the naming of which itself suggests the cruciality of position in interpretation), form an underclass in the novel, a source of labour for the elite (who are African in the narrative). *Out* centres on a sick white male protagonist, reliant on state-supplied '[u]nemployment benefit pills' and subsequently work from his wife's rich employer, Mrs Mgulu (76). This protagonist's perceptive faculties are so obscured that they call into question the very possibility of accurate sight, let alone objective vision.

The implications of Brooke-Rose's interrogations of objectivity and positionality for 'seeing' race in the narrative are myriad, and somewhat beyond the scope of this book; of the nine novels I read, *Out* is the only text which directly addresses racism in this way. My focus here in this regard will be on the implicit whiteness of Brooke-Rose's framing and gazing – and following Tina Campt, the potentially inherent whiteness of the very structure of the gaze, the structure of 'looking at' (which renders the situation of looking binary and hierarchical).[9] I am in agreement with Adam Guy's careful reasoning that '*Out*'s dystopian frame itself rests on ideologically problematic premises', 'reactionary' because it merely reverses existent structures of domination, rather than imagining outside these hierarchies. However, for Guy, the text is not only aware of but 'thematizes its own limits', thus carving 'out a negative space in which a better form and a better content might be inscribed' (*nouveau roman* 161). Speaking directly to the context of British establishment racism in the 1960s (for one example, the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act was designed to limit migration to the UK), Brooke-Rose's text is inflected with ostensibly anti-racist intentions if limited vision (and limitations on the anti-racist discourse available to her, too, perhaps). As Joseph

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[9] See Campt's *A Black Gaze*, which focuses on contemporary visual arts and culture and a new cohort of Black artists shifting 'the optics of "looking at" to a politics of *looking with, through,* and *alongside another*' (8). The Prelude covers previous scholarship on the inherent whiteness of the gaze, the gaze as 'structure of visual engagement' potentially inseparable from whiteness, and the 'traditional' dominant ways of seeing blackness: as the 'elsewhere (or nowhere) of whiteness' (7).

Darlington's discussion of the racist misreadings of *Out* in reviews makes clear (*Experimentalists* 83), the dominant British literary context at this point was as intensely conservative as the establishment political landscape, so that the idea of racial equality could be deemed so 'radical' as to provoke wariness verging on hysteria – the immediate context out of which Brooke-Rose's novel emerged.

Out frequently refers to technologies of vision. One of its most oft-repeated refrains concerns microscopes and other forms of (real and imagined) scope, each of which highlights the human factor that interprets the data, humorously relating to the novel's most fundamental structuring principle, that of Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. The position in which this theory puts the observer is something of an obsession for *Out*. Brooke-Rose summarises the Uncertainty Principle as follows:

> any object is affected by the instrument observing it. You can't actually see an electron jumping from one orbit to another, if indeed it jumps, and . . . the photon that you've got to use is going to affect its behaviour. And I think this is very important in the observation of reality; the moment you start observing it, it shifts. And I think this is a problem modern novelists have to face, that you can't just make a photograph of the reality immediately around you because it has already shifted by the very process of photographing it, and looking at it. (qtd in Reyes 57)

Brooke-Rose thus takes a different route towards identifying the speciousness of images – previously explored in regard to media messaging and poststructuralist theory – but arrives at a similar endpoint: visible reality is not to be trusted, at least not implicitly. Humans cannot even see reality at the quantum scale, and when they can (with the use of tools and aids to visibility), they risk altering it fundamentally. Brooke-Rose compares this to the difficulty of capturing contemporary reality in writing: it does not stay still for you to observe it. Her characteristic mode of aligning the methods of two disciplines – here, that of the scientist and the novelist – has a tendency to elide the possibility of difference. However, in her metaphorising of the Uncertainty Principle in this method, she is certainly not alone; Heisenberg himself discusses the cultural uptake of Quantum Physics in *Physics and Philosophy* in 1958. Fundamentally, the observer is shown to be an interferer – to affect the outcome or results in some way – independent of discipline, an idea with broad philosophical implications.

The focus in this section will be on how Brooke-Rose parses the inevitable subjectivity of seeing, as well as how she considers the

placement of a physical frame within a moving scene – so that the observer can move, as can the frame itself and the elements within it. As well as this rendering of a system full of variables, her moving point of observation within the scene makes the situation all the more dynamic, drawing attention to how the view changes depending on the position of the observer (and their frame of reference). The main point of coherence between *Berg* and *Out* is how both novels deal with a recurrent visual: Brooke-Rose's tree frame, which is simultaneously laden with suggestive meaning and completely arbitrary, seems inspired by the obsessive qualities of *nouveau roman* narratives (the repetition of the stain image in Robbe-Grillet's 1957 novel *Jealousy*, for instance, or even the actually repeated frames in his 1963 film *L'Immortelle*), while Quin's window functions as a kind of symbol (though not a stable one), more like the window as a means of systematically presenting each character's worldview in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*.[10] The recurrence of these visual images in the novels, as well as the fact that both images are frames, makes them useful counterpoints for considering the visual focus in this period, touching as they do on philosophical areas of enquiry into subjectivity, objectivity, interpretability, truth and vision. While in *Berg*, the repetition increases the paranoia of the protagonist, repeating specific imagery takes on a mechanical quality in texts like *Out* and in Robbe-Grillet's *nouveaux romans*, adding to the impersonal qualities of the narratives – seemingly automatic rather than selected and placed artistically within the narrative; the artifice (or artistry) may not be foregrounded in these cases, as it is in *Berg*, but the constructed, manufactured (as opposed to naturally occurring) quality of the novels is certainly being highlighted.

Before I get to the main focus of my close readings, which is to be the tree frames in the novel, it is worth attending to the basic set-up of visuality in the world of *Out*. In the first episode of *Out* (which is separated into unnumbered chapters or sections), we are introduced

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[10] Woolf's novel highlights the chain of linguistic association between the window and a person's 'outlook': Woolf's characters, in turn, approach the window, describing what they 'see' (sometimes interspersed with thoughts and memories). The first chapter, titled 'The Window', sees principal characters (Mr and Mrs Ramsay, Charles Tansley) looking out of the window, with their descriptions of what they see effectively summarising their personalities. For instance, Mrs Ramsay's optimistic proposal that they can visit the lighthouse (albeit contingent on the weather) is an ultimately empty, but compassionate, promise (5). This relation of my reading of *Berg* to Woolf's novel was first suggested by Nonia Williams at the Reconnecting Text and World: Re-Reading the British Experimental Novel at Post-War conference (Paris, 2019).

to the panopticon-like arrangement of the 'colourless' Settlement and the Labour Exchange, where the unemployed have to report on their work searches and receive unemployment or dole pills, all the time being monitored, highly visible to the system which records their activities (though the competence of the system is somewhat limited). As a microcosmic exploration of surveillance, the narrative begins zoomed in on a pair of flies, gradually moving outwards to reveal the human form on which they stand, which has one fixed eye and one surveillant eye (possibly referring to a lazy eye or the view through a microscope; the fragmented, iterative, narratorless form of *Out* makes it difficult to definitively know much about the narrative). At the end of the first episode, there is mention of two windows, through which gardens are visible depending (presumably) on the position of the observer or whether anything blocks the view. Fundamentally, what can be seen are 'shacks too close for health'. However, the episode ends on a point of underscoring the contingency of any act of visual perception: 'Some people like to call them bungalows' (21). Looking in this world (and by implication the world outside the novel, too) is limited: by social position, geographical and physical location, by the inherent limitations of any individual's perspective and by the fact that the act of observation alters what is being observed. Therefore, truth is not available; there is no fundamental, or objective, vision, as the narrative of *Out* is at continual pains to make clear.

The second episode contrasts strongly to the first, introducing the mimosa trees framing the drive of the Big House, which is Mrs Mgulu's, providing a different form of security to that introduced in episode one, through distance, hiddenness and invisibility. The tree frames provide a naturally occurring (and thus unavoidable) frame:

> Here however the fig-tree's thick grey twigs poke upwards into the sky. The branches bearing them are contorted, like the convolutions of the brain. The darker grey trunk leans along the edge of the bank at an angle of forty degrees, inside which, from a standing position, the road may be seen. One of the branches sweeps downwards out of the trunk, away from the road, forming with the trunk an arch that frames the piece of road within it. The thick and long grey twigs on this down sweeping branch grow first downward also, then curve up like large U-letters. (22)

The focus on visuality and sight means the description is full of intricate visual detail, regardless of any narrative importance that might be

attributed to the objects described (as one might expect from a more conventional, realist narrative). Incidentally, the detail expended on this description – this being just the second paragraph of seven, which in total extend over three pages – highlights the inadequacy, or certainly inefficiency, of the linguistic medium for the purpose of describing visual perceptions. Details might be noticed in sequence, but each visual detail noticed would register itself instantaneously if seen instead of described linguistically. The use of 'contorted' and 'convolutions' signals complexity, calling up the complicated natural forms of fractal geometry (forms like fractal branching), a field of mathematics yet to emerge in 1964.[11] The attention to multiple perspectives within the same view complicates the idea that vision necessitates a consciousness, that a description of seeing means that someone sees. In representing the branches from the street, but also revealing that the street can be seen from within the 'angle of forty degrees' the trunk forms with the bank, Brooke-Rose decentres the description: rather than focalise the language through a specific character, she represents various impressions simultaneously, some of which might be seen and some merely 'known' to be true, and not necessarily by the same person, thus lending a sort of impersonality to the narrative which suggests an attempt at objectivity (but results mainly in indeterminacy).

As Brooke-Rose states of *Out*:

> The narration is both objective (no 'I', no 'he', only what is seen and heard) and obsessive, sick, in a style clearly influenced by Robbe-Grillet, except that the *nouveau roman* was not interested in SF or alternative fictions but in shifting our perceptions of the 'real' (it was first labelled *nouveau-réalisme*). ('Illicitations' 102)

That a narrative can be both 'objective' and 'sick' shows Brooke-Rose's lack of confidence in absolute description; in fact the sickness may stem from the obsessive attempts at objectivity (which are impossible for a human mind, as *Out* makes clear). The influence of the *nouveau roman* – through techniques like the narratorless present tense, obsessive description, attempts at objectivity and so on – has been picked up

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[11] Benoit B. Mandelbrot was the forerunner of this field of mathematics which he worked on throughout the 1970s, publishing *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* in 1982. Pertinently his system of identification was primarily visual: he highlighted complex repeated forms appearing in nature by first identifying forms which looked like other forms (the veins of a leaf and the branches of a tree, for instance). Hugh Kenner refers to him as a 'visuel' (725).

on by most of Brooke-Rose's critics, though, after *Out*, Brooke-Rose was careful to distance herself from the movement in her personal and critical writing.[12] Brooke-Rose complicates the realist-experimentalist dichotomy, arguing implicitly that experimental form has the capacity to address reality – and even affect it (through influencing the perceptive faculties of readers). Brooke-Rose furthers this argument in a commentary on the *nouveau roman* writer Nathalie Sarraute:

> By this I mean rather more than what [Sarraute] seems to mean when she says that the so-called formalists, who try hard to look anew, and to evolve new forms for the expression of what they see, are the true realists; whereas the so-called realists are the formalists because they are essentially reporters, however acute, who look fairly hard but see what any other intelligent person looking at that same area of experience would also see, and who are obliged for ready intelligibility and urgency of communication to pour what they have seen into the by then familiar forms evolved by the previous generation's formal experimenters (indeed, one might add that their very seeing is conditioned by those forms). ('Baroque Imagination' 411)

Innovation becomes the new marker of attention to reality, in Brooke-Rose's account – conveyed in the language of vision, also: looking anew, seeing more clearly. The 'so-called realists' come off as lazy in comparison, or at least less able (because rushed, or because 'obliged', for whatever reason) to address the complexity of an ever-changing reality. The value judgement is not explicit, but it is clear where Brooke-Rose's own sympathies lie; couching the comparison in the language of work, effort, achievement ('try hard', 'evolve', 'true realists', as opposed to the realists' 'fairly hard') only adds to the exceptionalism Brooke-Rose seems to be suggesting for the experimental artist, to not be conditioned by preconceived forms. It is unclear whether she is suggesting that it is through sheer effort, or something innate, that the formalists evade the trap that the realists fall into, to 'pour what they have seen into [. . .] familiar forms' and, further, to have their very seeing conditioned by those forms. The near transcendental language ('are the true realists') does nothing to clear up the confusion. Brooke-Rose's attention here to how sight

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[12] See Adam Guy's *The nouveau roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism* (Oxford UP 2019), especially Chapter 5 which includes a reading of *Out*. Guy reads the *nouveau roman* in the context of empire and decolonisation, considering how Brooke-Rose and others respond to Alain Robbe-Grillet's work in manners 'reflective of and responsive to their shared historical moment' (149).

might be not only influenced, but conditioned, is important for an investigation into visuality in her work. If the *nouveau roman* was initially interested in 'shifting our perceptions of the "real"', *Out* seems interested in drawing our attention to how those perceptions are made, and possibly, as a result, shifting them – but putting the power or decision to do so in the hands of the reader, if only they will look closely enough at what is being revealed to them.

In an article entitled 'The Vanishing Author', Brooke-Rose claims that 'Robbe-Grillet has reduced the author to a mere "camera-I," a mere register' (26), as if the narrator is a focal point only, emptied of personality and subjectivity – or, maybe more aptly, subjecthood.[13] *Out*'s focaliser seems a much less efficient recording device than this description of a Robbe-Grillet narrator suggests, considering the reams of text it takes to render a visual impression. Natalie Ferris relates this nervy accumulation of detail to the act of framing itself and to Brooke-Rose's own emphasis on the selective qualities of framing, writing that 'Brooke-Rose introduces, to an obsessive degree, the potential for greater insight, making anxious moves between what could be near or far' ('Preferred it abstract' 237). Ferris discusses Brooke-Rose's own commentary on the filmic frame in her 1965 essay 'The Baroque Imagination of Robbe-Grillet': a means of giving significance, says Brooke-Rose, 'to any sight which in "reality" seems insignificant', which implies 'at least a minimal degree of composition' (409). Ferris conveys Brooke-Rose's perception of Robbe-Grillet's '"elaborate formalism" [as] itself a framing device' (239), highlighting how the performed absence of narratorial mastery might require a rigorously devised system which itself requires a high degree of skill and mastery to navigate. Nevertheless, the suggestion (of an anti-masterful stance towards observation and description) is there: no matter how wide the frame is cast, it never completes the image, or frames a whole; there is always more to be seen, perhaps in the detail, perhaps beneath the surface. As Brooke-Rose herself writes, '[d]oubt in the validity of appearance has of

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[13] This abstracting of the subject or emptying of subjecthood has correlations both in studies on perspective and in psychoanalytic theory contemporary to these writers. Margaret Iversen, writing on Hubert Damisch's study of perspective, summarises and synthesises several philosophical threads as such: '[Damisch] cites Lacan's observation that perspective reduces the human being to an eye and the eye to a point, and this reduction is then correlated with the later theorization of the Cartesian subject – itself a sort of geometrical point' (125). What is most relevant to my argument here is how thinking of perspective as emanating from a particular point stresses the spatial or positional aspects of visual perspective.

course become endemic, indeed, epidemic, in our time' ('Baroque Imagination' 407). In its exhaustive description of visual detail, *Out* comically emphasises the impossibility of objective representation, as well as the impossibility of accurately representing visible reality in language. Any resultant anxiety arises only when one is attempting to master the situation – to see or represent everything – and is met with the impossibility of that task.

In her reading of *Out*, Debra Malina presents the narrator as a 'focalizer-framer' ('for to focalize *is* to frame', she writes), seeing systems as 'frameworks of understanding' and systematisation as frame-construction (or sense-making). For this reason, in Malina's view, it is 'painful' for the narrator to be rendered frameless, to lose the ways to make sense of his environment: she claims that '*Out* stresses the psychic violence inflicted by both the construction and deconstruction of hierarchies' (69–70). Malina's analysis hinges on positioning the narrator of *Out* as framer, making sense (or rather failing to make sense) of his surroundings. Because of this positioning, the frame comes to symbolise stabilisation above all else – a seeming containment of supposed chaos – though Malina is in general attendant to the dual function of framing, 'the manner in which the frame constructs the framed' (70). In my reading, however, *Out* demonstrates the ways in which material – visual or otherwise – refuses to be framed, with the repeated description of the mimosa trees (and elsewhere, the fig trees) continually undercutting itself, constantly creating the push for more explanation or description. The frame, as a result, is shown to be an inherently unstable structure, a necessarily partial or imperfect construction which does not fit onto the complexities of life – just as Berlant points out the inherent stretchiness of rules and porousness of norms (*Inconvenience* 23). Furthermore, visual information rendered earlier is often retroactively shown to have been provisional, an interpretation or hypothesis, as the following analysis will highlight.

The description of the mimosa trees gives the reader plenty of detail outside of the (tree) frame, highlighting the relative paucity of the visual elements that are framed. And it soon becomes clear that there are multiple frames, or that the parts of the image framed change depending on viewpoint:

> In summer, from ground-level, nearer to the fig-tree, the arch formed by the leaning trunk and the down-sweeping branch frames a whole landscape of descending olive-groves beyond the road, which itself disappears behind the bank. In summer the grey framework of trunk and branch is further framed by a mass of deep green foliage.

At the moment, from a standing position, it is only a piece of road which is framed. At the moment the fig-tree looks blasted.

If the fig-tree here looks blasted then the mimosas up at the big house cannot be in bloom. The two events do not occur simultaneously. It is sometimes sufficient to imagine but only within nature's possibilities. (22)

We are given a hypothetical framed scene – from the temporal position of summer, spatial position of 'nearer to the fig-tree' – presumably gathered from previous experience of what can be seen during summer, but exactly whose experience is unclear. The need to attend to all possible aspects and permutations of the description gains in excess and Beckettian humour, rendering the situation somewhat baroque (or cubistic): the baroque is characterised for Brooke-Rose by 'sudden swerves of perspective, the exploitation of spatio-temporal relations, the way an object can be several things at once or seen from two or three different angles but never in isolation' ('Dynamic' 94).[14] In the passage above, the frame now contains imagery beyond the road, which was all that the previous frame contained, presumably because of the viewpoint. The image has gained in depth (spatial and temporal), and the hypothetical eye perceiving this scene further recedes – camera-like – to describe a frame around the frame: that of the 'mass of green foliage'. The passage then returns to the initial viewpoint, the term 'moment' highlighting the changeability of this scene and the momentary nature of any act of visual perception which is to take it in. Finally, the passage above contains the notion that the image is being constructed at least in part intellectually, from memory and reasoning: the knowledge that one set of trees looks a certain way is contingent upon the observation that the visible set of trees looks the way it does, as well as the knowledge that '[t]he two events do not occur simultaneously'. One can imagine the scene to a certain extent but must take into account what is known to be possible ('within nature's possibilities'): there is a system, within which there are many numerous (but finite) possibilities, like the system of language in structural linguistics – although the potential for Derridean free-play within the system, or framework, decidedly increases those possibilities.

[14] Brooke-Rose's description of Beckett's style, also in 'Dynamic Gradients', reads as particularly self-reflexive: 'The language [in *How It Is*] is funny, but also precise, mathematically so at times, full of annulled hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, everything scientifically open to doubt, no series of possible alternatives ever being in itself finite as a process but infinitely extendable' (94).

If *Berg* is sometimes like watching a film, in *Out* we are one fur-
ther step outside the frame – akin to watching the process of filming.
Receding even further, the hypothetical eye, or 'camera-I' – whether
physically moving or merely zooming out – gradually encompasses
more of the scene:

> Beyond the closed wrought-iron gates the plane-trees line the drive,
> forming with their bare and upward branches a series of networks
> that become finer and finer as the drive recedes towards the big house,
> made now discernible by the leaflessness. First there are the vertical
> bars of the tall wrought-iron gates, flanked, behind the two white
> pillars and white walls, by the feathery green mimosa trees which
> are not in bloom. Beyond the vertical bars of the closed wrought-
> iron gates there is the thick network of the first plane-trees on either
> side of the drive. Beyond the thick network of bare branches there is
> a finer network, closing in a little over the drive, and beyond that a
> finer network still. The network of bare branches functions in depth,
> a corridor of cobwebs full of traps for flies, woven by a giant spider
> behind huge prison bars. (22–3)

The 'series of networks' which becomes 'finer and finer' suggests the
increased complexity created by overlapping images; the fineness
also merely describing the proximity of viewer to object – notably
in terms of how its appearance is altered to the viewer (thicker or
thinner depending on proximity). The house is visible only because
the trees have no leaves, as is the fineness of the network (these
are the conditions for its visibility). The closer the network to the
viewer, the thicker it appears. The 'depth' necessary for the net-
work to function on one hand simply describes the fact that more
can be seen the further one looks, while on the other suggesting the
dual meaning of 'function' in terms of visibility (functions visually)
and purpose (functions as a trap for flies). It also implies three-
dimensionality, rendering depth in a scene in which the focal point
shifts around and the viewpoint seems to pan to incorporate more
and more of the drive in the description of the visual image: 'beyond'
this and 'beyond' that, acknowledging that the description is never
finished, unless ostensibly 'framed'.

The final paragraph of the description shifts back to a seemingly
more personal style of narration, in that the sentences appear to be the
workings out of a single consciousness rather than a kind of idealised
focal point that can be anywhere within the scene at any moment
(until fixed to a point by the rendering of the description in language):

> It is not true that the mimosas cannot blossom while the fig-tree looks blasted. The small nodules just visible on the straight long twigs of the fig-tree may already represent the first, January round of buds, the edible ones which do not produce leaves and fruit. Therefore the mimosas could just be in bloom. Unless of course the fig-tree does not look as blasted as all that. The nodules could already be the buds that produce leaves and fruit, in which case the problem does not arise. (23)

First undercutting the information supplied earlier, the passage renders previous 'certainties' false, calling into question the possible veracity of any supposedly accurate statement provided in the narrative – and addressing the concern with scientific theories and provisionality, how one theory is held to be 'true' until another, better theory displaces it.[15] In fact this passage contains two revisions, one of information provided earlier, and one of this first revision, setting up an iterative cycle of revisioning (re-visioning: seeing again) which can be compared to *Berg*'s circular depiction of unknowability. In fact, the build-up of qualifiers, rendering the passage less and less certain as it progresses, serve a specific purpose: the scene is open to contingency (not described in the style of a masterful observer-god), described in bits and seemingly from within (not above or outside). The image is thus allowed to emerge from the details. The passage ends with uncertainty concerning whether the mimosas are in bloom or not – it is too early to tell from the 'small nodules just visible' – thus negating both true and 'not true' statements about whether the two states can occur simultaneously. One outcome would render the previous statement problematic, while the other would not – but at this stage it is impossible to know which outcome will occur. Characteristic of the general narrative style of *Out*, any certainties do not remain so for long. The '[t]herefore', touching on the kind of resolution aimed at in mathematical or scientific problem-solving, is in tension with the contingencies highlighted by 'may already represent', '[u]nless of course', 'could already be'; however, the 'therefore' is itself already contingent upon the previous statement, itself unverifiable. In basing a conclusion upon irresolvable questions, Brooke-Rose describes a much greater

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[15] As Brooke-Rose puts it: 'They [scientific formulae and theories] "work", technologically and macroscopically, and they explain the phenomena, just as earlier hypotheses "worked" for their time. But at any moment they can and are replaced by others which "work" and explain the phenomena better' ('Dynamic' 95).

epistemological impossibility of knowing anything about reality with any degree of certainty. It is difficult to solve a problem where none of the figures are known, or where every factor is a variable.

In the tree passages analysed here, the image exceeds its frame (comparable to the conditions rendering Stein's 'necessity for cubism', as in the epigraph to my Introduction), an effect both of the complexity of the image and of the focaliser's inability to fix it – or frame it – in language. *Out* depicts various forms of looking technology alluded to or explicitly present in the novel: from still cameras to roving movie cameras suggested by the narrative techniques, to the assorted 'scopes' which reveal detail at unprecedented levels of scale or depth.[16] The novel interrogates the limits of looking with the aid of these technologies: how the limits shift as new technologies become available, and how the limitations of human capacities nonetheless impact upon the interpretation of data. The act of looking in *Out* is inevitably a matter of interpretation on the part of the viewer: 'A microscope might perhaps reveal animal ecstasy among the innumerable white globules in the circle of gruel, but only to the human mind behind the microscope' (*Out* 15). Seeing further or more deeply does not necessarily bring clarity, or anything approaching truth, and *Out* is continually attentive to the ways in which positioning – both spatial and social – affects what one can see.

These texts defamiliarise the most mundane images, calling attention to how they are formed, and indeed how they are interpreted. As such, in *Out*, a description of the minor character Mrs Ned is really a description of how she is seen. I intend both meanings: the physical act of looking at her and the conclusions arrived at by the observer (the narrator-focaliser). Importantly, Mrs Ned's shack is visible from both the Settlement and the Big House, forming an ambiguously in-between point: Mrs Ned is literally there to be looked at in the

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[16] Brooke-Rose's subsequent novel *Such* (1968) takes some of the themes in *Out* – technologies of vision, especially scientific technologies, frames of reference as individual perspectives on the world and the concept of the 'camera-eye' – to further extremes, travelling way outside the frame as previously delineated, however ineffectually, in *Out*. The main character, Larry, inhabits two worlds (life and afterlife), occasionally transitioning between the two (a sort of frame-jumping manoeuvre). Having died and come back to (after-)life, Larry finds himself in a trippy parallel space-based world where he has radio telescopes for eyes – a literalisation of the camera-eye/camera-I homophone, except instead of 'capturing' images as a camera does, Larry is ostensibly able to 'see' further/deeper into space with the use of radio waves, and so his capacity for sight/insight is greatly enhanced. Due to limitations of space, I do not read *Such* in detail here, although there is certainly a lot to say about frames, vision and visuality in that narrative.

narrative, primarily when she is sexualised in descriptions by the protagonist as the object of his extra-marital fantasies. The following passage demonstrates these power discrepancies revolving around vision and visibility:

> The rectangular frame of the verandah is itself still held in the rounded frame formed by the line of the eyebrow and the line of the nose, to the left of the nose with the right eye closed, to the right of the nose with the left eye closed; below, there is the invisible but assumed line of the cheek, which becomes visible only with a downward look that blurs the picture. The frame of the verandah expands beyond the rounded field of vision as Mrs. Ned grows unmistakably into Mrs [*sic*] Ned, who is ironing in the small front room. [. . .] She is cut across the chest by an oblong bar of light reflected in the glass. The frame of the verandah engulfs as Mrs. Ned looks up and smiles, with eyebrows raised perhaps more than is necessary for the occasion. (29)

This description takes its time, careful to detail the ways in which Mrs Ned is being represented so as to highlight the perceptual and interpretative processes in place, the fact that this is neither a static nor an innocent image. At every stage of the process, interpretations are being made – by the unknown observer and, in turn, by the reader – resulting in a great accumulation of assumptions and conclusions surrounding the figure being represented. The mechanics of seeing are self-evident in this paragraph, clearly signposted at every point. More insidious are the power relations encoded in this act of visual perception, the kinds of violence implicit in this observer's representation of Mrs Ned. The verandah forms a frame through which the image is viewed, in turn framed by the facial features of the observer, making clear that the representation is in this case the result of a human mind processing the visual imagery. The description also makes clear the impossibility of keeping the observer out of the frame, in the most literal of fashions (by extension revealing how every image is in effect framed, selected and interpreted by the observer). *Out* demonstrates that all acts of looking are embodied and subjective – and thus presumptuous, prejudiced. This passage also indicates, again in quite a literal sense, how easily perspective is altered on a purely physiological level: the image shifts depending on which eye is closed and which left open. The resultant monocular vision does not alter discernibly in content, although simple, factual information about the image (where the verandah is located) is altered by the basic movement of closing one eye, demonstrating once again the contingency on which all acts of visual perception

rest. If the observer makes their cheek visible, the picture is blurred: a literalised demonstration of the notion that one cannot see everything clearly at once (or keep the observer out of the frame). Focusing on one element in a situation obscures the others.

There is a measure of violence implied in the act of looking, the way the body of Mrs Ned is split, then framed, while the observer is at a complete remove, coolly detached from the object of observation. Mrs Ned is not after all being 'cut through the chest', but the violence of the language, and the casualness with which it is delivered, suggest something of the power relations in play here: Mrs Ned is a woman, and here part of the racialised underclass which Brooke-Rose has made white.[17] The use of violent language to describe a 'harmless' situation suggests the situation is not in fact harmless, that there is a power dynamic in play in this act of looking (which is one-way), that the observer wields a certain power over the observed and perceives without participation, from a distance, themselves unobserved. Even as the image returns to normality – with Mrs Ned no longer cut in half – the impact of the violent terminology lingers, demonstrating that even when a situation is reframed, it carries traces of its original framing. In reversing the racial hierarchy of the West, Brooke-Rose is ostensibly trying to point out the arbitrariness of hierarchical structures and the play of power within them, and the inseparability of position and power; however, the ease with which she depicts the reversal suggests a social relativity that elides the historical circumstances which caused the imbalance in the first place. It implies that were the situation reversed on these binary terms (black/ white, dominant/submissive, 'civilised'/'primitive' – the novel itself uses these latter terms), the outcome would ultimately be the same.

Out however includes a somewhat self-critical lens or at least a lens that allows for the possibility that its own vision is a composite of seen and known, of preinscribed or prejudiced ideas and mechanical vision. On my reading, *Out* is an interrogation of constructed and 'natural' frames: even when the framing device is incidental, there is always an interpreting mind behind the microscope, and there is no possibility of completely objective sight. Thus even when the view seems to present itself as natural, there is an inbuilt awareness that

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[17] The image of Mrs Ned cut in half also resembles the hypnagogic sentence that André Breton claimed as the basis for Surrealism: 'a man is cut in half by a window' (qtd in Schwenger 427, n. 7). Brooke-Rose takes a similar literalisation of a visual trick but politicises it so that the image is inflected with the inevitable power structures of the visual/visible world.

it is constructed. Brooke-Rose disavows individual mastery: what is seen at any given point is a composite of position, perspective, knowledge and preconceived opinion, and this can be shifted. Implicitly, the text thus includes an awareness that its own vision is limited. 'Knowledge certain or indubitable is unobtainable' is the epistemology that underwrites every act of visual perception (*Out* 60), so that even seeing is not straightforward. Prejudice alters perception from a basic or fundamental level, and perception affects how phenomena are read. 'Diagnosis provokes its own cause' (*Out* 139), and one's own act of looking itself can never be directly observed, for to do so would alter the conditions of looking.

The Frame in Theory

In 1978, Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* appeared in French. In this work, Derrida writes 'around' (not 'on') the subject of art, framing the subject in four points; his frame is riddled with holes, composed of 'unframed' fragments, and literally framed gaps in the text (16). This perforated frame, with permeable borders, signals a rethinking of the conception of disciplinary and intellectual mastery and the ability to contain, an undercutting of old faith in the frame, in the capacity to frame. And thus it seems – in its peculiar awareness of its limitations – a framing structure akin to those represented in *Berg* and *Out*. Derrida introduces the frame through the concept of the *parergon*, broadly meaning supplementary structure (the frame is one of several possible parergonal structures; the colonnade surrounding a building would be another):

> the insistent atopics of the *parergon*: neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d'oeuvre*], neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. (9)

Derrida thus describes how the frame becomes part of the artwork – 'no longer merely around' it – and how it both separates the artwork from what is outside (although all spatial terms lose their meaning and their use when boundaries are accepted as ambiguous, imagined or at the very least permeable) and makes the artwork happen, or function; performs the invisible work of definition that makes the artwork function as art. Within Derrida's account, frameworks let

things appear, but at the same time they shape what they are letting appear – which is a similar bind to the way *Berg* and *Out* present processes of vision within their narratives. Attentive to the ways in which external frameworks might shape the images being produced by the consciousnesses within these narratives, Quin and Brooke-Rose depict the perceptual processes of looking and seeing as overtly influenced by both interior and exterior factors, knowledge from multiple sources. Writing about seeing is itself an act of framing and enclosure. The novels read in this chapter enact the impossibility of framing, as environments and images refuse to be framed, spill outside frames or prove the instability of the frame, just as Derrida's *Truth in Painting* enacts the impossibility of writing authoritatively or thoroughly on/ about the subject of art, instead writing around the subject – although 'around' harbours its own suggestions of enclosure.

Derrida takes the idea of the invisible support structure further, in his attention to the more provisional structure of the passe-partout, which sits '[b]etween the outside and the inside, between the external and the internal edge-line, the framer and the framed, the figure and the ground, form and content, signifier and signified, and *so on* for any two-faced opposition' (11–12). The passe-partout is needed for the frame to function, and yet despite this necessity it is even more replaceable than the frame itself. Attending to the less solid and individual structure, Derrida's theorisation of the passe-partout addresses the general complexification of the concept of the frame in the 1960s and 1970s, as no longer a simple separation between art and reality, and as a structure which itself does a lot of (visible and invisible) work. The passe-partout 'holds up' the frame, which 'holds up' the work, and thus is indicative of the abyssal nature of supplementation in Derridean deconstruction, but also of the increasing abstraction being granted to the concept of the frame. This level of abstraction is already granted, as Derrida notes, to the work of art, which cannot be truly contained, limited or confined (or defined), no more than infinity can be confined. Derrida, via Kant, compares this to '[framing] a perfume' (82). The frame supplements some lack in the work, but it too contains a lack which must be supplemented (by the passe-partout) (and so on). We can think and think about the frame but we are never outside it.

Derrida's passe-partout 'remains a structure with a movable base', 'a frame within a frame', an 'empty enclosure' which 'lets or makes appear' the work of art, 'the picture, the painting, the figure, the form, the system of strokes [*traits*] and of colors' (12). A 'structure with a movable base' is almost entirely hypothetical, not tied

to any context: the frame still performs its functions as a frame, but its contents and surrounds are infinitely variable. King's sculpture, in its appearance as a free-standing frame with nothing inside, does much the same work as Derrida's theory, within a different medial framework. Looking at how novels conceive of the frame adds further depth to this consideration, as this chapter has shown. Derrida's 'structure with a movable base' is comparable to Butler's 'iterable structure of the frame' – how the frame 'breaks with itself', meaning that 'a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame' (*Frames* 12). For Butler, and in the context of media representations of race, war and grievable life, this capacity of frames to break with themselves has power: the potential to subvert the frames imposed by those in control of the presentation. Both Derrida's and Butler's accounts recognise the repetitive or replaceable nature of the frame, how it can be moved and applied in a variety of contexts (although the more attuned we are to acts of framing, the more we can question the naturalness of the content, as Butler's statement suggests). Butler highlights the inevitability that frames will 'break from themselves in order to install themselves' (*Frames* 12), suggesting that there are moments between the situation of the frames that allow for 'unframed' vision, in a sense a step outside the framework – similarly to how Brooke-Rose refers to the space between structures, as explored in the Introduction to this book. Thus, there is a moment between the removal and the installation of the frame where a frame might show itself up for its falsity, or certainly selectivity, of vision. In fact, for Butler, the frame is not a structure which inherently contains, but is actually understood as a breaking out or a breaking from: 'The frame, in this sense, permits—even requires—this breaking out' (11). As I hope my readings have shown in this chapter, the indisciplined or anti-disciplinary strategies of 1960s art and literature, especially the more conceptual strains in both, understood the frame in this way too. This is to say, the frame is understood as an undoing of itself, and in its limitations lie possibilities.

Conclusion

The frame serves as a point of convergence between the experiments of novel writers in the 1960s and those of the simultaneously burgeoning field of conceptual art, functioning as it does in both the visual and discursive realms (thus signalling the intermingling of those

realms). This is a useful method of approaching works in this period because it hinges on an interrogation of how the works handle issues of representation, containment and even normativity – of conventions both artistic and socio-political. I am considering the category of conceptual art quite loosely, so that it can encompass pieces like King's *Window Piece* which prefigures work more usually recognised as conceptual art (primarily from the mid-1960s onwards). King's sculpture shares with conceptual art its broadly intellectual content, its departure from the visible into the realm of ideas and its focus on the issues and processes surrounding its own construction. Brooke-Rose's and Quin's reimaginings of frames hinge on depicting a world which is impossible to frame, because too multiple, or subjective or contingent. These authors' experiments with 'frame-breaking' are themselves indisciplined strategies, disruptive instances where discursive material not normally seen in novels is given 'new' meaning, being used in new contexts. Sarah Birch, in 1994, referred to this merging of discourses and materials using a '"transfocal" strategy', to identify in Brooke-Rose's novels 'the prismatic effect of viewing one field of knowledge, one language, or one culture through the discursive lens of another' (3), pertinently referring to Brooke-Rose's indiscipline using the language of optics.

   This chapter has shown how novels by Quin and Brooke-Rose present various uncertainties around vision, visuality and (re)presentation, in working with a kind of unspoken 'language' of looking. *Berg* uses culturally embedded associations between looking and truth, transparency or visibility, as well as associations between vision and power, to signal the ways in which its protagonist isn't exactly the clearest of sight (or mind). From its attention to the influence of psychological state on perception and interpretation, to the heightened theatricality of the set-up and reminder that artistic framing devices are not 'windows on the world' (humorously, by detailing for readers Berg's actual window on the world), *Berg* draws our attention to the fact that visual perception is always mediated, interpreted by a consciousness more or less reliable (in fictional terms) – thus inflected with elements of that consciousness, and inescapably subjective. *Out* presents the opposite extreme: doubtful of its (or anyone's) capacities to frame even the simplest of subjects, the novel shows us how every act of vision is a construction: everything is framed, even the frame itself, and there is no separating vision from power. *Out* takes another kind of mediated vision, enhanced by optical instruments both real and invented, and constantly reminds us that meaning is not inherent in the visible image but is produced by the interpreting mind behind the microscope.

Between the solidity of Quin's window frame (a rigid structure with an inside and outside, albeit the view in or out is easily blurred, depending on the weather) and the mutability of Brooke-Rose's tree frames (which change depending on the season, or the hypotheses of the focaliser), lies a conception of the frame outside the traditional structure: less masterful in its containment, less determinate in its separation of what lies outside its boundaries from what is represented within.

This early stage in what I consider to be the increasingly visual trajectory of these authors' work demonstrates the prominent position that visuality is given in the work before it impacts formally on the novels in any explicit way, how visual thinking is at this point already impacting upon the way that language is used by these authors, and how the authors thus work through a series of modes of exploring their preoccupations with the visual – here, using acts of looking to make various social and political points, particularly in *Out* (though both *Berg* and *Out* make use of the male gaze, often also a misogynistic gaze). These early works are thematically concerned with visuality, with looking, seeing and visual representation; in later novels these concerns invade the structure of the page, and the novels themselves become overtly visual works. The desire to break out of frames is pervasive in these works and sometimes is carried over into areas of social conduct, particularly in the novels which I look at in the next chapter – Brooke-Rose's *Between* and Quin's *Three* – with their focus on the restrictions of femininity (and of being the object of the gaze), attempts to 'close the circuit' and break out of repetitive, constraining cycles.

Closed Circuits / Open Legs: Constructions of Femininity in Brooke-Rose's *Between* and Quin's *Three*

And I write to you that I love the delicate levers that pass between the legs of a word, between a word and itself to the point of making entire civilizations seesaw.

– Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*

Desire is embodied in the image which is equated with the woman who is reduced to the body which in turn is seen as the site of sexuality and the locus of desire . . .

– Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*

Introduction

Whereas the last chapter focused on the perceptive process of looking, the formation of visual images, and the conventions of framing and presentation, this chapter will focus on the image or object being presented, further considering the politics of positioning and perspective. For the texts I analyse here – Brooke-Rose's *Between* (1968) and Quin's *Three* (1966) – the image or object being presented is, in each case, the body of the feminised character or consciousness central to the narrative (in varying degrees of presence). This chapter also strengthens the connection between vision and embodiment in the works of these authors. Patricia Waugh, in 'Writing the Body: Modernism and Postmodernism', covers the philosophical background to modernist and postmodernist responses to (and sometimes revisions of) issues of Cartesian mind-body dualism, highlighting how:

vision is more suggestively bound up with the object, more exter-nalised, the least embodied of the senses: it is the human sense most associated by scientists and philosophers with objective knowledge, and the one most associated by poets and prophets with the tran-scendental imagination. What is seen is either outside the body, or carried into the body as an afterimage [. . .] which seems to supplant or 'transport' the materiality of the body. (132)

Waugh thus encompasses the intellectual background against which these authors are working; their depictions of vision are very much influenced by the material effects of being a body: having limited sight and mobility, with one's perspective determined by bodily position in space, not to mention psychological influences. Chapter 1 began to show how these texts conceive of vision as a particularly embodied sense, with Brooke-Rose's eye-forms in *Out*, and Berg's mood swings which affect his perception of the world – so that 'what is seen is [. . .] outside the body', as Waugh says, but how it is seen is directly influ-enced by the effects of embodiment, of being a body. There is another sense in which vision is connected to embodiment for these authors, which emerges in this chapter through the focus on the object of the gaze – invariably, here, a woman, and thus a hyper-visible body, sub-ject to operations of containment, aestheticisation and regulation. Chapters 2 and 3 will detail how visuality and embodiment are fun-damentally linked for these writers, how looking and being looked at are tied up with having/being a (gendered) body, which determines in part the potentials for positioning and perspective.

The type of looking to be considered in this chapter is a specific, and gendered, one: what Laura Mulvey refers to as the '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' of the woman (more specifically the woman's body on screen, and by extension in other forms of visual art and culture). Writing in 1973, not too long after the texts under discussion here were published, Mulvey formulates the power structures of cinematic representation in terms of gender: 'Woman as Image, [and] Man as Bearer of the Look', as wielder of the (male) gaze (11).[1] This structuring of power relations

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[1] Mulvey was of course also an experimental filmmaker, and it is interesting to note how some of her theoretical ideas play out formally on film, for example in *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). This film features 360-degree panning shots, depicting space in the round, as it were – circularly – but from a central point. The camera movement, however, is often slow and unfocused, and often it is unclear who is speaking, although it is clear that women's voices are the (aural) focus. Mulvey thus plays with aspects of visuality, clarity, focus and space to deliver something outside the conventional filmic format, a different kind of looking (and listening).

in terms of gender and looking comes out strongly in the two novels analysed here, albeit the 'looking' is perhaps more metaphorical in the case of *Three* (S's narrative is recounted through tapes and diaries, and so any looking takes place in the memories of Ruth and Leon). Nonetheless, both texts formulate constructions of femininity which revolve around conventions of feminine 'to-be-looked-at-ness', of the 'feminine' as image or object. Within these constructions, bodies are to varying degrees objectified, passive, there to be consumed (visually or narratively, from the points of view of other characters – with connotations, more or less overt, of sexual availability), materially present yet restricted in their movement, energy and agency. Both texts conceive of these 'feminine' traits in terms of openness, a form of unguardedness, a failure to remain closed: openness to outside influence, to predatory sexual advances, to whatever it is that might be trying to 'get at' them.

