

Translation on Edge: The Wager of Multilingual Poetics in Tessera's Last Volumes (2002-2005)

Elena Basile

University of Toronto

As a feminist bilingual journal dedicated to experimental writing, *Tessera's* fostering of a concerted dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone women writers in Canada played a pioneer role between the 1980s and 1990s in inscribing the question of translation at the heart of feminist discourse. From its first inception in 1984, *Tessera* quickly became a venue for writers, scholars and artists to intervene creatively on issues of translation, feminism, and experimental writing. Thanks especially to the efforts of Barbara Godard (one of the journal's founders), who edited an anthology of texts from *Tessera's* first ten years of publication in 1994 (*Collaboration in the feminine*), the journal's early history has both become well known and thoroughly appraised by feminist literary and translation scholars alike. Both early (Arrojo; Gentzler; Simon; von Flotow) and more recent critics (Bertacco; Capperdoni) generally agree that the journal promoted a hopeful erotics of translation, driven by "sexual" pleasure in the polysemic variances of languages and a deep seated trust in translation's capacity for a "drift/derive" (Brossard and Marlatt) of meaning capable of modifying different languages' topographies of sexual difference in profound ways.

However valuable this critical assessment may be, it assumes as its focus the work of the journal's mostly Anglophone First Collective (Louise Cotnoir, Barbara Godard, Susan Knutson, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei, Gail Scott), bypassing the fact that *Tessera* published regularly

for over twenty years and had three different editorial collectives working at its helm.¹ This historical omission has the unwanted effect of producing a fairly frozen—and to some extent idealized—image of the heyday of feminist cross-cultural collaboration in Canada, and neglects to trace the complex and multifaceted transformations of the translation poetics promoted by *Tessera* throughout its publishing history. Most importantly, this omission allows critics to avoid reckoning with the dramatic changes in *affective* tonality that came to characterize especially how the journal approached translation in its last years of publication, particularly after 2001. Such changes, I argue, speak to contemporary challenges and wagers in feminist discourse and translation poetics—challenges which the theorizations and experimentations of the 1980s and early 1990s certainly helped to confront, but whose complex and profoundly disorienting effects emerging both from the challenges of queer and anti-racist activism and from the traumatic inaugural events of the 21st century they could not foresee.

This paper seeks to explore how *Tessera* implicitly rearticulated its own translation mandate in the last three years of its publishing history (2002-2005) in order to meet the challenges of a profoundly changed trans-cultural landscape at the dawn of the 21st century. It is no small detail that in its last three years *Tessera* was lead for the first time by a predominantly Francophone editorial collective and operations materially shifted from Toronto to Montréal under the direction of Catherine Mavrikakis and Martine Delvaux. Together with an increased awareness of the tenuous and vulnerable nature of any territorialized inscription of sexed belonging within the confines of the nation-state, such shift produced a strong perspectival

¹ Members of the First editorial Collective ran the journal up until 1993, after which a Second Collective officially took over until 2002. Members of the second editorial collective who contributed to the journal between 1994 and 2002 include Jennifer Henderson, Katherine Binhammer and Lianne Moyes (1994-2002); Lauren Gillingham and Julie Murray (1997-2002); Cheryl Sourkes, who acted as the visual arts editor from 1994 to 2002; Anne-Marie Gauthier (1994-1996), Lise Harou (1996-2001), Nicole Markotic (1998-2002), Nancy Roussy (1997-1999), Patricia Seaman (1995-1998), Ellen Servinis (1996-1999), Chantal Vezina (1995-1996); Nadine Ltaif (1999-2002). Martine Delvaux and Catherine Mavrikakis, who will officially become journal directors between 2002 and 2005, had joined the collective with volume # 30, in 2001.

change with regards to the journal's language politics, insofar as it brought to the forefront not only a greater attention to *multi-lingual* (rather than just bi-lingual) cross-cultural contaminations, but also a heightened awareness of the difficulties, breakdowns and inevitable *losses* that always occur in the *uneven passages* of translation.

Space constraints force me to offer just a brief overview of the work of the Second Editorial Collective², which steered the journal between 1993 and 2002. Overall, the Second Collective modified the journal's mandate from a fairly exclusive interest in feminist experimental writing and Anglophone-Francophone dialogue, towards pursuing interventions in a Canadian cultural field increasingly interrogated from differing diasporic perspectives and through the overlapping frameworks of cultural studies, queer theory and feminist political thought. Accordingly, the translation poetics explored during the Second Collective's tenure tends to be diffuse and focused on broad issues of cultural translation rather than strictly linguistic ones—as was more often the case with the First Collective.

In contrast to this, Martine Delvaux and Catherine Mavrikakis' short tenure between 2002 and 2005 marks a return to a *linguistic* focus on translation, characterized by a particularly strong attention to the politics of feminist queer corporeality. The affective rhetoric characterizing their editorial direction differs quite substantially from both the immersive feminist stance showcased by the First Collective and the detached tone predominant during the Second Collective's tenure, insofar as they display an embattled perception of feminism as more *corporeally* besieged and fractured than ever before. Whereas the members of the Second Collective had with increasing frequency relied on the distancing conventions of academic writing in their introductions (identification of a field of study, review of the relevant critical

² Katharine Binhammer, Jennifer Henderson and Lianne Moyes were the members who served the longest—Moyes staying on the journal's Advisory Board until the journal's demise in 2005.

literature and extensive descriptions of each volume's contents) to buttress the dwindling authority of an explicitly interventionist approach to feminist cultural activism, Delvaux and Mavrikakis' introductions dramatically shift attention to a fragile, fractured and embattled corporeality that resonates with unprecedented affective intensity.³ Whether it is the multiple and excessive valences of *blood* (vol. 33-34), the policed bodies of *little girls* (vol. 35), the confusing violence of feminist *misogyny* (vol. 36), or the painfully self-aware voices that speak *languages* with an accent (vol.37-38), all of Delvaux and Mavrikakis' introductions⁴ to *Tessera* draw insistent attention to the *sensory and affective relays* that shuttle forcefully back and forth between living bodies and the social spaces they move through.

I want to draw attention to the tonality of such relays because it constitutes a marked departure in the affective tones of the journal's feminist poetics of translation, from the hopeful erotics of translation espoused in *Tessera*'s early years, to a poetics of translative *failure*, marked by an insistent exploration of the painful difficulties attending to *dwelling* in a space that in earlier years had been heralded as a *positively* seductive and appealing space of trans-cultural feminist production: *the in-between* (see Godard). Such change in affective politics need not be read negatively, insofar as it brings on its own set of critical insights into the complex imbrications of (access to) power and (speakability of) desire that characterize contemporary biopolitical deployments of gender in relation to citizenship, class, race and sexuality. It does, however, *need to be read and evaluated on its own terms* and in a context that is mindful of the

³ This is not to say that an attention to corporeality had been absent during the tenure of the Second Collective. Quite the contrary -- see in particular volume 27, on the "edged – and edgy – body ... the disabled body, and otherwise mediated and socially constructed body" (Markotic 6). What I am drawing attention to here, however, is the affective register and style of the journal's introductions, which speak to changing perceptions of feminism's epistemic authority in the cultural field between the 1990s and the early 2000s.

⁴ Two co-authored ("Blood" and "Languages") two single authored ("Little Girls," Delvaux; "Misogyny", Mavrikakis).

early pioneering experiments without falling prey to a nostalgic invocation of feminist better days.

It cannot be ignored that the last issues of *Tessera* were published in the climate of legislated paranoia following the attacks of September 11 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York, which, beside ushering in an era of “global war on terror” still with us to this day, signified an unprecedented tightening of regimes of biopolitical control and surveillance, whose capacity to single out and directly affect bodies through increasingly precise and flexible technologies of capture and statistical normalization has expanded exponentially over the past 10 years (Puar). The *disorienting* effects of such changes on feminist, queer and antiracist politics were particularly felt in the first half of the 2000s, and I believe *Tessera* was no exception to such trend. What is specific about it is how such dis-orientation shows up in the journal’s new editorial choices by way of an intensified focus on a queer corporeality marked by a state of fragile and yet politically-minded insistence on dwelling in the in-between. In this context translation appears as a *fracturing* rather than a *bridging* practice, one that *dwells* in the unraveling catastrophes of sense brought about by the sharp edges of cross-cultural collapses between bodies and languages, rather than *moves* outwardly into unforeseen possibilities of bodily and linguistic re-compositions.