As discussed in the Introduction to this book, Brooke-Rose writes about the difficulties faced by women experimental writers in terms of reception, of being read and taken seriously, and of entering a canon: 'women writers, not safely dead, who at any one living moment are trying to "look in new ways" or "reread" and therefore rewrite their world, are rarely treated on the level of seriousness as their male counterparts' ('Illiterations' 64–5). Aside from the pertinent equation of looking, reading and writing, as well as the links between experimentation and vision (and visionary-ness), Brooke-Rose's attention here to the ways in which experimental women writers are doubly or triply marginalised usefully prefigures the gendering in the two texts analysed in this chapter: how women are expected to be conduits in the context of simultaneous translation work in *Between*, and not to have ideas of their own; and how the character S in *Three* is already 'safely dead' before the text begins, so cannot interfere with the ways in which her narrative is being read and interpreted.

Linda Nochlin's seminal essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (also roughly contemporary to the novels discussed here, published originally in 1971) considers the situation of gender and authorship with regard to the visual arts, highlighting the material barriers women have historically faced to entering the academy, or even to practising on the same level as male artists, whether their work is recognised or not. One such example used by Nochlin is the impossibility for women to paint from nude life models, a prohibition in place as late as 1893, 'and even when they were, after that date, the model had to be "partially draped"' (n.p.). I choose this example to introduce the historical grounding for what this chapter

will take as a more theoretical consideration, the woman as object; or, the woman as model and the model as object. Nochlin writes:

> There exist, to my knowledge, no representations of artists drawing from the nude model which include women in any role but that of the nude model itself, an interesting commentary on rules of propriety: i.e., it is all right for a ('low,' of course) woman to reveal herself naked-as-an-object for a group of men, but forbidden to a woman to participate in the active study and recording of naked-man-as-an-object, or even of a fellow woman. (n.p.)

Models are there to be looked at, to provide for the (male) artist in that capacity; the model can be an artist, in some cases, but she will not have the same provisions as her male counterpart. Historically, then, to become an artist as a woman, to move from passive body to active maker, is itself a form of indiscipline. The power involved in looking in Nochlin's example, in being allowed to look, is similar to the power-play of looking examined in Chapter 1, in terms of dominant and submissive binary counterparts. However, this chapter focuses on the latter: on the relative powerlessness of the recipient of the gaze, in many cases a woman (and sometimes a model, when the onlooker is some form of artist) being looked at. The two texts I will analyse provide a valuable literary counterpoint to these considerations of the feminised body as erotic spectacle, as a thing to be looked at, in the visual arts and cinema, under direct examination in the second-wave feminist theory and criticism of the late 1960s and 1970s; literature and language, after all, leave much more room for overt theorisation. Of course, sometimes these ideas play out in artworks before the formalised theory comes about: artists like Pauline Boty were exploring gender politics and the male gaze through visual artworks earlier in the 1960s. Her paintings *It's a Man's World* (1964) and *It's a Man's World II* (1964–5) offer a scathing commentary from within the male-dominated genre of Pop Art, with the bodies of women literally cut (and pasted), discombobulated by the frame.

Both of the novels I read here hinge on the binary oppositions embedded within western language and culture (masculinity/femininity, active/passive, life/death, presence/absence and so on), in which femininity is a passive construction, something which reacts or relates to more active ('masculine') components in the same system. While Brooke-Rose poses a challenge to these constructions and oppositions, Quin's stance is rather more ambivalent, perhaps

even reinforcing the links between the 'lesser' halves in all those listed binaries (femininity, passivity, death and absence). However, both novels utilise a variety of formal methods to convey the ways in which women are positioned within society (and the 'feminine' within language): from Brooke-Rose's omission of the verb 'to be' in *Between* to Quin's mediation of S's narrative entirely through diary entries and recorded messages on tapes. While not necessarily motivated by feminist impulses, these texts certainly seem interested in investigating the position of women in the social world, the expectations that bind them to abide by certain types of behaviour. In the case of *Between*, this investigation reaches into the construction of gender categories within the language system, drawing together both culturally and linguistically embedded strictures of femininity. These categories are ultimately presented as somewhat arbitrary, although with the awareness that pointing out this arbitrariness does not result in instant liberation.

Alongside the literary texts, I will consider works by the painter and performance artist Carolee Schneemann, specifically *Interior Scroll* (first performed 1975) and *Vulva's School* (performed in the 1990s, but with attention to the masculinist structuralist discourse of the 1960s, and therefore thematically resonant with Brooke-Rose's work in particular). In *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann pulls a scroll from her vagina and reads from it, the text of which contains a conversation with a 'structuralist filmmaker', littered with gendered accusations and dismissals. In *Vulva's School*, a voracious personified vulva (also a painter) learns what it is to be labelled and positioned as female/feminine. Schneemann's work more generally figures a reclamation of the female body as subject and object of artwork, and the more celebratory aspects of her work (for example in *Interior Scroll* – an artistic attempt to present the vagina as productive, rather than as lack or absence) are sometimes at odds with the less celebratory (but also less essentialising) depictions of femininity in the texts here, so that the juxtaposition produces a useful tension, helping to unpack the motivations and effects of the representations of femininity in the novels. Brooke-Rose, in *Between*, undercuts the philosophical associations of the 'feminine' with lack or with absence linguistically and bodily, without any overt sense of reclamation. Likewise, Quin's character S reinforces the associations of femininity with death and absence without suggesting that an alternative route is possible (or even desirable, although the novel's ambivalence makes this unclear). Both texts interrogate the construction of femininity in language and society, with Brooke-Rose especially pointing out its arbitrariness as

a construction, but neither seems particularly optimistic about, or even concerned with, the possibilities for change. What makes these texts so interesting to compare is their varying focus on the bodily: the material body is somehow both present and absent in these texts, suspended in language or narrative but somehow always there.

The 'closed circuits' of the chapter title comes from an image in *Between*, of the central character seated in a defensive position with her hands together and ankles crossed, thus, as Brooke-Rose writes, 'closing the circuit'. The focus in this chapter will be on the feminised bodies at the centres of these texts; both novels happen to be circular in form. The circuit is resonant in many capacities but maybe most fundamentally for the ideas of circularity (of repetition and unchanging-ness) and enclosure it evokes. These texts tend to present breached circuits: a failure to protect the enclosed space – in both cases, a body. This chapter examines the circuits or loops of communication set up in these narratives, especially the portrayal of bodies as circuits – which ideally could be closed, but the failure to close them is one of the repeated motifs in both novels. This chapter also follows the breakdown of boundaries between discursive/abstract and physical/material structures in these texts – or perhaps the suggestion is that these boundaries never existed – as demonstrated textually through circuitous paths and frame-breaking strategies, non-linear and non-delineated structures. These texts use bodies to figure the relationship between subjects and systems (more explicitly in Brooke-Rose), to indicate how abstract or theoretical systems – most notably in these texts, regulatory systems of gender and sexuality – have material effects on the world, through the bodies they attempt to regulate. The 1960s is widely characterised as a time of optimism,[2] of sexual and social rebellion, but both of these texts depict subjects struggling, and ultimately failing, to break out of the systems that bind them. Although in both texts the central characters find alternative methods of absenting themselves from these structures, their methods could be contestable – in some sense similar to how Brooke-Rose

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[2] See Jenny Diski's memoir, *The Sixties*, for a detailed account of the complexities of sixties sexual and social liberation from a personal perspective: 'The sexual revolution is certainly an idea people have about the Sixties. It was also an idea that the Sixties had about itself' (55). The sixties that Diski evokes is youthful, rebellious and reasonably sheltered; this is the sort of experience I am thinking about when conceiving of 'indiscipline' as a way to describe the experimental artistic strategies of the writers I analyse, without wanting to relate this too closely to the authors' own biographical experience of the decade.

advises women writers to 'slip through the labels', even if this means 'belong[ing] nowhere', in 'Illiterations' (67). In *Between*, the 'body floats' in a state of non-belonging, unanchored within the discursive systems which would otherwise lay claim to it. In *Three*, the body is dead, no longer touchable or regulatable – but her story is. The circuit, of course, is also a marker of security: strong when closed, weak when open. Brooke-Rose worked as a decoder at Bletchley Park during World War Two,[3] and the narrative of *Between* is inflected with her wartime experience, questions of loyalty and security. The work of security thus takes on a peculiar femininity, as does translation work in the text of *Between* – passive rather than active work usually performed by women. Brooke-Rose explores this equation in *Between*: refusals to close the circuit on the part of the main consciousness seem unable to counter the iterative cycles of the narrative, the reproduction of its repeated segments, but they can provoke a change, interrupt the cycle as it were. As the readings will show, the texts are profoundly ambivalent when it comes to the reproduction of feminine norms: neither totally (cruelly) optimistic, nor wholly pessimistic. Overwhelmingly, the narratives present discomfort, a desire to break from their constricting frames (but not necessarily an idea or prescription for how).

'Neutralised transmitter of ideas': The Body as (Closed) Circuit in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Between*

Between is a multilingual narrative formed by a mesh of different voices and discourses, focalised through the consciousness of a simultaneous translator as she travels between multiple geographical locations. Brooke-Rose envisioned simultaneous translation as a 'passive activity, that of translating the ideas of others but giving voice to none of one's own, and therefore a feminine experience' (*Stories* 7). The narrative also entirely omits the verb 'to be', which Brooke-Rose relates to the translator's 'loss of identity due to her activity' (*Stories* 7). This passivity and loss of identity are further reinforced stylistically by the choice to write in narratorless present tense (discussed in Chapter 1), meaning that what is presented in the narrative is simply whatever is perceived by the central consciousness, with no interior processing of that information. This section considers how the associations between passivity and femininity are built up by the text and

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3 See Joseph Darlington's *The Experimentalists*, pp. 11–13 for further information on Brooke-Rose's wartime work.

encoded in the body of the translator. I read the repeated image of a sitting position regularly adopted by the character, described as a closed circuit, and the iterations of this body language in the text, exploring how the description accumulates meaning as it is presented in different contexts. In reading the sequence of these images, a story emerges – pertinently, through non-linguistic, gestural means which are suggestive rather than conclusive. In depicting the construction of femininity via an iterative process, *Between* calls for careful attention on the part of the reader to the way the construction is formed – and becomes a particularly lasting formation – as much as the contents of the construction itself.

In *Between*, several concepts are touched upon using the motif of the circuit: that of electricity (a closed circuit permits flow of energy; an open one does not); that of communication and language (the question of whether a message reaches its destination, thereby closing the circuit – with implications for security); and that of the body (itself a circulatory system). The closed circuit position is first described in a passage in which the narrator is alone, a section impossible to place definitively in narrative time or space:

> The hands lie quite still over the blue table-cloth, forming a squat diamond-space with the thumbs pressing towards the body the other fingers touching like a cathedral roof. Under the table the ankles cross over each other to close the circuit. (434)

The term 'close the circuit' is introduced without explanation, which is characteristic of the style of *Between*; the reader needs the other iterations to build up the narrative significance and so must do work to make meaning from the text. As with most of the narrative, this description omits personal pronouns, hence '[t]he hands', 'the body', 'the other fingers' and 'the ankles' are figured objectively – the translator's body parts are objectified at the same time as her body is depersonalised. This depiction furthers the work done by the omission of the verb 'to be' from the narrative, deepening the 'loss of identity' that Brooke-Rose speaks of. In a sort of grammatical dismembering, the body parts are not tied together linguistically through the indication of a singular, unified subject. She lacks an 'I' that would make the hands hers. The rest of this passage indicates that the translator is alone with a document concerning her marriage annulment. Through repetitions which link sections together throughout the novel, a vague picture of this marriage and subsequent annulment is built up. The annulment is seen as a failure in the eyes of the Church, but the narrative does not reveal whether this is

what prevents the translator from remarrying, or whether she simply chooses not to remarry. Her hands form 'a cathedral roof' above the tablecloth printed with 'towers cathedrals domes and palaces', thus tying together images of religious institutional power and the body. The Latin which signals the document – 'Nullitatis Matrimonii' – can be translated directly as 'nullity', as well as marriage annulment. In a novel where the action and language are in 'perpetual motion' (*Stories* 7), seeming to be endlessly generative, nullity and negation seem like impossible outcomes. Likewise, the translator cannot annul her marriage without permission from the Church, a situation depicting a power dynamic in which an individual's capacity to challenge the institution (here, religious) is severely limited. The character in effect arranges herself within these preconceived constraints of gender, a move mirrored by the novel stylistically by working within devised linguistic constraints. Omitting the verb 'to be' means Brooke-Rose must choose more active verbs in its place, mimicking the constant motion, as well as the status of being unrooted or not belonging, of the translator, rendering her simultaneously active and passive.

Brooke-Rose draws on the techniques of *nouveau roman* writers, especially Alain Robbe-Grillet, whom she translated into English. But she also makes plenty of developments upon these techniques, and here I suggest that the closeness of her allusions can function as a critique of the *nouveaux romanciers*, when we pay close attention to what it is she borrows and what it is she changes.[4] The following example is from Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957), chosen for the close resemblance to Brooke-Rose's description of the woman's seated position above:

> The photographer has not lowered his camera to put it on a level with his model. In fact he seems to have climbed up onto something: a stone bench, a step, or a low wall. A — has to raise her head to turn her face towards the lens. The slender neck is erect, turned toward the right. On this side, the hand is resting easily on the far end of the chair, against the thigh; the bare arm slightly bent at the elbow. The knees are apart, the legs half extended, ankles crossed. (*Two Novels*)

The 'ankles crossed', a symbol of demure femininity in the Robbe-Grillet, are reimagined as a barrier in Brooke-Rose's novel, an attempt

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4   See Adam Guy's *The nouveau roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism*, Chapter 5, for a reading of Brooke-Rose's *Out* which suggests it draws on the colonial setting of Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. Guy also references Morton P. Levitt's reading of *Out*, which acknowledges the novel as 'virtually a line-by-line parody' of Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*, again with a focus on the colonial setting of Robbe-Grillet's novel (qtd 158).

to keep the outside world out. The photographer is positioned above the model, looking down on her, has even climbed higher to increase his height and vantage point – these choices have connotations of greater power, as does his position as the looker. In fact the relationship between the photographer and model here fits quite neatly into Mulvey's account of the male gaze:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (11)

Robbe-Grillet's example plays out this 'determining male gaze', for the woman becomes an object or image through the actions of the photographer. Thus Robbe-Grillet's image of the woman is overtly filtered through the lens of a photographer's camera, and thus the woman's transition from an agent – with ownership over 'her head', 'her face' and ability to move them – to an image or object, depersonalised and robbed of agency – '[t]he slender neck', 'the hand' and so on – is accounted for in the narrative. However, in Brooke-Rose's example, the woman is never given a pronoun, is always objectified, which makes Robbe-Grillet's momentary or temporary objectification of the woman in the passage above seem lightly handled in comparison. Robbe-Grillet's example depicts a gendered relationship uncritically: the photographer a man, the model a woman, and it is at the hand (or under the gaze) of the photographer that the woman becomes an image or object. Brooke-Rose changes the emphasis, acknowledging that the feminine is always objectified. Brooke-Rose adopts the same seating position as Robbe-Grillet's 'A. . .' for the woman in *Between*, but the ways in which she develops on the description so that it becomes one of the repeated motifs (like the stain in Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*) further highlights that Brooke-Rose might be critiquing the depiction of women in Robbe-Grillet's texts (to the point where the male characters in *Jealousy* are named and the woman is simply 'A. . .').[5] Brooke-Rose's choice of

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[5] Her critique of male authors and theorists for gender bias is much more overt in her essays, for example in 'Woman As Semiotic Object' (*Poetics Today*, 1985), where she criticises the sexist foundations of structural linguistics and anthropology, particularly Lévi-Strauss's naturalisation of male dominance and freedom, and female objecthood and restriction, in his exploration of taboo behaviour in human society in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949).

repeated motif looks very much like one of Robbe-Grillet's descriptions, but hers describes a woman in a position of being threatened, or at the very least exasperated, attempting to fend off the advances of her interlocutor (or onlooker) but perhaps losing the energy to continue doing so. Brooke-Rose in effect 'replays' Robbe-Grillet's image but with a different emphasis, one in which the image becomes a body. Mulvey writes that the 'visual presence [of woman] tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation' (11). While this may be true of Robbe-Grillet's narrative (and more certainly his films), Brooke-Rose, as will be seen from the following analysis, has built up a narrative specifically through this repetition of the image of a woman, thus directly challenging the formulation of woman as erotic spectacle.

The 'squat diamond-space' between the character's hands in *Between* is a blank space surrounded by an unbroken circuit: a blank space framed by her hands, so the space, the lack of content, is the content. This arrangement of her hands which sits between her and her interlocutor, framing, effectively, an absence, starts to thread together imagery of feminine 'lack' and the idea of a structure with nothing at its centre (specifically how Derrida is starting to conceive of structure in the mid-1960s) – which is quite literally what constitutes a circuit. The 'squat diamond-space' is suggestively although perhaps unwittingly shaped like a vagina, coupled with multiple connotations of emptiness and penetration, a sign which means one thing to her and another to him: part of a defensive posture to her; something curious, to be opened, to him. These associations between femininity and absence are made explicit elsewhere in the text:

> Et comme l'a si bien dit Saussure, la langue peut se contenter de l'opposition de quelque chose avec rien. [And as Saussure said so well, language can content itself with the opposition between something and nothing.] The marked term on the one hand, say, the feminine, grand*e*, the unmarked on the other, say, the masculine, grand. (426)[6]

The regular invocation of Saussure in *Between* highlights the principles of structural linguistics which form one of the main bedrocks of the novel. Specifically, Brooke-Rose uses Saussure's conception of a linguistic system built on difference – where words do not signify by dint of any intrinsic meaning but through variation with one another,

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[6]   All translations from the French are my own.

and thus in a framework which is totally relational – to highlight the simultaneously arbitrary and yet deeply embedded associations of certain traits with binary gender categories (passivity with femininity, for instance). In the above passage, the offhanded 'say', as if the examples were plucked at random, naturalises the difference, as does the choice of verb, 'content', somewhat determined by the impossibility of saying 'language is' in this narrative (because of the lipogramatic structure, the omission of the verb 'to be') – as if language merely describes these oppositions which have a pre-existence outside of language. This naturalising tendency could also be attributable to whoever spoke this sentence in the first place, likely a speaker at a conference whose speech the character is translating, and thus a person in some position of intellectual authority. The text is full of these repeated phrases from conferences at which the translator has worked, levelling the various discourses and disciplines she has participated in translating, mingling them all together. Notable also is how easily the marked/unmarked dichotomy is reversed in the ensuing sentence: 'Mais notez bien que le non-marqué peut dériver du marqué par retranchement, by subtraction, par une absence qui signifie [But note well that the non-marked can derive from the marked by subtraction [. . .] by an absence which signifies]' (426). The gap between her hands literalises this notion of an 'absence which signifies' (which again owes much to Saussure's conception of language). The space is shaped by the material around it, the frame.[7] The hands which form a perimeter around the absence effect the shaping of a nothing into something (as well as transporting the process into the bodily, and thus material realm of physical presence). However, the perimeters, the hands, are equally shaped by the negative space between them. Thus a dialectical relationship emerges, one in which each of the binary terms shapes and is in turn shaped by the other. The relationship of the framed to the frame is highlighted, or the reader's attention is drawn to the frame – here, notably, a body.

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[7] In this interpretation, the formation she makes with her hands resonates with Phillip King's *Window Piece*, analysed in the previous chapter: the focus is on the frame(work) rather than the contents. As with Brooke-Rose's version of the repeated *nouveau roman* image, and vision itself, her version of the frame is embodied and gendered. Another artistic point of comparison might be André Breton's *Full Margin* (1943), mentioned in Susan Sontag's essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence' (1967), where she describes it as such: 'The artist is enjoined to devote himself to filling up the periphery of the art space, leaving the central area of usage blank' (12). Like King's sculpture, where all the discursive work takes place around a blank centre, as symbolised by the figure of the frame, both novels in this chapter feature blank centres around which interpretative work takes place.

Frequent references, direct and indirect, to the simultaneous translator as a 'vessel of conception' and a 'neutralised transmitter of ideas' emphasise the bodily figuration of translation in *Between*. One of the most frequently repeated passages describes 'words flowing into the ear through earphones in French and down at once out of the mouth into the attached mouthpiece in simultaneous German' (398). The translator is here objectified, emptied of her own ideas: 'No one requires us to have any of our own' (413). Her body is a conduit through which words can flow, as energy in an electrical circuit. We follow the movement of the words from the ears to the mouth in the repeated description, consciously made aware of the parts of her body employed in the act of translation (occasionally she also gestures with her hands). This professional objectification is furthered in the narrative by the descriptions of her interactions with men, usually older, and the way they treat her: 'Bright girl, she translates beautifully don't you think? Says the boss. Meaning in his greying English way come live with me and adorn my gracious Regency London house' (414). Thus the translator is a body both in how she becomes a physical conduit for language and ideas in her profession, and how she is seen by her employers and other men in the narrative.

The second time the translator uses the body language of the 'closed circuit' is during a conversation with her colleague and sometimes-lover, Siegfried. After an almost-verbatim repetition of the description of the posture above comes the sentence spoken by Siegfried: 'Yes I notice you always sit like that, even in an armchair, your ankles crossed your hands joined in your lap' (444). This statement indicates that she assumes this position in more relaxed surroundings – 'even in an armchair', as well as upright at a table – and 'always' when she is with Siegfried. A short exchange between the two follows, beginning with her response to his observation:

> — Well it closes the circuit you see, so that you're self-contained, relaxed, and no-one can get at you.
> — But who do you suppose wants to get at you mein Liebes? (444)

'Self-contained' evokes the circular self-referentiality of this novel's form, the uninterrupted flow of an electrical closed circuit, as well as suggesting that the translator does not wish to interact with her environment or those around her. The metaphorical use of the closed circuit structure gains significance, since open circuits prevent the flow of current and the transfer of energy. Later in the novel, the position is described as such: 'the ankles crossed to keep the résistivité

électrique within so that you feel relaxed and no one can get at you' (549), adding resistance or resistivity to the aggregate of associations. With this reading, closed circuits in the text now carry the association of energy, open ones of inertia. '[R]elaxed' indicates that she would experience the reverse if open to her surroundings. And 'so that [. . .] no-one can get at you' lends the posture a defensive quality, one seemingly in response to a threat or aggressive gesture – all of which, because only assumed by women, moreover as a reaction to men, are gendered by the text. Siegfried's response is to challenge her 'self-contain[ment]', thus assuming his position as the aggressor in this verbal exchange. The indication that it is someone rather than something that might try to get at her complicates this bodily closing of the circuit, suggesting the threat to be physical. It means that this segment cannot just be interpreted in relation to her job; as a simultaneous translator assimilating information in one language and feeding it out in another, having people 'get at' her (at least linguistically) is a frequent occurrence. If translating is both a 'passive activity' and a 'feminine experience', according to Brooke-Rose (*Stories* 7), so too is closing the circuit in this text, adopting defensive body language so as not to be intruded upon, to have one's boundaries permeated or penetrated. The bodily structure of the closed circuit is in some sense provoked or shaped by the gestures which seek to open the circuit, thus reinforcing the dialectical relationship between binary linguistic terms in the example above (as before, the Saussurian view of language). In this case, the feminine or passive assumes its position in relation to the masculine or active, but by way of aversion rather than subtraction.

Later in the text this conversation with Siegfried is recycled, albeit with a notable difference:

> The thumbs press each other towards the body forming a squat diamond space with the fingers touching like a cathedral roof, the ankles crossed under the tablecloth to close the circuit and who do you suppose wants to get at you mein Lieb? Apart from me I mean? (498)

This final statement places Siegfried definitively as a threat to the closed circuit that the translator attempts to maintain. His question is an intrusion into the description, his speech not delineated from the narrative passage as in the previous iteration. The position of her hands takes on new meaning here, now that it is clear that this complex of gestures is figured predominantly in situations where the interlocutor poses some kind of sexual threat, where their advances

are undesired. Even in the first iteration when she was alone, she was alone with a marriage annulment – the validity of which was refuted by the Church. The various iterations indicate that this bodily position is adopted in situations where some form of violence towards women's bodies is being alluded to, whether institutional or sexual, and thus the position is reactive. Her closed hands form one barrier between her and Siegfried, one which is now laden with associations of institutional power and marriage relations (a physical manifestation of the excuse she gives Siegfried for not marrying him, which is that her previous marriage has not been annulled) as well as femininity and absence, and the penetrative connotations of 'breaking the circuit', of opening her hands or her legs. All this detail deepens the reading of her body language as a defensive stance, as a way of keeping out what might otherwise come in, interestingly phrased as 'get at' in the text. This phrase connotes an action which is vexing, an annoyance, as well as suggesting that the action comes up to – but does not pass – the barrier, in this sentence, the 'you'. The 'you' is used in previous iterations also by the translator, the only personal pronoun she uses being the second person, so that she refers to herself only obliquely. The context suggests she is referring to herself, but the grammar suggests she is generalising, speaking about a common 'you'. It seems that attempts to get 'in' are thus deflected, suggesting that identity stops at the surface in this text, at least in regard to the translator. It also seems that the circuit cannot necessarily be breached – likely because it has no centre, no interior, as the circuit formed by her hands contains a blank space – but the circuit can be broken, or opened.

Thus when the phrase 'Ouvre les jambes [Open the legs]' appears in the text – in the imperative, as a command – the associations with the closed circuit structure are evident. The repeated phrase first appears as a piece of misdirection: 'Ouvre les jambes, Véronique, ouvre les jambes' (436), easily achieved by the sexual overtones, and by its placement one page after the first occurrence of the closed circuit position. It is further repeated on the following page (437), revealed then to be spoken as part of a children's jump-rope game, thus desexualised, momentarily; the phrase takes on different meanings in different situations, but its relation to the primary motif of the closed circuit gives it a particular kind of currency. Most significant is its structure as a command, the proximity of its appearance to the initial closed circuit, and the resonances with the image of the translator's crossed ankles. The phrase is taken up and altered slightly in the following passage, a mesh of recycled statements from elsewhere in the text:

In some countries the women would segregate still to the left of the aisle worshipping plaster images, the men less numerous to the right shouting ka-din ka-din [woman woman] oh ma déesse tu me désires tu m'ouvres les jambes [oh my goddess you desire me you open your legs to me] a Ding no dea does. (543)

Though it is not possible to definitively determine the speaker in this segment, the gender can be inferred as male from the syntax – the clause beginning 'the men less numerous' segues into 'oh ma déesse . . .' – and the gender of the addressee by the method of address, 'goddess', and the fact that the passage refers to men shouting at women; there is a general heterosexual bias in *Between* in any case, and so it can be reasonably assumed this scene is between a man and woman, although what is most important is that there are active and passive binary components and that the active is characterised as masculine. The appearance of the phrase in French also invites an association with the translator's personal relationships, since this segment appears in a section of the novel dominated by possibly imagined love letters (in French) from the translator's other lover, Bertrand. The use of pronouns is notable, highlighting that this phrase is spoken by someone other than the translator. Personal pronouns only appear when she is addressed by someone else, thus the strongest indications of the translator's personhood in the text come from others, from their depictions of her (this kind of linguistic 'subjection' is also a focal point in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*, which I discuss in Chapter 4). The use of the reflexive verb above also allows for the possible alternative translations, 'you open my legs' and 'you make me open my legs', which could seem to lend the situation a pleasingly open ambiguity, although if there is one thing that seems fixed in *Between* it is that the woman occupies the passive position. The ambiguity is thus there, in the language, but the rest of the narrative makes the ambiguity untenable. Within the narration, she is the agent who is opening her own legs; the position is complicated, however, by the fact that the male speaker is the one telling us what is happening. The woman's body is depicted, as expected, as closed – or attempting closure – and openable, as represented by the man who is looking at her.

Far from achieving narrative closure, the iterative accumulation of meaning in these few sections allows for numerous other links to be made with the rest of the text, evidencing that as far as this novel is concerned, meaning cannot be contained in a circuit of self-referentiality; as for Derrida, the 'legs' of the text branch out in many

directions at once. The separated parts of text won't stop 'speaking to' each other. While *Between* is perhaps too ambiguous to be determinably feminist, it certainly engages with contemporary investigations into the category of 'woman' by feminist theorists like Cixous, as well as psychoanalysts and poststructuralists like Lacan. Lacan says that '[t]he woman does not exist' (qtd in Rose 48), by which he signifies, as Jacqueline Rose tells us, 'not that women do not exist, but that her status as an absolute category and guarantor of fantasy (exactly *The* woman) is false (The)' (48). Lacan's phrasing is purposefully provocative (and masculinist), but he refers to deeply embedded associations between femininity and absence, while also signalling that the category of 'woman' is a fabrication, a fantasy (of passivity, servitude, wish-fulfilment and so on). Brooke-Rose plays with the implications of this statement, and the seemingly inherent associations between femininity and negation/absence within the linguistic system: even the use of 'Nullitatis' to refer to the marriage annulment in *Between* carries this sense – 'Nullitatis' means 'non-existent' and is grammatically feminine. Brooke-Rose uses character in *Between* to literalise or embody a theoretical construct – that is, the closed (or open) circuit is literalised in the body of the translator: via the pose she adopts to visually signal closure to her interlocutor, as well as via the bodily circuit created by the act of simultaneous translation in the novel. Presumably she signals her closure with her body because language is too confrontational, too forward, and she is expected to acquiesce. She becomes a conduit: the ideas enter her body, via her ears, in one language and leave in another, via her mouth. The perfect act of translation does not disrupt the message being translated: she is paid to recycle ideas in another language, not to offer interpretations of her own.

The closed circuit as depicted in this text is feminised, an attempt to be sealed off from the surrounding environment, both physically and mentally:

> A woman of uncertain age uncertain loyalties holding her hands quite still with all the fingers touching to keep the résistivité électrique en Ohms and battericamente pura within and not give out too generously with a flow of rash enthusiasm (*Between* 445)

Closing the circuit, 'not [giving] out too generously', are methods of retaining energy, functioning as forms of resistance in *Between*: resistance to expectations of feminine behaviour, that is, expectations to remain open, visible and accommodating to the desires of

their interlocutors. The sexualisation of the circuit via the imagery of closed and open legs enmeshes the translator's situation with the recycled bits of conventional romance narrative plots, with their stereotypical gender roles, where 'one day the man will come and lift you out of your self-containment or absorption' (446). This text uses master plots such as this one to indicate that femininity is conventionally depicted as passive, and the result of these 'layered centuries of thickening sensibilities' (464) is that these associations are difficult to shake. *Between* recognises linguistic constructions like gendered norms as 'vital lies', but equally asks the question: 'Can we call mensonge un mensonge qui a tant de vitalité? [Can we call a lie a lie that has so much vitality?]' (506), indicating that social structures are perhaps not as easily reversed, or transformed, as linguistic ones. *Between* considers how femininity is shaped by language and culture, with the consistent subtext of pointing out its arbitrariness as a construction. Yet the 'bind' is at the same time presented, the difficulty of evading the 'feminine' within the language and culture in which it is constructed.

The parts I have selected from *Between* depict an iterative process of storytelling and character-formation which could be compared to the iterative process of subject formation. *Between* is in effect showing us a series of similar situations in which a set of behaviours is reinforced and normalised on the parts of both subjects depicted. As Judith Butler writes, '[t]he normative production of the subject is an iterable process—the norm is repeated, and in this sense is constantly "breaking" with the contexts delimited as the "conditions of production"' (*Frames* 168). For Butler, the normative behaviour 'breaks' from its original context to become something more generalised, less grounded (and less tied to a specific framework). In *Between*, the process of subject-construction takes place in a never-ending cycle, in which the 'lies' reinforce themselves, because embodied or enacted in society. The novel itself is constructed as a circle – one which does not close completely, mirroring the broken circuit of the central character's body language. Beginning and ending on an aeroplane, with an almost verbatim repetition of the first sentence at the end: 'Between the enormous wings the body of the plane stretches' to begin, and 'Between the enormous wings the body floats' to end (395, 575), *Between* consciously circles back on itself. The repetition is enough to suggest a circular construction, the differences enough to suggest the circle isn't fully closed, that the narrative is in a different location to where it began. As such, *Between* does not suggest a way out. Instead, 'the body floats' in suspension between systems.

Interlude: Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* and *Vulva's School*

Carolee Schneemann, the American feminist performance artist – also notable for her interdisciplinarity, working originally in (kinetic) painting and across multiple types of experimental performance art and film – addresses the same structuralism and masculinism as Brooke-Rose, although with a very different bodily emphasis. Early works of Schneemann's like *Eye Body* (1963) – in which she inserts her own naked body into the artwork – and *Meat Joy* (1964) – which I consider briefly in the next chapter – overtly challenge restrictive societal norms of femininity and female sexuality. Where Brooke-Rose attempts to undercut, and thereby loosen, the associations between femininity, lack and emptiness (structures so often mapped onto binary gender, specifically in the era in which Brooke-Rose and Schneemann were working), Schneemann makes work that attempts to refigure 'feminine' traits as productive. So in *Interior Scroll* (1975), she 'produces' a scroll from her vagina, reading aloud from it a script where she debates a 'structuralist filmmaker' about gender stereotypes, like 'feminine' bodily processes versus 'masculine' rationality. However, Schneemann's particular attention to the way the feminised body has been positioned in art history (usually as model, usually as nude, passive, reclining and so on), and how she revolts against that positioning, is more aligned with what Brooke-Rose does with gendered positioning and perspective in *Between*. Certainly Schneemann takes further the literalisation of theory through the body – or the performance of an overtly embodied theory – in making her body the subject (and object) of her work, than Brooke-Rose's depiction of the embodied circuit of translation and embodied 'feminine' absence in *Between*.

Schneemann directly referenced the woman-as-model convention in the performance of *Interior Scroll* in 1975, first assuming a series of 'action poses' in the manner of a life model. Subsequently, she begins to pull the scroll from her vagina and read aloud – becoming an active and productive agent in the artwork, and speaking subject. In the script (for a film called *Kitch's Last Meal*), the structuralist filmmaker is in a position of authority, praising the speaker's films but refusing to look at them (because they are too personal, too cluttered). The script reads: 'He protested you are unable to appreciate the system the grid the numerical rational procedures [. . .] I saw my failings were worthy of dismissal I'd be buried alive my works lost . . . .' (Schneemann, *Interior*). Like Brooke-Rose, Schneemann aligns the stereotypical

traits of masculinity and femininity with gendered power hierarchies, suggesting male gatekeepers as one reason why women's work does not receive the same level of attention as men's. However, she is less invested in disavowing stereotypically 'feminine' traits like intuition and feeling – indeed Schneemann's general artistic project is more geared towards reclamation, towards upending the hierarchy of masculinity–femininity rather than destroying the binary associations or attempting to dissociate herself from the characteristics of 'femininity'. However, as Johnson, Alison and Gompertz make clear in the *Body Politics* exhibition catalogue: 'Schneemann was not only concerned with the specifics of being a woman – in her writing in the 1970s, she reflected on the merits of finding neutral instead of gendered terms' (6). Furthermore, they write: 'Schneemann was engaged with an expansive kind of body politics', understanding 'her body as inextricably linked with its environment and the bodies of others' (6). Schneemann, like the writers I study here, contributes to more relational understandings of the subject developing in feminist and queer theory (as opposed to the colonialist fantasy of sovereign subjectivity, described by Berlant in *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (3)). Berlant in fact refers to the subject's sense of relationality with the world as an 'attachment circuit' – one which can be broken, for example in moments of misjudged sociality (a misfiring joke), which in turn has repercussions for the subject's 'self-idealization' (37).

Schneemann's *Vulva's School* (1995) interrogates the gender bias in structuralist theory (and beyond) and therefore provides a useful counterpoint for Brooke-Rose's *Between*, particularly in the way it questions the equation of feminine sexuality with lack and emptiness. During the performance, 'Vulva goes to school and discovers she doesn't exist'; she 'deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void, of absence, of what is not male . . . (she is given a pen for taking notes . . .)' (*Imaging* 299). She is an image, a visualisation, and a deviation from the (male) norm, rather than a subject in her own right. The subjects here, in *Vulva's School* and *Between*, learn how they are to be positioned within linguistic and social systems, and existent within both works is the vague but pervasive expectation (from wider society) that the subjects will fit themselves into these systems. Both works depict the central subjects struggling with these expectations. The use of 'discovers' naturalises the findings, rather than positioning them as constructions within a masculine-dominated system: discovering, as in uncovering, suggests a one-sided relationship where the natural

world is fixed and waiting to reveal itself to the intellectual explorer. Later in the performance text comes the following passage:

> The transformative variousness of the female genital disturbs mechanistic intent and rationalized homologies. Vulva relates this to a Western art-historical tradition of diminishing perspective, the extensions of depth of field to a vanishing point—the 'Circle of Confusion'—Is this pictorial reach to the suppressed state of os? Entrance to the womb? (*Imaging* 305)

The passage seems to suggest that old (western) perspective (the single-point perspective explored in Chapter 1) and rational thought are destroyed by 'female' genital 'variousness', similar to Cixous's suggestion that writing the female body can upend patriarchal structures of thought (in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', also 1975). However, it is difficult to tell how much of the ideas in the performance are being put forward by the text itself and how much is being used derisively; the text deals heavily in irony. In relating the vanishing point to the 'Circle of Confusion' and 'Entrance to the Womb', Schneemann taps into theoretical equations of femininity and mystery, the kind of material Barbara Creed uses in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to relate symbology of the womb to the emptiness of space and the black hole (as the most mysterious of objects).[8] Brooke-Rose's closed circuit looks very different to Schneemann's 'Circle of Confusion' – and other Os as employed by overtly feminist writers and artists, like Monique Wittig in *Les Guérillères* (a 1969 novel in which a female militia attacks male language and bodies): 'The women say that of her song nothing is to be heard but a continuous O. That is why this song evokes for them, like everything that recalls the O, the zero or the circle, the vulval ring' (7). Riffing on associations of femininity and circularity, Wittig's text is interesting for making this specific to the graphic 'O', opening as it does with a solitary ring in large type (later revealed to be the hole through which a woman is urinating).

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[8]   Another 1960s visual counterpart for this imagery of nothingness is the work of Lee Bontecou, who made sculptural wall-hangings which obsessively repeated the same hole imagery and machine aesthetic. Her most famous sculptures are wire frames with canvas coverings, stretched and painted, with black holes of various sizes – often hanging at head height, provoking an intense engagement with the viewer. Jo Applin has written on the multiple interpretations of Bontecou's voids – including a consideration of Creed's monstrous feminine, and an identification through Bontecou's work of a 'return of the body' ('This Threatening' 496).

Brooke-Rose does not go as far as Schneemann in 'championing' femininity or women's bodies. In fact, she actively resists this kind of essentialist thinking – Cixous's 'writing the body' – in her essay 'A Womb of One's Own?'. In this essay, Brooke-Rose attempts to dissociate women from terms like '*flux, flow, fluidity* [which] return again and again, together with the notion of circular structure, open endings, avoidance of climax' (*Stories* 228). In arguing that '[a] writer, man or woman, is essentially alone, and will be "good" or "bad" independently of sex or origin' (226), however, she seems also to be negating material factors for inequality (something she is keenly aware of in her 1989 essay 'Illiterations' and elsewhere). As mentioned before, Brooke-Rose was invited to work at Paris VIII in 1968 by Cixous, who had founded the experimental university, but they diverged soon after because of differences in outlook and investment. In an interview with Natalie Ferris in 2012, Cixous states: 'Christine did not come for women . . . I was trying in every way possible to open ways for women, and she didn't want to take part in that' (qtd in Ferris, 'Manna' 284). As Ferris writes, 'Brooke-Rose intimated many years later that she simply did not engage to any real extent with Cixous' own brand of feminist discourse in the late sixties and seventies, only retrospectively realising in the eighties the difficulties she had faced as a "woman writer", and a "woman *experimental writer*" at that' ('Manna' 284). Brooke-Rose seems to be working through some of the issues of gendered power imbalances that made it into her nonfiction work in the 1980s, apparently before even realising it, but also in a way that steers clear of any essentialising focus on women's bodies or specifically gendered creative processes; certainly in part an attempt to dissociate herself from the label 'woman writer' and the restrictions that label brought with it. For Brooke-Rose, any consideration of 'female' lack is totally embedded and constructed within language and discourse, and while her focus in *Between* is somewhat bodily, it concerns the material effect of these abstract associations on the bodies of women – as they are seen as objects to be looked at, and opened, by the men in the text.

'Body composed of a series of revolving wheels': Narrative Circuits / Circuitous Narratives in *Three*

Quin's *Three*, like *Between*, takes a circuitous structure, and also makes it bodily. When the narrative refers to a '[b]ody composed of a series of revolving wheels' (37), it means the method by which the story of S is

relayed to the reader. S is one of the three central characters, a young girl who is dead before the novel opens, presumed to be a suicide. *Three* depicts the other two characters, a middle-aged couple in suburban surroundings, listening to tapes ('revolving wheels') recorded by S, as well as reading her diary entries – so that within the narrative she is in some sense present, although her story is told in overtly mediated ways. It comes to us second-hand, slightly out of context by its repetition in the present (and influenced by our knowledge of the characters listening to it). The informational circuit, the tape itself, can be continuous (at least until the hardware breaks), but the content of the circuit means something different each time, depending on the context in which it is being listened to, who is listening and so on, rendering the circuit both open and closed: open to new influences, to the accumulation of new meaning; closed in that it can no longer be changed, and no intervention is possible. S's words, relayed through tapes and diaries, are all that remain of her, are what make her present for the reader(s) (and listeners), what make up her 'body' for them – or at least replace it or represent it, provide a material substitute. While no one is 'looking' at S directly (although the footage does include a film of her), her body is metaphorically present in the narrative through the tapes, there to be consumed – aurally as opposed to visually. *Three* therefore contains some interesting tensions between looking and listening, and a rare use of audio technology, where most of the texts I study here explore visual technologies. The tapes serve to reinforce S's bodily absence, in fact, as her narrative is relayed through her disembodied voice; and frustration – at not being able to see or know what happened – is one of the novel's central themes. There is nonetheless a visual emphasis in the narrative of *Three* because much of the content is about looking at or watching S (in the past or the imagination). Nonia Williams describes 'a particular emphasis on the visual [in *Three*], on scenes which appear as frozen images rather than dynamic spaces' ('Ann Quin' 149). Indeed, *Three* – like Quin's earlier novel, *Berg* – seems at times to be thinking of itself as a film; and Williams notes also the influence of New Wave filmmaker Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). This film is visually striking, its oblique narrative conveyed through repetitions and iterations or vignettes, with repeated visual motifs, and a sculptural quality with its *tableaux vivants*; influences of this nature can be felt throughout Quin's work. Sontag notes how the film frustrates interpretation: 'What matters in *Marienbad* is the pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy of some of its images' ('Against' 9). Writers like Quin employed similar strategies to those of visual artists and filmmakers to reach a comparable sort of 'untranslatability' and immediacy in text.

Quin's *Three*, like *Between*, is built using a kind of circulatory motion: the narrative cycles between the three main characters: Ruth and Leonard, a married couple; and S, who comes to stay with them. Ruth and Leonard's sections are written in dense blocks of prose which does not distinguish between speakers, or between interior and exterior narration. S's sections are more fragmented, with short diary entries and snippets of speech from recorded tapes, arranged on the page like a visual poem, not adhering to the conventional rules of prose syntax, and with plenty of white space. As she has died before the narrative begins, S's narrative is recounted through overtly mediated methods: diary entries, primarily being read by Ruth, and tape recordings, being listened to by Ruth. This places S in a position of supreme passivity – resonating with the depiction of the 'feminine' in *Between* – but at the same time allows no one (Ruth, Leonard or the reader) anything approaching full access to her narrative, which necessarily remains, in a sense, closed. There is continuity between the two texts also in their representations of feminised bodies and their reinforcement of the links between femininity and passivity, femininity and death: Brooke-Rose's central consciousness is tired, restricted in her movement and agency; Quin's central character is literally dead, immobile.[9] There are the same general expectations in *Three* as in *Between* of a sort of passive openness for women, preventing the kind of closure or separateness which is depicted as a desire of these characters, or at least suggested as desirable within the narratives (and even perhaps as an escape). This negation of the singular self – the self as bounded, as separate from others – is mirrored in the narrative techniques in both texts, the non-delineation of different speakers, the permeability of the 'frames' separating characters, times or locations, so that one thing bleeds into another.

To give a sense of what this looks like formally in *Three*, I quote from early on in the first section:

> She moved around the room, the cat clinging, tail up. Still we don't get hordes like in the summer and by then well perhaps the Council will have done something. About time they did—where's my drink? Over there. By the way Ruth do you happen to know where that book is I'm reading? How should I know? They moved round each other. (5)

This 'moving round each other' can be interpreted both literally and figuratively: conversationally and physically, the characters move

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9 In the previous decade, both Alexander Trocchi's *Young Adam* (1954) and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur* (1955) feature dead female bodies as their central motifs.

around each other, and the connotations of avoidance, of skirting around issues, are apt (as, of course, is the circularity of their motion). In *Three*, the speech of characters is neither marked off by quotation marks nor separated from the rest of the text. Nor is the speech attributed ostensibly to specific characters; the speaker must be determined from context. Here, the first line is third-person narration, the second line Ruth speaking, the third Leonard, the fourth Ruth, the fifth Leonard, the sixth Ruth and the seventh is third-person narration again. Half of the book is composed in this way, in three sections from the point of view of Ruth and Leonard alternately or together, interspersed with three sections of S's diary entries. Quin's techniques have clear modernist precedents, especially her version of the stream-of-consciousness technique, which developed a heightened psychological realism in early twentieth-century novels, representing the interior life of a character within their milieu. Because of their naturalistic, purportedly 'uncrafted' tendencies, stream-of-consciousness narratives often incorporate mundane details (the paradigmatic example is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a massive work capturing a single day in Dublin in 1904). Quin plays with this technique to represent the banality of suburban middle-class life: the erosion of boundaries between characters and their environment, and between each other, is somewhat comfortable or familiar and somewhat insidious. Both Brooke-Rose and Quin employ versions of stream-of-consciousness, with Brooke-Rose going further to depict a 'narratorless' narrative. These techniques in the hands of Quin and Brooke-Rose are developed to emphasise the fragility of subjecthood and subject boundaries, the impossibility of remaining separate and closed, 'enframed' by a body and an identity. Like Schneemann, their depictions betray an awareness of the interrelatedness of people and things. The movement of the characters in the section above mirrors the circulatory nature of the narrative itself; the sense, as with most of Quin's work, is that everything is constantly in motion (characters, their thoughts, the environment, at all scales) and the boundaries between different subjects unclear, or non-existent. Even the fundamental back-and-forth between the two types of narrative from one section to the next contributes towards this effect – between the sections narrating Ruth's and Leonard's present, and those narrating S's diary entries as they are read by Ruth. Similarly, the fact that S's diary entries are written in a present tense now past means that the whole narrative cycles back and forth between different timelines.

    Three, like *Between*, can be conceived of as circular in structure, in the sense that although time has passed, the final line – 'I know

nothing will change' (143) – suggests that any kind of forward move-ment, of 'progress' as such, is an impossibility. The character uttering that line, S, is effectively stuck in a narrative loop. There is dramatic irony in the fact that it is a line of S's, written before her death, read by Ruth after her death: the last line of the narrative is 'spoken' from the perspective of a character currently, and permanently, in stasis, with no possibility of progression or movement in any direc-tion (so of course 'nothing will change'). The structure can thus be considered a loop, in which events are necessarily repeated by the cyclical nature of the narrative, so much of which is either recounted memories or readings of a present-now-past. Brian Evenson writes in his introduction to *Three* that 'finally the picture remains blurred, compromised, the individual accounts gapped and hard to reconcile completely either with each other or with the third person present account. In short, Quin's fiction refuses the consolation of neat clo-sure' (xiii). The narrative of *Three* – S's story in particular – is closed in the sense that it is not totally accessible, yet refusing 'neat clo-sure' because not allowing for any kind of resolution (here, closure connotes neatness, the tying up of loose ends; openness connotes messiness, the possibility of change).

Somewhat fortuitously (for my comparison to *Between*), some-what because the routine objectification of women's bodies nor-malises these images, *Three* too features the imagery of crossed legs and open legs. Legs come to stand in, almost metonymically, for women, with overt connotations of sexuality and, through this association, for the policing of women's sexuality. Legs are parts, not wholes – they can be considered parts that stand in for a whole, as in the metonym, but in line with the grammatical dismembering mentioned for *Between* above, the focus on legs fragments the body. As Julia Jordan writes:

> One thing Quin's novels seem consistently to suggest is that the expe-rience of being female is akin to existing in parts, parts that might feel detached and fragmented, that one might glimpse at an odd angle in a mirror and not quite recognize ('Quin Thing').

This bodily fragmentation or incoherence thus comes to be associ-ated with the very construction of femininity, recalling Waugh's com-mentary cited in the Introduction on how feminised subjects were never in possession of a 'whole' self. The fragmentation stems in part also from being an image as opposed to a subject; with an image, you can zoom in on parts, section them off from the rest. As Mulvey

notes, '[o]ne part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space', the 'illusion of depth' (as in single-point perspective), as this close focus 'integrate[s] into the narrative a different mode of eroticism' (12). Representation in parts stresses that the representation is an image, a copy, a replica (as opposed to something original, real, whole). Boty's cut-up female bodies, which will be discussed again in the next chapter, provide a visual analogue for this exploration of femininity 'in parts'.

About a third of the way into *Three*, Ruth comments, remembering S dancing on the beach with one of the 'bloody trespassers' she repeatedly refers to: 'I thought she looked obscene really the way her legs spread out and. . . .' (43–4). There is clear judgement on Ruth's part: of S, for appearing promiscuous, and implicitly of the 'bloody trespassers', mentioned so soon after she asks Leonard to '[g]et a good class of person' to do some work on the house (43). Considering that she is trying to put S down because she suspects Leonard of having an affair with her, and that she does so by making judgements based on S's class (or the class of people she associates with) and perceived expressions of sexuality, this judgement highlights the kinds of hierarchies at play in Ruth's view of the world. Later when Leonard rapes his wife, she is depicted as struggling: 'She tried bringing her legs together. His knees pressed them further apart' (127). The narrative echo set up between these two instances is complex, depicting what is actually a cycle of violence in a seemingly linear relation of events. Because Ruth is the main focal point for both sections, what happens via this narrative echo – if we are paying close attention – is that the latter causes us to look back on the former, to read the events circularly as well as linearly, so that the violence which Leonard inflicts on Ruth by raping her is linked to the judgement Ruth makes of S, is implicitly (on a larger scale) part of what informs the judgement (violence internalised and subsequently enacted). As in *Between*, sexual choices in *Three* are not always made by the character (and it is significant that the characters are women) being represented – although they sometimes are. There is some attempt in both texts to depict these central characters as sexually liberated agents, but ultimately the scenes depicted end up positioning them as largely passive.

Within the narrative of *Three*, Ruth and Leonard cannot help but return to the same texts left behind by S, delving further into what is ultimately a finite amount of material, but within which they can possibly reveal complexities thus far overlooked (like the relatively self-contained narrative 'currents' in *Between*). Their motion is

circulatory: returning back repeatedly to the same material, circling back on past events, creating links with the present from where they look back upon the past – setting up circuits or currents. S's narrative revolves: physically, in the form of the spinning tape reels, and metaphorically, skirting around a dark centre which – Ruth and Leonard presume – contains answers, reasons, motivations (the things we would expect from conventional realistic narratives and characters). Thus the movement originally intended to reveal serves only to twist and obscure the material even more, results only in more turning, 'turning the inside out' (56), and back again. S's narrative is relayed through recorded messages on tapes, with the circularity of the material structure frequently highlighted ('and watched the silent reel spin' (52); 'allowing it to spin silently' (118)), resonating with other parts of the text, other cycles in the narrative. Ruth and Leonard listen, looping back on a past narrative via recorded words (themselves a loop, possibly playing on a loop, in theory infinitely, in reality for as long as the tapes last) from beyond the grave, as it were: these events cause the narrative to – in a sense – turn in on itself. In fact, Quin even uses the line 'Talk / turned in upon itself' in a section of S's diary, to suggest insularity and avoidance, in a section which also refers to a more light-hearted (at least on the surface) sort of game played by Ruth and Leonard: 'Compelled to talk / about everything. Except what there was / to be confronted by. Talk / turned in upon itself' (113). The sense is of implosion, a continual turning towards the centre without any revelation.

Towards the end of the novel Ruth listens to a section beginning with S narrating a stay in a hotel with an unidentified man (presumably Leonard). When the tape starts playing, the narrative shifts to S's sparer, more truncated and impressionistic narrative style – for the first time incorporating a lengthy section into the narrative of Ruth and Leonard, so that the narratives meld more fully than they have before, no longer delineated into separate sections:

> She lifted the tape recorder up, looked through the reels, and put one on, allowing it to spin silently, then she pressed down.
>   . . . of some exotic flower. Hovered over walls. Smell of . . . She pressed down again and moved the reel by hand.
>   . . . his mask. In the heat. The robes clinging. As a weekend. In a hotel room. Meals brought up. And not eating. (118)

The physical process of playing the narrative is narrated in detail: the handling of the reels, the movements necessary to make the

narrative audible. The process is somewhat laborious, the physicality of the labour emphasising the difficulties for Ruth in finding out the nature of her husband's relationship with S – the reel must be moved by hand, at times, presumably when it will not play as normal. S's narration details smells and physical sensations, rendering the text bodily – touch is at the centre of the narrative detail and is a required element of making the narrative audible, known. Some details are missing – represented by ellipses, by interruptions from Ruth – and we never know precisely how much material is omitted.

As the taped narrative continues, the delineation of the border between S's words and Ruth's present-tense narrative lessens even further:

> Avoiding
> the issue
> possibility. For the last time. Remembering only the first. Climbing the stairs. Knowing the receptionist looked. Two days. Nights. Spent in. Over. The bed. Heavy curtains . . . She switched off. Searched for a cigarette. What's the use—the use? She moved the reel round, and switched on. (118)

The passage begins with avoidance, a skirting around the issue, then circles back to the beginning ('Remembering only the first') from a point of finality ('For the last time'). The truncated syntax sets up a rhythm of speech and pauses, especially from '[t]wo days' onwards, mirroring the rhythmic revolutions of the tape wheels, the crackling quality of recordings made by this method. The split between the two narratives – S's and Ruth's – is marked by an ellipsis but nothing more, no spatial separation of the two texts. The transition between the two is relatively smooth as a result, so much so that the shift – in effect, Ruth's silencing of S's narrative – may not be immediately noticeable to the reader. Ruth's exasperated exclamation, 'What's the use—the use?', serves as representative for the subjects in *Three*, but especially for the women, in its fatigue, its hopelessness – with the suggestion that there is no point in acting without the possibility for something different. Ruth, despite obvious discomfort at the contents of the tape, switches it back on.

Ruth interrupts S's narrative in this way on multiple occasions, but generally keeps starting it up again. S's narrative, because of its existence on paper and on tape, has a persistent materiality, a sort of permanence (though the material can become worn or can break). Even though Ruth silences the narrative at points, it continues to

exist – and its material presence in print in the form of the book reinforces this existence, and persistent visibility, even further. Ruth can stop and play the tapes, and as a temporal art form, what has passed is technically no longer present – not so with print, where the words previously read amass and accumulate in the form of read pages; the words played on the tape are still visible even after the tape, for Ruth, has been stopped. This peculiar discrepancy between the experience of the character and the experience of the reader highlights certain differences between art forms, media and methods of recording information, in terms of materiality and visibility. Soon after starting the tape, Ruth stops it and tells the cat: 'It doesn't mean a thing Bobo' (119). The whole listening process is full of stops and starts as Ruth pauses the narrative to find a cigarette, to talk to the cat, to reassure herself she must have misheard. The tape itself is faulty, and Ruth has to push it on by hand to reveal the content – forcefully uncovering the meaning. Not the smooth, continuous cycle promised by the technology, the whole experience is rather a struggle, physically and emotionally, for Ruth: a jagged circle in fits and starts, with gaps everywhere, points at which the structure can be invaded or leak information outwards. Like the interpreting mind of the scientist behind the microscope in *Out*, Ruth's act of observation affects the material observed.

Finally removing one reel which seems separated from the rest, Ruth hears 'Leonard's voice, sharp, slowly' (120). Ruth listens to his monologue in which seems to both admit culpability ('That she suffered there can be no doubt. I felt anxious. It was unpleasant. But there was pleasure. Not unshared') and relinquish his responsibility ('Habits take over, the pain becomes an object looked at from a distance') (122). Distance is imposed here through looking (as opposed to being close enough to touch). When she goes to rewind the tape she is met with a further material obstacle, that of the tape snapping and unravelling:

> Leonard's voice muffled, then high-pitched. Switching on the light, she looked down at the recorder, turned it off, and took up the spool. The tape broke as she tried to re-wind. Twisted as she straightened by unwinding further, until a twisting mass lay in her lap, curled about itself in her hands. (122)

The narrative has physically disintegrated in her hands, and the function supposedly inherent in the technology – that of being able to rewind and re-listen – is denied. Leonard arrives home to Ruth holding

the unspooled reel in her hands. He questions why she has listened to his tape but they do not address the contents; the realisation Ruth has come to is left unspoken. The section ends with Leonard reading Ruth's journal – so that, in a sense, a conversation between the two has taken place, but not directly. Thus, the cycle of communication set up by the narrative is never closed: subjects do not speak directly to one another, only obliquely.

Turn / Return

Alan Bass provides a glossary in the introduction to his translation of Derrida's *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (French 1980, English 1987), and includes in that glossary an entry for the term 'legs', meaning 'legacy' in French:

> A legacy is what one leaves, of course; *lais* was both the ancient form of *legs* and the term for a narrative or lyric poem. [. . .] Similarly *laisse*, also from *laisser*, can mean a couplet from a courtly epic, or the lines of high and low tide; its principal meaning, however, is the same as the English 'leash.' Thus the paradox implicit in *legs*: it leashes, ties up, *binds* (see *lier*) those to whom it is left, while maintaining reso- nances of tidal, rhythmic return (see *revenir* under *venir*). [. . .] *Legs* branches out in many other directions. [. . .] There is also the refer- ence to *jambes*, legs, and 'jambs': the question of what is between the jambs of the chimney in 'The Purloined Letter' leads to the question of what is between the '*legs*' in general. (xxiii)

This question of 'what is between the "*legs*"' for Derrida, especially in relation to the Poe story, draws together concerns about gender and mystery, reading and erotics ('looking' for answers may result in visual gratification). The curiosity of what is to be found 'between the legs', or within the chimney, is like the curiosity that keeps one reading a story, especially a mystery story – for the presumed revelation. The texts explored in this chapter implicitly take this simple – and somewhat puerile – curiosity emerging in Derrida via Freud, and they twist it, or thwart the questioning process. What is 'between the legs' is a point of enquiry in *Three*, where the question is filtered through Ruth's jeal- ousy of S, and in *Between*, where the answer is usually nothing, as in absence, or lack, and the legs invariably belong to a woman. The other meanings of legacy, bind and leash are equally pertinent: this chapter has been looking at how the novels construct femininity, thereby also at how the novels perceive the construction of femininity in culture – as a particularly lasting construction which is deeply restrictive, especially

as a construction which has material effects on bodies (whatever might be happening with the dissolution of the subject, in theory, in this period). Quin writes: 'I'm having ghastly nightmares about [*Berg*] and meeting publishers who look at my legs and not my manuscript' (qtd in Jordan, 'Quin Thing') – a worry about being forever positioned (in the eyes of the gatekeepers) as model, not artist.

As the word 'legs' branches out in 'many other directions' in the above, so the concept of the closed circuit (variously literal, theoretical, metaphorical and physical) takes on numerous connotations in the texts examined in this chapter. The chain of interpretation opened in the above quotation by the connotations attached to the word and its etymology replicates the structures of these novels, particularly Brooke-Rose's (in large part due to the propensity she shares with Derrida for punning, wordplay and neologisms). As the 'levers that pass between the legs of a word' in the epigraph can '[make] entire civilizations seesaw' (*Post Card* 78), so these novels interrogate the relationship between language and social categories, how the indeterminacies seemingly inherent in language reveal the flimsiness of constructions like femininity, in their abstract sense if not in their concrete effects; Brooke-Rose's *Between* is especially interested in how lasting and strong the material effects of these constructions are. Precisely because the linguistic system underwrites 'entire civilizations', the idea of toppling some linguistic certainties might show a degree of political and social promise – which is the argument of Friedman and Fuchs's *Breaking the Sequence*, as discussed in the Introduction. However, these texts are not wholly (or at all) optimistic on this front and are more interested in investigating the discrepancies between linguistic structures and material realities – between making a difference to both.

In *The Post Card*, which is in part a satire of epistolary storytelling in the form of love letters to an unknown recipient, Derrida approaches the circuit of communication via multiple intermeshed methods: firstly, through the metaphor of the postal system, the sending and receiving of information in letters, or on post cards. The act of communicating via post entails the idea of sending, rather than giving. The message is sent, after which control over the content is relinquished by the sender, passes through many hands, and may or may not end up at its intended destination:

> Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? Without any desire to surprise, and thereby to grab attention by means of obscurity, I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know. (5)

This uncertain, seemingly unclosable circuit serves as a fitting metaphor for all communication, including supposedly more direct forms (such as in-person conversation). Brooke-Rose's simultaneous translator never quite manages to close the loop of communication: statements from conferences at which she has translated are recycled throughout the narrative, in new contexts, accumulating new meanings as they go, branching outwards from their initial appearance into the broader narrative of *Between*. Likewise in Quin's *Three*: attempts are made by Ruth and Leonard to get at the 'centre' of S's story, to reveal details and secrets that could make sense of her presumed suicide. These attempts are ultimately unsuccessful, and if anything contribute to push the characters doing the seeking further outwards, away from any kind of easy explanation.

In another context, the allusion to 'what is between the legs' might be seen as connotative of sexual threat. In *Three*, those enquiring do pose a threat to S: either predatorily, from Leonard, or motivated by jealousy and suspicion (and aimed at S rather than Leonard), from Ruth. If treated not as a sexual proposition but merely as a question, the phrase is perhaps no less threatening: as Brophy's *In Transit* (which will be considered in depth in Chapter 4) has it, the question is not so easily answered, especially when the only acceptable answer is one of two binaries, and the threat more existential (although the 'I' in Brophy's novel is clear to state they've lost only their gender, not their identity). In *Between*, the answer to the question is 'nothing', as in lack or absence, a play on the embeddedness of gender within language and the associations of feminine sexuality with lack. Derrida's *Post Card* is built on a sort of sub-textual identification with the male subject – 'the man of discourse or writing' (4) – although he does refer to 'male and female' readers (5). But the writing or creative subject is male, and so the text is subtly self-policing, negating the same level of identification for the female reader, subliminally telling her: this is not for you. As Lisa Robertson writes in *The Baudelaire Fractal*, '[v]ery often a text contains its own police; the she-reader is simply shut out, among various others, none of us the men of the declared inside' (106). The textual system is thus closed off to the reader who does not belong. Putting Brooke-Rose and Quin in dialogue with Derrida highlights the numerous naturalising tendencies that the deconstructive theoretical enterprise neglects to address, all the while purporting to upend systemic thinking based on binary opposition. Brooke-Rose, in her own nonfiction, claims that the canon 'is very much a masculine notion, a priesthood (not to be polluted by women), a club, a sacred male preserve' ('Illiterations' 55).

The legacies left to the experimental woman writer for mainstream support and appeal are slim. Zambreno carries this thought a little further: 'Canon actually comes from a Greek word for "measuring rod"' (Part 2), conflating a young male writer's ego and genital fixation, as he tells her about his new book.

Reading gesture or body language is pertinent to the investigation of visuality in these texts, and in part a means of shifting attention onto the visual and the bodily – away from the linguistic, the discursive, which is also very much foregrounded in these texts and is the part that usually receives more critical attention. Eve Meltzer, in *Systems We Have Loved* (2013), writes on the reassertion of the body in conceptual art in this period:

> To [Brian] Massumi's notion of a disembodied (or even de-bodied, disowned, or dis-possessed) 'land' of theory, the works of art and art historical work that I consider in this book make clear how contested that negated body is and, further, track the ways in which the body and its effects nonetheless continue – as Robert Morris puts it – to 'assert the endless wonder: "Still there!"' even after so many 'deaths' (of the author, the individual, art, even the subject) have been announced. (24)

Meltzer thus uses conceptual artwork by artists like Mary Kelly, Robert Smithson and Sol LeWitt to demonstrate a sort of bodying of theory underway in the 1960s, as a critique of or argument against the abstractions of the kind of 'disembodied [. . .] "land" of theory' Massumi writes about. The 'deaths' referred to in the quotation can be seen as some of the most significant turning points in late twentieth-century theory, and as raised in my Introduction with the work of Waugh and Felski, those deaths might work differently for marginalised subjects; artists who have always had their authorship and individuality challenged and suppressed might not experience the same dissolutions as the white western cis-male subject. Brooke-Rose's and Quin's novels participate in or interact with both the 'de-bodied' abstractions of poststructuralist theory and the re-bodying that Meltzer identifies in the work of certain conceptual artists – although the above discussion about the canon suggests that poststructuralist theory is not actually disembodied. Rather, certain bodies are considered normal and neutral, while others are excluded.

The ways in which Quin and Brooke-Rose use gesture, body language, the unspoken, especially in *Between* and *Three*, assert the presence of the body as a material entity (as opposed to the reduction

of women to bodies, on which they also provide commentary). Of course, not too much later than these writers, in the mid-1970s, Cixous was putting forth the assertion that 'women are body' ('Medusa' 886) – in opposition to men, who have the world of society and discourse. But rather than reclaiming the realm of the body for women and women artists, as Cixous does, these texts are rather attuned to the experience of specific bodies in space and society, particularly in their social relations with men as figures of unspoken authority. Depicting the iterative process of subject formation, both novels are fittingly circular in form. Whereas *Three* places the dead female body at the centre of its narrative in order to heighten the sense of fixity and entrapment, *Between* depicts the construction of gender within language, and the resultant violence of gender constructions within subject relations. Meltzer offers a reading of Althusser's gesture of turning around as emblematic of the structuralist sense of subject formation, particularly pertinent here for the focus on gesture, the language of the body as interpellated with the language of systems and structure, and her focus on turning, the circuitous structure with no real beginning or end: 'In that account, the human subject forcibly comes into being by the very gesture of turning – specifically, around and toward an authoritative and disembodied voice representative of structure itself' (19). The subject turns towards a voice which calls on them, is always called before they turn, is constructed by the system which structures the call – thus the entire process of subject formation in this thinking is a cycle, the origin of which is impossible to determine. The beginning or end of the cycle is indeterminate, does not exist. Within this structure, there is no way out. The belatedness referred to by Meltzer, and also by Derrida via Lacan in *The Post Card*, describes a state of always-already-existing that gets straight to the centre of these texts' explorations (direct or indirect) of subject-system interactions. Just as it is impossible to describe the linear formation of a somehow always-already-existing construction, the novels' forms are circular. Meltzer's 'disembodied voice representative of structure itself' is present in the novels through linguistic and social strictures placed on the central characters – the linguistic restrictions and markers in *Between*; the immobilisation of S in *Three* – which shape them into passive feminised subjects.

When Leonard is showing Ruth some films late in *Three*, he accidentally plays a film he has shot of S. *Three* thus employs a visual medium at a highly significant moment, providing an actual image of S, our only 'glimpse' of her (mediated by text, of course):

> A film of a girl in a bikini, she lay face down on sand. Who's that
> Leon? Sorry didn't mean to put it on reels got mixed up just a minute
> I'll change it. No don't I want to look at her. See how she walks Ruth
> just like the girl I saw this morning. Did she know you were taking it?
> Can't remember. Strange how she never faces the camera always her
> head turned away. He switched off. Oh no more? Don't think so. But
> what's on the rest Leon? Nothing much orchids that's all (84)

Ruth asks Leonard not to turn off the film, because she wants to look
at the girl on screen; at this point S is literally an image, embodying
Mary Kelly's epigraph to this chapter, how the image is 'equated with
the woman who is reduced to the body' (122), desired by both Ruth
and Leonard but for different reasons. Ruth is curious about whether
the girl knows she is being filmed – how voyeuristic the act of captur-
ing the images was. S's gesture of turning away is ambiguously avoid-
ant, and representative of the indirectness of the communication in
Three. But it is also representative of the turning and re-turning of
the narrative, largely emerging through the spinning reels of tapes –
the more Ruth and Leonard try to get at S, the more she turns away.
In a similar gesture of turning away, Leonard shuts off the projec-
tor, seemingly before it has finished, so that neither Ruth nor the
reader sees the rest of it; Leonard thus assumes the ultimate narrative
control. S's final act of rebellion (which takes place in a mediated
form which she is not there to witness) is to turn away when she
is being looked at, to avoid eye contact with those looking at her
(variously Leonard, Ruth, the reader) but not to fully absent herself
from the situation, for that does not seem like a possibility. Neither
Between nor *Three* reaches towards anything resembling a resolu-
tion or answer, but rather they turn in a different way: inwards, back
into the text.

Conclusion

These novels do not attempt to 'break the old circuits', as Cixous
calls for in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (890). Rather, they meticu-
lously recreate these circuits so that the process of subject formation
is basically enacted in the narratives. The forms of these novels are
both circular, although both are imperfect circles, and in different
ways imperfect. Neither form is completely closed: the narrative of
Between seems like it could spiral off at any point, not linked together
by causal logic but formed of circuitous repetitions of remembered

speech; *Three* remains open ultimately through indeterminacy – very little can be definitively known about the narrative. This chapter has also taken a sideways glance at the 'models' of the Introduction title, chosen mainly for its connotations of structure and standardisation (as well as exemplification, excellence), against which each of these authors perform their own indisciplined rebellions. Here, in considering the objectification of the feminised body, an extra layer of meaning has been added, as well as an extra layer of identification between text and body, if both are to be models. In both cases, attempts are made to transgress the restrictive outlines of the model; being stuck in the gendered body, particularly as a woman writer (as Brooke-Rose's 'Illiterations' and Quin's comments on her publishers make clear), is as frustrating as expectations to remain within forms which, at their very base, exclude a feminine readership. If they do not exclude them totally, they position them, as in Derrida's *Post Card*, where the man can write and discourse but the woman only read. The disciplinary gaze too positions women, attempts to contain them as objects to be looked at, as hyper-visible bodies, to be regulated, controlled and aestheticised. *Between* and *Three* begin to present the body's indisciplined materiality, which will become more of a focus in the next chapter. Here, bodies attempt to resist the disciplinary operations of gender through closure or absence – and so there is indiscipline at the level of content as well as form – but they are still subjected to its restrictions and regulatory procedures, rendering them 'femininely' passive and open.

What emerges in these texts is an investigation of the material effects of discursive and abstract structures on particular bodies: the 'descent into matter' in *Between* which describes the way language and structure meets bodies, as well as the overt meaning of the plane touching ground (409). The conception of the circuit metaphor seems to suggest that women are required to be closed, guarded, self-contained if they wish to preserve any sense of self, however tenuous, and simultaneously open, available, accommodating to the advances – linguistic and sexual – of their more active, masculine interlocutors. In *Three* the circuit structure describes cycles of behaviour that characters struggle to break out of. These cycles are mapped onto the structure of S's narrative, itself formed of revolving tape reels, that Ruth and Leonard attempt to 'open' or enter to get to the supposed truth. The closed circuit in *Between* figures the body's inseparability from its environment: the central consciousness repeatedly attempts to close the circuit and repeatedly faces the intrusion of others, and thus her desire for closure has no bearing on her reality. Analogously

in *Three*, S has no control over her narrative, which is repeatedly being intruded upon by Ruth and Leonard (and by extension the reader). The restrictive gender formulations these texts employ and interrogate are emblematised in the circular formations of the texts themselves, and the many circles and cycles they contain, with the suggestion that certain behaviours are to be endlessly repeated without change or challenge, reinforced by their own repetition – something like the 'protected place of disciplinary monotony' that Foucault writes about in *Discipline and Punish* (141). This cyclical reinforcement is repeated in the poststructuralist notion of belatedness and the whole idea of subject formation as a cycle with no determinate origin or end. These are the circuits that seem most resonant with *Between* and *Three*, although both do play on the associations between femininity and lack – as played out in their circular structures with nothing at the centre: their repetition with a difference of the emblematic O.

Indisciplined Bodies: Brophy's *Flesh*, Quin's *Passages*, Soft Sculpture and the Gender of Material

I write because I love you, my material, language
                    – Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Self-Confrontation and the Writer'

Not only am I an image maker, but I explore the image values of flesh as material I choose to work with.
                    – Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*

Introduction

While the art object was being 'dematerialised', in becoming more ideas-based or theoretical, in the 1960s and 1970s, many visual artists and writers were still concerned with material, with the body and the concrete effects of abstract systems – including (to varying degrees and purposes) Brooke-Rose, Quin and artist Carolee Schneemann, as the previous chapter has discussed. This chapter continues this consideration of the bodily, and its ties to visuality and indiscipline in the themes and techniques of the authors. Where the previous chapter focused on the body as image, this chapter considers the depictions of the (sometimes excessively) material body in Brophy's *Flesh* (1962) and Quin's *Passages* (1969), taking in soft sculptural experiments along the way, for the specific ways in which they too challenge conventions of what both body and artwork are meant to look like. The soft sculptures[1] form a hinge point in this chapter, relating to Brophy's

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[1] Interchangeably referred to as 'anti-form' and soft sculptures, as per various write-ups of the 2009 exhibition *Soft Sculpture* at the National Gallery of Australia: 'Soft Sculpture' in *Artonview* no. 56, and 'Soft Sculpture: Don't Touch, Lick or Smell' in *Artonview* no. 57.

work thematically – Brophy's novel revolves around a character who becomes increasingly obese, and thus fleshiness is thematised – and sharing with Quin's novel an 'anti-formal' tendency: that is, to create novels which do not look like 'novels', and sculptures which do not look like 'sculptures' of the expected type. For, as Krauss writes, '[t]he logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument [. . .] sculptures are normally figurative and vertical' (33). The discussion of softness which follows incorporates connotations of 'formlessness', of the body especially, and of impermanent material(s) – and the gendering these materials, and artists working with them, routinely undergo.

My readings of both novels will highlight how the authors attend to the implications of following these aesthetic (and gendered) frameworks into the material world of bodies. Soft sculptural forms spread out, spill outside of their boundaries, adopt organic shapes; in short, they take on properties of the human body, rather than of classical sculpture and traditional materials. In the case of *Flesh*, the 'indisciplined' body in question is a return to classical ideals, as Marcus comes to resemble the subjects of his own desirous gaze (desiring of flesh and of art), the women of Rubens's paintings: as such, the depiction of Marcus slyly challenges the typically feminine gendering of fleshiness, and its associated qualities of formlessness. *Passages* depicts bodies vulnerable to dissolution, to loss of solidity as the characters come to resemble one another, and to each other, within a text which is formally and visually experimental, itself refusing the solidity of categorisation. The title, 'Indisciplined Bodies' (stemming in part from Foucault's 'docile bodies' in *Discipline and Punish*),[2] is intended to evoke the various ways that the bodies depicted refuse to conform to disciplinary expectations – of size and shape, in *Flesh*, as well as morality; of distinction from one another, and wholeness, in *Passages*. Likewise, the soft sculptures I will consider sag and bulge, sinking into their surroundings rather than emerging erect from them – a refusal on the part of artists in the 1960s, largely women, to conform to sculptural expectations of monumentality, hardness and permanence, as well as being a reaction against the cool lines, sharp edges and geometric shapes of minimalism. In *Flesh*, the indisciplined body

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[2] Foucault opens the section on 'Docile Bodies' with a consideration of the soldier as a docile and pliable body which can be mastered and modified: 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (136). Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he writes, 'the disciplines became general formulas of domination' (137). The subjected body (here the soldier's) is considered to be material which can be shaped by discipline, forced into submission to a set of regulatory procedures.

is that of one of the characters, and the considerations of softness and subversion are thematic. In the anti-form sculptures and in *Passages*, the indiscipline takes place at the level of form and content: softness is both theme and technique, subject and object in the sculptures to be examined. The bodies in *Passages* are indisciplined in their incapacity to remain separate, both formally and narratively: it becomes difficult to distinguish between the characters at points in the novel because of the form, while the characters also develop mutually destructive tendencies that occupy the narrative.

Judith Butler writes in the Preface to *Bodies That Matter* (1993) that in considering the materiality of the body, she found it difficult to stay on subject: 'I proved resistant to discipline. Inevitably', she writes, 'I began to consider that perhaps this resistance to fixing the subject was essential to the matter at hand' (viii). '[E]ssential' to the consideration of bodily materiality is the instability (and resistance to disciplinary enclosure) of embodied existence. As Meltzer writes with regard to conceptual art and structuralism:

> philosophers and cultural critics have begun to question if and how anything *matters* for structuralisms of varied sorts, emphasizing with that multivalent word that there is a relationship between significa- tion and materiality that the linguistic idealism of structuralism can- not account for. (150)

Following Meltzer on the visual arts, I attempt to tease out from these novels what 'matters' when it comes to abstract structures, consider- ing their approaches to the material ramifications of rigid classifica- tion: the effects of structure on bodies and subjects. With the subtle subversions in *Flesh* and *Passages* in terms of binary oppositions (especially gender binaries), a blurring of opposites – and of defini- tion more generally – occurs, a complication of structuralist ideals of separation and distinction. Waugh characterises the years following 1970 by an obsession 'with understanding the body as "written", as text' pertinently highlighting 'the flesh-eating proclivities of the postmodern turn' ('Writing the Body' 133). This turn is preceded by the semiotic rendering of any subject as a possible 'text' to be read, as discussed in the Introduction, and the negation of bodily material- ity through poststructuralist assertions that the world is ultimately constructed through discourse, that everything is made in and of language. Hence the 'flesh-eating proclivities' Waugh identifies; the body's flesh has been replaced with text. The novels in this chapter foreground the material body, and its depiction in/through text. At

the same time, they concern themselves with the materiality of language, with the idea that language is material: it exists in the physical world; it is also the material, the fabric, with which they work.

Whereas in Chapter 2 the focus was on feminised bodies as objects of the gaze, here the body is matter, material to be shaped, as well as to be looked at. Nonetheless, the presence of the gaze runs through all these chapters, as a disciplinary operation which seeks to regulate and aestheticise particularly female bodies. Both *Flesh* and *Passages* rework the Pygmalion-Galatea myth – in which a (male) sculptor creates a (female) sculpture who subsequently comes to life – to bring out the deeply embedded associations between women and material, as passive, shapeable, fleshly. *Flesh* reverses the gender roles, while *Passages* reinforces and eventually complicates the gendered relationship depicted. In *Flesh*, the narcissism inherent in the desirous look is brought out in Marcus's desire both to possess and to become like the Rubens women he desires; in *Passages*, looking is figured in terms of power and impotence, presented as a passive, (technically) non-interventionary and silent act, although *Passages* is also attuned to how the gaze can wield power over another, with recurrent reference to surveillance and voyeurism. The visuality manifests itself in *Passages* through Quin's borrowing of compositional techniques from the visual arts – layering effects from painting, shaping and cutting techniques from sculpture, the whole method of the textual cut-up. Quin splits her narrative in two sections seemingly narrated by each of the main characters, one woman and one man. Applying painterly techniques to the former and sculptural to the latter, Quin's narrative implicitly explores the habitual feminisation or masculinisation of certain aesthetic categories and modes of epistemological enquiry, as well as unequal power relations and gender politics within a social context.

In *Flesh*, the look is contained within the narrative: between Marcus and Nancy, and Marcus and the Rubens women. The reader looks in from the outside of this exchange, whereas in *Passages*, the reader is positioned as if they were looking at an artwork, because of the work Quin does in formally reinforcing the content being depicted, which often is the visual imagery of memory. The reader does need to do some necessary interpretive work to make sense of the narrative, although the narrative also resists this sense-making – the proliferation of narrative gaps and physical lacunae leaves it open. Faced with the impossibility of knowing, the reader can merely look at what the narrative reveals. This chapter therefore enacts the trajectory of this book in its own right, from the treatment of looking

as thematic in Brophy to being part of the reading or viewing experience in the artworks and in Quin. Brophy's text poses the question of what difference there might be between looking at art objects and love/sex objects, representations of bodies and the bodies themselves, as Marcus metamorphoses from one to the other; later in the chapter, artworks like Schneemann's *Meat Joy* and Eleanor Antin's *CARVING*, will take this line of questioning to its extreme, where the art object is not just bodily, like in the soft sculptures, but is an actual body or bodies. Both in the artworks and in Quin, the observer is encouraged to interrogate their own position and acts of looking.

As a way into the discussion of soft sculpture, my reading of Brophy's *Flesh* will look at the character of Marcus as a sort of art object, as he indirectly evokes the aesthetics of soft sculpture (becoming larger and softer and eventually resembling a soft sculpture himself), spilling outside of his frame, threatening the structural integrity of the boundaries separating him from other entities. Brophy's form of indiscipline is more a mode of perversion than overt formal experimentation; she subtly twists the realist form as well as norms of behaviour, morality and appearance, over the course of her short novel, *Flesh*. Quin's *Passages*, on the other hand, seems to want to be another form, or forms. This novel reaches out to painting, sculpture, music and more specific artistic moments like the cut-up, concrete poetry, New Wave cinema and more, thus demonstrating Quin's particular propensity for indiscipline: the incorporation, and often close stylistic mimicry, of a range of different art forms and influences in her novels. The works considered here feature both indisciplined bodies and indisciplined forms/themes (the works are themselves indisciplined bodies), demonstrating a parallel dissatisfaction with the line/boundary – with expectations of what bodies as well as artworks should look like, and they form challenges to that. Variously refusing to stand upright (the sculptures) or to face a subject head-on (the novels), they investigate the possibilities of formlessness, or of states approaching formlessness (including softness, unfinishedness, gesturality as opposed to solidity), as well as obliqueness in their angles of address.

Soft Subjects: Brophy's *Flesh* and the 'Anti-form' Sculpture of the 1960s

Since Brophy's only text to feature overt visual experimentation is *In Transit* (1969), she has played a lesser part in this book than the other two authors up until this point. However, in a discussion of indisciplined bodily materiality and the gaze, *Flesh* is a necessary inclusion.

Not only is it thematically extremely relevant, but it provides a way into talking about anti-form sculpture, which relates to Quin's novel more analogously, through its aesthetic strategies of impersonality, atypical sculptural techniques and materials. The work in this chapter thus forms a constellation of fictional and artistic handlings of the body as material in the 1960s. My reading of *Flesh* is more thematic than my other analyses because the novel is not formally experimental – although there is much to be teased conceptually out of the relationship between bodies, and especially between Marcus's body and his surroundings. The novel also provokes many questions about the nature of the gaze, the relationship between the subject and object of the desirous gaze, how the gaze changes subject and object both – and about looking at art objects, perhaps desirously.

Jennifer Hodgson refers to 'Brophy's earlier, less explicitly experimental works [including *Flesh* which] tend to be viewed as mannerist period pieces' as reason for her outlier status ('Afterword' 272). Indeed what Hodgson calls 'their classicist restraint [and] what Brophy would call their "designedness"' does make them seem more polished, even more old-fashioned than works by Brooke-Rose and Quin, and others in the 'freewheeling avant garde' ('Afterword' 273). Brophy is generally more focused on narrative and thematic experiments or pushing of boundaries – and in what I have been suggesting is a perversion of forms and genres from the inside – rather than the use of abstract or theoretical framing ideas, which Brooke-Rose does explicitly, and Quin more implicitly. What I mean by this perversion is a stretching of the bounds of the novel in terms of sexuality and sometimes morality – which is not to say Brophy's content is immoral, but rather that she is posing a challenge to the perceived 'stuffiness' of more conventional realist fiction in this period. As she writes in a 1968 article, 'Our Impermissive Society', '[i]n comparison with the freedom and frequency of our allusions to violence, our allusions to sex are still rare, veiled and restricted' (2). In the same article, she remarks on how she's become known in England as a 'sexpert' (15). Perversion seems an apt term for much of Brophy's work, describing the specifically sexual subversion she is often performing, where she changes the emphasis of realist fiction rather than overturning the form. *Flesh* provides a good example of these 'softer' tactics of subversion, in that it starts off quite normally: the situation and style are realistic, and the relationships represented recognisable; even the subversion of gender categories seems relatively normative, in that Marcus seems to assume a feminised role while Nancy is masculinised.