In their attention to corporeality, Delvaux and Mavrikakis renew *Tessera*’s inaugural commitment to a translational poetics committed to (re) “writing the body” (Godard, “Theorizing Feminist Discourse / Translation”). Such re-writing, however, is no longer anchored “in the feminine” in any recognizable way—either as ideal horizon of post-patriarchal non-binary discourse or as the signifier of modes of desire predicated on abundance rather than lack. Rather, it emerges from the “performative” lessons of queer theory and the “hybridity” lessons of post-

Elena Basile

coloniality in ways that disrupt any easy mapping of the gendered, racial and culturally recognizable body. Ambiguity, ambivalence and suspension prevail now, in ways that are simultaneously strategic and yet forcefully imposed. An unprecedented focus on *hesitation* and *loss* seems to orient the journal: hesitation between languages and frameworks for analyzing the complexity of a present haunted by violent repetitions, and a certain loss of readability among such hesitations. What comes to the fore, then, is an affective emphasis on reckoning with an un/readable and fractured present, which may overwhelm with its negativity, but which cannot be easily dismissed.

Indeed, the most prominent poet featured in the volumes edited by Delvaux and Mavrikakis, Nathalie Stephens, offers a provocatively fractured poetics where queer corporeality meets linguistic uncertainty leading to a sustained meditation on the undecidable dimensions and the unavoidable pain of dwelling in the “interstices” of translation. Stephens’ positive insistence on “going nowhere” (“Echoes Enough of Echoes” 68) conveys a very peculiar affective resonance, whose negativity and “weak” intentionality is reminiscent of the cluster of “ugly feelings” that Sianne Ngai argues powerfully diagnose a “predicament posed by a general state of obstructed agency” in contemporary cultural work (*Ugly Feelings* 3).

Stephens—who now publishes as Nathanaël—contributed regularly to *Tessera* between 1999 and 2005, and also sat on what officially became the “comité de lecture/advisory board” once Mavrikakis and Delvaux took over. I want to offer here an analysis of one of Stephens’ first texts to appear in the journal in the Summer of 2002 (vol. 31) titled “elliptique héréditaire je.” Insofar as it contains implicit intertextual allusions to a 1989 bilingual text by Nicole Brossard and Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (*Sous la langue/Under Tongue*), this text offers a

productive space of comparison from where to begin to understand the specificity of *Tessera's* translation poetics post-2000.

Con-fusing Tongues

“elliptique héréditaire je” is a predominantly French text that exemplifies Stephens’ practice of what she calls “l’entre-genre,” i.e. a mode of writing that hovers suspended over interstices and fissures, simultaneously sharpening and collapsing boundaries between languages, gender and genre (*At Alberta*). Highlighting the French homonymy between literary genre and corporeal gender (both are designated by the word “genre”), Stephens twists the explorations of the “écriture au féminin” of the 1980s in unexpected ways. If the polysemically feminine and predominantly lesbian écriture promoted by Brossard, Cotnoir, De Lotbinière-Harwood, Godard, Marlatt, Tostevin, and many other contributors under the tenure of *Tessera's* First Collective, was future-oriented and inscribed in a libidinal economy of abundance and cross-cultural flourishings, Stephens’ “entre-genre” constitutes a far more sober approach to desire in language and the translative poetics of writing the body.

“elliptique héréditaire je” weaves lesbian desire with questions of bodily and cultural/linguistic exile, and by doing so provokes a radical *queering* and unraveling of the explicit “dream of a common language” present, however problematically, in earlier experiments. Through some of its marine imagery and extended alliterations, Stephens’ text makes inter-textual allusions to Nicole Brossard’s poetics of lesbian “délire” (a practice of unreading patriarchal scripts – “de-lire” –, which is also a productive “delirium”), and in particular to her inter-linguistic collaboration with Susanne De Lotbinière-Harwood in *Sous la langue/Under Tongue* in 1987—a chapbook about which De Lotbinière-Harwood published a brief essay in *Tessera's* vol 6, “Translating in the feminine/La traduction au féminin” (Spring

1989). A comparison between the texts is illustrative of the distance traveled by Stephens in extending (and twisting) that earlier poetics.