Flesh is described by one *Observer* critic as 'an exquisite little parable of the victory of sloth' (cover quote from the 1990 Cardinal

edition), a snippet which captures the novel's brevity, seeming simplicity, and also the way in which it reverses conventions: sloth is a threat, but it is also a delight, if one opens oneself up to the pleasures it can provide, as Marcus does in *Flesh*. In the novel, Marcus, an increasingly slothful aesthete, meets Nancy, self-contained and efficient, who expands Marcus's sexual experience as she expands his waistline, becoming both his teacher and simultaneously shaping his physical appearance, in a wry reversal of the conventional gendering of the Pygmalion-Galatea myth. Even when she becomes pregnant, it is Marcus's body that expands – she remains within her frame, while he spills over the edges of his, increasingly as the narrative progresses. In stressing the obscenity of Marcus's flesh and behaviour, Brophy implicitly highlights the relative inferiority with which fleshiness and formlessness are treated (as opposed to hard, contained, more 'structured' bodies and forms), without passing obvious judgement; the narrative angle is highly ambiguous. Twisting the parable form, Brophy renders it unclear throughout whether readers should be admiring or denigrating Marcus. Sebastian Groes cites *Flesh* as the 'most obvious example' (68) of what he calls 'Women's Skinny Fiction', which he conceives of as 'clever novellas' (60) written by women as part of a sort of minoritarian tradition based on Deleuze and Guattari's study *Kafka: Towards a Theory of Minor Literature* (1975). He sees these 'skinny fictions' as reactions against the 'weight of realism' and the male tradition (58). While Groes's alignment of sparse prose, weight loss, starvation and societal pressures on women raises some questions, it does suggest how these novels can be seen as posing a similar challenge to traditional artistic monumentality as the fleshy forms of soft sculpture – specifically in their anti-masterful, and perhaps minoritarian, positions regarding their material. It is my contention that these anti-monumental stances are tied to an increasing interest in visuality on the parts of these authors; not only does visuality occupy the minoritarian side of the text–image binary, but images communicate more obliquely than text, in not transmitting a determinable message in the same way, though of course language has its limitations there too.

Soft sculpture

Rather than suggesting Brophy was trying to evoke specifically the aesthetics of soft sculpture in *Flesh*, I am suggesting more broadly that flesh and the materiality of the body were concerns for visual artists and experimental writers alike in this period, and that they developed parallel strategies of approaching these concerns. These

strategies take the form mainly of challenges to subject- and object-boundaries in artworks and novels, and – in some cases – of championing flesh and fleshy aesthetics. Schneemann's *Meat Joy* was, in her words, 'a celebration of meat as material' (*More* 63). First performed in 1964, the piece features three men, three women and a serving maid performing various choreographed routines: undressing, dancing or moving their legs in synchronicity; slapping, rubbing and eating together pieces of meat and fish. The overarching mood of the piece is one of absurdity and fun. In the performance notes, Schneemann writes about the close proximity of the audience, 'seated on the floor as close to the performance area as possible', which 'heightened the sense of communality, transgressing the polarity between performer and audience' (*More* 63). This overt questioning of the relationship of observer to work was occurring across multiple art forms at this time: in performance art, Happenings,[3] sculpture and even painting, with Op artists like Bridget Riley making works which affected the viewer physically, as Jo Applin writes in her work on the soft sculpture of the 1960s.[4] Riley's optical effects interfere with the observer's vision, cause dizziness, and so on, involving them bodily in the experience of looking at art: as Mika Yoshitake writes, Riley was interested in 'the haptics of optical perception' (66). Yoshitake writes of Riley in comparison to another pertinent artist, Yayoi Kusama, who worked in the 1960s across Happenings and soft sculpture (among other art forms), and whose interest in modularity, repetition and the distorting effects of representing infinity, as well as her provocative play with soft aesthetics, could expand this chapter beyond its own spatial limits. Moreover, these works highlighted that looking at art is always an embodied experience.

Thus far, in beginning to discuss Brophy's *Flesh*, I have alluded to the ways in which soft sculpture conceptually breaks down boundaries between the artwork and the environment – as the sculptures melt or sink into their surroundings, become prey to gravity as well as weathering – and between the artwork and observer – as through a sort of uncanny identification or affinity experienced by the observer.

[3] Susan Sontag's essay 'Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition' (1962) describes how audiences at Happenings were abused or scapegoated, with the treatment of audiences being one of the main subversions of expectation in the art form.

[4] This point is made in an article, 'When Attitudes Became Formless' (183). Applin also has a book-length work on 1960s soft sculpture, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (2012), and curated an exhibition called *Flesh* in York in 2016, which presented an overview of how artists have dealt with the material of flesh throughout history – the show includes Rubens paintings as well as contemporary works – using images of flesh and the body to interrogate gendered and racial stereotypes.

Sometimes a measure of abstraction on the part of the artist fore-grounds the uncanniness of the recognition, particularly in the case of Louise Bourgeois's work of the early 1960s during her 'bodily turn': encompassing works like *Portrait* (1963; Figure 3.1), *Torso: Self-Portrait* (1963–4) and *Amoeba* (1963–5). In fact, Bourgeois once said: 'for me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture' (qtd in Manchester).

Bourgeois's latex sculpture (Figure 3.1) appears very bodily indeed, as if from inside the body itself; its blood-coloured, sinewy forms are markedly different to the alien-smooth pink-orange surface of Tanning's nude and the skin-shades of Nengudi's stockinged forms, as will be seen shortly. Recalling Brooke-Rose's 'squat diamond shape' from the previous chapter, the piece also looks masticated, regurgitated, scrambled in some way, bloody and organ-like, occasionally breast-like, in its bulges and protrusions. An affinity is called for with the body of the viewer, and that affinity is not necessarily a comfortable one – but there is a tenderness to the forms, seeming to be shaped by hand rather than tool, and not by any particular figurative or aesthetic rules.

Applin describes the movement of 1960s artists away from abstraction, 'towards a radical reconfiguration of the object as variously bodily, performative, contingent, and even destructive' ('When Attitudes' 181). Against the background of minimalism and conceptualism, artists like Bourgeois, Tanning and Nengudi working with soft materials were radically challenging what sculpture could be. The choice of flesh tones (sometimes necessitated by the material, in the case of Nengudi who used actual stockings filled with sand), bodily shapes, material which ages, absorbs smell, changes colour

Figure 3.1 *Portrait*, 1963, Louise Bourgeois. 2025 © Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

due to light exposure, calls for an affinity between the body of the viewer and the bodily-ness of the work. Like the skin of the body, these soft materials expand and contract under different environmental conditions, can be stretched to incorporate more filling – especially when the material is elasticated – or shrink and sag when the amount of filling is reduced, a changeability and adaptability which mirrors the form of the body, reacts against the hardness and rigidity of traditional sculptural materials, the stones and metals – materials intended to last, to remain structurally the same. These works challenge traditional ideals like sculptural monumentality in their refusal to last – and their artist's refusal to make them (to) last. The practitioners working with soft materials were often women. Considering how Oldenburg is so often cited as the instigator of soft sculpture in the 1960s, Lippard's statement in 'Making Something from Nothing (Towards a Definition of Women's "Hobby Art")' is pertinent: 'It took a man, Claes Oldenburg, to make fabric sculpture acceptable, though his wife, Patty, did the actual sewing' (102).

Dorothea Tanning's sculptural practice perfectly sums up these anti-formal and anti-monumental aims of soft sculpture, especially her 1969–70 work, *Nue couchée*. Tanning's nude (Figure 3.2) seems alien, almost monstrous (but tenderly so), with its visible seams,

Figure 3.2 *Nue couchée*, 1969–70, Dorothea Tanning. Tate, Purchased 2003. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2024. Photo: © Tate.

spidery angular arms, shapes reminiscent of the human body but in surprising assemblage (like Bourgeois's portrait, with the same vaguely torso-shaped form), its leathery texture and uniform peach-pink hue. Seemingly housing a spinal column but unclear how it might stand upright, the horizontal form cannot but recline; reclining might suggest relaxation if we read the title before seeing the sculpture. Its limbs wrap around each other in what looks like a protective stance, but there is also something exhibitionistic about the pose: prone, nude and twisted into a position that is reminiscent of classical female nudes (echoing Manet's *Olympia* of 1863, and her defiant stare, which poses an earlier challenge to the classical nude):[5] it presents itself, or the sculptor has presented it, to be looked at. However, the facelessness also prevents a level of identification we might be more used to in visual art – that of the mutual gaze, of meeting the eye contact made by a portrait (again, like Manet's *Olympia* or Titian's *Venus of Urbino*) – forcing the identification to assume other forms, which potentially feel vaguer and more uncanny for their lack of the specific visual cues of identification. With only a partially visible skeletal frame, the curved line of vertebrae, the suggestion is of a frame engulfed by flesh: a body frame providing structure from the inside, although not very determinant of what the outer form will look like. Analogously, Quin's *Passages* seems guided by some internal structural principles, but the visible form seems only loosely connected to those 'rules'. Brophy's *Flesh* also expands outwards beyond its slim frame. The difference between the connotations of the title, *Flesh* (with its sexual suggestiveness), and what the book actually contains (a strange tale of an increasingly obese man) is similarly sly in approach to Tanning's title, *Reclining Nude*, and the alien form depicted: both text and artwork are humorous, irreverent and interested in a sort of general bodily oddness – an indisciplined refusal to conform to ideals.

Fleshy aesthetics

In Brophy's characterisation of Marcus, the focus from the beginning is on his flesh, but notably in the negative terms of fleshiness (he is variously portrayed as animalistic, vulnerable, formless, blatant), suggesting he is material ready to be shaped – normally a status

[5] Classical nudes like Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1536–8), displaying the conventional pose of the female reclining nude, were repurposed by Manet's *Olympia*, which was sensational for its blatant portrayal of a sex worker in the guise of typically mythical and/or virginal female nudes.

reserved for women. When he and Nancy first meet at a party, he is described as follows: 'But where there was flesh it was blatantly fleshy, hanging, without shape, on the point of becoming tremulous—or, rather, it always looked as though this was the moment just after it had been flayed, and while it was still quivering' (10). The 'blatant' nature of Marcus's flesh affirms the accepted undesirability of flesh itself: flesh which is unashamedly fleshy, shapeless, wobbling. The shift to meatiness (via reference to flaying, the suggestive vulnerability of 'quivering') makes Marcus an object of prey – emphasis on the object – perhaps for Nancy's 'predatory' forwardness. Marcus is characterised as sensitive, vulnerable, suffering: his lips 'seemed to have been turned too far out, exposing some of the sensitive, private skin that should have been kept inside the mouth' (11). Apart from the obvious condition of tenderness, of exposing flesh which is delicate and not adapted to outside conditions, the description is decidedly vulval. The intention throughout seems to be to feminise Marcus, to reverse conventional gender expectations in the characterisation of him and Nancy, and also to make him seem grotesque. It seems intended also to sexualise him: he in fact becomes a parody of the sex object, through his close resemblance to vulval, shapeable flesh. With these moves, Brophy highlights the undesirability of 'feminine' traits, of fleshiness, softness, vulnerability, as well as grotesque displays of too much flesh (flesh which 'should have been kept inside'). Here, flesh is most certainly feminine, simultaneously sexualised and grotesque – both in its visibility and excess, and its refusal to stay bounded.

Mieke Bal, in 'Dead Flesh, or the Smell of a Painting', highlights the bond 'between death and femininity', specifically in the paintings of Rembrandt but pointing to a more widespread association (365). The focus on flesh, on embodiment, in linking the representative trope with femininity, speaks to the gendering of flesh apparent in Brophy's novel (and elsewhere in her writing on the visual arts),[6] pointing to

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[6] In *Black and White* (1968), a study of the artist Aubrey Beardsley, Brophy writes, referring to an illustration of the Roman performer Bathyllus: 'The flabby femaleness of Bathyllus's flesh Beardsley decorates by comically flinging over his shoulder something remarkably like a Wagnerian maiden's plait – which is yet also a displaced horse's tail: the very blatancy with which Bathyllus prances with monumentally spread buttocks turns on the ironic joke that his pose is one which, in equestrian monuments, is conventionally noble' (14, 16). Brophy thus aligns fleshiness with femaleness, and simultaneously with ridicule, in the joke about Bathyllus's 'noble' pose, his suggested position as rider but also ridden. Thus the typical feminine trait of 'flabbiness' seems a cue for comedy and mockery of a would-be monumental character, although Brophy's wielding of the convention is typically multivalent, as she is also pointing out the gender ambiguity of Beardsley's character.

more widespread associations of femininity with vulnerability, materiality and exposure/openness. The conversation between Nancy and Marcus is 'as a rule about the arts', and early on in their relationship he attempts to convey to her 'the agonised, ecstatic rapture that was provoked in him, provoked almost like a rash on his skin, by his sensuous, lyrical response to great blonde areas of Rubens flesh' (22). His own skin reacts to seeing the flesh he likes in the painting, in a manner recalling Quin's voyeuristic looking depicted in *Berg*; what he likes is an abundance of white ('blonde') flesh, 'classical' bodies – the evocation is certainly racialised, but Brophy focuses on interrogating the gendered connotations by feminising Marcus and making his desire circular, directed at himself. A sort of narcissistic circle is set up: Marcus desires what he already resembles and possesses (great areas of flesh); he comes closer and closer to the object he desires as the narrative progresses, by becoming himself like a Rubens woman (and thus a painting and a soft sculpture at once). Marcus in fact becomes more narcissistic as he grows larger and more lethargic: 'If he was a spring flower, it must be a narcissus' (50). Rubens's *Venus at a Mirror* (Figure 3.3) provides a fitting comparison for the character of Marcus, with his narcissism, desire for ample flesh (for himself) and self-love.

Figure 3.3 *Venus at a Mirror*, c1613–14, Peter Paul Rubens. © Liechtenstein Museum / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

A visual trope of classical art, the woman – typically Venus or Aphrodite – looking in the mirror naturalises 'feminine' vanity.[7] Rubens's work only reinforces this typical portrayal: Venus looks approvingly, perhaps also desirously, at herself and, through the mirror image, also at the viewer; the woman on the right looks desirously, perhaps also approvingly, at Venus's image, and thus her blackness functions as a prop to reinforce Venus's whiteness more starkly (with Venus positioned centrally, as the 'ideal'); the winged cherub looks at Venus herself, perhaps also seeking approval. The viewer's gaze catches Venus's own, but the eye is drawn to the expanse of rippling, muscled flesh at Venus's back, practically glowing against the shaded background: an effect designed to capture the gaze, so that we might see her body before her face. *Flesh* depicts a similar array of gazes: Nancy looks desirously at Marcus, but with an eye to what she can change about him; Marcus looks desirously at the Rubens women, coveting their fleshly forms for ambiguously narcissistic and sexual reasons; by the end of the novel, both Marcus and Nancy look approvingly and desirously upon his form – more on this below.

Despite the spreading soft fleshy exterior so frequently evoked in Brophy's novel, formlessness, or anti-form, does not appear to be the aim, does not appear to be what Marcus desires. In fact, it is the solidity of Rubens's Venus, above, that Marcus covets in his fleshly expansion. While the novel is not pushing against formal boundaries, there is something threatening (aesthetically and morally) about Marcus's increasingly flabby state, which is boundless and difficult to define. However, the tone remains light throughout; Brophy seems to have fun with pointing out how much fun Marcus is having. Late in the novel, 'he liked the feeling of his now firmer, more solid figure' (102). It is as if he becomes more present as he grows larger, more imposing; his gaining of flesh does not render him soft, and so he maintains some conventional masculinity. Nancy does become slightly less neat in pregnancy, even if Marcus is the one who expands the most: framed by her bodily edges, Nancy had previously been 'too neat and contained for a completely abandoned experience', but Marcus now thinks 'it would be possible to lose awareness of both bodies' (139). Within as outside the novel, it is more permissible for the male character to exceed his boundaries, abandon his inhibitions. From Marcus's perspective, the boundaries between them can break

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[7] As in Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* (1555) and Diego Velázquez's *The Rokeby Venus* (1647–51).

down now, and it seems that the experience would be pleasurable – to someone seeking complete abandon in any case, as is Marcus. The 'lesson' to be extracted from this slim parable is very ambiguous: Marcus becomes so obese he can barely move, but in doing so he is able to access unprecedented levels of pleasure precisely because of his newfound shiftiness with boundaries, his ability to expand outwith his own frame.

By the end of the novel, Marcus resembles a soft sculpture: 'He could still get into [his bathing trunks], because the material gave, but he bulged horribly through them' (153). His frame can no longer contain him and he spills outside it; he is material. He effectively begins to absorb people: their child-minder Ilse, whom he has an affair with and subsequently fires; in the end, even Nancy, who speaks to him contemptuously concerning his weight but looks at him 'desirous[ly]' (154). Marcus's fleshy aesthetics resemble soft sculpture in their boundarylessness, but he is being depicted as a monster. Marcus's 'feminine' traits are throughout a signalling that he is not the kind to be confined within strict boundary lines, reinforcing the idea of feminised bodies as material, leaky and dangerously unbounded, excessively corporeal and grotesque. Marcus's fleshiness makes him monstrous through this process of feminisation, whereas Tanning's own (also somewhat monstrous) forms show, through their softness, a more acute awareness of the humanity of their materiality and life spans. Brophy's portrayal of Marcus resembles the trope of the grotesque body in Mikhail Bakhtin's 1965 study of medieval and Renaissance representation, *Rabelais and His World*, in which the grotesque is characterised by '[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness' of style (303). Here, the carnivalesque, excessively corporeal, fleshy, pleasure-oriented body is a means of degradation of the model or ideal, a drawing down from the abstract to the material world – but Brophy is not using this trope in a wholly negative way; the novel is not a straightforward denigration of Marcus's behaviour.

Marcus spills outside his body frame in amassing more flesh, and bulges 'horribly through' his clothing, his flesh refusing to be contained or shaped by the fabric. His flesh performs similarly to how Nengudi's sculptures bulge and sag – both grotesque and tender, in their abstract resemblance to the body – how the inner material (usually sand) collects in the stockings, forcing the material to expand to accommodate its weight and bulk (Figure 3.4). Nengudi determines the repetition, arrangement and modularity, but to a certain extent the shapes are determined by gravity, displaying the tension between artistic control and its disavowal so prevalent in the works in this book. Thus
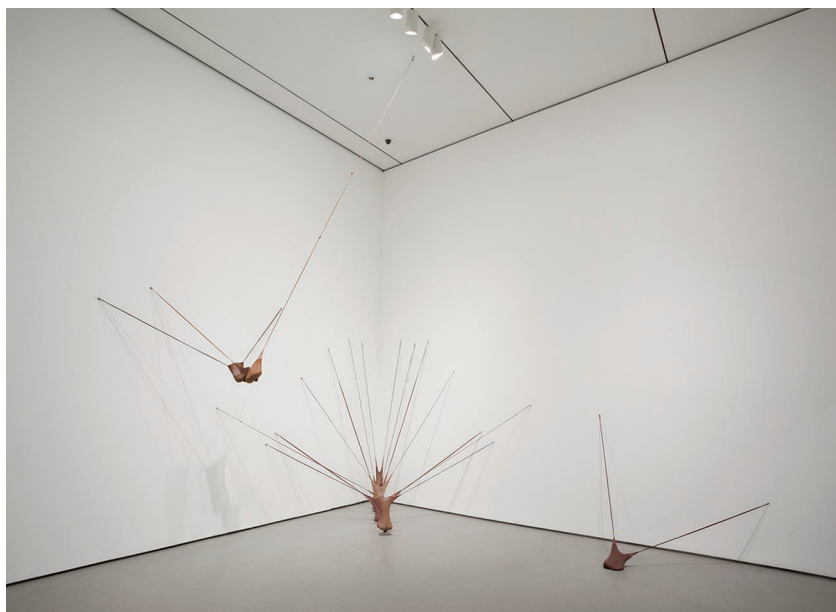
Figure 3.4 *R.S.V.P. I*, 1977–2003, Senga Nengudi. Installation view of the exhibition 'Contemporary Galleries: 1980 – Now'. MoMA, NY, November 16, 2011 through February 9, 2014. (photo: Jonathan Muzikar, copyright: The Museum of Modern Art, NY, IN2176). Pantyhose and sand, 10 pieces, overall dimensions variable. Committee on Painting and Sculpture Funds, and The Friends of Education of The Museum of Modern Art. Acc. n.: 857.2011. 2025 © Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

she works with the material and its properties, rather than against it; in filling the stockings with sand she changes their structure, but their form has always been malleable, and the kind of frame they provide for the interior material is soft, shapeable – can be stretched, but only to a point. Nengudi's work demonstrates quite succinctly the ways we might look at flesh as a material sympathetic to the anti-masterful methods of innovation employed by Brophy, Quin and Brooke-Rose. The membranous qualities of flesh, the way it moves and changes as its contents grow and shrink, evokes both the reassertion of the body in the visual arts and the refusal to remain within restrictive forms and frameworks in the experimental novel.

Lovia Gyarkye describes how Nengudi's pantyhose sculptures were 'prompted by the physical and psychological changes she experienced during pregnancy', evoking 'the human body's elasticity'. Splayed leg forms recall the content of Chapter 2, and the stereotypical constructs of femininity it explored. Gyarkye also describes Nengudi's integral

part in the multi-disciplinary Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and feminist art circuits, and yet her relative obscurity within the mainstream art world, largely because her work was 'difficult to categorize', 'too conceptual' for the mainstream, and conceptual art was populated by 'mostly white men': she was 'uncategorizeable in an age that, for all its experimentation, still treasured systems of organization', evoking the restrictions on Black artists to represent Black life in specific, prescribed ways by the white-dominated mainstream art world (n.p.). Beginning in the 1970s, Nengudi wove performance art into her sculptural works: a collaborator, usually Maren Hassinger, would 'activate' the pieces via dance or movement, not only challenging boundaries between artwork and environment, and the traditional hardness of sculptural monumentality, but imbuing the still sculptural form with life and activity. These qualities are subtly and fundamentally present by the nature of the soft sculptural material: though pinned to walls, the movement of passers-by might imperceptibly shift some of the hanging forms, while the fabric itself would stretch over time. Life and activity are qualities not normally associated with the material of (traditional) sculpture, the material that is worked on by the active hand of the artist.

Interlude: Pygmalion Reversals

Both *Flesh* and *Passages* negotiate the Pygmalion-Galatea myth, challenging the embedded associations of femininity with passivity and corporeality, and masculinity with action and artistry. Carole Sweeney notes the novel's mythic reversal, as well as the 'reversal of the ubiquitous male gaze on the female nude', asserting that '*Flesh* presents women as intensely sexual without any monstrosity accruing to their bodies or lives' ('Why This' 243). However, as my reading has shown, Marcus becomes monstrous in the process of his feminisation, and so the 'feminine', regardless of who is embodying it at that moment, is always monstrous. While in a way this reversal reinforces the binary categorisation of masculine and feminine characteristics, Brophy's 'intermingling' of traits between the characters complicates at the same time as potentially reproducing the undesirability of 'feminine' softness. Marcus becomes 'disgustingly fat' with 'pendulous breasts, like a woman' and Sweeney notes that he is nonetheless attractive to Nancy ('Why This' 243); but the novel, in order to fulfil comedic expectations, presents this like a perversion. Nancy is not punished for her desire, but Marcus is exposed as grotesque, for being fat, lazy and transgressive of personal boundaries – most notably in his absorption

of the child-minder Ilse. Jonathan Gibbs too seeks to rescue *Flesh* from any accusations of conservatism that might accrue from Nancy's seeming submission to her husband at the end, by recognising that 'Marcus's fatness [. . .] feminises him', and so 'Nancy is essentially embracing her bisexuality, at the very moment Marcus is luxuriating in his newfound hermaphroditism' (126). Indeed, the novel's perversion of both the realist form and the disciplinary rigours of binary gender are subtle, and its ambivalence makes it difficult to tell whether any of these 'perversities' are being genuinely denigrated. It is the extremity to which these categories are taken which is held up to be grotesque, of course, but depicting Marcus's weight gain as a slippery scale leading to the ultimate transgression of personal boundaries in a bid to satisfy his own desires exposes the exploitation of normalising tendencies for comic effect. If any 'perversity' is being denigrated here, it seems to be the desirability of fat bodies – indisciplined through their violation of boundaries – although, in the gendering of flesh as feminine, that category seems inseparable from the feminine.

Flesh concerns itself with the complication of conventional gender roles – so what appears chiasmic in the novel is in fact less straightforward, looking forward to how Quin complicates binary distinction in *Passages*. In *Flesh*, Brophy reverses the conventional gender roles of the myth, so that the female character is the one moulding the man, bringing him 'to life'. In *Passages*, the myth is upended in a variety of complex ways, but for the purpose of introduction, the characters are built and unbuilt, with the emphasis being on the unbuilding, undoing or fragmentation of subjects (both of whom demonstrate a level of co-dependency in which they seem constantly under threat of being unbuilt by the other). In an era where the sexism and gender bias of traditional art was being overtly interrogated – especially by feminist performance and body artists like Schneemann, whose work was considered in the last chapter – the Pygmalion-Galatea myth provides a fitting means of challenging stereotypical portrayals of gendered roles for women, as model, muse, material. Eleanor Antin's *CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) provides another direct reworking of the myth.

In *CARVING* (Figure 3.5), Antin is both sculptor and sculpted, the material of her own work, subverting and short-circuiting the myth's requirement of a binary and gendered relationship. The marble of the original story is transformed into flesh – itself a fulfilment of the myth's trajectory, a knowing and discomfiting mirror held up to the notion of 'traditional' sculpture, with its 'traditional' object in the feminised body. In Antin's work, the traditional role of material for the feminine body is subverted; woman is both carver and carved. The body is material, and is also what disappears.
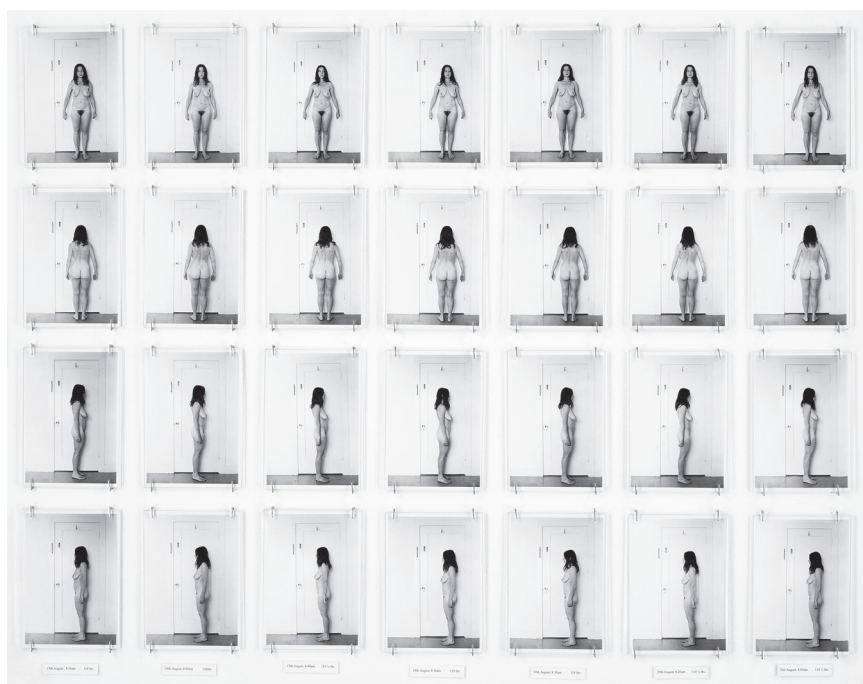
Figure 3.5 *CARVING*: *A Traditional Sculpture*, 1972, Eleanor Antin. © Eleanor Antin. Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery London and Rome.

Specifically, flesh disappears, revealing more of the structural skeletal frame. Antin's body becomes harder, smaller, less – less present, literally disappearing. As a mixed media work – variously classifiable as sculpture, photography, performance and conceptual artwork – *CARVING*'s formal indiscipline only enriches the associations: with woman as image, as body, as material, all at once. Looking at these novels alongside works of feminist art from the same period allows for an investigation into the gendering of art practices across forms, and where the pushing against the idea of form itself (specifically the Greenbergian idea of a purity of form) was a means of pushing against these genderings, or at least pushing against the hierarchies implied by the gendering.[8]

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[8] In 'Modernist Painting', a 1960 essay by formalist art critic Clement Greenberg, he writes: 'The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence' (n.p.). Greenberg praises artwork

'Feeling myself in a world of forms': Bodies, Matter and the Gendering of Art Forms in Quin's *Passages*

Passages eludes generic categorisation and, like *Flesh*, concerns itself with the transgression of boundaries, edges and any sense of stable classification. Indeed, its dreamlike form helps to achieve this instability: the pronouns shift as in Quin's other work, so that often the perspective travels from first to third person, providing a sense that out-of-body experience is underway.[9] *Passages*, however, takes this investigation into the formal realm: the book is composed in two styles, one for each of the characters, each of which has its own distinct typographical layout. Those pertaining to the female character are composed in blocks or fragments of prose with limited punctuation; those pertaining to the male character are like a typeset diary, with marginalia loosely relating to the 'main' contents, lots of lists and fragmented phrases (see Figures 3.6 and 3.7 for examples of each). The plot, in so much as there is one, follows these two characters in a search for the woman's missing brother, across a vague European landscape, with hazy suggestions of experiment with the limits of consciousness and sexuality, as well as heightened paranoia and concerns about surveillance, being followed and being watched. The diary in the novel contains the line: 'I would like to exhaust the limits of the possible' (88), a motive or aim which can be applied to almost any aspect of the novel, not least the formal composition, the extension of the expressive capacities of language via visual techniques – the search for an art form to match the experience of reality.

Quin's interest in and exposure to the visual arts is increasingly gaining critical attention; Jennifer Hodgson has written about Quin's presence in London in the 1960s as the British Pop Art scene was growing up, and 'the art school's abiding influence on her'

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which focuses on its own formal areas of specialisation – for example, painting which exemplifies the flatness of on-canvas work, such as Piet Mondrian's. Highlighting a gradual shift towards abstraction in twentieth-century visual arts, the essay also at times seems to promote a sort of purity of forms: painting driven towards producing work only possible in painting, and likewise in sculpture, film and so on – so that the forms, in becoming more specialised, become separated from one another.

9 I write elsewhere on Quin's dreamlike technique, in '"Turning her over in the flat of my dreams": Visuality, Cut-up and Irreality in the Work of Ann Quin', *Women: a cultural review* (vol. 33, no. 1, Spring 2022).

him, he pushed her down onto her knees. I drew the curtains. I couldn't see, but saw what next would happen. I was thirsty. Water heavy with smoke, heat, a bitter taste. Hardness of the glass, she saw herself in. Buzz buzz buzzing of a mosquito round a candle. Wax formed green rivers. Frozen. I tried lifting him from the floor. Laughter. Afterwards recognised as my own. The sea a faint white line. A longing

for rain. Olives dried in the sun no longer sensations. Grapes whiter from dust, sand, shaken in water. Seaweed he put round the bed, when my hair, neck were no longer part of the seaweed. Sun behind rocks. Shadow columns from fig trees, where I slept. Woke up hanging over the bed. In the next room I pictured her smile, larger it seemed than the face could hold. She held his head. He in a praying position, about to throw up. He moved between mirrors, measured the two rooms. Appeared naked on the balcony. Ah here you are I wondered where you had got to. He turned away, murmuring. Heat so unbearable if only it wasn't so dry if only it would rain. He gestured as if opening the sky. Split in half. He turned the air conditioner up.

We drank small cups of black coffee, thick, sweet. And sucked halva. Bread from an oven, in another part of the house. A spiral stairway he went down. She looked in the round mirror. Walls of mirrors. Circles of water, trees, faces edged off by shifting light. He rubbed an oblong stone. A fig opened slowly. Lips thin. Eyes narrowed on the deeper textures. Moments flashed, yellow, blue, orange. Sky so blue startles the eyes. Lying down I no longer saw the sea. Land a desert. Gulls, paper-wet, screamed. She looked for her brother against marble, steel railings, entrance halls, hotels. A museum I remember where I came across his signature, that perhaps wasn't there at all.

Up from the beach we held hands, ran across the dunes.

The lower dunes where we lay. Tall grass sand shaken, surrounded. Oceans of sand swallowed up crevices. The beach long, narrow. Hollows, patches, marks where others had been buried. Underwater we circled fish, each other. Shadows grew, slid across, terraced. Making patterns she leaned from. Hills of sand our shadows slipped over. We ate grapes dipped in the sea, salt added to their sweetness. Taken out of their skins. Wasps settled on the remains. Shoal of small white fish unchained at the water's edge. His hands cupped under. Network of fingers over the sea. Waves recoiled from places they struck. Hands felt the dry under parts of sand. One hill

in darkness. Sheep, goat bells heavier as we approached. Town lights, a fallen nest of fireflies, between the hills. Groups of musicians outside cafes. Men played dice. We were strangers. We were accepted, ignored. Initial curiosity. They went back to their beads, dice, drink. Men danced with men. Women watched, pretended not to. Priests still walking in cemeteries, passed by smiling, hands raised, gathered more dust on their robes, beards. Older men carried on gambling, talked of the political situation, fishing, money, the war. Countries they had seen, not seen, hoped for their sons to see. They spoke at times in a dialect we didn't understand. We were misinterpreted. Information given in exchange for money, clothes, cigarettes, drink. We were misinformed. He has now understood we have no choice, so we move from hotel to taxi, from taxi to train. Dining car to sleeper.

Blinds half way. Dips of black, quarter whiteness. Patches of water along the coast. Rain walked designing its own shadow. Winds condensed on summits, the straight sides of mountains. The sea cut swift movements of clouds. Over valleys grown wider, deeper, where rivers continually change their position. Bases of the hills bent back towards the course of the river. Lights, signs from cities, villages, towns I know only from maps, brochures. Long empty stations. Tracks

2   3

Figure 3.6 Formatting of female character's sections in Ann Quin's *Passages*, pp. 2–3, And Other Stories.

Sunday

Heat reflected from the wall across the street. Energetic waiter, almost an Eastern Jew in his gestures. Courtyard noisy as an invasion. Intolerable smells. Mosquito—managed getting three already—crushing this one a hard decision.

Tuesday

Almost a relief to be on my own. More and more unable to observe, determine the truth of things, share an experience. Is knowing this as clear as the thing itself? Writing these thoughts, if only to see what I might think. Lucid—well fairly so—at the moment. She has her own lucidity in fantasies, sometimes shared. The need to follow these. The need for sharing mine vicariously.

June

When, where to decide at what point to preserve

Obsession she has, that at least admitted. Equal to mine?

What are we doing in this city, this land I find no reconciliation with now. Come to terms with that, work it through, out of the system. She says I have no responsibility, no sense of responsibility to myself. I have no quarrel with myself, only an argument to follow through.

Enduring the argument without hope for any answer

Easier letting go when she isn't around. Easier sitting back and thinking. Allow thoughts to go in any direction. Just be in some hotel, part of the room, chairs, table. A little music perhaps. Ah listen to that shaping shapes in space, she said the other afternoon. The light in her eyes, that comes from someone else's eyes. The brightness, lighter movements; the aura she brings back, spreads. I catch some of it, though this sets off the argument. The longing.

Her fantasies: making love on the edge of a bank/cliff. A space capsule: 'Imagine floating around in all that space and copulating at the same time'. With two men—one under, one above. Another woman.

Note: Does she recognise the sadistic side of my nature?

What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself.

Monday

The need to find some unambiguous truth—not depending on the edge

No sleep at all, lay two hours in the afternoon sleepless and apathetic. Same at night. Impossible to pull myself together, only when I have become satisfied with the depression can I stop.

24   25

Figure 3.7 Formatting of male character's sections in Ann Quin's *Passages*, pp. 24–5, And Other Stories.

('Introduction' 8).[10] Here, I explore the textual effects of Quin's interest in the visual arts by considering how visual thinking impacts upon experimentation with language in *Passages*, focusing on how this novel skirts the edges of the visual and verbal representational modes, at the same time examining the challenges that *Passages* poses to such categorical thinking in terms of the 'purely' visual or verbal; Quin's technique in the novel implicitly suggests the inseparability of the two modes. Investigations of visuality in Quin's work can help to elucidate the ways in which aesthetic and social categories are continually intertwined in her work, how challenges to restrictive frameworks of classification in an aesthetic sense readily metamorphose into explorations of oppressive or harmful divisions in the realm of social relations and gender politics, and how the lines between the two are never clear.

In *Passages* both verbal images and characters are composed by the visual logic of painting, through layers of colour, shapes and shadows, or of sculpture, shapeshifting as they pass from one form to another. Like the soft artworks considered earlier, *Passages* is in some sense about form (and the possibilities of formlessness) – as is *Flesh*, although the forms are represented there by characters, not techniques. Quin takes the experiment farther than Brophy in mapping formal techniques onto each of the characters, so that the form 'enacts' the content, which is broadly about exceeding and blurring boundaries. These techniques are gendered in their alignment with Quin's male and female characters, although Quin does complicate the binary nature of this alignment, in confusing the boundaries between the two characters at times in the novel. Stylistically though, Quin's female character narrates in the compositional manner of painting, attuned to images and shapes and visual layers; while her male character's more typographically unusual sections are directly connected to the material world, as his interest in forming (and unforming) seems to have more material consequences within the novel.[11] The heightened attention to

[10] Elsewhere, Hodgson writes about Quin's early experiments with 'visual-textual writing' in her short fiction ('Beyond' 143). Alice Butler writes about Quin's relationship to the visual arts in 'Night-Time Ink', telling us how Quin was 'seduced by paintings', quoting Quin from a letter to Robert Sward: 'Got giddy at the Guggenheim . . . Ad Reinhardt's paintings which turn me on' (23). For a succinct yet illuminating analysis of the illustrations in Quin's later work, *Tripticks*, see Evenson and Howard, 'Ann Quin' (2003).

[11] Quin is not the first to make this gendered alignment. As Linda Nochlin writes in 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', '[a]s far as painting specifically is concerned, Mrs. Ellis finds that it has one immediate advantage for the young lady over its rival branch of artistic activity, music–it is quiet and disturbs no one (this negative virtue, of course, would not be true of sculpture, but accomplishment with the hammer and chisel simply never occurs as a suitable accomplishment for the weaker sex)' (n.p.). The associations therefore between the quiet, more contained nature of painting and the restrictive requirements of femininity have real-world precedent.

composition results in a novel whose architecture is exposed, which seems to be visibly in mid-formation, projecting forwards into futurity at the same time as unmaking itself, tending towards fragmentation. The mutable form of *Passages* demonstrates an aesthetics of unfinishedness or incompleteness, where forms are not fully formed, and resultantly there is less obvious separation between things (and people). *Passages* sets up rules only to break them soon after their insistence; this indisciplined resistance to conformity and categorisation – on the level both of individual passages of text and of Quin's work more generally – invites readers and critics to question the frameworks in which they are trying to place the parts, to challenge the rigidity of the categories themselves.

This section is split in two, as is *Passages* itself, one strand seemingly focalised through the woman character and one through the man, with their ambiguous pursuit narrative taking them through multiple unidentified locations. Each character's sections are accompanied by different stylistic techniques, as before, the female character's sections the more 'painterly', employing the impressionistic technique of truncated sentences depicting brief visuals and sensations, flickering depictions of vision punctuated with silences, the white spaces functioning as both visual and narrative gaps. The second sub-section here addresses the more physical, sculptural techniques of shaping and cutting in the text, and the collage or 'cut-up' method which emphasises the materiality of the printed text, all of which feature in the male character's sections. *Passages* sets up stylistic differences between the characters, implicitly mapping the artistic practices employed and modes of expression projected onto gender relations within the text. This gendering of the narrative sections allows for a critical interrogation of the conventional gendering of certain aesthetic categories and modes of epistemological enquiry, especially since, in *Passages*, the gender politics are enacted at the level of form.

'Succession of images, controlled by choice': painterly technique and visual memory in 'her' narrative

The narrative from the female character's point of view is distinguished by painterly attention to visual detail, descriptions in which objects, people and landscapes are flattened, composed of angles, lines, colour and shading. Exemplary of this technique are the visual descriptions of the scenery: 'Mountain rocks reddish, parts in light fawn-coloured. Branches contained shadows of every other branch, the light on one side extended equalled the shadow's shape' (13).

The specificity of colour and the concision with which depth is rendered lend this verbal image the vibrancy and immediacy of visual perception. The narrative stresses the passivity of looking; she is not involved in her environment in the same way as the male character is – also because her narrative is largely memory, and therefore it makes sense that her narrative is played out in imagery. What makes the technique above so precisely painterly is not only the impressionistic quality of the writing and resultant immediacy but the way this image is formed as if in layers of paint. Quin exploits the sequential nature of language to emulate the compositional process of painting, instead of the finished product of the painting itself, so that the narrative is always in process (always being formed, never static). The redness of the rocks effectively underlies their 'fawn-coloured' highlights, because of the order in which the elements of the visual image are recorded within the sentence. The branches contain blocks of colour which we know are shadows cast by other branches, but the emphasis is on visual, not causal, relationships – the emphasis is on the shapes themselves rather than where the shapes come from. This visual feature is carried through to the narrative level, in that we often do not see events as causally related: *Passages* gives us snapshots, which may or may not be connected to each other, and we rarely know the motivation for any actions. Sometimes the landscape is explicitly rendered as if being drawn, as in '[d]ownward outline of the hills' (14). This outline is imposed on the landscape by the character, or the author: the '[d]ownward' direction is not implicit in the vision of the hills, but foregrounds the creative agency involved in the description, the representation over the material being represented. Imposing a further layer of artistry (on top of Quin's own), this technique further distances the material being represented from the reader, showing us representation within representation; *Passages* is throughout interested in the idea of infinite regress, like the '[i]mages within images' formed when two mirrors face each other (21).

Characters, too, are composed of shapes and angles, the relationship between them visual: 'Dark spokes of the fan across his face. Angle of his body met the angles of her arms, legs. The shape of these shaped her moods. Fingers along ridges, furrows' (15). The main way in which the fictional world is perceived in the female character's sections is through looking. Rather than evoking the sense of touch, we see snapshots of 'Fingers', 'ridges', 'furrows'; clear causal and narrative connectives are omitted in favour of suggestive gaps between assembled images. The only verbs in the description are

those describing what the visual elements are doing: angles meeting angles; although moods too are 'shaped', putting them on a continuum with the visual aspects. Her looking is figured as a silent act, one which can be done secretively – defiant, in part, despite its passivity – and so if her gaze gives her any power it cannot be applied directly to her surroundings. The relay through memory imposes spatial and temporal distance between the narrator and 'image', an effect supported by Quin's technique of relating visual impressions in language. These distancing techniques ensure a high degree of disorientation on the part of the reader, as the mode of representation shifts between media, the narrative between states (mental and physical), times, places.

Passages of prose in the female character's sections succeed one another like remembered images – thus it is apt that characters and landscapes alike are composed of pictorial elements like line and colour. The character is, quite literally, looking back on past events. What we, as readers, see is a succession of images in her memory, where the writing techniques closely mirror the visuality of what is being represented – so that writing assumes, at least in part, the 'rules' of another (visual) discipline. One passage in particular reinforces this possibility:

> what did I see, for when the scene reappears it merges with a dream, fallen back into slowly, connected yet not connected in parts. So what I saw then was as much a voyeur's sense. And since has become heightened. Succession of images, controlled by choice. I chose then to remain outside. Later I entered, allowed other entries. In that room a series of pictures thrown on the walls, ceiling, floor, some upsidedown. Only afterwards could I see things. More so now in specific detail. (20)

As in dreams, the passages are 'connected yet not connected in parts': sometimes the syntax across successive passages is continuous but the context shifts, sometimes both syntax and context are continuous, sometimes neither. For example, 'A longing / for rain' could run continuously across textual segments – but the continuity suggested is not definite, not wholly supported by the narrative (2); 'he looked like / I ran on' is more jarring, disrupts the consistency seemingly set up in previous transitions between segments (13). The fragments form a series, linked by certain likenesses or continuities but ultimately distinct. To see in a 'voyeur's sense' suggests observation alone, without interaction; it also suggests looking for sexual pleasure, potentially

at violent or distressing scenes (characteristically of *Passages*, we do not receive the details). Observation without interaction is suggestive of recounted memories, but also dreams, and looking at visual art. The latter is suggested by the phrase 'a series of pictures thrown on the walls', but also on the 'ceiling, floor', heightening the unreality of the scene and drawing the reader back into the realm of dream or memory.[12] In the remembering, the sensory data have 'become heightened', less a spontaneous reaction and more of an artistic rendering: 'Succession of images, controlled by choice'. As with most of *Passages*, positions are relational, relative – 'outside' and inside – rather than situated definitively in space or time; anchor-lines are few, so that the narrative is purposefully disorientating. The suggestive phrasing of 'allowed other entries' connotes invasion or penetration, but it is unclear who or what is being penetrated or invaded. Similarly, 'afterwards', 'now' and the situation of the passage in the past tense: we are offered glimpses of fixity constantly shifting in relation to one another, but without an identifiable frame of reference, one known position to work from, these relationships are unanchored, ultimately indeterminable. The narrative is a succession of images, but these cannot always be seen clearly; sometimes the details are hazy, more constitutive of a mood than an image.

Quin's narrative, so concerned with the concept of shape and with shaping (less so with specific shapes), with how one thing shapes another, itself is shaped by these visual techniques – the characters, locations and plot seem to take on the qualities of visual imagery. Adjacent, or connected, elements shape each other: 'Landscape formed the angle of her head' (9); 'Shape of mouth corners shapes the corners of his eyes' (5); 'Gap in the wall held part of the sea' (16). The relationships between elements depicted here are primarily visual ones: only visually does a hole in the wall 'hold' the sea. Once characters are reduced to angles, it is the relationship between these angles that 'shaped her moods' (15), as flat pictorial elements can be seen to shape each other. If one shape in a picture is enlarged, necessarily those it overlaps with are reduced. As characters become (like) images, as this visual metaphor is carried over into their characterisation, they are flattened: the reader's knowledge tends to

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[12] This description is also suggestive of Plato's cave allegory, in which Plato likens the uneducated to prisoners trapped in a cave and unable to turn their heads, watching images projected on the wall of the cave and thus confusing illusion for reality. Quin's example seems designed to purposefully confuse the two and suggest the impossibility of meaningful difference between appearance and the 'real'.

be limited to the interpretation of surfaces. Without so much narrative exposition, the reading process becomes more akin to looking at a picture; the *telos* of sequence conventionally expected from plot is thwarted. Once the emphasis is shifted onto surface, onto effect rather than cause, the motivation behind actions is for the most part unknowable. These properties of Quin's writing have much in common with the *nouveau roman*, and indeed these aspects of her work would normally be read in relation to the *nouveau roman*: the intensely visual quality of the writing, the lack of causal relationships between events, the indeterminacy of motivation and the relationships between characters, the suggestive relation of images and ideas rather than anything explained, sharing an impressionistic quality with Nathalie Sarraute (particularly *Tropisms*, published in 1939) and voyeuristic qualities with Robbe-Grillet. Focusing on visuality in Quin's work, and reading her in relation to the visual arts, is more of a shift of emphasis on my part, rather than an argument against those readings – although Quin's writing is too expansive and indisciplined to be read solely in terms of its relation to the *nouveau roman*. Focusing on visuality in Quin is an acknowledgement of the myriad things Quin is doing with the thematisation of vision and incorporations of visual technique in her work. As the linguistic medium, in Quin's hands, becomes more visual, becomes in some sense about looking, the language becomes sparser and the narrative flatter, refusing depth and the kinds of explanatory relationships – attempts at mastery – that kind of vertical arrangement might seem to offer.

Thinking through these visual techniques and this narrative emphasis on process, *Passages* could perhaps more accurately be thought of in terms of sketching than of painting – because of its movement away from the linguistic through the incorporation of visual technique, its mutability and unfinishedness. Robert Buckeye uses the term 'sketchy' to describe the 'uncompleted' nature of Quin's novels (38). But there is more to this 'sketchy' technique than incompleteness. In pictorial sketches, more of the architecture of the image is visible than if the surface were polished, pencil lines erased or painted over. In *Passages*, too, the conventional elements we might expect of a novel – characters, events, narrative arc – are suggested or projected rather than fully rendered. As readers we get sparse details about the characters 'in process', but little to no background or motivation, as exemplified by the novel's opening:

> Not that I've dismissed the possibility my brother is dead. We have discussed what is possible, what is not. They say there's every chance.

> No chance at all. Over a thousand displaced persons in these parts, perhaps more. So we move on. Towards. Away. Claiming another to take his place, as I place him in profile. Shapes suiting my fancy. Rooms with or without connecting doors. He watches when she isn't around. A perverse protection he knows she needs. From his need (1)

Nothing is certain in this passage, and the opening sentence formulation sets the tonal scene for the whole novel: beginning *in medias res*, conversationally, with a negation which is not really a negation but a negation of dismissing a possibility – thus anything to be known is on shaky foundations. There is both 'every chance' and 'no chance' that the brother is dead. We are not given a location but 'these parts', from which they 'move on', the locale becoming vaguer and vaguer until only the directions 'Towards' and 'Away' are listed – the movement, the process-words, rather than any fixed locations. She places the brother 'in profile', an attempt at identification which also suggests artistry, through portraiture. As the sense of the passage becomes increasingly hard to hold onto, the narrative shifts from first to third person, presumably depicting the male character of the main couple, who has not yet been introduced, watching as a form of 'perverse protection', indicating some of the obscure motivations on which the narrative is loosely hung.

As Quin builds up characters in a painterly fashion, 'applying' multiple layers in the form of linguistic impressions, so the narrative of *Passages* is built up from fragments of text. An overall effect emerges in the process of reading, through accumulation (always the case to a certain extent, but in Quin the effect is purposefully heightened by the visuality of the narrative). Quin's narrative forms and unforms: its architecture is visible, like in sketches. We see the narrative being built, and then dismantled, and the focus is on process rather than the finished image or object. These narrative structures of Quin's are not permanent, can be undone – just as the decentred form of structure being theorised in this period makes the elements of a structure relational and contingent, rather than fixed.[13] Quin's contemporary, the novelist B. S. Johnson, also makes use of architectural metaphors to

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[13] In 1966, at the Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man conference, Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' marks a point in critical thinking after which the concept of structure, or the 'structurality of structure', shifted. Once conceived of as centred, organised around 'a fixed origin', structure was now being thought of as decentred, a conception which permitted the '*play* of the structure' – that is, the unlimited interplay of the composing elements, as the boundaries which once supposedly delineated the structure become unclear, undeterminable (*Writing and Difference* 352).

speak of literary form: 'The architects can teach us something [. . .] Subject matter is everywhere, general, is brick, concrete, plastic; the ways of putting it together are particular, are crucial' ('Introduction'). The subject matter (or elements in the structure) is not what is important here, but the way in which the elements are put together: the form or composition or relation between elements.

These architectural metaphors represent the move away from 'purely' linguistic expression (if such a thing were possible), towards indiscipline and expression by other means (including the visual). Rosmarie Waldrop, in 1971, was prophesying that

> the general restlessness as far as form and media are concerned is part of a more general aesthetic change. And the direction seems to be away from the pole of expressiveness towards greater emphasis on composition, towards a kind of formalism. (*Against* 123)

Waldrop seems to consider expressiveness in terms of completeness – a finished statement – as opposed to the 'emphasis on composition', on the process of formation. Moving away from the pole of expressiveness is also moving away from what language is supposed to do better than other media, and thus away from the kind of formal purity Greenberg talks about. W. J. T. Mitchell underscores the relevance of visuality to this argument: considering expression in terms of visual images, he opposes the expression achieved by 'predicates' which can be attached to 'pictured objects' to the 'expressive charge' of visual elements like 'setting, compositional arrangement, and color scheme' ('What Is' 528). The latter, more abstract, categories allow us to 'speak of moods and emotional atmospheres' ('What Is' 528), an interpretive idea extremely resonant with a text like *Passages*, which renders 'moods and emotional atmospheres' so deftly by linguistic means, all the more 'charged' for their lack of narrative exposition. Visuality makes narrative more suggestive, more hazy, less strictly knowable.

Quin's focus on the visual in *Passages* is indicative of the more general shift within the art of the 1960s and 1970s, from 'monomodality' to 'multimodality' as John Bateman puts it (30), a shift away from Waldrop's 'pole of expressiveness' to incorporate expression by means other than language. One early (unsigned) reviewer of *Passages* describes how 'the language seems bent on effacing itself in favour of some musical or visual medium' (qtd in Evenson and Howard 5), a statement which raises questions about the separation of disciplines: whether language and visual representation can really be considered separate expressive media or whether the linguistic

always contains a modicum of the visual. The reviewer's statement attributes the agency to language itself, so that the language desires and chooses to become visual – similarly to how Stein's comments about cubism attributed the rebellion to the pictures themselves (which wanted to leave their frames). In the end, effacement is not the aim of Quin's technique, or at least it cannot be the effect: the incorporation of visual techniques into a narrative simply cannot make the language function exactly like a visual medium. Rather, in writing according to a largely visual logic, Quin infuses the narrative at all points with the visual, in effect demonstrating the difficulty of separating the two media, suggesting instead that categories like the visual and verbal are always intertwined, never separate.

'Shaping shapes in space': sculptural technique and text as material in 'his' narrative

The sections written from the male character's perspective take on the attributes of sculpture, and the newly emergent literary cut-up. Sculpture is masculinised in being more active, 'hands-on', shaping the environment – although Quin complicates this gendering by mingling the characters together. The male character's narrative consists of diary entries, classificatory lists and marginalia: sometimes references to classical myth or literature – 'Does she expect then for me to play Orpheus?' (28) – sometimes ekphrastic encounters with classical art, often with suggestive relation to the main text: 'On the reverse of vase there's Dionysus, who has made all this madness, looking peaceful' (26).[14] Sometimes the marginalia are simply extensions of the main text, referring to the relationship being depicted, often with a measure of paranoia: 'How she watches me' (27). While both narrative styles contain ellipses and multidirectional reading possibilities, these are on the surface more apparent in 'his' section because of the more unusual spatial layout employed. His section is more overtly visual: the text is laid out in idiosyncratic arrangements on the page, in part to look more like a handwritten diary, but also taking on the appearance of visual poetry (poetry arranged so that the visual dimension adds to the meaning). The techniques of sculpture and cut-up become associated with brutality

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[14] There are frequent references in *Passages* to the Greek god Dionysus, who is associated with limits, transgression, shapeshifting, and has a 'paradoxical ability to embody multiple extremes at once – whether they pertain to emotion, gender, or sexuality' (W. Harrison). Nonia Williams points out that *Passages*' main intertext is Jane Harrison's 1903 *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, from which Quin quotes without contextualising, or produces 'undigested source material' ('Ann Quin' 155).

The figure content reads:

Sunday

Lay out this obsession : hers/mine :

How she watches me. God how she watches herself watching. However if no one observes me I have to observe myself all the more

Obsession/obsidian, obsidional

attention	Carefulness
positiveness	observance
bias	mindfulness
belief	observation
folly	watchfulness
eccentricity	eyes on, watch,
Obsessive/unceasing	guard
habitual	

The general argument : I am completely lost in this country—this climate.

27

Figure 3.8 Ann Quin, *Passages*, p. 27, And Other Stories.

in the narrative of *Passages*, as will be seen, demonstrating Quin's extremes of passivity and activity. Figure 3.8 reproduces an example of the experimental typography.

The associative – and sometimes visual or aural, sometimes concrete – logic governing the transition between items in the list is character-istic of the narrative as a whole, as is the pattern of resonances set up between certain elements within the whole – here, terms or phrases suggesting observation, watching or being watched. The references to watching also reveal details about the characters' relationship, as well as the general paranoid atmosphere of the book: her watching implies passivity, not doing, potentially voyeurism, perhaps surveillance, which he seems to find frustrating. Yet without the watching to keep him in check, he seems uncertain (and potentially concerned) what the result would be, hence their interdependency as characters. The placement of the marginalia allows for their relation to either the phrase which introduces the list or to the list itself; in fact, none of the items of text is strictly delineated from others (or definitively linked to another). The blurring of 'hers/mine' further reinforces this inseparability of elements within the larger structure – here, specifically, characters within the nar-rative, as well as smaller parts of the text within this fragment. Frequent references to shaping elsewhere in the text help to guide the reading of sections like this, too: the negative space between the columns of the list stands out, an interpretative lacuna at the centre of the quoted

segment, which in turn shapes the text around it; on a narrative level, the marginalia shape the main text – in that they influence our reading of it – and vice versa. The male character's narrative comprises a more overt gallery view of successive verbal images, invisible frames (formatting conventions) keeping the text in line, segments of text situated in suggestive rather than definitive relationship to one another, allowing the reader to choose the reading sequence and make their own links between sections. Much like the plot as indicated from the opening passage of the novel, discussed above, the reading experience takes place as a series of movements between indeterminately linked segments of text, movements which are much less guided in the male character's sections.

There are numerous references to 'forming' in 'his' narrative – '[f]orms forming themselves' (27), 'within forms and shadows— wondering when they become real' (55), '[f]eeling myself in a world of forms' (56) – mostly suggesting combination, genesis, a building up of material rather than a taking away. However, his sculptural technique performs the opposite: 'In her nakedness she presents to him the surface of marble, which he slowly begins to cut other shapes from' (84). A clear reference to the Pygmalion myth, this section reverses the process: the human becomes sculptural, is already figurative, and yet he begins to cut other shapes from – to fragment – the form. The gender roles within the original myth are exaggerated – 'she presents to him', the underlying violence reinforced with the term 'cut', with the calculated slowness of the process. Her material is memory; his material is her – the greater physicality of his material and technique often connoting or leading to violence. Worth recalling also is the 'voyeur's sense' in which she is said to see (20), imposing further distance (and minimal interaction) between her and her material, whereas his sculptural technique is more 'hands-on', as it were. This stereotypical distinction is certainly well-worn: the gendering of activity as masculine and material as feminine goes back to Aristotle and Plato.

Later, the Pygmalion myth is taken up again and reversed in a different way: 'He shaped out of the wall a creature, a sort of half man, half woman. Just before he completed this the creature jumped out and began to unshape him bit by bit until only his toe remained' (92). Demonstrating his anxiety about being unshaped or fragmented, in this version, the sculpted 'creature' revolts, segmenting the sculptor – 'bit by bit', in vague but quantifiable units – seemingly again for no purpose except to dismantle him: no reference is made to the shapes removed; the emphasis is on the dwindling remains. The 'half man, half woman' he creates resonates with the overall narrative of *Passages*, in which by this point the sections have begun to overlap

so that there are echoes of each other in each character's narrative; it is also a further reference to the androgynous, limit-defying god Dionysus. As she is his medium in the first passage quoted above, so he becomes the medium in the second, but this is not a reciprocal relationship between parts. The reversal is not straightforward, the power relations not equal. While these texts may sometimes seem to present a sort of structuralist view in that gender categories (and other social constructs) and artistic styles (and other aesthetic categories) can be intermingled in the same way, as if these constructions are made of the same material, it is the nuance with which these writers treat their reversals or complications of binary opposites that transports the representations into the material realm: how they take subject positions into account, recognise the effects on specific subjects or bodies. The violence implicit in the act of cutting represents something of the nature of their relationship: each character is partially responsible for fragmenting the 'whole' of the other (not that *Passages* ever suggests that subjects are wholes). However, the greater physicality of the sculptural technique associated with the male character's narrative sections seems to imply a more embodied form of violence, a directness of contact prevented in the female character's narrative by the distancing techniques employed therein.

Loraine Morley has discussed the gendering of the sections, 'the male (masculine) journal, the female (feminine) stream-of-bodyconsciousness' (133). However, the means by which the female narrator is distanced from her material – through recounting memories in the past tense, through the heightened artifice of the painterly technique and the filtering of visual impressions through language – complicate Morley's notion of an embodied 'feminine' narration. In fact, by rendering the male character's narrative as the more embodied, the more directly in contact with the reality it describes – through its situation in the present tense, through the physicality and direct contact implied by the artistic techniques of sculpture and cut-up, the more overtly written, and therefore material, nature of the diary entries that form 'his' sections – Quin follows abstract associations between gender and knowledge through to their social implications. Quin plays with the rigidity of gender categories, but this play is lent a darker tenor as the narrative develops, as the male character dreams of beating and killing the female character, a progression from the bodily violence implied by the Pygmalion references. While Quin complicates any supposed binary division between the male and female characters, the power dynamic between the two is not so simply upended, the threat of male violence perhaps even increased under the circumstances. The fragmentation of character and identity

in *Passages* allows the male character to be 'inside' her head while entertaining violent fantasies in his own.

The familiar association between masculinity and sharpness is handled in Waldrop's poem, *The Reproduction of Profiles*: 'As long as I wanted to become a man I considered thought as a keen blade cutting through the uncertain brambles in my path' (*Curves* 37). Masculine knowledge and epistemological enquiry are characterised as sharp, incisive, precise, and fittingly in Waldrop's passage are compared to cutting into the natural landscape to forge a path. Quin, then, seems to be playing directly with this stereotype when she includes two explicitly labelled 'cut-up dreams' in the male character's narrative, both entirely in first-person present tense, this consistency a rarity in the novel (and one granted only to the male character). William Burroughs claimed that the literary cut-up (a technique which he borrowed from the artist Brion Gysin) 'brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years' (29). Cut-up and collage entail the spatial juxtaposition of elements rather than a strictly linear or causal relationship, and cut-up is to a certain degree structured by chance.

The first dream (Figure 3.9), before it even gets cut up (see Figure 3.10), entails shapeshifting ('My body covered by fish scales, fins, tails [. . .] I am a star fish'), changes of location ('A glass stairway I climb into the sky, changes into a bank of snow') and changes

August 18th

Dream

A glass stairway I climb into the sky, changes into a bank of snow. I collapse. My body covered by fish scales, fins, tails, I try picking off. I swim in snow. I am a star fish. I dance underwater, between arrows of light that pierce the ripples, waves above. Through me. I float between stars, between the sun and moon. A centipede settles on the sun, I squash it with a starfish feeler. It blackens the sun with dark blood that drips onto my head, eyes. Hot blood like oil. It is oil. I plunge into water. It is ice. I sink into the ice. A woman bends over me. My head sticks out of the ice. I lick the woman, the pinkness, wet, dripping. My mouth full of fish. I go down into transparency. I am alone. I cry out in halls of icicles. I crawl towards an opening, a shaft of light that gradually darkens. The sun and moon have been blotted out by a thousand and one centipedes.

Figure 3.9 Ann Quin, *Passages*, p. 48, And Other Stories.

> **Cut-up dream**
>
> I am walking in a glass stairway. I climb into the sky, mother's grave. The cemetery a bank of snow. I collapse. All sides to the horizon. Body covered by fish scales in the open grave. I swim in snow. The family throw flowers, star-fish. I dance underwater, between arrows in large boxes, tied with light that pierce the ripples, waves above. I haul myself up. I float between stars, between ladders. I am pursued by the sun and moon. A centipede settles on the cave. A flock of geese blacken the sun with blood that drips. White horses come onto my head, eyes. I plunge into hot blood, oil, white bones. Ice whiter than shells. A woman bends over me. My father dressed as a carnival. The pinkness, wet, dripping. My mouth full of crazy Rabbi, walks along the fish. I go down into transparency. Father looks at me, hands me a book. Alone I cry out in halls of icicles. I say nothing, and walk on. I crawl towards a shaft that opens onto a skeleton. I begin to follow my father. Geese/horses cry above. The sun and moon beat their wings on my head. They have been blotted out by a thousand and one centipedes, feet, my genitals.

Figure 3.10 Ann Quin, *Passages*, p. 49, And Other Stories.

of state ('I swim in snow'; 'I plunge into water. It is ice') (48) – so that shapeshifting becomes a structural principle. This thematic interest in changing states resonates with the novel's formal shifts between verbal and visual semiotic registers, once again reinforcing that one medium need not 'efface' itself to become another. Rather, one medium is always already in a position of turning over into the other (and back again, depending on environmental factors).

After a short reflective passage, in which 'the dream pursues' him (48) – thus after a period of waking – he includes a passage headed by the phrase 'Cut-up dream' (Figure 3.10). Almost immediately he takes the dream and consciously turns it into an artwork, changes its shape, re-ordering reality as he does in lists elsewhere in the diary entries. Recalling the female character's '[s]uccession of images, controlled by choice' (which suggests distinction between images, frames present even if invisible – like filmic frames which look continuous when played in quick succession), the cut-up dream reorganises the material provided by the male character's unconscious in dreaming. This is not necessarily a conscious assemblage, and

the order is still presumably determined by chance, although there are multiple additional elements in the cut-up version. It is unclear where all of these have come from – certainly not all from the rest of the available narrative of *Passages*. The sky in the original dream becomes 'the sky, mother's grave' in the cut-up, and a father first appears in the cut-up; considering also the more sexualised imagery in the cut-up dream, Quin seems to be purposefully stressing the Freudian overtones. In fact, the relationship between the original dream and the cut-up seems to demonstrate an exact reversal of Freud's own assertion that 'some dreams completely disregard the logical sequence of their material [. . .]. In doing so dreams depart sometimes more and sometimes less widely from the text that is at their disposal for manipulation' (330). Quin's character has somehow departed rather, in waking, from the material made available to him by his dream. Reality and text alike are materials subject to conscious fragmentation in Quin's narrative. The practice of cut-up uses the materiality of paper and written words or phrases which have been fragmented and reconstructed, recalling Roland Barthes's statement that '[t]he structuralist takes the real, decomposes it, then puts it back together again' (qtd in Spencer 174), albeit the 'real' here is a dream. It is relevant, also, that the 'structuralist' in Quin's text is male, his character in effect a play on the masculinised notion of masterful classification.

Cut-ups, according to Burroughs, are by nature boundary-defying:

> Either-or thinking just is not accurate thinking. That's not the way things occur, and I feel the Aristotelian construct is one of the great shackles of Western civilization. Cut-ups are a movement towards breaking this down. (5–6)

Being in two states at once is by this thinking quite natural, over and above being simply possible, and the cut-up breaks from the rigidity of conscious thinking to indicate these alternative pathways: 'Acting as an agent of simultaneous integration and disintegration, the cut-up imposes another path on the eyes and on thought' (Burroughs 21). Like the pictures which want to break out of frames in Stein's account of cubism, like Brooke-Rose wanting to transgress the normative model in the epigraph to this book, Burroughs recognises the 'shackles of Western civilization', identifying an artistic method for breaking free, even for opening up new pathways in the brain – prompting us to think in 'both/and' formations, as opposed to the 'either/or' formations he mentions here as 'inaccurate'. This has direct implications for the form of Quin's novel, which, as I have

said, does not move between being visual and then being verbal, but is always both at once.

Dodie Bellamy, inventor of the 'cunt-up' (the name of which more obviously fuses concerns with the materiality of the body and materiality of text than 'cut-up'), has characterised the cut-up form as masculine (though she does renege somewhat in saying that might have been reductive):

> It seemed to me that only someone who had no access to an intuitive sense of reality would need to cut the text up and tape it back together to get to this non-linear place. It seemed, in my reductive view of things, a very male thing to do a cut-up. [. . .] Just that you would need to physically and violently rip these texts up and tape them back together in order to transcend logocentrality. So, I used pornographic material for my cuts-ups and renamed the form 'cunt-ups.' It's a joke, but it's also a feminist re-claiming of the cut-up. (Wintz)

The associations between masculinity, physicality and brutality illustrated here are also embedded in *Passages*, as is something of Bellamy's impetus to 'feminise' the cut-up form by using it to subvert stable categories – and the indiscipline in this merging of material from multiple sources. As Kaye Mitchell describes, the result of this 'splicing together of apparently incompatible material' is disjunctive 'even while exploring the seamless conjunction and transmutation of bodies and body parts' ('Vulnerability' 168). In *Cunt-ups* (2001), 'there are no stable subjects (or even subject positions)', and 'bodies refuse to cohere into "male" or "female"; shifting pronouns disrupt the ownership of bodies and actions' ('Vulnerability' 170). In *Passages*, the stability of subjects and subject positions is challenged, in part using a technique present in Quin's first novel *Berg*, that of shifting pronouns and narratorial position – as in the shift from first to third person with the opening passage of the book, analysed above. The cut-up technique provides a means of developing this disorientating effect in *Passages*, taken further in Quin's last novel *Tripticks*, which I will look at in the next chapter.

The associations between 'sharp', 'masculine' reasoning and the act of cutting are brought together in a passage towards the end of the novel which acts as a kind of coda to the male character's sections, fittingly titled '*Metamorphosis*':

> There must be time enough for preparation and for destruction, for the scheming, for reconstruction. A kind of dream made to order. To arrive finally at a unit with contradictory attributes never moulded or fused together, but clearly differentiated. (107)

The need for 'preparation' and 'scheming' belies the more ordered nature of his narrative, his propensity for categorising and typifying, while movements of 'destruction' and 'reconstruction' underpin both his relationship to the Pygmalion myth and his cut-up dreams, and associatively also his relationship to his female co-traveller. 'A kind of dream made to order' plays on the multiple meanings of 'order': a dream with order imposed on it, a dream imposing order on reality, a dream made as one requests it. The final sentence seemingly describes the form of the whole novel, which is indeed made up of fragments 'never moulded or fused together, but clearly differentiated', although the use of 'clearly' is perhaps a bit optimistic. The suggested syntactical and contextual links, the echoes and overlaps between multiple parts of the narrative, within singular page layouts and across the whole narrative, complicate any such clear differentiation. Finally, the use of 'unit' suggests coherence, and indeed the textual elements do form a unit of sorts, in the form of the book, in the manner that they are all laid out – flatly – on the page. But they are also nearly always in tension with one another, a tension largely maintained by gaps and silences that resist authoritative interpretation.

Quin's employment of the more 'hands-off' painterly technique for the female character's narrative and the distancing effect of having her recount from memory are sharply contrasted to the male character's narrative which is largely in the present tense. The female character's capacity for self-expression is much more limited by the greater restrictions imposed on her narrative: the relay through memory, the relay through vision, the singular reading direction. Quin's narrative effectively carries within it the aforementioned association between language and expression – where language is expression, while the visual represents with much less specificity, much less control over the meaning or message – although *Passages* characteristically complicates the relationship between the two 'poles'. Aligning language and expression closely enough that a greater emphasis on visuality implies a restricted form of self-expression, Quin's technique also suggests the ways that visuality might extend the capacities of linguistic expression, allowing for a closer approximation of non-linguistic aspects of experience like the 'moods and emotional atmospheres' W. J. T. Mitchell mentions ('What Is' 528). However, in a similarly complex move, *Passages* also maps modes of expression onto contexts of self-expression, shifting the conceptual landscape somewhat so that the poles are no longer those of expression and relationship but those of masculinity and femininity, or both sets of poles exist simultaneously

in an oblique relationship to one another. Thus the focus on visuality takes on different attributes in the context of male and female characterisation, as the narrative is continually attuned to the differing hindrances to self-expression for different kinds of subject.

Notably in *Passages*, the wish to 'exhaust the limits of the possible' (88) is framed as a desire, not an achievement. While the visual techniques Quin employs grant a certain artistic and expressive freedom, there is a sense of discomfort in the blurring of other lines, especially those between characters, as becomes evident in the male character's violent fantasies and the destructive connotations that cutting and shaping take on in his narrative sections. Hodgson writes of Quin's 'uncommon sensitivity to the cost of extremity, transgression, and limit experiences in terms of invisibility, disempowerment, and risk', her 'refusal to romantically valorize such a position', to 'simply [celebrate] the freedoms and possibilities of being in-between' ('Beyond' 145). Hodgson thus homes in on what makes Quin's dealings with structure and abstractions so nuanced: Quin continually follows through the abstractions – here the aesthetic categories and modes of epistemological enquiry, plus a general consideration of binary oppositions – to their effects on specific bodies and subjects. In *Passages* the exploration of being in-between takes on a particularly dark tone, specifically because of the narrative emphasis on bodies and materiality, with the artistic material – whether sculptural or textual – directly representing the bodies being shaped. Thus the shaping of subjects artistically (via the Pygmalion myth) is on a continuum with male violence. In *Passages*, there is a bit of everything in everything else, but it turns out that the intermingling is not exactly equal. No matter the consistency with which Quin blurs boundaries of all kinds, the power dynamic in the relationship depicted remains imbalanced. To be in between art forms is one thing; to want to transgress strict societal categories is another, and yields different results. Quin does seem to stress the possibility, at least in artistic terms, implied in the shift from visual to spatial metaphors towards the end of the novel – for '[a] distance now that never reaches its limits' (107) and for '[a] new order of space' (108). But, as with everything in *Passages*, these statements resist singular interpretation: not reaching limits can imply failure, and the need for a 'new order' suggests problems with the old. Quin juxtaposes various forms of social and artistic indiscipline in *Passages*, which for the most part are inseparable, the social rebellion continuous with aesthetic rebellion – except they are sharply delineated when considering the effects on material reality, succinctly represented by the generalised blurring

of all boundaries in the novel, except for the gendered power imbalance that renders the male character physically dominant.

Berlant contends that '[r]ules are stretchy and norms are porous', and in studying the relational and always-in-formation concept of 'infrastructures', they attend to this quality: 'Infrastructures [. . .] follow the elastic logic of cluster, of assemblage' (*Inconvenience* 23). Both Brophy's and Quin's novels navigate this terrain in different ways. In *Passages*, rules and norms are certainly transgressed, especially those to do with form, consciousness and sexuality, while others reassert themselves with a nightmarish edge, the lines of masculinised dominance and violence. Brophy's novel delights in the stretchiness of rules of propriety and morality, the clustering and assemblage of more and more material, and the stretchiness of the body itself – flesh is not a rigid framework, after all – while subtly reinforcing stereotypes about fatness and slovenliness. Neither novel totally changes the terrain it traverses, though the interest in exceeding limits, the designing of new forms, is clear.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered how the gender binaries around which these texts revolve are complicated by each author, through specific attention to embodiment and materiality. In *Flesh*, femininity is identified with monstrosity and grotesqueness; Marcus becomes feminised by dint of his fleshiness, unboundedness and formlessness – by his capacity for being shaped, thus his materiality – so the couple's gender roles become ostensibly reversed. In *Passages*, binary gender is embedded at the level of form, with a different style each for the male and female character, so that they perform as emblems of gendered modes of representation and enquiry – which Quin ultimately complicates by confusing the separation between the two characters. Alongside these considerations of gendered style and materiality within experimental literature, the soft or anti-form sculpture of the 1960s provides a fitting counterpoint from the visual arts, forming as it does a direct interrogation of the types of material and making considered to be 'feminine' – soft materials cut, stitched and stuffed. The artworks in this chapter show how women practitioners were employing these stereotypically 'feminine' materials to make works which challenged the very nature of sculpture in their softness and anti-monumentality. Bodies which overstep their bounds are similarly indisciplined.

The type of indiscipline apparent in the works in this chapter concerns specifically the depiction of bodies – as non-conforming to expectations of gender (Marcus's feminisation; Quin's occasionally indeterminate or interchangeable characters), size, shape and morality (Marcus in *Flesh*), separability and stability (in Quin's *Passages*). Quin's novel enacts this indiscipline at the level of form, especially utilising techniques borrowed from the visual arts, and focusing on their compositional processes (rather than the finished products) – both Quin's female and male characters' sections are intensely visual, but in different ways, and Quin has worked this into the characterisation of both, as well as implicitly gendering the styles by linking them to the characters. Flesh and softness form challenges to artistic expectations in various ways in this chapter, with the connotations of flesh signalling low-key obscenity in both novels: a piece of humorous misdirection in Brophy's text, although she writes about sexuality, obscenity and pornography in her nonfiction; Quin's novel has hints of sadomasochism and sexual violence which she seems to be aligning with altered states of consciousness as various forms of transgressing societal boundaries. Softness, as above, provides a challenge to the model or ideal artistic style in most art forms, in its associations with weakness and femininity. As it stands, softness is currently being reimagined within feminist and queer theory, reappropriated as an aesthetic and political approach for its radical potential: as Andi Schwartz quotes artist Lora Mathis, 'radical softness can be used as a weapon' (qtd in Schwartz), also writing that '[t]he preference for hardness that prevails in many circles betrays a hefty stake in the (neo)liberal myth of the autonomous, independent subject' (n.p.). The use of softness aesthetically and politically now is on a continuum with its use in the 1960s and 1970s, by experimental writers and artists, as a means of challenging ideals of universality, rationality and monumentality.

This chapter has carried the themes of gender, power and looking – and their connection to indiscipline – developed in the first two chapters further than before, beginning to think about the materiality of the text, which will be a primary focus in the next chapter. As Waugh reads the visual devices in Laurence Sterne's proto-postmodernist, typographically experimental novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759) as '[flaunting] the materiality of the book and the world, and [drawing] attention to the problem of reincorporating the body into language' ('Writing the Body' 140), visual devices in the hands of Quin, Brophy and Brooke-Rose too highlight the problems of negating the body in an overly abstracted consideration of textuality. In Chapter 4, all three

novels considered employ experiments with visuality and materiality in narratives which are heavily concerned with gender, embodied existence and presence; these works thus use formal indiscipline to pose links between the material and textual worlds. Thus two trajectories in these writers' oeuvres culminate at the same time: the increasing experimentation with typography and visual technique which grows out of their interest in vision and visuality as themes and methods of perceiving and ordering the world, and the concerns with gender which increasingly pervade and structure the narratives – as indicated in this chapter by the use in both novels of binary gender as emblems or archetypes, generally in order to challenge the rigidity of the categories. The complex relationship between text and world explored in this chapter becomes even further complicated in the next, with the page functioning as a point of crossing between the two.

New Rules of No Rules: Visual Structure and Visible Indiscipline in Brophy's *In Transit*, Quin's *Tripticks* and Brooke-Rose's *Thru*

These are familiar rules, made to be broken in an age of transition between evolving permanence and permanent revolution moving right to left from the point of view of the object exchanged.

– Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*

Familiar shapes in familiar surroundings are invisible.

– Rosmarie Waldrop, 'A Basis of Concrete Poetry'

Introduction

This final chapter focuses on the three most visually experimental works by these authors: Brophy's *In Transit* (1969), Quin's *Tripticks* (1972) and Brooke-Rose's *Thru* (1975). Forming the apex of my focus on medial crossings – by which I mean instances where the texts use more than one medium to communicate at a time, or display overlaps between visual and verbal media – these texts take the experimentation with framing and frame-breaking, circularity and indeterminacy, and the breakdown of subject and medial boundaries (as explored in the previous three chapters) to their extremity. What emerges is a literary aesthetics built on border-crossing or boundary-transgression (of media, disciplines, categorical/structural frameworks, subject boundaries and classifications, language borders, to name a few), on mutability and permeability. As I have been arguing throughout this book, investigations of visuality and visual-verbal medial crossings in the

novels help to elucidate the ways in which aesthetic and social categories are continually tied up with one another in the work of these three authors. Usually these aesthetic–social crossings take the form of interrogations of restrictive categories of gender and sexuality, or critiques of gender-blindness in their contemporaries, and simultaneously a formal experimentation which is geared towards openness, expansion, newness and curiosity. Attitudes towards restrictive frameworks and disciplinary 'rules' in the aesthetics of these novels are readily transposed onto considerations of oppressive or harmful divisions in a socio-political sense (again, usually surrounding gender and sexuality, although addressing race too in Brooke-Rose's *Out*); in the work of these authors, these two realms are never decisively delineated.

Quin's *Tripticks* (1972) is a cut-up road novel following the protagonist's pursuit of his 'No. 1 X-wife' and her new lover (7). A series of images (illustrations by Carol Annand), akin to a comic strip or a flickering television in the background, accompanies the text throughout, so that the reading experience is constantly mediated between text and image, although the relationship between the two is not always clear. Brophy's *In Transit* (1969) is set in the liminal space of an airport terminal, following the protagonist as they forget their gender after contracting 'linguistic leprosy' (11) and subsequently attempt to determine it through the reactions of various interlocutors. During this process, the reader has to navigate between two columns of text or, as it is phrased in *In Transit*, 'two simultaneous trains of idea' (93). Along with Brooke-Rose's *Thru*, it is perhaps the most explicit example of a novel 'doing theory' investigated in this book. *Thru* (1975) takes place on an unspecified university campus – 'in a radical university which has been dreamt up by the unreliable narrator of the moment' (633) – and consists of what may be the contents of a college writing class, with characters inventing each other as the narrative progresses. *Thru*, which self-consciously switches back and forth between narrative and narratological commentary/theory, contains around seventy pages of 'concrete' prose (prose arranged spatially in order to visually reinforce the content of the text) interspersed within the more conventionally laid out pages (many of which feature acrostics, so that the reading experience is never unidirectional) – so complicated at the time that it took almost two years to typeset.[1] *Thru* thus employs multiple methods of highlighting its own construction, and deconstruction.

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[1] In correspondence with Carcanet regarding the publication of *Next* (1998), Brooke-Rose wrote that it was 'less typographically startling than *Thru*' (Letter to Michael Schmidt, 26 Sept. 1996), the earlier novel having been originally 'published by Hamish

By way of approach, this chapter identifies the structural and thematic 'crossings' within the novels under investigation, using moments of boundary-transgression and chiasmic reversals as emblematic of the novels' experiments with form and theory: particularly the repeated figure of the mirror reflection which provokes, in these novels, uncertainty surrounding origin and replication. The figure of the 'X' forms an emblem for the novels' various crossings. I will take into account the many 'X's standing in, almost algebraically (that is, interchangeably, as 'x' can be any value within the mathematical framework), for a number of subjects, some within the texts and some within the authors' archives. Examples of these 'X's include the instruction to 'eXit thru the teXt' at the end of *Thru*; 'X' as shorthand for prefixes criss-, cross- or trans- (X-form, X-tine for Christine),[2] both a time-saving measure and symbol saturated with meaning; X-wives in Quin's *Tripticks* (where ex- means past); the diagrammatic crossings in *Thru*, particularly the logical reversal in A. J. Greimas's semiotic square (Figure 4.1); crossings out, elisions and erasures of text to signify their unsuitability or exclusion, especially in manuscript drafts. The algebraic 'x' – a portable and transferable signifier – forms a point of coherence for my concerns with visuality, visibility, materiality and gendered representation throughout this chapter, in providing a space for a value which can itself be changed, and a meaning which is not fixed. Formal crossings and logical reversals seem to hold the promise of mutability for these authors: the possibility (both aesthetic and political) of one thing turning into another, which would seem to place medial categories on a continuum. If imagery can be read as text, or if text can be used to form images, then surely they are made of the same stuff. Yet at the same time, these structural formations uphold some of

Hamilton, whose printer gave up after a year, and it had to be done by hand by a private couple, "painstakingly" as acknowledged on inside page (but very beautifully, much better looking than the merely photographed text)' (Letter to Robyn Marsack, 26 Dec. 1997).

2   These works, in some of their thinking, resonate with contemporary Trans theory such as the following passage from Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift's chapter, 'Radical Transfeminism: Trans as Anti-static Ethics Escaping Neoliberal Encapsulation', in *The New Feminist Literary Studies* (2020): 'Trans is thus a dynamic formation, which does not lay a claim to simply *be*, but which functions by disrupting static categories of being. As a form of refusal this entails claiming a difference of being, without necessarily leading to a separation with other forms of life. There is no being left behind; indeed, the separation of categories is put in question. Trans emerges from its negation, its refusal, through a flight from the world of norms, as an indeterminate affirmation of life. [. . .] Trans is thus a claim to categorical change, which entails a change in the status of how categories are understood to operate' (16).

the rigidity of binary thinking: everything occurs in multiples of two (representational modes, genders, reading paths), has an opposite, and the opposite ends of the spectrum are opposing extremes. These novels are effectively models which show the structural conflict between system and subject, and between rules and rule-breaking – and even fixate on or gravitate towards these conflicts.

In a 1968 essay by structuralist theorists Greimas and François Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', the authors set out to show how the 'creative faculty [. . .] makes its way, through a number of determinisms, toward an exaltation of liberty' (86). Their basic premise is that creativity is a play between constraint and choice, governed not by chance but by deep and superficial structures. Their 'elementary structure of meaning' (88) is represented in the diagrammatic arrangement shown in Figure 4.1.

S is any semiotic system, which by virtue of its existence in a relational system of meaning has an opposite (its absence), represented as S1 and its inverse (represented with a line above it), and the same with S2 and its inverse. This relational system of meaning is like Saussure's systematics of language detailed in Chapter 2, where meaning is constructed differentially, where 'cat' has meaning because it is not 'dog', or any number of other things. The above diagram places two contrary systems S1 and S2 in relationship to one another, a relationship based on conjunction and disjunction (88), on 'positive' rules and their 'negative' absences (92). In Greimas and Rastier's essay, the way to interpret the content of the diagram is demonstrated using the 'social model of sexual relations' – of permissible (for example, matrimony) and forbidden (for example, incest) relations and their respective inverses – based on Claude Lévi-Strauss's deeply sexist exploration of social taboo in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*
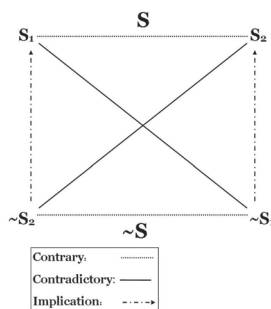
Figure 4.1 Greimas Semiotic Square. © EmmaSofia515 / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

(1949), directly criticised by Brooke-Rose in her essay 'Woman as Semiotic Object' (1985).[3] The model is then taken up and interpreted in a number of ways – and in many cases parodied – by both Brophy and Brooke-Rose in the novels below. For the purpose of this introduction, I mainly want to point out the diagram's structure as a crossing, where the point of crossover of the two axes is a kind of 'origin', suggesting an imaginary middle of a spectrum between two opposites, a possible neutral point at the centre.

A decade after Greimas and Rastier's essay, in 1979, art historian Rosalind Krauss used the same diagrammatic structure to describe the new range of sculptural practices appearing in the late 1960s and 1970s, which did not resemble traditional sculpture (Figure 4.2): 'narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms; temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert' (30). Krauss's formulation thus implies more overtly the possibility inherent in the diagram for expansion – although this was present in the earlier formulation, with Greimas and Rastier's interest in choice and liberty in the creative process, the drawing of the diagrammatic axes with arrows on the end (implying their movement outwards). The diagram was thus always intended as an aid to understanding fields of multifarious possibilities, by placing a structure over the information which could help to order it. Eve Meltzer writes on Krauss's expanded field:
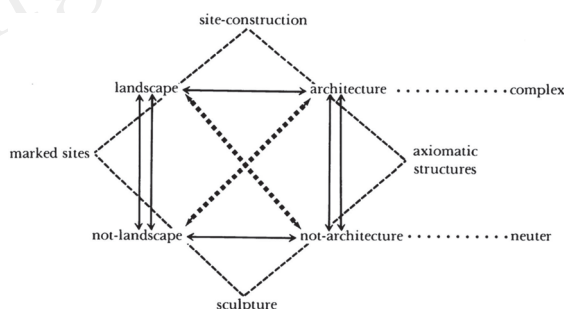
Figure 4.2 Diagram from 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', 1979, Rosalind E. Krauss.

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[3] In this essay, Brooke-Rose says Greimas and Rastier's essay 'made [her] laugh out loud' (*Stories* 237), ending on the more serious note that she 'cannot help wondering whether semiotics is not a peculiarly reactionary discipline, and semioticians unconsciously nostalgic for nice, deep, ancient, phallocratic, elementary structures of significance' (*Stories* 249).

> The generation of the square is said to 'exhaust the logical possibili-
> ties of binary opposition,' thus allowing the art historian to locate
> new forms not precisely as, but still satisfyingly adjacent to, the
> familiar term 'sculpture'—in spite of the fact that everything that
> previously had fallen under that sign looked so different. (123–4)

Thus the semiotic square might be seen as a means of breaking out
of this system of binary oppositions, allowing for a more spectral
(and spatial) way of thinking about categories – but in its explica-
tory function is nonetheless limiting. It allows for the stretching of
the bounds of what constitutes a category like 'sculpture'; in the
same move it shrinks the possibilities of identification by making
more things count as sculpture, instead of allowing for the presence
of new forms.

Thus the 'X' holds the possibility of expansion (as in Krauss's
expanded field diagram above) but is simultaneously limiting
(considering the connotations of elision or erasure), analogous to
how, throughout this book, the texts under investigation struggle
conceptually and theoretically with the conflict between structure
and indiscipline, the need for rules and the need to break them.
Even when the 'X' is performing its function of elision – in crossing
out – material elided by the 'X' does not disappear but is covered
over, signifying its unsuitability. Derrida's practice of writing 'under
erasure', as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, performs this same
duplicity: writing a word and crossing it out, signifying its descrip-
tive or semantic inadequacy, but printing 'both word and deletion.
(Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary,
it remains legible)' (Spivak). Working in the same time period as
these authors (*Of Grammatology* was published in French in 1967),
Derrida too uses a visual technique to deconstruct the presence–
absence binary and challenge the representative capacities of lan-
guage – or, by extension, any singular medium. In fact, Johanna
Drucker has argued that typographical experimentation itself
problematises the 'old distinction' between presence and absence
(245–6). This logic of erasure is encompassed also in Brooke-Rose's
advice to women writers to 'slip through all the labels' and 'belong
nowhere' ('Illiterations' 67), simultaneously present and absent, as
Brooke-Rose's self-erasure in *Invisible Author* is an expression of
frustration: 'Have you ever tried to do something very difficult as
well as you can, over a long period, and found that nobody notices?
That's what I've been doing for over thirty years' (1). These texts
and authors consistently cycle between the utopian possibility for

something new to be made in language and the practical impossibility of completely breaking with existing structures, linguistic or material.

In this chapter I explore what Glyn White refers to as the 'graphic surface' of the page. White's work details what visual experimentation does to the reading experience: 'What I mean by graphic device is simply an intentional alteration or disruption of the conventional layout of the page of a text which adds another layer of meaning' (*Reading* 6). Fundamental to my enquiry is the idea that visual experimentation adds meaning, allows text to communicate in alternative, or additional, non-linguistic ways – via its placement, layout, shape or other visual choices like font, size and so on. White also positions the page itself as a point of crossing:

> the point at which reality and fiction are bound together is that of the graphic surface of the page: it forms both the text's grounding in the world and the jumping off point for fiction. Unfortunately, this means that the graphic surface *must* be an interpretative blindspot for any critical scheme that includes the idea of an antagonism between art and reality. (*Reading* 53)

In White's model, the page exists simultaneously in the world of the book and the world of the reader, as a sort of membrane rather than a barrier (or a porous frame like Derrida's in *The Truth in Painting*). As White comments, critical schemes that separate art and reality do not have room for the graphic surface which asserts the fiction's presence in the world at the same time as foregrounding the reader's embodied experience of the text: this type of page is too ambiguously placed in both realms, too difficult to separate or limit. Thinking of the page itself as an edge or a border, one which is routinely crossed by the reader, I consider what is at stake in making certain things 'more visible' through formal indiscipline: that is, using experimental, difficult or unusual forms to interrogate subject categories or expectations that have been normalised by language and society; these texts are particularly attuned to those involving gender, though the individual texts vary widely in their attitudes within this broad category. I argue that the texts here present various ways of modelling reality, and that the page is the hinge point in this relationship: a visible representative for the links posited between aesthetic and socio-political formations, and between linguistic structures and social structures.

'Reality seen through a rear-view mirror': Reflective Inversion in *Tripticks*

As Quin's *Tripticks* features illustrations rather than concrete prose arrangements like Brooke-Rose's and Brophy's novels examined here, I will consider it first before moving on to more closely compare the other two texts. *Tripticks* is a verbal collage of detective fiction, psychedelia, advertising language, hyperbolic or parodic lists, with the visual addition of film noir, Pop Art, popular culture, porn and comic book references, a road narrative in which an unnamed male narrator travels across an American landscape in pursuit of (and then by) his 'No. 1 X-wife and her schoolboy gigolo' (7). As Julia Jordan tells us, the novel is composed of 'cut-ups from *Time* magazine, television advertisements and pulp fiction, [and] was also influenced by [Quin's] experiences with peyote' ('Quin Thing'). *Tripticks* was partially inspired by Quin's travels in America and, like *Passages*, synthesises experiments with cutting up material text and attempts to transgress the limitations of consciousness; Burroughs's own comments had suggested that the cut-up could open up new pathways of thinking, simply through the randomisation of juxtaposition (21). Nonia Williams refers to *Tripticks* as 'the most exaggerated and problematic example of the inclusive, "derivative" experimental method that Quin developed in the 1960s', thus characterising Quin's indiscipline as 'inclusive' because of the multiple fields it incorporates, which resultantly challenges the reading process to the point of rendering the experience 'problematic' ('Ann Quin' 157). Indeed, the cut-up technique makes for a jarring narrative experience in *Tripticks*, as the tone shifts from sentence to sentence, but Quin works with this discordance so it contributes to the characterisation. The rapid tonal shifts are befitting of the narrator's paranoiac persona, with the sometimes random juxtapositions making his speech seem flippant and eccentric: 'The man who doesn't reckon his pleasures on a silver platter is a fish that walks by night. Batman's the name, reform's the game' (8). Lippard's thoughts on collage are particularly relevant here:

> [C]ollage in the broadest sense, not pasted papers or any particular technique but the 'juxtaposition of unlike realities to create a new reality'. Collage as dialectic. Collage as revolution. 'Collage of Indignation.' Collage as words and images exposing the cultural structure of a society in which art has been turned against itself and against the public. ('Hot Potatoes')

The effects of juxtaposition in aesthetic and revolutionary terms are invoked – collage in a broad sense, not merely of paper images (words, too, can be collaged, as the cut-up method makes clear). Lippard's commentary is key in highlighting the propensity the technique has for exposition: it reveals latent or hidden realities embedded in our systems, invisible through normalisation, made visible through the defamiliarising tendencies of collage.

Tripticks opens with images, the first appearance of which looks something like a comic strip, a succession of frames, although no clear narrative emerges (Figure 4.3). Instead a series of framed body parts, co-ordinates and an 'X' in what looks like a game of noughts and crosses (Os and Xs) float untethered on the page, loosely suggesting themes of sexual domination and geographical dislocation. The first page of the novel is more image than text, but by the second page, the images have been relegated to the bottom of the page, seeming to take on more of a background role. The 'No. 1' in 'No. 1 X-wife' is already suggestive of the introduction of imagery into the text: the emblematic '1' as opposed to 'one', shortly followed by 'X' for 'ex'. This substitution performs many functions: the paring down of language by removing letters moves the language into a more visual realm; the meaning of 'ex' as in past/departed collapses into the symbol 'X' with its habitual use as elision, its function of crossing out material which is not to be used, not to be read – something crossed out is to be succeeded, hopefully by something better. At the same time, something crossed out does not disappear: it is marked as unusable, and moved on from, but nonetheless there. Like Derrida's use of erasure, Quin's 'X' for 'ex' emblematises the presence–absence binary, as the X-wife in *Tripticks* characterises the dichotomy: both past and present, in endless pursuit of resolution.

The rendering of the double image on the first page of the text – one black and one white – suggests multiplicity ('Many faces') within the binary possibilities of conventional printed text, that is black text on white page. The clipped sentences, idiosyncratic phrasing – 'No. 1 X-wife', 'particularity of flesh' – combined with the accumulation of seemingly arbitrary data, indicate how the cut-up technique can contribute a sense of impersonality to a text. As discussed in the previous chapter, with reference to Dodie Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups*, cut-up characters (if they can be called that) refuse to coalesce into a singular entity, or body, or gender. Quin does not exploit cut-up to problematise gender binaries and boundaries, as she does in *Passages*, a text which confuses the borders between characters and employs cut-up to
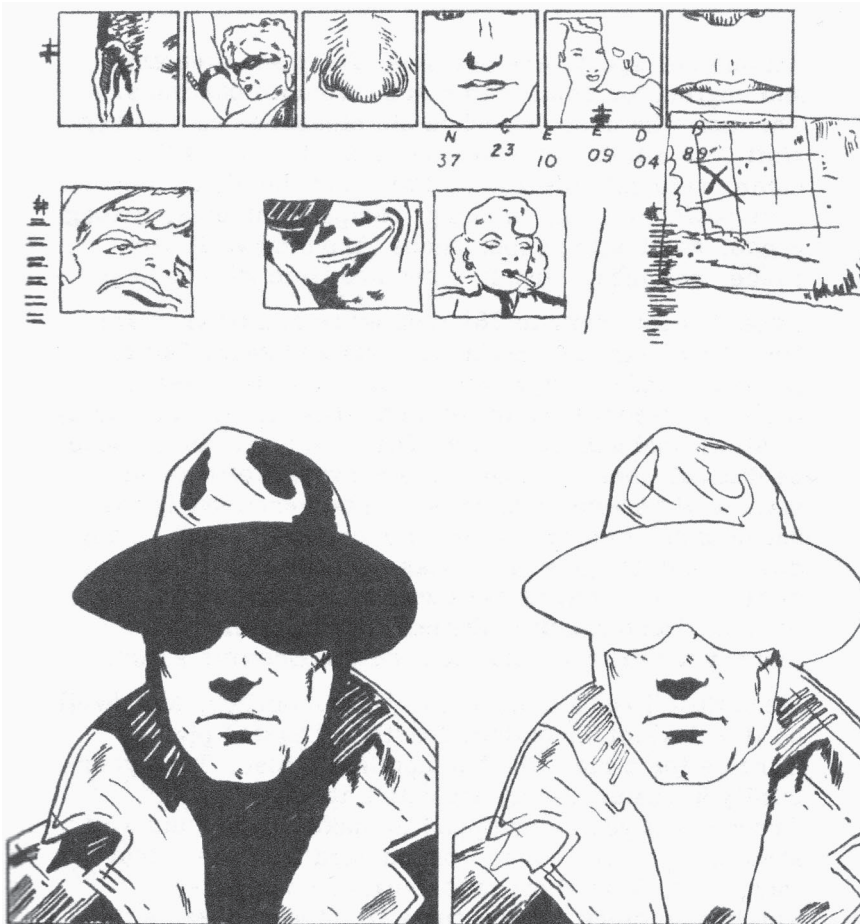
I have many names. Many faces. At the moment my
No. 1 X-wife and her schoolboy gigolo are following
a particularity of flesh attired in a grey suit and
button-down Brooks Brothers shirt. Time checked
14.04 hours Central Standard Time. 73 degrees
outside. Area 158,693 square miles, of which 1,890
square miles are water. Natural endowments are
included in 20 million acres of public reservations.

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Figure 4.3 Ann Quin, *Tripticks*, p. 7, And Other Stories. Illustrations by Carol Annand.

blur the boundary between the inside and outside of the text. In fact, in *Tripticks*, Quin keeps intact the rigid categorisation of gender binaries – and gendered roles of characters – from the pulp fiction material which she cuts up. Coupled with imagery ambiguously placed between pornography and sexual violence, with frequent representations of female bodies bound and gagged, the effect is a rigidly binary and stereotypical gender system, which does not seem to be under any major interrogation in the novel.

The images add to the fractured nature of the text in *Tripticks*, themselves comprising a mixture of styles, sometimes resembling film stills, sometimes comic strips or illustrations or Pop Art. *Tripticks*, more than any of the other texts dealt with in this book, synthesises the contemporary Pop aesthetic and its ambiguous stance towards advertising imagery, brand names, the increasing corporatisation of art and culture.[4] Imagery, in *Tripticks*, is always there, sometimes foregrounded and sometimes in the background, at the margins of a page, like a television set left on silent, the pictures flickering away: 'Hovering, pale and jittery, like an image that persists for a second after the set has been turned off' (10) (in context, this refers to a person). The aesthetics of the comic book were already familiar in Pop, especially within the work of Roy Lichtenstein[5] and Andy Warhol,[6] its modularity and repetition of celebrities and advertising imagery, and the more collage-like aesthetic of Pauline Boty (virtually the only woman associated with the Pop scene in London). Boty's work (see especially *It's a Man's World II* from 1964–5) foregrounds the overt sexualisation of women's bodies, cutting them up or zooming in on parts to mimic the ways in which they are routinely presented.[7] With these techniques, Boty's work resembles the illustrator Annand's

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[4] J. G. Ballard's writing is also doing this in the 1970s. Quin and Ballard share an interest in critiquing American culture and media, although Quin's novels are more ambivalent (and more varied) in tone, less didactic than something like Ballard's *Crash* (1973), which repeats fetishistic car-crash sex scenes to bludgeoning effect (recalling Warhol's *Car Crash* series). Ballard co-edited (with Martin Bax) the magazine *Ambit* which, as Jennifer Hodgson tells us, published two stories by Quin featuring 'her interest in new forms of textual experiment – cut-up, montage and collage', and indeed the magazine 'played an important role in incubating this mode of visual-textual writing in Britain' ('Beyond' 143).

[5] See, for example, *In the Car* and *Whaam!* (both 1963).

[6] See the successive frames of *Green Car Crash* (1963), arranged like film stills, or the colour-block portraits of celebrities – *Liz* (1963), *Marilyn Monroe* (1967) – or repetitious imagery of branded products – *Campbell's Soup I: Tomato* (1968).

[7] The image can be viewed here: www.wikiart.org/en/pauline-boty/it-s-a-man-s-world-ii-1965

representations of the female body in *Tripticks*, suggesting a possible critical element at work in the novel and its incorporated artwork. Internalising the aesthetic of the comic book, the protagonist of *Tripticks* eventually starts to think 'in terms of cartoons, each frame changing' – that is, in a simplified visual version of reality – but this situation is described as if it is a point of life one reaches, rather than a condition of over-saturation: 'I arrived at that time in life when there's difficulty finding the reality of the reflection rather than the reflection of the reality' (44). Such 'difficulty' is representative of the numerous inversions performed by the text, signalling the difficulty of identifying origins in general: 'A reel-by-reel search for reality. The best angle may be from a lily pond. Can film be truth at 24 times a second?' (49). Not only reality but truth, too, is conflated with imagery. Quin seems at this point to be denying any substantial difference between the 'original' and its reproduction, challenging the traditional hierarchy between original and copy.

In this satirical model of contemporary American society, Quin empties even the spectator of substance:

> I switched off the boob tube. But then decided a truly perfect duologue would be two TV sets tuned in and facing each other. One tube ran the ad intact, the other performed surgery on the figure's silhouetted breast. Their desire for variety was certainly not objectionable. Charlotte let her gown fall to her waist, her breasts covered by two 3-inch TV sets. 'By using TV as a bra the most intimate belonging of a human being, we try to humanize the technology.' (53–4)

The observer in this model is literally meaningless, and may as well be another TV, both sets playing to no one (that is, playing to each other), forming a closed circuit of information sharing. Simultaneously a joke about the supreme passivity of the capitalist consumer, the pacifying and nullifying effect of the echo chamber, and the blatant sexualisation of the feminised body in popular media, the passage appears to cut up what is presumably a sexy encounter from a pulp fiction novel and a television advert. The splicing of these two sources is itself a joke about the merging of imagery and reality, and itself a kind of theory – variously concerning gendered representation, technology and advertising – in its regard for visuality, visibility, illusion and reality, a hallucinatory and artificial merging of materials and registers, of bodies and technology, fiction and reality. A hybrid is formed of television and bra (varied, and everything a consumer might want), 'to humanize the technology'. This humour

arises in part from the serendipitous and unusual juxtaposition of material, presumably in some part determined by the author doing the splicing, a simultaneous disavowal of narratorial mastery and retaining of some control.

Throughout *Tripticks*, this narrative opacity operates at the level of both text and image, infusing both with the logic of the cut-up – that is, juxtaposition without explanation. Figure 4.4 demonstrates the difficulty of extracting a clear narrative from the illustrative segments. Disparate images are placed together without context; a relationship arises out of their juxtaposition, influenced by the textual narrative, which is in turn influenced by the imagistic narrative. The page above features at least two different illustration styles (the sketchier and more figurative illustrations in the top row, and the more cartoon-like two heads in the bottom right), depicting religious imagery alongside sexual violence, and what seems to be the protagonist screaming; the placement vaguely suggests it could be a response to the middle panel in the top row, which would seem to set up a causal relationship, but the relationship is ultimately indeterminate. The dotted grid seems to merge the two illustrative styles, depicting uniformly spaced and shaped dots with a hand-drawn box and hand-scrawled Xs, one of which seems a doodle in-process, part of a box, the other of which appears to mark a spot – but in a map of uniform dots, the location it marks is unclear. The X in this case is emblematic of marking the spot, or even the process of marking a spot; it is a structure emptied of substance (like the 'map' it appears to take place in). The X is circled, making 'X' the object – the X could be short for X-wife; the whole narrative is, in this sense, about looking for X.

The X is also a symbol of negation. The anarchic 'new rules of no rules' of the chapter title is from a passage titled 'More By Less' in *Tripticks*, featured in a series of letters to the protagonist from his parents. The letter in question is signed, 'The old man', and features a pile-up of negations, inversions and seemingly meaningless platitudes: 'You are going to show a new purpose by having no purpose'; 'You want to create new rules of no rules'; 'Now I understand why I don't understand' (92–3). The accumulation suggests a sense of negation for the sake of negation, anarchy for the sake of anarchy, or a sort of aesthetic petulance. The father perceives the 'new rules' and structures to be arbitrary negations of the old: the 'new morality' is no morality (92). This pile-up empties the phrases of meaning, through repeating the same formula over and over, of listing a system and its opposite – (new) rules and no rules – in a manner which
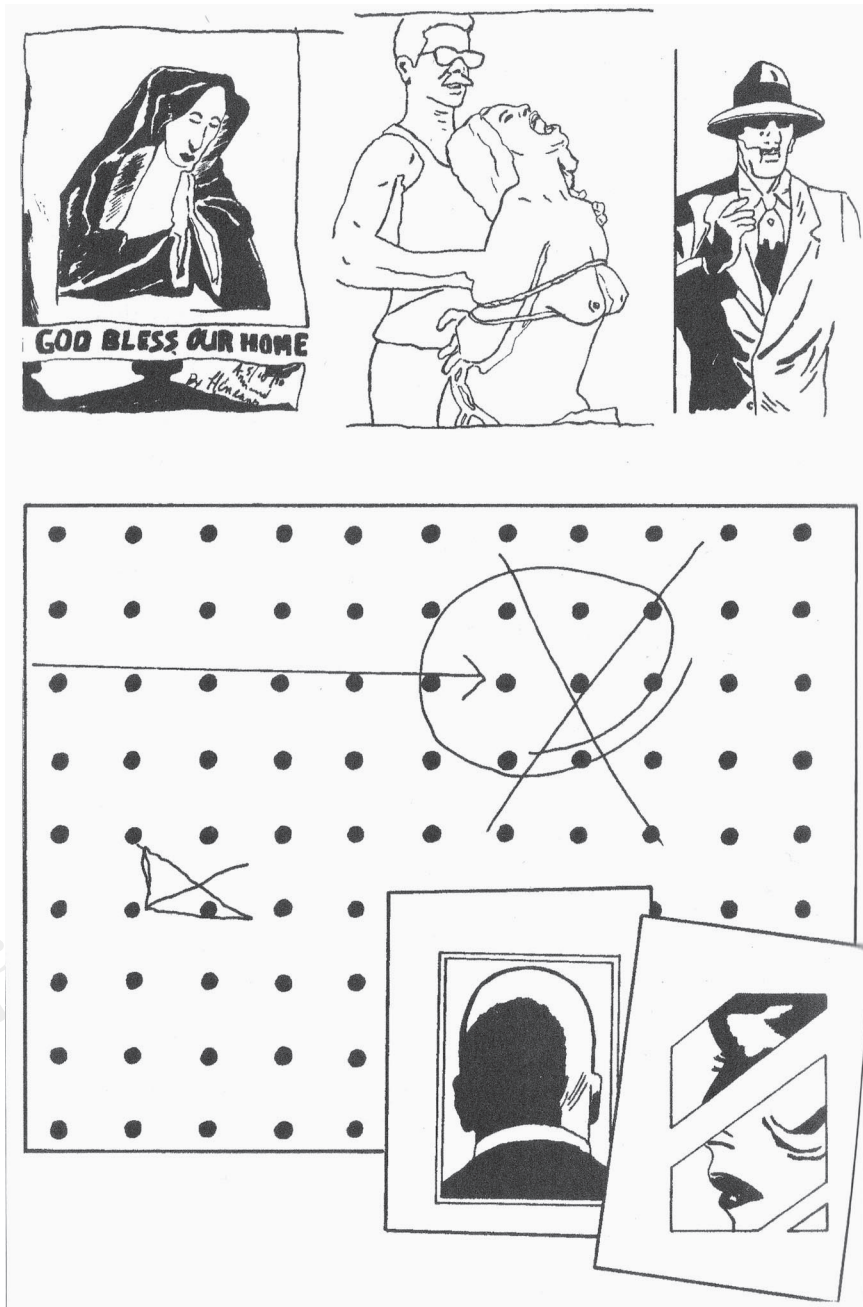
Figure 4.4 Ann Quin, *Tripticks*, p. 60, And Other Stories. Illustrations by Carol Annand.

comically resembles the situation represented by Greimas's semiotic square, depicting systems and their inverses. The X is a fitting symbol of reflection and inversion, reversible and symmetrical.

At the end of *Tripticks*, the protagonist expresses:

> a desperate need to break out into a stream of verbal images. [. . .]
> I opened my mouth, but no words. Only the words of others I saw,
> like ads, texts, psalms, from those who had attempted to persuade
> me into their systems. A power I did not want to possess. The Inqui-
> sition. (191–2)

By the end of the novel, the narrator speaks only the words of others, in a literalisation of the poststructuralist subject composed of text(s), but is not emptied of subjecthood in the process – he is rather a frustrated and afraid subject, stifling a scream he cannot express. In fact he seems trapped between systems, unable to speak. The list of 'ads, texts, psalms' describing his environment (as composed of imagery) levels those things, so that ads, texts and psalms are enough alike to be grouped together. It also places them on a trajectory, suggesting an increase of significance with each item on the list – culminating in the biblically suggestive psalms lends the categories of ads and texts something of the divine, even if on the lower end of the spectrum. This in turn has a levelling capacity: a practice commonly associated with the postmodernism of the 1970s and 1980s, to highlight the valueless nature of the postmodern world and the flatness, rootlessness, lack of substance associated with the postmodern; post death of god, advertising and the Bible are alike: they are all texts.[8] The 'power' he mentions at the end is ambiguous: perhaps the power of those with the systems, perhaps the power of expression, perhaps the

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[8] As Fredric Jameson writes in 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capital-ism' (1984), in which he characterises 'what is increasingly called postmodernism' by various 'ends': 'the end of ideology, art or social class; the "crisis" of Leninism, social democracy or the welfare state, etc., etc.' (n.p.). On the cultural 'levelling' underway, he says: '[t]he postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest cul-ture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and sciencefiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply "quote", as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance' (n.p.). Quin's *Tripticks* can be seen as part of this postmodernism, including her use of the cut-up so that the material is not merely quoted but forms the very fabric of the text.

power of being part of a system. In any case, it is a power he does not possess and does 'not want to possess', thus a power he disavows. The Inquisition which ends the novel pits the subject against the systems, but it is unclear where Quin's narrator (or indeed Quin) lies; it appears the narrator is comparing his condition of being inundated with imagery and quotations to the Inquisition, so attacked does he feel. Fittingly then, *Tripticks* begins and ends in images – actual illustrations at the beginning, and the transposition of the narrator's thoughts into imagery at the end, the 'stream of verbal images' (191) – is framed by the world of imagery, in which the protagonist comes to feel immersed, even subsumed.

'Two simultaneous trains of idea': Typography and Duality in *In Transit*

Whereas Quin's novel, in its postmodernism and affinities with Pop, is explicitly relatable to contemporary visual artists, Brophy's style often reaches further back in time, to baroque art, music and architecture, or its decadent revivals. However, an early blurb for *In Transit* draws out its more conceptual relationship to the visual arts – in which '[t]he "I" of Brigid Brophy's new novel is very much an eye' – and comments on the 'typographical tricks' which 'form the fabric of a literally artful novel [. . .] The personal quest of the narrator [. . .] is parallel to the quest of modern art, including the art of fiction, for a style and an idiom' ('*In Transit* blurb'). Allowing for the parallel trajectories of modern art and fiction, suggesting that eras of high experimentation are actually quests for appropriate forms, this typescript blurb also gives due credit to the typographical devices. Seeming to dismiss them, by calling them 'tricks', the author then acknowledges that the typographical experimentation is a fundamental part of the novel's meaning, enacting its relationship to the world of visuality and the visual arts. The comment about the 'I' being an 'eye' alludes to the fact that the narrator is an observer, a perspectival point that can, in some respects, change position, moving through the story world and relaying impressions for the reader – as opposed to rendering a masterfully (and artfully) composed, and closed, plot and environment. Brophy's authorial artistry is certainly still present but is applied to a different purpose: to make the form of the novel 'speak to' other disciplines, by rendering it visibly different to conventional narrative.

Annegret Maack characterises Brophy's indiscipline in *In Transit* as an '[attempt] to create a baroque *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a work

embracing every medium' in its 'appropriation of music and of paint-
ing' (44). Maack's allusion to a compendious attempt to be many
art forms suggests an encyclopaedic motivation for Brophy's emula-
tions of music and painting. By close reading the visual strategies in
the novel, I argue that the visuality supports Brophy's representation
of an effectively undecidable situation. Regarding the musical struc-
ture, Brophy herself comments that she modelled *In Transit* on the
nineteenth-century composer Brahms, for his 'ability to create disin-
tegration' (Dock and Brophy 166) – thus employing techniques to dis-
mantle artistic structure, at the same time as challenging the rigidity
of gender construction. More recently, Sonya Andermahr tells us that
'Brophy's work is highly interdisciplinary, bringing the techniques of
musical composition, film, and Baroque art and architecture to bear
on the structure of the novel', pointing out 'numerous painterly and/
or sculptural references in the text' ('Both/And' 256–7) – thus use-
fully listing the points at which Brophy directly references classical
artworks. My focus here is on Brophy's visual experimentation with
text, which critics have certainly addressed – Maack briefly references
'the development of the "concrete novel"' in her article on *In Transit*
(40) – but on which no sustained examination of the different effects
of the various dualities presented in the textual columns exists.

Brophy exploits the graphic surface of the page in a seemingly
quite simple way: splitting the text into two columns explicitly to
represent two things at once, that is, simultaneous trains of thought
undertaken by the same character, who themself has undergone a
potential split, not being able to tell – even after several investigations
of their body, clothing, sense of self, and experiments with the reac-
tions of interlocutors – whether they are male or female. Referencing
Brian McHale's reading of *In Transit* and his discussion of a long
tradition of 'inverted and exploded [bodies]', Carole Sweeney writes:
'Bodies in one form of transit or other, he suggests [. . .] have been
an important part of literary explorations of the borders and limits
of selfhood and language' ('Groping' 310). Brophy's novel, then, like
the other texts in this study, reinforces the coincidence of experiments
with the materiality of the text and the book, and interrogations of
structure, system, body and identity: in other words, disruption of
typography is often a means of exploring 'disrupted' senses of reality
or subjecthood on the parts of the consciousnesses being represented.
Brophy's depiction of her protagonist's subjective 'split', then, does
something theoretically quite complex. *In Transit* shows throughout
that the protagonist never simply inhabits one gender or one train of
thought, or does not do so without existential or intellectual difficulty.

Neither is the protagonist ever both of the available genders, nor do they experience both trains of thought simultaneously: this is a result of the reader not being able to read both columns simultaneously – an inherent limitation of the linguistic representational system – even though the columns can be used to signal a relative simultaneity of thought. Effectively, *In Transit* represents a strict binary system which the protagonist cannot inhabit comfortably, as they cannot situate themselves within it unproblematically; these ontological and epistemological problems are reinforced textually and aesthetically through Brophy's formal choices.

The necessity felt by the protagonist of *In Transit*, Pat O' Rooley, to fit themself within a social and sexual category is expressed parodically in the following 'paradigm of the possible truths' of their situation:

I am a man
I am a woman
I am a homosexual man
I am a homosexual woman.   (91)

Commenting on the following page on the heterosexual bias of society (hence the omission of sexual preference in the first two, 'neutral' entries), Pat simultaneously recognises the fact that they 'must' (not only 'could') inhabit one option of the supposedly 'exhaustive tabulation of the sexual ways' of being listed above (92). The joke lies in the decidedly inexhaustive nature of the list, and also in its being a revision of Lévi-Strauss's social model of permissible sexual relations re-used by Greimas and Rastier. The list could in fact be expressed diagrammatically using Greimas's semiotic square diagram so prevalent in *Thru*. Brophy's novel here expresses an 'expanded field' of sexuality (following Krauss's 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'), showing up the limitations of the diagrammatic apparatus when it is applied to the material and social world, even if it is intended to signify greater nuance and multiplicity. Almost immediately after this formulation, the first split occurs in the text, described by Pat in the narrative as 'two simultaneous trains of idea' (93) (Figure 4.5).

Importantly, this is not a split along gender lines. Here, the double columns represent a split consciousness, both halves of which are dealing with the same problem, approaching it from slightly different angles: (i) wonders if they could determine their gender through the books they've bought, while simultaneously driving home the visuality of the experiment by referring to a natural 'bifocalism', and the

As she distanced herself from me, I noticed she was wearing (blue, serge, presumably also uniform) trousers.

I reflected that the airport authorities rather contradicted themselves by employing the archaic trousered silhouette to differentiate the men's lavatory from the women's and yet issuing the women on their café staff with trousers as an item of uniform.

The uptodateness of that consideration drew me out of my hermit's-cell refuge in medieval scholasticism. As I emerged, my mind was set on by two simultaneous trains of idea.

(i) edged me again towards the books I'd bought. Perhaps I had not exhausted documentary evidence when I had discovered the uselessness of my passport.

However, (i) was coming to me out of the weaker speaker.

Technology errs, I contrived to think just before fadeout supervened, in propping up our bifocalism: wasteful to direct the two speakers of a stereophonic system, or the two lenses of a pair of spectacles, to helping two sense organs to focus on a single object.

The true advance of civilization will come when science enables a human being to see two Veroneses, one out of each eye, at once or to lend each of his ears to a different opera at the same time.

My own intellectual stereophony was, however, so little perfected that at that point (i)

(ii), meanwhile, put it interestingly to me that there was a secondary sex characteristic which I had so far completely ignored.

It was, moreover, the very one you would have expected to jump first to my mind, given my passion for opera and my even having received, somewhere in my child-hinter-hood, the elements of a vocal-musical education.

At that point I set my mark on a theme (ii)(a) to be resumed later, if need be.

In some hope that, as a result, need would not be, I rushed on to (ii)'s main burden.

Idiot, negligent idiot, I had not tested the pitch of my voice.

The speaking voice I discounted, that mere internal turning over of a gravelly mechanism, pitchless, claimed not by the external ear as notes

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Figure 4.5 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 93, Dalkey Archive Press.

occasional necessity of glasses to help 'two sense organs to focus on a single object', as if the two trains of thought are wandering eyes which need to be refocused on a single point with the aid of optical technology. This analogy also holds the suggestion of 'correction': the split is an error, which should be rectified. However, immediately following this idea is the thought that: 'The true advance of civilization will come when science enables a human being to see two Veroneses, one out of each eye, at once or to lend each of his ears to a different opera at the same time' (93). The ability to experience two things at once, independently of one another, is held up as the ideal, although at this time is functioning only as an imperfect system, with too much interference between the two receptors: the ideal here would seem to be the experience of two separate phenomena at once, hence upholding the distinctness of each category, and the explicit utility of this skill is one of artistic consumption.

Simultaneously with the above, (ii) thinks of trying out the 'secondary sex characteristic' of their vocal pitch in order to determine their gender, but finds it to be 'an utter (social) impossibility' (the necessity being to test the pitch operatically, for speaking will not suffice) (93–4). Thus the possibility that they are one or the other binary gender is always latent in Pat's mind, but when it comes down to testing their deductions either the results are inconclusive or they are inhibited by social propriety from obtaining the necessary conclusive results. Pat's thinking is restricted by what they deem to be possible: 'For a Logical proposition *can* have only two Terms' (95). The deference towards the field of Logic and the infallibility of Terms is indicated by the capitalisation of the two words, reinforced by the emphasis on 'can' through the italicisation. Furthermore, while (ii) is attempting to raid their memory for clues as to where they performed in the choir at school, (i) comments on the inconclusiveness of the investigation: '[I] quickly saw that [. . .] it could be read both ways' (97). The ambiguity of the reading upholds the indeterminacy of the results. The suggestion throughout the double-columned passage is that the answer must be one of two binaries, but Pat is constantly being presented with evidence which can be 'read both ways' – the desire is to fit the evidence into the conventional system of categorisation, but the evidence itself is slippery, cannot be so easily placed.

In this first split section, the columns begin in alignment (as in Figure 4.5), but as the thoughts progress, the columns are staggered, in effect falling into 'conversation' with one another (Figure 4.6). (i), represented by the left-hand column (last numbered on page 94), speaks back to or comments on (ii), represented by the right-hand

boy), upright with that effort-less verticality of the back of the neck attainable only by pre-pubescents; pursing and unpursing the pink o of his mouth, he lets fly the acid-drop-shower of notes, the seething morally-evil syllables, of Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen, with the most complete musical purity and precision and not the tiniest inflexion of emotional under-standing.

The book in my hands was paper-bound in a way that suggested it was French, though the writing on the back of the cover seemed English.

The writing on the back was upside-down to me – but, I re-called with a faint anxiety I couldn't immediately place, the right way up for my close companion opposite.

My educational resumé had delivered   disappointment. Through all the vicissitudes of my career as a pupil, the one vital item remained constant: I had been co-educated.

A last, despairing recall of the final reaches of my higher education recovered only the blank-faced fact that at Lon-don I had attended King's (co-educational,   non-residential) College.

I turned the book round, which would put it out of bounds to my companion unless he had (which from the look of him he well might) the sinister knack of reading up-side down, and skimmed through the plaudits patting it on the back cover:
'exploration of the I-thou relationship in the context of the post-Herzen dialectic' – *George Steiner*
'like Stendhal' – *Stephen Vizinczey.*

Another bizarre image stood stark on my memory. One turret of the castellated Vic-torian grange occupied by the choirschool was known as 'the Headmasters' Wing'. The headmasters were a pair of by then crumbling bass baritones, one with a flop of dyed auburn hair, one with a moustache we naturally believed spirit-gummed on. Both wore suede shoes. Both had in their time sung (or so ardently aspired to sing that they had by now fan-tasized that they did sing) Don Giovanni. Up in the Head-master's turret, they must have had (it was forbidden territory to us, of course) two bath-rooms side by side – or, con-ceivably and yet more bizarrely, two baths side by side in a

98   99

Figure 4.6 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 98–9, Dalkey Archive Press.

column (last numbered on page 95), and vice versa. The facing col-umns are split by line breaks when each side has a thought, so that the reader can pass more easily from one side to the next, not hav-ing to choose which column to read first as when they are placed more strictly side-by-side (as in Figure 4.5, from earlier on in the 'conversation'). This section, then, seems intended to represent a more generally divided mind, where one side will make a suggestion for determining their sex and the other will detail why it will not work, interspersed with memories and other digressions, so that the search is never the sole item occupying Pat's mind. Thus the reader crosses over from one to the other, and back, as guided by the text, as the thoughts presented are either from side (i) or (ii), usually in the form of an interruption: usually (i) interrupting (ii), as '(i) was coming to me out of the weaker speaker' (93) and thus (ii) is the dominant side. The reader's point of crossing between one column and another, between the 'dominant' and the 'weaker' (although not submissive, for (i) continually interrupts (ii), even if ultimately occupying less textual space) is thus here, to an extent, controlled by the layout. The two-column sections in general begin with the two columns placed side-by-side, the two sides of the 'conversation' eventually falling into step with one another, so that they are not 'speaking at once'.

However, two pages later, the second split-column section picks up where the first left off – with the book Pat is reading, *L'Histoire de La Langue D'Oc* [*The Story of Oc's Tongue*], a mash-up of the sadomasochistic, pornographic *Story of O* and *The History of the Western Language* (Oc being short, in this case, for *Occidentale*), humorously 'reviewed' in the first split-column section by Brigid Brophy (crossing between the text-world and the author-world) as 'straightforward commercial pornography: and what's wrong with that?' (100). Notably in this second split-column section, the columns are simultaneous (Figure 4.7). This section brings the question of gender to the fore, but not before the protagonist refers to their gender search as 'an absurd inquiry, but that didn't make it less wearying' (101). The columns here figure a different kind of split, that between reading and annotation, a mind divided between both. In a moment of metafictional play with the materiality of the book, Pat turns the page at the same time as the reader starts a new page, and both are met with the realisation that '[Pat's] consciousness was no longer undivided' (102). Following this, in the left-hand column, the male character in the book Pat is reading is represented in quotation marks: 'He'. The commentary in the right-hand column offers up dual possibilities for the convention: that there is something performative about 'his' gender (as the text puts it, 'the *He* in question is in some way not a genuine he' (103)); or, that it might be a typesetting mistake (a dual possibility). On the right, *He* is in italics (and capitalised) and thus still set apart from the rest of the text.

The gender roles in this section are exaggerated within the framework of the dominant–submissive binary. Playing on the sexual connotations of 'discipline', Brophy simultaneously performs the 'disciplinary' juxtaposition of pornography and language lessons. And as Brooke-Rose indicated with *Between*, lessons in language are often lessons in gender, so embedded are the binary associations with femininity and masculinity in the structure and grammar of language, and this is just one of the ways in which the binary, as well as the hierarchy, becomes naturalised. On the following page, within the normal textual layout (single page-width column), Pat reflects on their reading experience and identification with the text: 'While I read, I *was* [. . .] Oc. [. . .] While I read, I also *saw* Oc – from the outside' (105). Since Oc is the female character, Pat is disappointed because their duplicitous identification does not reveal to them their gender; they assume if they identified with Oc, they must be female. Pat's identification with both Oc and not-Oc, maybe 'He' or maybe a

and possessed her whole body, that "He" was present.

Meekly, Oc waited, standing between her guardians, who had allowed the leading-chain to fall slack.

Blindfolded as she was, her gaze, in natural modesty, sought the floor.

From the far end of the great salon came a sharp swishing sound.

This was followed by booted footsteps.

Then, to Oc's joy, "He" spoke. "His" deep, grave tones were presumably addressed to the guardians of one of the other pupils. "Very well. You may take this one away now. But keep her in readiness, in case I require her again later this evening."

The booted footfalls then approached Oc.

She trembled again, in joy mingled with dread.

"He'' was standing directly before her, contemplating the absolute submission of the slight yet full figure as it stood, naked, awaiting "His" will and pleasure, the thighs held slightly and invitingly apart by the rubber rings that had been immovably placed high up on them, like garters, at the completion of the fifth lesson.

Almost overwhelmed by the sweetness of being at "His" service, Oc waited for the signal that "He" was ready to begin.

It came. The leathern loop of "His"

The double quotes round *He* may be a mistake, on the part of a typesetter working in a language not native to him, for the emphasis of italics. Alternatively, it may be conjectured, but in the absence of knowledge of the earlier part of the text cannot be verified, that the double inverted commas (note the possible play on the word *inverted*) should be read as implying that the *He* in question is in some way not a genuine he.

We may make legitimate surmises as to the nature of the expected readership from the fact that a sophisticated reader would scarcely succumb to 'deep, grave tones' or gazes which 'seek the floor'.

Note the cardinal rôle taken in pornography by ritual: cf. the anxiety-allaying rôle of ritual in obsessional neurotic acts, including communal (e.g. religious) ones.

It must be assumed that the rings round Oc's thighs were, in

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Figure 4.7 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 103, Dalkey Archive Press.

point outside both of them (thus alternately, or perhaps simultaneously, on both sides of the disciplinary gaze), also makes possible that their identification with the text and the characters is not based solely on gender.

The first time the double columns are definitely representative of binary gender is in Chapter 15, in a highly performative context, where the artifice of the situation is being foregrounded, parsed in the overblown language of romance and detective fiction, poking fun at romantic plot-lines revolving around missed encounters to uphold suspense. Pat O'Rooley has split into two fictionalised characters, one of whom is male (O'Rooley) and one female (Patricia/Bunny), to figure a 'chase', in which one half of Pat's ego is pursued by the other. This pursuit is rendered textually by double columns which never align, are always just 'missing' each other, and diagrams (marked by gender symbols) detailing the movements of the two. Aside from the farcically circular search (played out in the text of Figure 4.8 using a circular tie-rack, symbolising the vicious circle or ouroboros), the artificiality of this sequence is heightened through the use of

that stood just inside the entrance.

Wait.

Did not his delicately attuned sleuth's sensory apparatus detect from somewhere a distinct, a regularly rasped in and out, a definitely Greco-Irish hrough breathing?

With an agility amazing in so muscularly built a man, O'Rooley rounded the tie-rack and took refuge behind it.

Having asked directions ('My friends, I rely on your simplicity') from the Three Geniuses (the rôles, originally written for bôys, are nowadays usually sung by wômen), the heroine arrives at the shop.

Just inside the entrance, she pauses, leaning her hand casually on a tie-rack that happens to be standing there. While she sings despairingly of the hopelessness of her search for the hero ('Patrizio, dove sei andato?'), she gradually turns the tie-rack and herself moves slowly behind it.

O'Rooley realized that the hand with which he intended to steady himself in his concealment was in reality pushing the tie-rack round. Following its course automatically, he found himself

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precipitated, as by a revolving door, into the middle of the shop again.

He cast a look about. There was still no one in sight.

Concluding that the rough-breathing he had heard was an auditory illusion or just possibly the result of some defect in the functioning of the neon light, he left the shop.

He turned sharply to his left, and, still exercising a sleuth's stealth, moved like a shadow along the North wall and then, turning left again, set off down the outside of the West wall.

The heroine vanishes behind the revolving rack from the view of the audience.

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Figure 4.8 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 170–1, Dalkey Archive Press.

diagrams – diagrams which should be aids to understanding, but which here illustrate the endless, repetitive pursuit. The text is toying with the reader's expectations, constantly deferring resolution on the issue of whether the protagonist's gender can be known, and whether it matters: whether the entire search is genuine or parodic. By the end of the novel, Patricia and Patrick seem to be still definitively separate (Figure 4.9).

Just before the final split represented in Figure 4.9, Brophy makes an authorial interjection to refuse authorial mastery: she won't play god because she rigorously dislikes 'that old fraud's authoritarian temperament' (235). In a Barthesian move, she seems to hand the text over to the reader for interpretation: 'So You'll have to make the choice' (235). The text itself contains not answers but possibilities, as Brophy here indicates, suggesting that the ultimate decision is down to the reader – although by allowing for both options, Brophy complicates the idea of any absolute, singular outcome. Additionally, the text makes possible the interpretation that the 'You' here refers to the characters, the textual material, so that Brophy is refusing to dictate their storylines and make choices that would resolve the narrative, render the questioning closed.

At the end, Patricia commits suicide. Patrick attempts to back down off the girder and return to safety but slips, so meeting the same fate as Patricia (Figure 4.10). Brophy undercuts this dual suicide immediately, with the phrase '[e]xplicit fiction' (236). At the end, the 'I' seems to be Brophy's authorial I, whom '[l]ove of You' (which in the context could refer to either the reader or the characters, or text) encourages to live.

> Neatly Patricia swung her legs over the side of the girder.
>
> The crowd sighed and shushed one another.
>
> Holding on by her fingertips, she lowered herself till her body hung free.
>
> Someone screamed below.
>
> Patricia swung.
>
> She let go.
>
> She fell plumb into the space the crowd had cleared.
>
> Convinced by his interlocutors (he was always a rational being), Patrick decided to come out of his perilous predicament.
>
> With a slowness that caught the crowd's breath up into its throats, he slid his left knee backwards along the girder and began cautiously to back out the way he had come.
>
> The crowd called up direc-
>
> 235

Figure 4.9 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 235, Dalkey Archive Press.

Her body, spread-eagled, was flattened by the fall, like an animated-cartoon hero who's been run over.

The entrails were too distorted to be of any use for transplants.

tions, as though he were a car trying to park.

After a few paces, if that's the word, his right knee slipped over the edge.

No harm was immediately done, but he'd slipped into a posture of castration-agony. Lurching out of it, he slipped wholesale, and plummetted when neither he nor anyone else was expecting him to. The crowd scattered out of his way only just in time.

Explicit fiction. In the truth of baroque metaphor, Bernini's Saint Teresa reclined and expired in a smile of orgasmic ecstasy, while her honey-tongued, artificial-shepherd-cheeked seraph, in an act of inspired and transcendant bad taste, pierced and pierced her with his phallic spear, wearing on his honeysweet and musical lips a silly sexy simper.

Love of You has, I mean to say, decided me to live. I conceive I can read as well as be read like a book. I desire You to locute to me. Aphrodite is re-sea-born of the sperm and spume bubble-and-squeaking about her da's off-torn, projectiled, sea-crashed virile member and drifts to the foamrubbed shore chanting an old, enchanting mermaidshanty or ariaphrodisiacavatina to me.

I am not so daft as to try to back out the way I came. I shall take the longer but infinitely safer route forward, knee after cumbrous knee. I am coming out now, quite datively, to and for You – to and for, that is Scholiastically to say, the both of You.

Figure 4.10 Brigid Brophy, *In Transit*, p. 236, Dalkey Archive Press.

The reference to 'read[ing] as well as be[ing] read like a book' blurs the lines between fiction and reality, and the textual and the material worlds, making of both a fiction (and a reality). At the same time as these lines are blurred, the relationship is being figured as a romantic one, parsed in the language of love and desire – as with Stein's epigraph which opened this book, the 'pictures [that] commenced to want to leave their frames' (*Picasso* 12), and Brooke-Rose's epigraph to Chapter 3: 'I love you, my material, language' ('Self-Confrontation' 136). Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, is invoked at the end

of *In Transit*, as is her unconventional birth via 'her da's off-torn, projectiled, sea-crashed virile member' (from which Aphrodite was mythologically birthed, the combination of 'sperm and spume', that is, the sea) (236). The final line concisely sums up (without resolving) many ambiguities represented in the course of the novel: 'I am coming out now, quite datively, to and for You – to and for, that is Scholiastically to say, the both of You' (236). Coming out, the authorial I is emerging from the novel, the story world, with play on the meaning of 'coming out' in terms of sexuality, when she says 'coming out [. . .] *to* and for You' (emphasis mine), coming out as Author. *In Transit* ends, then, on several notes of explicit ambiguity, or multiple possibilities.

While *In Transit* sometimes refers to a divide between binary gender categories, this specific divide is never the primary or most fruitful focus, but rather a jumping off point for further considerations of division and multiplicity. Despite her 'Both/And' thesis, encompassing the idea that material can be two things at once, Andermahr, like many critics, sees the ending as a direct address to the reader, rather than potentially directed at the characters, diminishing what could be seen as the purposeful ambiguity of the text ('Both/And' 260). The 'both of You' in the novel's last line could refer either to Brophy's dual character(s) or to the reader; as everything is doubled in *In Transit*, so presumably the reader contains (at least) two 'selves'. Brophy herself supported the 'simple Freudian recognition of the basic bisexuality of everybody', insisting on 'the mental interchangeability of the sexes' (Dock and Brophy 159). This is not to say that the final line of *In Transit* is definitively referring to an implied 'bisexual reader', but that Brophy dismisses any intellectual or mental difference posited on binary sex. She also says that 'to be transported, if one is female, to a male character, and vice versa, is a terribly light transposition: this is a terribly small flight, compared to what the imagination *can* do' (Dock 159). Brophy finds gender as narratively limiting as it is materially restrictive.

As the character Och says in one of the novel's references to the *Story of O*, '[t]o be absolutely frank, what I should most like to resemble is a small but powerful and concentrated bomb. My ambition is to explode and shatter the rules' (197). Comparably, the aesthetic impulse of *In Transit* is to disintegrate known forms and categories, rather than to propose new ones (and perhaps, in disintegrating, to find new forms, or allow them to emerge). In *In Transit* the protagonist forgets their gender, but they never stop feeling like an 'I', indicating that, in the text, the protagonist can have identity

without gender: 'Identity, however, is unloseable' (44). Contrastingly, Eveline Kilian's reading of the novel finds that 'it is almost impossible to survive as a subject without a fixed sex/gender, because such a being can only have a very limited linguistic existence' (43). Indeed, Brophy's protagonist is stuck within the confines of an airport transit lounge, but within that framework the text exhibits an immense freedom, represented by the fragmentation and disintegration of the structure of the page: a freedom within constraint. Moreover, as the double columns stem from the premise that the protagonist cannot remember their gender, and so might be either of two options, the text seems resistant to sticking to this formulation: the split columns are only sometimes deemed to be representative of the possible genders. So while Kilian is right to say that Brophy 'refrains from suggesting any new categories in place of the old [binary gender categories]' (46), Brophy's novel is rather indicating the limitations of categorical restrictions more widely. Elsewhere, the columns represent the regularly divided mind, split along lines of concentrated reading and discursive thought, or simply along indecision between any two options or different trains of thought. In doing so, Brophy suggests that it is quite normal for two possibilities to exist at once, as the text refuses – right up until the end – to be pushed decisively down one path. The text enacts this refusal wholly at the level of both form and content, a practice common and fundamental to the concrete poetry being developed in this period.

Interlude: Concrete in *Thru* and *In Transit*

The textual arrangements in Brooke-Rose's *Thru* and Brophy's *In Transit* draw on the visual techniques of concrete poetry, a form developing from the 1950s onwards, simultaneously in South America and Europe, which is highly experimental with typography and spatial layout. This movement was considerably, if indirectly, influential on British avant-garde fiction in the 1960s, as Kaye Mitchell writes, considering how '[c]oncrete poetry can be seen as opening further the possibilities of experimentation with white space' for meaning within the novelistic worlds being drawn and the site of the page itself ('The avant-garde' 13). In Brophy's novel, we have seen how white space signifies a split, a gap between two things, and space as well as time in the conversational segments; white space here is a division, but one that looks slightly different each time and is shaped by the textual material around it. In Eugen Gomringer's

famous concrete poem 'Silencio', the space at the centre of the poem (a formal enactment of the silence which is the poem's subject) communicates as much as the individual words do:

silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio   silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio

(reproduced typographically from image at https://elmcip.net/ node/14067)

Gomringer's poem usefully indicates how words function as units in concrete poetry – like blocks built into structures which convey meaning both by their semantic content and their placement – signifying their architectural capacities. Waldrop writes that the concrete poem is 'a structure which explores elements of language itself rather than one which uses language to explore something else. The parallel to the non-representational painters like Mondrian and Kandinsky is explicit. Structure is contents' ('Basis' 142). The novels (which are not exactly non-representational but which challenge conventions of representation and form) are at least partially 'about' structure, about how they themselves are structured – and seem preoccupied with undoing themselves, in turn. The 'linguistic leprosy' which begins *In Transit* is concerned with how linguistic disintegration affects subjecthood. *Thru* unmakes subjects as readily as it makes them (or they make each other, by writing each other), and in the end seems to 'undo' itself (as does *In Transit*), as a sort of exercise in deconstruction. Like *In Transit*, this visual reinforcement of the text's linguistic content transports the piece of writing overtly into the visual realm, signalling its relationship to the visual arts and visual culture; the key here is in the overtness, the visibility, because written text has of course always been visual. These pages use the logic of concrete poetics to investigate the structures of language and of the subject, how subjects are made 'within' (as well as 'out of') language.

Waldrop (via Siegfried Schmidt) identifies one of the most crucial aspects of concrete poetry, or maybe more generally the more abstract poetic or prose works which are about language and structure:

A great number of interpretations is possible. But beyond a purely linguistic one there is no way of claiming that one reading is right

to the exclusion of all others. In this perspectivism Siegfried Schmidt sees the social importance of concrete poetry, its political and revolutionary potential: it presents a text (and thereby 'reality') not as something given, fixed, to be accepted, but as a structure that can be seen differently from different perspectives and can therefore be changed ('Basis' 149–50)

The importance assigned to perspective here is something that Brooke-Rose especially, but also Quin and Brophy, have been exploring in the texts covered so far in this book. Brooke-Rose's *Out* is obsessed with the importance of perspective and positioning for what is seen; Quin's *Berg* also attends to the subjectivity of seeing, as the readings in Chapter 1 have shown. Brooke-Rose's *Between* interrogates the structure of language and demonstrates how easily linguistic structures can be altered (with the implication that these structures are not directly linked to material reality, however), as my reading in Chapter 2 has shown. In incorporating the techniques of concrete poets into their novels, Brooke-Rose and Brophy, and Quin to a certain extent with *Passages*, make these structures visible in narrative, make their made qualities known, highlight the materiality of language – as will be seen in *Thru*, the novel which does this most explicitly.

'As into a secret chiasmus': The Visible Structure of *Thru*

Thru wreaks havoc with the 'familiar rules' of novel writing (*Thru* 635), removing the grounding in speaker, character, narrator, location, even scene, that a reader may have come to expect by reading more conventional novels. As Brooke-Rose says herself of her 'favorite' novel in a chapter of *Invisible Author* entitled 'Is Self-Reflexivity Mere?' (17):

> I am *also* doing the exact opposite of self-reflexivity, putting it, as it were, under erasure, but using language so mimetically that critics and readers who expect narrative conventions to indicate who's speaking, whether it's thought or speech, who is a character or why he's there, and typographic spaces or new chapters to change the viewpoint and so on, seem unable to grasp this direct, almost naive mimetism of how we act and speak and think at the same time, without telling ourselves who we are (107)

Consequently, Brooke-Rose also says that *Thru* 'is the novel that even most of [her] fans got wrong, not noticing, because it really

is typographically quite hard to read, explanations that are clearly given' (*Invisible* 17). Acknowledging that readers are less literate in visual forms, simply because there have been fewer examples, and we have normalised the conventions of realism, Brooke-Rose seems more antagonistic towards the idea that we would need a singular, unchanging viewpoint or explanatory narrative material at all. She is more interested in the pseudo-objective rendering of the texture of experience, as it is actually lived, rather than a neatly contained plot and characters. In putting self-reflexivity 'under erasure', Brooke-Rose is omitting basically all explanatory material, a practice that might itself be deemed a disavowal of mastery. This is made all the more complicated by the classroom setting of most of *Thru*, in which many consciousnesses are present and vying for narrative space. For Karen Lawrence, Brooke-Rose demonstrates the 'chiasmic' qualities of narrative and theory, how 'theories tell stories and stories tell theory' (*Techniques* 4), indicating how Brooke-Rose often uses a theoretical framework to drive a narrative – as will be seen in the analysis of *Thru* – or uses a narrative to enact or embody a theoretical concept, as I showed with *Between* in Chapter 2. *Thru* teems with a juvenile-seeming enthusiasm around the field of narratology and literary theory, mimicking young college students learning new terms and ways of thinking; this is also where much of the humour comes from – both the enthusiasm itself, and the occasional misapplication or exaggeration of the terms or rules. Indeed, semiotics and other timely theoretical frameworks like structuralism open up whole new realms of rules to be broken, accidentally or on purpose.

From the outset, *Thru* merges linguistic and visual registers. Below the first page is reproduced (Figure 4.11), showing the use of white space, which functions both visually and aurally (as it might in poetry) to indicate a pause – thus creating both a temporal and spatial gap at once. This first page contains many visual clues for how the ensuing narrative will unfold and how it should be read: the word 'place' is displaced on line two, off to the right of the rest of the text, subtly indicating the disorienting effects of a narrative which continually elides any sense of its own origins. The use of 'Q' for cue employs a visual shortcut, a symbol entailing a crossing from aural to visual sense, so that the sentence 'speaks' in both registers at once (as did the 'X' in *Tripticks*). The use of actual symbols – triangles for noses and road-signs – furthers this intermingling of the visual and linguistic, and also transfers the punning so characteristic of Brooke-Rose, and especially *Thru*, into the visual realm. And of course, as the text states, 'some languages [are] more visible

Through the driving-mirror four eyes stare back
two of them in their proper   place
Now right on
Q   ask us

to de   V   elop   foot on gas
how m(any   how)   eyes?

four   two
 of them   correct

on either side   ▽   of the
nose   the other

two   ⚠   O danger
slow   down

eXact   replicas

nearer the hairline further up the brow but dimmed as in a glass
tarnished by the close-cropped mat of hair they peer through

The mat of hair is khaki, growing a bit too low on the brow
the nose too big.

Who speaks?

le rétro   viseur   (some   languages
 more   visible than   others)

579

Figure 4.11 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 579, Carcanet Press.

than others' (579). For ease of reference, the text can be divided up into rectangles (see Figure 4.12) that mimic the shape of the driving-mirror of the first line, which – in the notable absence of a singular or identifiable narrator – stands in as the focaliser of this page of text.

The driving-mirror (a device also used in *Tripticks*, as in the title of that section of this chapter) as narratological focalisation point is itself a multi-layered play on the idea that the focaliser here is an object rather than a person, and that the defining feature of a mirror is its reflectiveness and propensity for focalisation: it can't help but reflect; it will reflect whatever is put in front of it. Brooke-Rose thus boils down the idea of a central, guiding consciousness into its most

Through the driving-mirror four eyes stare back
two of them in their proper   place
Now right on
Q   ask us

to de	V	elop	foot on gas
how m(any		how)	eyes?
four		two	
of them		correct	
on either side	▽	of the	
nose		the other	
two	⚠	O danger	
slow		down	
	eXact		replicas

nearer the hairline further up the brow but dimmed as in a glass
tarnished by the close-cropped mat of hair they peer through

The mat of hair is khaki, growing a bit too low on the brow
the nose too big.

Who speaks?

| le rétro | | viseur | (some | languages |
| more | | visible than | others) | |

579

Figure 4.12 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 579, Carcanet Press. Lines added are my own.

literal manifestation (and a visual one at that), also alluding humorously to the impersonality and pseudo-objectivity of contemporary experiments with the *nouveau roman*. The driving-mirror becomes a tool to guide and shape the narrative, albeit one which does its job automatically, requires little to no human agency in its operation. It shapes the text both in terms of its physical appearance – as

a rectangle – and its optical function – rendering the text multidirectional and reflective. The multidirectionality effected here is key: as the driving-mirror functions by 'looking forwards to see backwards while driving forwards' in Brooke-Rose's words (*Invisible* 66), the minimal syntax, typographical layout, allusions and visual puns grant this text a radically non-linear structure, as produced in the reading of it, heightened by the addition of visual elements: the eye makes visual links while the ear (figuratively speaking) makes linguistic links, proliferating possibilities of interpretation so there really is no guidance as to when the page should be turned. The text constantly loops back on itself, disrupting the easy progression of a linear reading, rendering the process circular as well as forward-moving.

The first rectangle (Figure 4.12) mimics the shape of the driving-mirror, the word 'place' displaced to indicate the faultiness of the mirror: that it reflects four eyes instead of two, and that two are where you would expect them to be, the other two displaced. So already there is the sense that through this imperfect tool, reality isn't necessarily being accurately reflected: what we get is a specific version as filtered through this specific focaliser; it might differ from the original, but as the text will soon indicate, the origin is also indeterminable. The second rectangle is much the same as the first, although more skewed; the translation of the word 'cue' to the typographical symbol 'Q' underlines this, as well as indicating that the visual will be standing in for the linguistic or aural in much of this text – importantly, this does not alter the sense, but adds to the layers of signification. The third rectangle is larger, in keeping with the narrative's heightened attention to the reflection of the eyes in the mirror – a kind of textual close-up. I have emphasised the rectangle in blue for a variety of reasons: the transition of shapes forms a series of visual puns, repeating the basic triangle shape to produce new meaning each time, the sense of which can be found in the surrounding text. They are united insofar as the same shape is repeated: the V is repeated in the triangle which represents the reflected nose, which is flipped in the representation of the traffic sign, the two triangles combined in the capitalised X in 'eXact' at the end. This X references Greimas's semiotic square which forms one of the repeated refrains of the text – an early indication that the narrative is built upon and structured by the theories of narratology it incorporates.[9] The line of

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[9] Glyn White has recently linked the 'X' in *Thru* to the novel's deconstructionist aspects, writing that '[t]he "X" device, as in Greimas's use as a diagram of contraries and contradictories, could be a shorthand structural plan of *Thru* [. . .] but this is also a significant

symbols also functions as its own kind of mirror: the text on either side is fairly symmetrical. Importantly there is no significant difference between the reflected and the reflection, no way of identifying which is which. The text on either side of the blue rectangle is divided: as the eyes are, by the nose; as the reflection and eyes are, by the mirror; as the action of the text is divided by the real-world interruption of the traffic sign, prompting a shift from internal to external focalisation, though it is still unclear whether anything is being said or everything thought, and how many consciousnesses are contributing to the narrative. The displaced text indicative of the mirror's faultiness is repeated along the right-hand side, as before.

The next two rectangles continue the description of the reflection, interrupted by the statement 'Who Speaks?', highlighting the fact that we are not yet aware who is in the car. This question is a multivalent allusion to multiple sources, including Beckett's *The Unnameable* (1958) which revolves around the speaking subject, beginning 'Where now? Who now? When now?' (285). The question is also a direct reference to Barthes's *S/Z* and through that an allusion to the impossibility of attributing the origin of a statement. The question 'Who Speaks?' interrupts the narrative in the same way that the traffic sign – and statement 'O danger slow down' – interrupts the visual description of the reflected eyes above. Finally, the question is playfully answered in the next line: 'le rétro viseur' is technically doing the speaking here, in that it is ordering the text, determining the layout, and is so far 'responsible' for the bulk of the narrative content. There is an additional joke based on the fact that the visual signifies, or 'speaks' – simply because it too communicates meaning on its own terms, but also because it is interpreted linguistically and forms part of the narrative. Finally, the joke that 'some languages are more visible than others' plays on the fact that this text combines verbal and visual methods of communication to make a hybrid language which is by nature visual. My point in going through the first page in so much detail is to indicate how much the visual techniques add to the meaning, to show how much there is to be unravelled in every page of *Thru*, and thus how dense a reading experience it provides. Because the form itself is 'speaking' in this way, like a concrete poem,

reference to the chiasmus we find in Derrida in his bracketed note appendant to the Greek X: "which can be considered a quick thematic diagram of dissemination"' ('Motes' 330). White thus highlights the multivalency of the X-symbol, which I am here using to emblematise my considerations of the simultaneous attention to expansion and erasure in these texts, particularly in *Thru*.

the text becomes like a piece of language philosophy or theory, as well as narrative.[10]

The second page (Figure 4.13) introduces another visual register used frequently in *Thru*, the spatial arrangement of text, more like visual poetry, rather than the stricter definition of concrete poetry. This kind of typographical arrangement fragments the page, forces the reader to slow down and pay closer attention, and also allows for reading in multiple directions – but not by rule (that is, not consistently or not all the time). For instance, the parenthetical statement '(O capital! punishment)' can be read vertically at the same time as 'O capital!' leads horizontally into 'your story or your life [. . .]' (580). The left-hand column continues to demonstrate some associative sense (capital punishment, 'Hang it all', head, chief, capital cities and so on) if read vertically, whereas the others do not, necessitating a double reading: one partial and vertical, one 'whole' and horizontal. The passage employs other visual methods of communication aside from spatial layout: the use of capitals, brackets, double possibilities (constanza/constante), culminating in the capitalised 'SIN TAG MA TRICKS' which alone contains several puns (sin for 'syn', tricks for 'tics'), indicating the foundation of structural linguistics on which much of the humour of *Thru* is based, as well as the propensity for messing with these structures, breaking syntactic rules, playing tricks with the elements of the linguistic system.

The visual arrangement on page 584 in the Carcanet *Omnibus* (2006)[11] edition of *Thru* furthers the techniques introduced on page 580 (Figure 4.13), with emboldened letters within words forming a vertical (acrostic) code amidst the text (Figure 4.14). With plenty of white space interspersed between the words and letters, and certain letters capitalised and emboldened inviting us to read vertically down the page, there are two paths the reading eye can take: horizontally from

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[10] This theoretical aspect of Brooke-Rose's work has been discussed more widely than it has for Brophy's and Quin's. Lawrence's recognition that *Thru* depicts 'the uses and abuses of theory, both theory's desire to master the production of meaning and the recognition that mastery is an impossibility' (*Techniques* 80), aligns with Glyn White's suggestion that the narrative is theorising itself as a means of undermining its own mastery: '*Thru*'s self-reflexivity demonstrates that critical control of narrative is itself a fiction. By poeticising poetics *Thru* shows narrative dominating and confounding criticism, proving that it is inherently the stronger of the two' (*Reading* 157). White thus suggests that the unruliness of narrative cannot be contained by any kind of critical schema (or diagrammatic formation). In a later article, he even suggests that Brooke-Rose's 'engagement with a species of criticism in poeticised form is much bolder than her actual criticism' ('Motes' 332).

[11] All further in-text page references will be to this edition.

or the vizir looming grey eminence behind the consultan listener how
many times leaning a little to the right to peer into how many
rectangles a thousand and one in which there is a   flaw?

The second pair of eyes are less pale veiled by
the reflected hair crinkly khaki flecked grey

O but handsome all told whatever all is and who
ever tells a young god yet the lower eyes lie
blue to the tarnished replicas higher up the brow
which whoever speaks (Nourennin?) calls too low.

Some tale-bearer
(O capital!   your
                              story or   your
                              life
              wot no   story?
                    no   life
punishment)   So that
Hang it all
                    no   life
                              story
              off with   your
head   said the
chief   in-sultan to   his
                              red red rose
              washed by
              once upon
              (some times)   purple passages
              (other times)
hanging   suspen(I)s
              from the
capital   of
Baghdad
Rome
Athens
Istambul   busy anteroom
                        con { st(anza)
                              (ante)
Neopolis
                        scarlet

580

Figure 4.13 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 580, Carcanet Press.

```
              never               the      lesS
            this is                        noT
                                            nO
                                  (My)
         the                      h Y s T e R y  of The
                                                              Eye
      becAuse I would noT               S e  E  thY      cRuel   Nails
      boaRish                                             fAngs
                             pluck  ouT                      hIs
                  pooR old              (E     Xtract)     (Cruel
         Cruel         nAils)    uPon          These       eyEs of
         tHine
         I'll set         (C      R u El                     fanGs)
                          my    foOt  Poo R old eyes
         These          eyEs       hIs  eYes
      pooR old eyes
         beAm                                                Mote
         Cruel                   fanGs
         Eyes                      cRuel                     fAngs
                                  boArish
                                 bea M
                                   Moat
                                   Etc
                                 alreaDy        (all read eye)

                                 naIls
                                  Nails

                             upon These
                           eyes of tHine I'll
                                  sEt

                           the  re Mote     sTone
                          Wide     Eyes   wEt?
                          pArch    Ment  waX
                          arXi      stOne        Trace
                                  dRy
                                 papYrus
                                 eye 'S




                                 584
```

Figure 4.14 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 584, Carcanet Press.

left to right, and vertically from top to bottom – literally crossways. Eyes are ubiquitous within this passage (and indeed in all of *Thru*): 'the hystery of the eye', 'these eyes of thine' (twice), 'poor old eyes' (twice), 'these eyes his eyes', 'cruel eyes' (vertical), '(all read eye)', 'wide eyes wet', 'dry papyrus eye's' (necessarily vertical at the end where there is only one word on each line) (584). The multiplicity of eyes here signals a number of things: that subjects are represented by eyes ('eye' for 'I'), being primarily observers; that this text is communicating visually, is largely about looking, in form and content; that much of the content is about desire, and desirous looking. Indeed, vision and visuality remain themes in *Thru*, even (or especially) as they inform its method and how it looks on the page, the formal choices Brooke-Rose has made concerning its presentation. These frequent references to eyes reinforce the emphasis on looking in the horizontal text, while the vertical text reads: 'Story Mystery Text Trace Enigma Architrace Trace Pro/Epi-grammed In The Memory's Text Wax' (although the order of the words isn't clear so the sense is that the words form stand-alone units rather than a sentence, at least in the top half of the page). The words like 'enigma' and 'mystery' seem to refer self-reflexively to the way the page is a kind of puzzle in itself, even though it contains a narrative and references other parts of the text: there is a mystery on the plane of language alone, disregarding the content, in that the emboldened letters beg interpretation, but the fact that they are not arranged in a conventional format means the syntax is ambiguous. The letters perform a more 'concrete' function, standing alone rather than consecutively in a sentence. At the same time, there is also a mystery at the level of the narrative. The references to Bataille's 1928 erotic novel *The Story of the Eye* (in the Mystery/Hystery of the Eye, and so on) are reinforced on the next page with the line: 'Hang it all we have the story of an I' (in the text there is a triangle around the 'I'; see Figure 4.15) (585). The conflation of 'eye' and 'I', which happens all the time in these texts, figures the individual as an eye which witnesses the world, recording the experience that goes to make up the subject.

Brooke-Rose reinforces the interchangeability of 'eye' and 'I' (most commonly seen in 'camera-I' for 'camera-eye') on several occasions in *Thru*: 'gouge out the I' (595); 'losing I-contact with everyone' (634). Replacing 'eye' with 'I' posits the subject primarily as an observer, as a perspectival point and potentially as a machine or recorder. Moreover, it conflates looking with being: if 'I' as the marker of identity is the same as 'eye', then subjectivity is basically equal to what is being looked at. This is shorthand for quite a broad

philosophical disavowal of mastery: to strip the subject of agency or capacity to act in/on the world, stressing instead their observational capacities; to look is not necessarily to interact, as the multiple references to voyeurism in these novels (*Berg*, *Out*, *Passages* especially) make clear. Primarily, Brooke-Rose's intention with these examples seems to be humour, but humour based on a density of philosophical and theoretical allusion, as is typical of her style; gouging out the 'I' signals a loss of subjecthood, perhaps as serious as it is humorous (the humour deriving from the punning on eye/I, and the repetition of this convention in new phrasal circumstances). Likewise, losing 'I-contact' calls up the philosophical history of the unified, whole humanist subject which has supposedly been disintegrating throughout the twentieth century. The philosophical trajectory contained in this pun is one which Brooke-Rose is consciously playing with, as in: 'discourse occurs only insofar as there is lack of sight, eyelessness is not a provisional state but a structure' (725). Eyelessness might suggest I-lessness, or lack of subject or self, which is itself a structure or framework for existence. Furthermore, the statement suggests discourse is invented to fill a space that cannot be seen – to explain when clear vision is impossible (which according to the texts in this book, especially those by Brooke-Rose, is always).

The first appearance of a visually rendered crossing occurs on page 585 (Figure 4.15). The line preceding the X-formation – 'I me if it be possible despite non-equivalence to rewrite I as O and O as I' – itself signals a crossing: of 'I' and 'me', 'I' and 'O', where these symbols would seem to stand in for self and other. The latter possibility is reinforced elsewhere in *Thru*: 'Each I leads into another I, unless I into O for Other interruption with a point of information?' (618). However, the symbols carry a multivalent sense, alluding to binary code in computing (1s and 0s), as well as the binary gender code (reinforced by an 'I enters O' joke on page 598). The arrow formation repeated in the 'teXt' following the diagram signifies continual expansion in every possible direction (in this diagrammatic arrangement, there are four possible directions), while the dual possibility of 'thattaway' and 'latterway' offers flipsides of the same situation (where the eye can wander back and forth between the two options) suggestive of the symmetrical/palindromic structure of the X. Thus the diagram is once again representative of the simultaneous expansion and limitation its own formation provides.

One of the most unusual visual arrangements of *Thru* occurs just twice (615, 734) (see Figure 4.16), in both cases preceded by a line referencing 'a coherent structure diminishing in size' (614, 733).

> Hang it all we have the story of an △!
> O but is not incompetent performance a non-disjunction at
> level of deep structure? I me if it be possible despite non-
> equivalence to rewrite I as O and O as I
>
> which has been suggested,
> here,
> you see,
>   cosÍ   I
>
>   I   I
>   should you start structuring your te><thattaway
>   or the   latterway?
>   Those for: Peter Brandt Barbara Darcy Francesca
> Newman Robert Galliard Myra Kaplan Kathleen
> O'Shaunessy Ali Nourennin Renata Polanska Lin Su Fu.
>   Those against: Vittoria Charib Marie Faber Salvatore
> Tancredi Michael Mandel Jean-Marie Fèvre Eliza Jones.

Figure 4.15 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 585, Carcanet Press.

Considering the predilection towards symmetry and palindromic
structure in *Thru*, it makes sense that this layout would occur twice,
in both cases ending with the same dual call for 'order order', the
two words sharing the 'O' that begins each word, a possible allu-
sion to the origin, the void, the zero, the endless repetition of the
ouroboros. The reading direction in Figure 4.16 is determined by
the sense of the passages, rather than any kind of consistent rule,
and is actually quite unclear from the linguistic content. One might
expect a cascade of information downwards, as the shape suggests,
but while the reading does take place from the top to the bottom of
the page, sometimes the syntax forces the reading direction upwards
(for example, the second segment from the top on the left). Most
importantly, the rules change in the reading of the page; reading is
sometimes upward, sometimes downward, and you cannot predict
which it will be by any reliable adherence to a pattern. The reading
starts to spiral more as it reaches the bottom of the page, like an
object circling a drain before it goes in.

Most often this page is read as a visual representation of a lecture
hall, partially linked to the content which has to do with students,
although it seems more like a meeting amongst teachers about the

about
this
like
to go on   thus
aberrant   the
utterly   lanky
that it is   hench
of protest   two   man be
speeches   item   traying
of   tall   to   a slight
anyons   even   the   anxiety
ie tall   haven't   about item
de of   and we   real   two unless
time   item   merely a
ither   wasting   being   pretence at
on   we are   hidden   a desire
agenda   or   under   for
on the   selves   any other   speed
not even   your
which is   sure of   idi   business
affair   so un   otic   the meeting
idiotic   you all   affair   having then
this   tion are   in the   dispersed
why this   indigna   first   he having
anyway   too   place   raised
performance   it   it is a   the
again it's   know   demential
etence   dents   proposition
comp   stu-   If   that this .
oh   the   we're   should be
tent and   going   posed as a
compe-   by   to take   question
who is not   not   student   of
who is and   chers   mythology   comp
we all know   tea   as criterion
Besides   ing   as   we're building
what?   look   he   our house
best   passes   on quick
by the   As   a hand   sand
courses   swiftly   s
choose   a   through
students   mid-   his soft
know   dle   brown
we all   aged   buil   hair
talk   man I'm   ding   Thus
and   glad   our
some of   house
them are   Oh   on
perverts   no   quick
then   real   Oh   sand
ly!   sh   s?
This   O   ut
is   r   r   up
too   d   d
e   e
r   r

615

Figure 4.16 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 615, Carcanet Press.

students. Michael Westlake, writing to Brooke-Rose, melds two meanings in referring to the page in question as: 'that very beautiful (and erotic, I find) page from Thru [. . .] representing "a sea of faces rising in waves upward and away"' (Letter to Brooke-Rose). Regarding the 'erotic' aspect Westlake identifies, the text does seem to mimic the 'squat diamond shape' repeated regularly in the earlier *Between*, although, were this the case, the content of the sections would make the link between the linguistic and the visual sense extremely tenuous; elsewhere there are plentiful jokes about the textual/sexual. Westlake and Brooke-Rose, in this exchange, are discussing proofs of Brian McHale's 1987 critical work, *Postmodernist Fiction*, in which McHale briefly discusses the page in question (as a lecture hall), a discussion which Brooke-Rose found cursory. In a letter to McHale's publishers, Brooke-Rose provides a complicated explanation as to why the text does not look exactly like what it represents:

> Thus the curves 'represent' first the arclamps (in his mind during the meeting, or in presence as he thinks of the meeting, either way), AND the tall canyons of speech and confronting minds, which leads to the student faces breaking up (in his mind during the meeting or while perceiving the arclamps), exactly like the tablet [. . .]. In other words, a meeting, not an amphitheatre. (Letter to Merrilyn Julian)

Brooke-Rose succinctly questions the nature of the iconic segment by putting 'represent' in quotation marks: the representation is suggestive, taking place on visual and linguistic levels simultaneously; 'represents' perhaps too closely suggests that it might look like what it is representing, perform more figuratively or pictorially than it does. Furthermore, taking place in the character's memory, thus merging memory with present, the representation is supposed to be picturing two things at once, capturing the way that memory can be simultaneously present to the thinking subject, as much so as their external environment – thus a very complex situation to render in text, let alone in a visual-text format with which readers are largely unfamiliar. Brooke-Rose further laments, again to McHale's publisher, that 'even those who are bold enough to work on contemporary texts, seem so often to miss wholly and reduce to the familiar' (Letter to Merrilyn Julian).

In the third manuscript draft of *Thru*, the small illustration on the page facing the arc-lamps shows what looks like a series of receding archways, which would fit with the more abstract reference in the text to 'a coherent structure diminishing in size' (Figure 4.17).
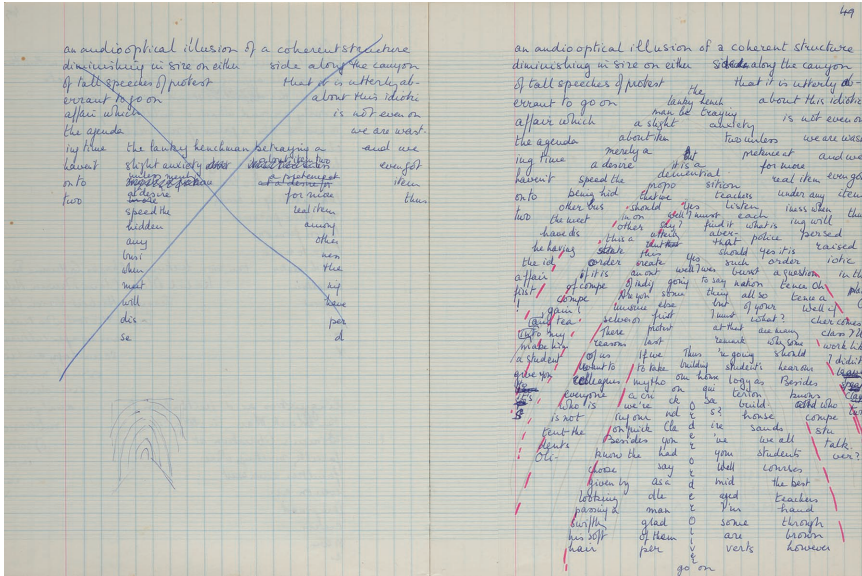
Figure 4.17 THRU 'Textermination' holograph manuscript of a 3rd version, Christine Brooke-Rose. Christine Brooke-Rose Papers, box 9, folder 1, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

In fact in this earlier draft the design looks different, looks more intended to mimic that illustration on the left-hand page (which may well be intended to represent arc-lamps also). Whether or not this is meant to represent the arc-lamps Brooke-Rose envisioned, or whether the image perhaps passed through different stages in different drafts, is a moot point. Most striking from these exchanges is the tension between Brooke-Rose's demands for closer attention to the complexity of her representations, and her reasonably convoluted and very specific explanation for what the visual arrangement is supposed to represent. Furthermore, *Thru* seems designed to undercut the possibility of a singular resolution and is constantly deferring meaning, sending the reader back into the text with visual and aural links and echoes, refusing to remain stable. Glyn White, in an article which offers a detailed background on what he calls the 'arc-icons', talks about the 'ambivalence between readings allowed by this novel's technique', comparing it to a quotation from the first arc-lamps page, 'we're building our house on quicksands' ('Motes' 324). If the foundation is shaky, unstable or purposefully uncertain, then it would seem an impossibility to attribute a specific meaning to any aspect of *Thru*, especially when that meaning relies on the

interpretation of an idiosyncratic visual device, based on what the reader can see in the representation, which is to say that the whole situation is highly subjective and contingent. Using his own correspondence with Brooke-Rose as an example, White claims that the 'mutability of possible interpretations of the arc-icon page is instructive, perhaps especially as possible interpretations proliferated the more both author and critic sought to pin it down' ('Motes' 326). White thus identifies that indeterminacy is the point; further to his claims, I am arguing that indeterminacy can be seen as a strategy (whether purposefully executed by Brooke-Rose or not). Focusing on the 'how' rather than the 'what', the process rather than any ultimate meaning, my reading of *Thru* highlights what the visual passages are doing particularly in regard to representational frameworks, rules and consistency. In reading the textual arrangement as a visual reflection of the linguistic precedent, in both cases, of 'a coherent structure diminishing in size' (*Thru* 614, 733), I have suggested that these arc-lamp pages exist in a more abstract relationship to the rest of *Thru*, functioning as a sort of microcosm of the structure of *Thru*, as the diamond-shaped visual arrangement outlined above diminishes and then forms again, on one page and then the next.

Though Westlake's attempts to eroticise the arc-lamps page were not necessarily what Brooke-Rose had in mind, he would not be alone in attempting to make a body of the text of *Thru*. In fact, Lawrence argues that Brooke-Rose '[turns] her text into a hysterical body', 'fictionalizing the theoretical discourse' of hysteria via Cixous and psychoanalysis, rendering a text 'complete with cuts, gaps, silences, and crazy repetitions that mime a narrative out of control, helplessly watching its own delirious projections' (*Techniques* 90–1). In doing so, Lawrence demonstrates some of the most prominent ways in which experimental writing by women is conventionally misread (though she is suggesting Brooke-Rose uses this material self-consciously): in the suggestion via Cixous that women write 'with their bodies', that the work is 'hysterical' and 'out of control', thus conflating attributions of stereotypically 'feminine' traits with problematic assertions of biological gender. Lawrence's reading is interesting for the bodily way it ascribes a perspective to the text itself, although it is a hypothetical perspective ('that mime a narrative'): the text watches; the text loses control. If this were the case, Brooke-Rose would seem to be performing a similar repudiation of mastery to both Quin and Brophy: Quin, via her use of cut-up in *Tripticks*, and Brophy, via her handing of the text over to the reader (or to the text itself) at the end of *In Transit*. While Brooke-Rose's own writing on *Thru* suggests a wish to retain

some authority over the narrative, the text of *Thru* presents itself as impossible to contain. Brooke-Rose is of course aware of the tension between these issues of control, of being both an author and a reader, and deliberately plays with rules and rule-breaking in *Thru*, the ways in which text and material deconstructs itself; she purposefully works with those properties. As a means of considering *Thru*'s linking of textuality and embodiment, I will consider one final example – that of *Thru*'s own handling of the Pygmalion-Galatea myth – in which these principles of restriction and expansion are applied to a literal 'body', that of one of the characters.

Like both *Passages* and *Flesh* in the previous chapter, *Thru* contains several references to the Pygmalion-Galatea myth, furthering the relationship between textual and material experiment and considerations of gender and embodiment:

> The unmarked term, scaring, scarring you with his zero, forming you to his pygmalion desire that realises retrospectively that it has worked at something infinitely beyond itself since the diagonal contradictory of the dialectical reply to I want to take you over must necessarily be I want to overtake you whatever the deep structure. How long O Freud how long? (681)

While the passage is dense with allusion in general, the Pygmalion reference alludes to the ways in which the two main characters of the novel are forming each other, which in turn carries a double meaning: that the indeterminate author-narrator is possibly one of them, therefore textually forming the other. Mirroring this formation, the passage contains other dualities and inversions, such as the repetition and inversion of 'take you over' and 'overtake you', suggesting both domination and driving; it is quite typical of *Thru* to be in two places at once. The Pygmalion reference also carries a gendered significance: throughout there are signals to the construction of the female subject/object (of desire, of love, of inspiration, with the muse and so on) – through society, discourse and male desire. The reference to the 'unmarked term' recalls *Between* with its references to Saussure and structural linguistics, referring to how in French the feminine forms of words carry an extra letter and are as such marked as different from the masculine forms, which present the basis or fundamental structure against which the deviation is pitched. Thus Brooke-Rose is piling up references to feminine inferiority, the placement of which alongside one another drives home their cultural and theoretical embeddedness, the ways in which they have been

naturalised. The use of 'scaring' and 'scarring' in direct succession suggests the ease with which the psychological passes to the physical (and back again), as does the transition from 'take you over' to 'overtake you', as do the allusions to linguistics ('deep structure') and psychoanalysis ('O Freud') – all working to suggest a complete intertwinement of the abstract and material, text and world, imagination and reality throughout this text.

A literal reimagining of this Pygmalion shaping occurs in both textual and diagrammatic form in *Thru*, where Larissa (the female component in the couple possibly inventing one another) is portrayed as a combination of numerous cultural and historical references by Armel (the male component), demonstrated visually (Figure 4.18).

(Portrait by Armel from an original creation by Larissa)
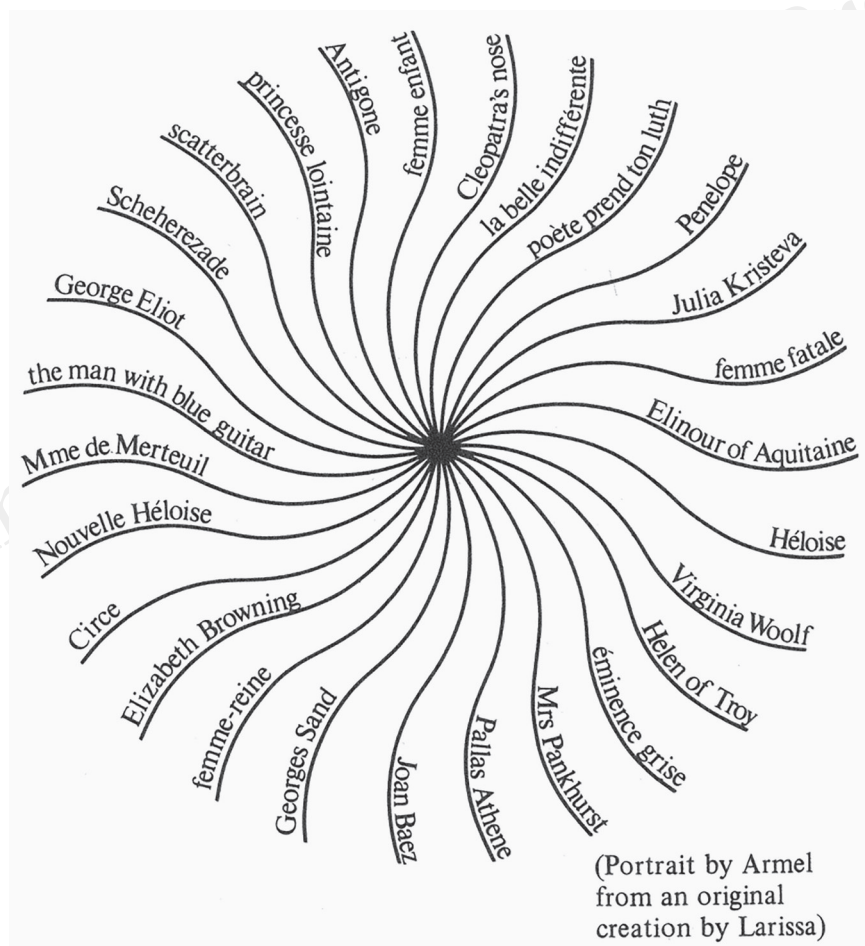
Figure 4.18 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 663, Carcanet Press.

Here, Larissa's 'body' of influences or components (and in a sense the more direct meaning of 'body') has become completely textual, thus anticipating the 'flesh-eating proclivities' that Waugh identifies with postmodernist representations of the body ('Writing the Body' 133). This textual rendering does not mean Larissa's body loses materiality, however, but it assumes a different sort of materiality. The use of 'portrait' to describe the diagram also fuses the visual and verbal elements: this is a portrait in text, both verbal (containing text) and visual (artfully arranged) – although, much like the earlier example of the arc-lamps, it can perhaps only be said to 'represent' Larissa in quotation marks. As well as being both visual and verbal, the portrait concerns both appearance and personality, as well as containing an indication of how her subjecthood has been constructed. The 'influences' on Larissa include Antigone, Penelope, Julia Kristeva, Georges Sand, Joan Baez, femme fatale and femme enfant: mythological and historical figures alike, as well as authors, theorists, figures from popular culture, personal references ('scatterbrain') and more general tropes of femininity. On the previous page, these components have been listed in a more conventional format and preceded by the phrase 'A dompna soisebuda composed of', with 'dompna soisebuda' meaning 'ideal lady'. While the text suggests she may have 'carefully reinvented herself' for Armel or some other (662), rather than having been directly shaped by him, the sense is that she has formed herself in accordance with what she imagines his desire to be, not anything based in her own desire; here the material out of which 'she' is formed is discourse. Fittingly, the form of the portrait is circular – recalling the formation of the structuralist subject considered at the end of Chapter 2, where the formation of the subject is cyclical, with no identifiable beginning or end.

Glyn White relates form to gender using the diagram content of the novel, although his relation is perhaps a little strict in its binary identification. Commenting on the gendering of timetables in *Thru*, he says the point being made is 'essentially about enclosure, politically and gender motivated, particularly the male urge to place things in a box and thus control them [. . .] tied to the satire of the diagrammatic impulse' (*Reading* 142). White acknowledges that '*Thru* fights for narrative which can't be so easily contained' (142). As my reading has shown, Brooke-Rose's text throughout resists explanatory and diagrammatic enclosure, parodying attempts to do so elsewhere, such as in structuralism and semiotic theory, as represented by Greimas's semiotic square. Perhaps even more significantly, *Thru* refuses to stick consistently to a rule that fixes the relationship between two

things. So while diagrams enclose and relate to masculinist systems of order, they also help to elucidate complicated material (Krauss's use); these texts are attuned to that tension. White suggests the gendered 'objective' of *Thru* is the 're-equilibration of male and female, text and reader': the fact that 'male readers can read as female' and vice versa 'requires the text itself to be bisexual' (153). Further, White claims that *Thru* achieves this objective by '[refusing] to allow its narrative sections to be attributed to a gendered narrator during reading' (154), working 'towards a male/female unification, the collision that will create a bisexual re-equilibration and join the separate genders' (156). White's assertion of a 'bisexual' text resembles Brophy's comments for the bisexuality of readers; the reasoning is that since binary gender is somehow false, it makes more sense to merge the 'two' genders into some kind of universal whole. However, *In Transit* and *Thru* are more inclined to acknowledge a limitless complexity, using binary gender categories to signal further multiplicity; in confusing characters with other characters, they refuse to assume fixed identities and genders at all. In rendering a portrait in text of one of the characters, thus drawing together verbal and visual representational codes and 'embodying' them, Brooke-Rose directly challenges the divide between structure and subject, reminiscent of the ending of Quin's *Tripticks*, where she depicts a subject caught up in systems beyond his control, and suffering for it. In relating this diagrammatic portrait of Larissa to the Pygmalion-Galatea myth, Brooke-Rose is drawing a lineage between the positioning of women in classical art, myth and contemporary theory – highlighting the sexist bias in each (and humorously, by using a diagram). Instead of ordering and containing the information it 'encloses', Brooke-Rose's diagram reaches out allusively to countless other sources.

Similarly, at the end of *Thru*, Brooke-Rose makes no effort to 'close' the text, in fact performing the exact opposite movement (Figure 4.19). Ending similarly to *Tripticks* in a slew of unidentified advertising imagery ('disembodied voiceless logos') received through the eyes of the narrator of that moment, *Thru* goes that much further in disappearing its narrator ('who would not stay for an answer') than *In Transit* does. The visual image of eyes has been 'made up' by the narrator, which – fittingly – could mean they have composed/compiled the image, or that they have invented/imagined it. The passage also collects some of the visuals from the text: the dancing hoops that appeared previously on pages 609, 618 and 619, and the retro-vizor reflecting the eyes that opens the novel – which incidentally here reflects nothing but text (in one possible reading). The

> must go on the other scene since the institution of unlearning has
> been closed down by an obituary act of authority due to
> textual disturbances.
>   So that you^n drive away into the nightwiddling along the trans-
> istor of disembodied voiceless logos watching the hoops that dance
> red amber white green mauve eyes made up by the disappeared
> narrator in a mere vehicle now deprived of pilot who would not
> stay for an answer
>
> his f o u r   ▽s   l o d g e d in
> the retro   v   izor never
>
> to sally fort-da and reflecting nothing but
>
>   T
>   E
>   X
>   (I)
>   U Я H T H R U

Figure 4.19 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*, p. 742, Carcanet Press.

text therefore begins and ends in reflection, demonstrated textually
by the final palindromic line, a reflection of itself (and repetition of
the title): 'URHTHRU'. The insertion of the '(I)' – apart from being
a joke about the position of the subject in this text – converts part
of 'TEXT' to 'EXIT', suggesting a way out, and subsequently offer-
ing two: at either end of the palindrome, if we take the conventional
linearity of reading and see the text as providing two possible paths
here, both beginning at the same point, the 'T' of 'Thru'. The dual
possibility recalls the possibilities of structuring the text 'thattaway'
or the 'latterway' in an earlier example. Where at the beginning there
are four eyes, at the end there are four 'I's, suggesting both the pos-
sibility that they are interchangeable, and that a subject (I) has devel-
oped in the course of the narrative. At the end of the novel, the class
seem to be reflecting on the exercise of maybe writing the novel, but
there appears to still be a narratorial/authorial/textual presence on
the final page – speaking to 'you^n', or you 'to the power of n', which
could suggest any number of times that 'you' will be multiplied by
itself, thus splitting the subject indeterminately (but suggesting large
quantities by the mathematical formulation). The novel effectively
'ends' in an endless loop, the palindromic layout of 'THRU' sug-
gesting endless reflection and inversion – infinite regress, a favourite
structure of all three of these authors.

'Our language reflects this desire'

Thru, like *In Transit*, thwarts any sense of closure the reader might desire at the end of the narrative. Spivak makes this closure an '*en*closure', writing in her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

> It is also the metaphysical desire to make the end coincide with the means, create an *en*closure, make the definition coincide with the defined, the 'father' with the 'son'; within the logic of identity to balance the equation, close the circle. Our language reflects this desire. And so it is from within this language that we must attempt an 'opening.' (Spivak)

This is to suggest that language strives for exactness, that slippages or inaccuracies of language are accidental, proof of its representative inadequacy. Quin, Brophy and Brooke-Rose seem at home in this slippery indeterminate realm of inexact meaning, which is like the indisciplined regions between structures and categories, or the moments when these categories break down. These authors in fact seem to find ways of enhancing the indeterminacy: as in this chapter, Quin's use of the cut-up, Brophy's refusal to fix gender and Brooke-Rose's refusal to fix anything – narrator, speaker, meaning, rule or style. Their work poses challenges to this supposedly inherent desire for definition, logic and the closing of circles (or circuits) which is embedded within the linguistic system. Visuality proves one method of thwarting the desire for fixed meaning, with Barthes writing in 1964 that 'the image is felt to be weak in respect to meaning' (*Image* 152) – borne out by the example of the arc-lamp pages in *Thru*, as discussed above, and Brooke-Rose's lengthy correspondence concerning these two pages and their possibilities for meaning.

Brooke-Rose's visual text is particularly hard to read, as she herself acknowledges, and part of the reason for this (which she does not acknowledge) is its idiosyncrasy. Let alone the visual illiteracy of her audience, much of her experimentation is highly individual in form, as exemplified in her hand-drawn designs in manuscript drafts of *Thru* (Figures 4.20 and 4.21). Brooke-Rose's *Thru* looks like no other text, even those which use a similar amount of concrete and visual text, and part of this is the originality that arises from experiments drawn by hand (not by software, as they might be done today).

In archives, we have perhaps one of the most obvious examples of 'erased' material being both simultaneously present and absent. Figure 4.22 shows a page from Brooke-Rose's first draft manuscript
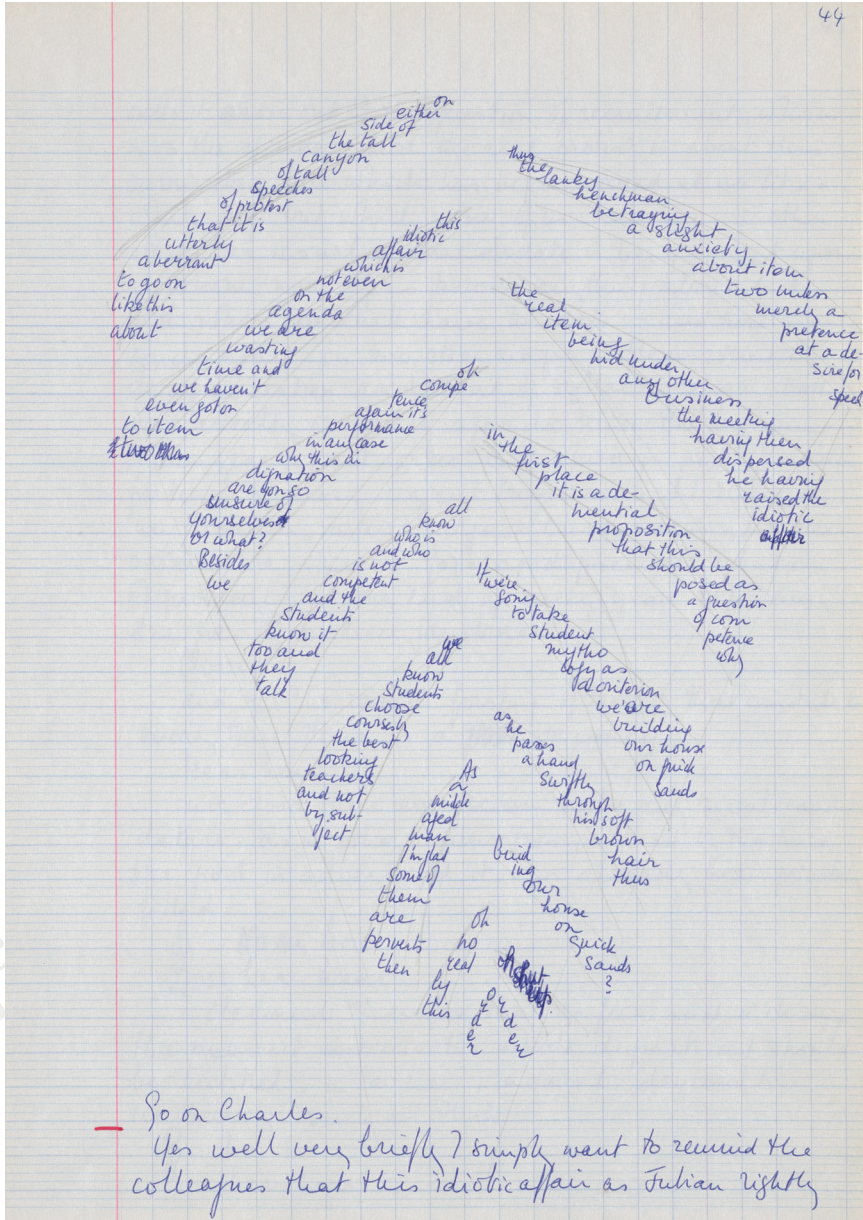
Figure 4.20 THRU 'Final draft 72' holograph manuscript, Christine Brooke-Rose. Christine Brooke-Rose Papers, box 9, folder 3, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

50

Brother? thank you well as you all know some of our student
were arrested in the demo yesterday and we have called
a strike of all
   Who's we?
   A majority of over a thousand to sixty-seven in the general
Assembly
   Okay and there are over fifteen thousand students
in the university
   Yeah and where were they? If they're not concerned
with the iniquitous situation resulting from authoritarian
decrees in a society which serves only the interests of
capitalism
      Cant!
      and conspicuous consumption
      go consume yourself
      hear hear
      them out they're right
      Who sez?
      Some tail-bearer or other body with his with t

Agitato sostenuto

Figure 4.21 THRU 'Final draft 72' holograph manuscript, Christine Brooke-Rose. Christine Brooke-Rose Papers, box 9, folder 3, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 4.22 Thru 'first draft' holograph manuscript, Christine Brooke-Rose. Christine Brooke-Rose Papers, box 8, folder 8, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

of *Thru*. The simple figure of the 'X' to cross out large segments of text (rather than the strike-through used for individual lines) is infused with this emblem's representational and theoretical potential – not least because of the increased interest in authors' archives in the current critical field, the frequent digging up of previously elided material, attempts to rescue artists from erasure. Brooke-Rose had her own thoughts on author-erasure. In an introduction to Brophy's *In Transit* (printed in the Dalkey Archive edition) she writes: 'During the sixties, Brigid Brophy was briefly known in London literary circles as the brainiest woman in Britain' – not a compliment, as Brooke-Rose says – shortly followed by the sentiment that while Brophy 'bathed in culture, [she] knew deep-down that writers can be forgotten' (i). Brooke-Rose titled her own last collection of essays *Invisible Author*, indicating that, in her lifetime, she certainly seemed to think that being forgotten as an author was possible. Each of the authors in this book has experienced some measure of critical erasure, but that situation now seems to be reversing. Like many who refuse to conform, recognition simply took a while. My focus on the emblem of the 'X' itself provides a means of challenging the often gendered erasure of difficult artists and of re-animating these 'closed circles' of meaning and circulation (circles which are often exclusionary), of finding areas of expansion within fixed forms.

Conclusion

In the quotation used to end the section on *In Transit* in this chapter, Och described her desire to 'shatter the rules'. She is met with this response by her interlocutor: 'Splendider and splendider! You have the true violent spirit of the creative artist. It is by the setting off of bombs inside the existing framework of the arts that new artistic forms come into being'. Och replies that she feels impotent: 'I can't find anyone who will teach me the rules. So how can I make sure of breaking them?' (197). While this small exchange is a joke, it suggests something of the bind on Brophy, Brooke-Rose and Quin, who at various points have expressed a wish to totally break with old forms or models, or make 'new rules of no rules' in their fiction and nonfiction. Perhaps it really is only through the complete eradication of old forms that something truly new could arise. These authors are well attuned to the impossibilities for originality in the era of the 'Death of the Author'. Och's reply suggests the old adage that one must first master the rules before they can break them, or as Brooke-Rose puts

it: 'in order to transgress one needs to know the rules, the boundaries' ('Self-Confrontation' 134). Och's reply is humorous, however, in that she just wants to know what the rules are so she can be sure she is breaking them. Brophy thus alludes to the ways in which experimentation and rule-breaking themselves become conventional, if practised for long enough by enough artists and writers. Brophy's joke perhaps addresses artistic experimentation 'for the sake of it': artists may become unsure of what constitutes rules and what constitutes rule-breaking (perhaps in an era where artistic experimentation proliferates). However, sometimes it is enough – and is necessary – to break disciplinary rules merely for the sake of it.

Following the respective publications of the three texts considered in this chapter, none of the authors continued with visual experimentation. Quin began a new novel before her death in 1973, *The Unmapped Country*, a realist-seeming narrative set in a mental health institution, which shows no signs of being visually experimental in manuscript drafts. *In Transit* is Brophy's only novel to use typographical devices; her later work maintains its interest in baroque excess across the art forms, although without overtly visual experimentation. Brooke-Rose's later work employs some visual devices: *Amalgamemnon* (1984) features genealogical trees and a couple of small hand-drawn illustrations; *Next* (1998) graphically reproduces the nomadic existence of its homeless subjects through textual layout – but neither approaches *Thru*'s level of visual experimentation. In *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose writes of *Thru*: 'I'm glad I wrote it, even if, once I had done it, I was not interested in attempting the same experiment again' (63). Whether unwilling to repeat the experiment because of typesetting difficulties or lack of enthusiastic or even adequate reception (in *Invisible Author* she provides her own reading of the first twenty pages of *Thru* because no critic had yet approached a thorough and accurate reading), the refusal to continue does seem pointed.

All three texts in this chapter employ the figure of the 'X' at various points and to various purposes; I have brought these points together by considering the 'X' as emblematic of these authors' conflicting relationships to rules and rule-breaking. The figure of the 'X' carries connotations of expansion – through its use in the Greimas diagram and Krauss's expanded field diagram – as well as erasure or elision – through its use as a crossing out, or symbol of negation. I have called these 'X's crossings at times, because the word signals both erasure (crossing out) and combination – further suggesting hybridity and indiscipline. In making their experiments so 'visible' in these novels,

these authors draw attention to the construction of their texts, and the frameworks and systems which make their texts work – those of language and imagery, visual culture and the media, as well as the world of material and social reality; for these are what give the texts meaning (social categories like gender have as much an effect on subject formation as language does, if the two can even be separated). To come back full-circle to Brooke-Rose's consideration of being an experimental woman writer, perhaps the only way to experience full freedom from constraint is to 'slip through all the labels' ('Illiterations' 67), and perhaps the inevitable and necessary price to pay is that of belonging nowhere. As I have been suggesting throughout this book, this nowhere is only nowhere by virtue of its not being somewhere, the mainstream or the canon; to think of it in a different way is to grant it the possibilities of freedom and of newness.

Conclusion: A Necessary Indiscipline

Throughout this book I have been showing that to be indisciplined is to be without, or outside of, discipline(s): to work across forms and media, to pick and choose what one needs from a number of disciplines rather than mastering a single one. Indiscipline works against the very idea of mastery in being difficult to pin down, to define, in being somehow both protean and refined in its meanings and connotations. As my analyses in the preceding chapters reveal, indiscipline is more than rule-breaking; it is a strategy by which authors and artists might resist disciplinary and material restrictions, and the idea of sameness that the term 'discipline' implies. I have argued that in performing novelistic acts of indiscipline, Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy push back against disciplinary operations of gender and literary form which seek to limit them and their work. The visual texts that I examined in Chapter 4 blatantly asserted that (aesthetic) rules may be broken simply for the sake of it, with no necessarily attributed reason; thus the delinquency associated with indiscipline takes on new resonance. To uphold the rules, similarly for the sake of it, would be to maintain the kind of disciplinary monotony that leads to stagnation or to rules becoming so embedded that the possibility of change recedes.

I began this project with a desire to examine the complex relations between text and image in narrative works but, as my analyses of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy have shown, these categories of text and image – aside from being inseparable from one another – are intimately connected to the visual and material worlds they attempt to 'body forth'. And so, there is no studying the relationship of text and image in these works without considering the ideological ramifications of vision and visuality, or the presence of the body, the categories of materiality and corporeality. In fact, the study of text and image in these works necessitates that we attend to the

very breakdown of distinct categories – a breakdown which leads to, or sometimes is caused by, the practice of indiscipline itself. As I have argued, visuality provides a multivalent lens through which to explore works of indisciplined literature: in its interdisciplinary tendencies, by bringing visual techniques 'into' literature; in its implicit dismantling of linguistic mastery and authority, in that its very use by writers suggests something lacking in the language system; in its inherent concern for embodiment and power structures – how vision, in these works, is always embodied, and looking is tied up with position and power, a power which is often gendered. The way these texts look at looking, in other words, can tell us a lot about their views on authority, discipline, language, gender, power and agency. My study of visuality in this book reveals how intimately issues of vision and visibility are tied to power, how a textual interest in visuality is a means of exploring power discrepancies in their insidious structuring of the visible world. Thus, in *Out* and *Berg*, the directionality of the gaze reinforces racial, gendered and patriarchal hierarchies. My analyses of *Between* and *Three* unravelled the status of the central female characters as images or objects 'to-be-looked-at' by mostly male characters within the narratives, a status that confines them and holds them in place. I argued that in *Flesh* and *Passages* the desirous, narcissistic and often brutalising gaze holds the potential to break down the subject's thin boundaries. Finally, I showed how in *Tripticks*, *In Transit* and *Thru*, the subjects appear trapped within visual and highly visible textual structures, and the only means of escape is to cease to exist.

My analyses reveal that the emphasis on looking in these texts addresses the incapacity of language to adequately describe or encompass reality – hence the lack of explanation or of causal relation between events in many of these novels, in which the visual techniques of collage and juxtaposition are more usual methods of structural organisation. This is the case especially in texts which use cut-up, like Quin's *Passages* and *Tripticks*, but also to a certain extent in all of the texts which do not offer clearly plotted linear narratives, favouring instead more fragmentary and repetitious textual constructions (especially Brooke-Rose's *Out* and *Between*). In fact, the increasing interest in visuality in the work of these authors itself enacts a loss of faith in 'masterful' explanation. For instance, images and events are merely shown to the reader, not necessarily strung together in any overt way. Nor are they offered as part of a causally related sequence of events. Moreover, narrative lacunae (and visual white space) often take the place of narrative exposition.

I have argued that this loss of faith in explanation is connected to loss of faith in the frame (to adequately encompass or authoritatively present) – a study which could be carried further in a future project – a loss which is perhaps promising to those who desire to break out of their own restrictions, aesthetic or otherwise. Following Judith Butler, the capacity for frames to 'break from' their determined contexts makes them sites of possibility (*Frames* 11). Additionally, I have highlighted how visual communication conveys meaning differently to language, more 'quietly', with potentially less control over its received meaning, and in this sense less masterfully. Visuality takes over when language fails – not necessarily to do the job of communication more successfully, but to do it differently, and arguably with less predictable results. My readings suggest that these authors find pleasure in that unknown. In this sense, visuality and indiscipline provide lenses through which we might conceive of experimental literature in new ways, as a departure from Bray, Gibbons and McHale's conception that '[e]xperiment is one of the engines of literary change and renewal; it is literature's way of reinventing itself' (1). Taking the emphasis off productivity and progress, I want to suggest that indiscipline works by not knowing where it is going and being comfortable in that unknowing. Moreover, visuality can provide a fitting method of presenting such a philosophy, not being geared towards any particular goal, through a focus on observation rather than definition. As such, visuality is a useful area of enquiry for writing (and criticism) less interested in mastering or controlling its material than traditional forms might be.

Through considering embodiment as part of these novels' visuality, and also bringing in questions of disciplinarity and form, I have expanded our idea of what attention to 'the visual' in literature might look like. Because vision is always embodied for these authors, visuality and embodiment are intimately linked: any looking is done by a body, and that body is subject to disciplinary enclosures (and allowances) surrounding gender, appearance, behaviour and so on. The texts build this constant awareness of being a body into their considerations of vision and visuality. Thus my sense of visuality is one which encompasses the visual, the material and the bodily, and not just the visual arrangement of text or the incorporation of images; this is important for showing how literary experiment is more than just play, more than 'word games'. My expanded sense of visuality moves forward the conversation on visual literature from previous studies like Glyn White's *Reading the Graphic Surface* (2005) and Simon Barton's *Visual Devices in*

Contemporary Prose Fiction: Gaps, Gestures, Images (2015), both of which revolve around issues of typographical experimentation, readerly experience and ontological enquiry. I have shown that the visual experimentation undertaken by Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy, their specific practices of indiscipline, are linked not only to their thematic interests in vision and the visual but also to their concerns with the bodily, with the material existence of bodies in space, and with the presence of the page and the book as physical and visual objects in space. As such, I have revealed that gender and the body are major themes motivating experiment for these authors, rather than minor or background concerns. Furthermore, my analyses show the impossibility of disembodied readings of visuality and indiscipline, or of separating visuality from materiality.

In analysing the most overtly visual and visible experiments by each author in Chapter 4, I showed that the novels blur the boundaries between body and text, ultimately presenting a situation in which bodies and subjects cannot be contained by/within text (or, for that matter, gender). Thus, in this final chapter, I drew together two culminating strands in these authors' experimentation. The first strand concerns the visual, which started with the thematisation of vision in the early works and became increasingly experimental with typography and the book format in the late 1960s and 1970s. The second is the focus on the body as a material entity subject to abstract structural restrictions, with the novels (for the most part) becoming explicitly interested in gender in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As my readings showed, Brophy's *In Transit* and Brooke-Rose's *Thru* use atypical textual arrangements to emulate the texture of experience, in all its disorientating multiplicity, and in a way that is more than simply descriptive. In enacting the 'mysteries' of the plots at a formal level – the gender 'search' in *In Transit*, and the uncertainty surrounding narrator, speaker and character, as well as textual origin, authorial status and so on, in *Thru* – these novels challenge the divisive separation of text and world, of structure in an abstract sense and in a social, material sense. Visual-formal indiscipline 'enacts' the material/social indiscipline that forms the novels' content, thus allowing these novels to perform a sort of theoretical enquiry, act as models of the concept of indiscipline itself. Furthermore, my analyses show that this formal 'enactment' of indiscipline highlights the continuity between disciplinary operations in language, in literary form, in social relations and in subject formation, thus challenging the distinction between the abstract and material realms. These novels can be seen to 'test out' various ways of being anti-disciplinary,

undisciplined, outside of or without discipline – outside of certain rules and operations which determine (and demand) conformity in both aesthetic and societal contexts, while 'inside' others.

I have used a somewhat indisciplined method of criticism in this book, incorporating visual and conceptual artworks in order to better understand the visual techniques being used in the novels: not necessarily with every text, but only and especially when artworks help to shed light on the novels' techniques and thematisations of visuality. This kind of critical indiscipline would prove a valuable approach for experimental writing more generally, in its adaptability to the changeable and unpredictable nature of literary experiment, which is characterised by trying techniques which have ideally not been seen before; criticism too must keep changing, in order to keep up. By reading visual artworks and novels alongside each other, we can better see the indisciplined strategies underway in both, the ways in which they push at the boundaries of their own forms and media: for instance, the ways in which both novels and artworks pushed against the restrictions of the frame in Chapter 1; the ways in which both text and performance art pushed against the restrictions of femininity in Chapter 2; or the ways in which *Passages*, *Tripticks*, *In Transit* and *Thru* push against the boundaries of the literary novel in becoming overtly visual, requiring the reader to decode meaning both visually and linguistically.

In the course of this book, I have drawn out overlapping strategies in the visual and literary arts towards impersonality, abstraction and anti-mastery – especially the latter. These strategies have been exemplified by women practitioners in the decades under discussion. I have suggested some reasons for this: that many of the rebellions with form and material are gendered, such as interrogations of the mythical association of women with inert matter as explored in Chapter 3, or Brooke-Rose's challenges to the sexist bias in theory and literature in her nonfiction and fiction, exemplified by her subtle retort to Robbe-Grillet in *Between*, discussed in Chapter 2. In Chapters 1 and 4 I have suggested that these artists twist structures and forms which have previously suggested normativity and enclosure, such as the frame and the diagram, or the 'models' of the Introduction title. Focusing on women authors allows for a complexification of this area of enquiry through the ways in which gender itself is a disciplinary operation and constraining factor, and through the positioning of women within these structures: as passive, inert, material; objects to be framed; models to be 'captured' artistically.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Brooke-Rose, Brophy and Quin all ceased experimentation with overtly visual techniques (at least, of

such an extreme sort) after their most experimental works. Their trajectories are of course a bit different: Brooke-Rose continued to incorporate a small amount of illustration (*Amalgamemnon*) and idiosyncratic or poetic typographical choices (*Next*), but nowhere near as much as in *Thru*; Quin died in 1973, though the typescript of her final unfinished work appears more conventional in terms of formatting than her previous three works; Brophy's only real typographical experimentation was in *In Transit*, so she is more of an outlier in this regard, included here because of the significance of that experiment and her interest in the visual arts (I include her 1962 novella, *Flesh*, for ways in which it speaks to the development of soft sculpture, the erosion of boundaries between subject and object). Whether this constitutes a general retreat from sixties optimism (or the kind of optimism that iconoclastic experiment might be seen to represent), a disenchantment with the image, a desire to be more commercially successful, an effort to fit in more with the British literary establishment, or some combination of the above, today it is not at all unusual to see visually experimental and interdisciplinary literary work, and not solely in small or independent presses (though this type of work flourishes there). There is simultaneously a renewed interest in the 1960s, with many works coming back into print (notably Quin's work is being republished by And Other Stories). While they retain their cult status, there is certainly appetite for these authors' most experimental works both within and outside academic circles nowadays.

The poor reception of *Thru* may have been one reason why Brooke-Rose ceased this level of visual experimentation, although she did also say she did not feel the need to repeat the experiment (*Invisible* 63), having carried it to its logical end point. While not all of the reviews were bad, by any means, Peter Ackroyd's *Spectator* review, 'Modernist?' (1975), represents perhaps the worst, calling it 'clumsy' and 'obvious' at the same time as offering a sexist appraisal of Brooke-Rose's author photo. Ackroyd describes the novel as 'too little [. . .] too late' and 'neither here nor there'. 'The English', he writes, 'have missed that particular development of modernism but it is too late to imitate it: we must go beyond it' (52). Ackroyd thereby succinctly demonstrates nearly all of the negative terms by which innovative women's writing is dismissed, which Brooke-Rose herself lists in 'Illiterations' in 1989. The generally lacklustre reception, including accusations like Ackroyd's of being outdated, and frustration surrounding the readership's low visual literacy (leading to visual devices being ignored, dismissed or misinterpreted) seem

like important factors in Brooke-Rose's choice to write more 'accessibly' after *Thru*. Aside from possible tensions between the liberating possibilities of novelistic indiscipline and the constraining factors of marketing and publishing, however, these authors' shifts in focus in the 1970s suggest that their visual experiments may have been at least partially motivated by the high visibility of indisciplined experiment in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the visual arts.

I have presented the 1960s and 1970s as decades in which disciplines, and the concept of discipline, were overwhelmingly called into question. As indicated in the Introduction, Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy provide a persuasive case study of the increasingly interdisciplinary and entangled art forms in these decades. To a certain extent, then, they are reacting to the proliferation of visual-verbal experiments in the art and theory of their time, but all in striking ways that seem more in touch with the visual arts (especially American art, and also European literature and theory) than with their contemporary writers in Britain, highlighting one reason for their outlier status. The legacies of these writers (and the widespread indiscipline of these decades more generally) are felt today, as well as in the decades following the 1970s. The list which follows addresses these legacies in terms specifically of visuality and indiscipline, for these writers have been influential in many other ways. Kathy Acker, like Quin, experimented with cut-up and illustration in the 1980s and 1990s; in *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) she intersperses the narrative with maps merging temporality and spatiality, sometimes of dreams, and pornographic line-drawings roughly related to the narrative content. New computer technologies in the 1990s allowed for on-screen experiments in narrative, which readily incorporated the visual, including Shelley Jackson's hypertext-experiments *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and *My Body – A Wunderkammer* (1997). Both works by Jackson play on the Frankenstein story, inviting the reader to click on body parts to progress the narrative. Perhaps as a direct result of these technological developments, experiments with visual and multimodal techniques are more common today in novels (although still in the minority) and are occasionally even part of mainstream publishing (a situation seemingly dominated by male authors), with works like Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), Steve Tomasula's *Vas: An Opera in Flatland* (2002), Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) and Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007) all achieving some measure of popular success.

Alongside the mainstream, the artist and writer Renee Gladman's practice spans fiction, poetry and drawing, the concerns of which are

all interrelated, with her interest in 'being a body in space' (qtd in McNamara) and depicting that narratively, and her dual interest in 'the line' in drawing and writing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the practice of incorporating imagery and visual devices into poetry is more common than in novels: Susan Howe's *The Midnight* (2003) suggestively places images within the text, allowing the two to play off each other; Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (2004) and *Citizen* (2014) both include images which often starkly reinforce the linguistic content; M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008) cuts up a case report concerning the murder of enslaved African people on a British slave ship in the eighteenth century; Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010) is like an artist's book, printed from a hand-made collage/text accordion book (in a box), an expression of the author's grief after the loss of her brother; Bhanu Kapil's *Ban en Banlieue* (2015) incorporates images of the poet's prone body, which among many things addresses the unspeakable nature of the instances of sexual, gender-based and racialised violence the text addresses. In small independent publishers of experimental poetry, this kind of indisciplined work is increasingly common: Lila Matsumoto's *Urn and Drum* (Shearsman, 2018) features idiosyncratic poem-image pairings; Nat Raha's *Of Sirens, Body and Faultlines* (Boilerhouse Press, 2018) exploits the spatiality of the page and includes collage-text formations; Nisha Ramayya's *States of the Body Produced by Love* (Ignota, 2019) skirts the boundaries between poetry, fiction, essay and image. Collaborative works of poetry and philosophy by Lyn Hejinian and Leslie Scalapino, *Sight* (1999) and *Hearing* (2021), provide an exploratory ethics of situated and embodied criticism. Prototype's *Intertitles* anthology (2021), edited by Jess Chandler, Aimee Selby, Hana Noorali and Lynton Talbot, collects contemporary work at the intersections of writing and visual art, showing the extent to which artists practise this kind of intermediality today.

This current proliferation of text-image work and the increasingly blurry lines between fiction, poetry and nonfiction is not to say that all of these contemporary authors were directly influenced by experimental fiction from the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, these seeming outliers in the 1960s and 1970s, including Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy, anticipated many of the directions fiction, and indisciplined art and literature in general, would take in the decades which followed – especially towards refusing strict disciplinary distinctions, and making work which does not fit neatly into any one category; and work which simultaneously explores these formal categories and restrictions at the same time as displaying an interest in the condition

of the body. Several of the works above (including Rankine's and Kapil's) use text-image work to explore issues of racism and gender-based violence, suggesting the potential power of this intermedial mode of expression, when language is either not adequate on its own or – in the way it resists change and carries violent histories embedded in its usage – may even form part of the problem. As Sontag writes, 'Language is experienced not merely as something shared but as something corrupted, weighed down by historical accumulation' ('Aesthetics' 15). This aspect of text-image work provides one avenue for future enquiry, to carry forth this book's exploration of the dual interest in the materiality of the book and the materiality of the body in visually experimental work into more contemporary examples. Work like this which employs multiple methods of communication might help us address issues especially of the unspeakable, in the ways in which it poses challenges to the disciplinary and exclusionary functions of language. Furthermore, we might use indisciplined contemporary work to investigate why disciplinary refusals, especially by women authors, proliferate in the 1960s–70s and today, what it is about these times that prompts this kind of experiment and why it has – at least in the past – subsequently receded.

This book has established a strong link between visuality, indiscipline and embodiment in the work of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy. Previous considerations of visuality in their work have largely been brief, with a few exceptions indicated in my general Introduction. None of them handles the intersection I have identified above – an intersection which expands the category of the visual in its application to literary works. Body and literary form are rarely linked in criticism on these authors (if the visual, bodily and material are even mentioned at all), partially perhaps because of the problematic ways that women's writing has been read in the past as being 'of the body' in a way that somehow men's writing was not, and of women's formal experiment being somehow feminine, even in a problematically biological sense. Cixous's *écriture féminine* is perhaps the primary example of essentialising gender in this way, and conflating women's bodies and writing style, although *écriture féminine* could of course be – and often was, in Cixous's account – conducted by men. My readings of indisciplined form consider the presence of the body specifically because of the ways that disciplinary restrictions are felt on both the bodies and the forms of these texts, because the central characters are often constrained, and because the bodies they represent and invoke are usually feminised (in being rendered as objectified, passive, confined). In particular, these texts draw our attention to the

disciplinary functioning of the gaze – the power embedded within the act of looking, and how that power structures the relationships of subject and object within situations variously artistic (observer and art object) and social (male power over objectified feminised body).

While the novels present no direct or necessary link between their formal subversion and any kind of progressive politics (to which they may or may not be subscribing) or possibility for change, there is some sense in which they are modelling reality – suggesting what might be possible – in their treatment of structure and subject, but with the recognition that models are usually simplifications. Nonetheless, these 'models' refuse to conform to a specific set of rules or restrictions; they are without, or outwith, discipline; they present not solutions but the overwhelming need to get somewhere new, and are not afraid of the unknowing, or the not belonging, in the time before that destination is reached. In their performances of indiscipline, these texts also draw attention to the inherent instability of discipline – especially around the edges. They know, according to Lauren Berlant's formulation, that '[r]ules are stretchy and norms are porous' (*Inconvenience* 23). What I have been showing with these texts is that the rigidity called for by disciplinary ideals is untenable and is bound to self-destruct – as many of these texts, especially *Thru* and *In Transit*, take great pleasure in enacting. Discipline installs its own demise, a situation which the 1960s–70s novels of Brooke-Rose, Quin and Brophy play out repeatedly, with indisciplined fervour.

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