Similarly to *Sous la langue/Under Tongue*, “elliptique héréditaire je” offers a fragmented and lyrical narrative of a lesbian sexual encounter, where the double signification of *langue/tongue* as bodily (sexual) organ and abstract system of meaning (language) plays a central role. However, whereas *Sous la langue/Under Tongue* lingers on the utopian potential for symbolic change inscribed in the process of lesbian coming-into-representation, Stephens inscribes that same possibility within a tattered web of racial/ethnic and linguistic/cultural determinations that mark the *place* and *identity* of the eroticized lesbian body *as contested*—also revealing in the comparison, the geopolitical situatedness of Brossard and De Lotbinière-Harwood’s collaboration.

Brossard and De Lotbinière-Harwood’s bilingual text is made up of a series of page-long paragraphs, most of which begin with the formulaic “On ne peut pas prévoir si/You cannot foresee if” followed by sentences in the future indicative, which repeatedly explore the relays of “sexual” arousal obtaining between words and bodies coming into focus in an image of lesbian *jouissance*. The emphasis here is on the *positively* unpredictable epistemic effects that obtain from the orgasmic representation of lesbian sex: language is stretched and new words are invented by way of linguistic cross-contamination. Commenting on the difficult task of inscribing across two languages the same erotic intermingling of tongues described on the page, Suzanne De Lotbinière-Harwood draws attention in her essay to the word “cyprine” in Brossard’s alliterative sentence below:

Fricatelle ruisselle essentielle aime-t-elle le long de son corps la morsure, le bruit des vagues, aime-t-elle l’état du monde dans la flambée des chairs pendant que les secondes s’écoulent cyprines, lutines, marines (no pagination)

For De Lotbinière-Harwood this sentence lifts “a veil” offering an

image that speaks deeper than lips touching. What was un-seen yet known by the dreamer is now unveiled on condition she awakes, silken, salty, *cyprine*. ‘No such word,’ you say, ‘l’anglais n’as pas de mot pour le dire.’ ‘No word but wet.’ Let us read in a ‘common language’ the inter-sexual dream we are wa(1)king into. Call it Aphrodite’s foam, gynergic secretions, yoni juice. ‘Fabriquons un mot pour (se) le dire,’ redisent mes lèvres dilatées. And so border woman** that she is the translator deletes the *e muet mutant*, silent like the dreams of two mouths meeting and delivers *cyprin* into the lexical gap of the English tongue. Fondue la place des deux solitudes, là où la lenteur fait du bien. (De Lotbinière-Harwood 24-25)

De Lotbinière-Harwood’s explanation for the *foreignizing* translation strategy around the French word “cyprine” both makes obvious the geopolitical situatedness of the text’s political charge, and elucidates the affective logic of its semiotic instantiation. The lesbian-feminist “dream of a common language” is specifically meant to challenge the conventional Canadian narrative of the divided incommunicable bilingual nation. The logic of “fusion” of its two solitudes requires that De Lotbinière-Harwood make visible the symbolic displacement of a phoneme (the *e* in “cyprine”), whose elision in the target language (English) paradoxically highlights the feminine connotations that accompany it silently in the source language (French). The insertion of the new word “cyprin” in English constitutes both a *foreignizing* and a *complicit* translation strategy, insofar as it is sustained by a shared affective surge—a *sexual* arousal—that seeks to surface lesbian symbolic agency across the uneven hegemonies that structure French-English relations in Canada.

This is an example of what Barbara Godard identifies as the doubling and compounding of an ethics of cultural difference into one of sexual difference, which foreground the incommensurability of languages while also exploring their “in-between” as a space of potentially new configurations of culture/s in the feminine (Godard, *Canadian Literature at the Crossroads* 310-311). One should note, however, that the point of reference for the lesbian-

feminist community imagined here remains firmly rooted—however excessively so—in the hegemonic narrative of the bilingual Canadian nation-state.

Against this inter-textual background, Stephens’ “elliptique héréditaire je” stands out for how much further it stretches and interrogates the idea of the (lesbian) feminine as a site of excess and contradiction, with the potential of throwing into question “the nation as totality” (Godard, *Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture* 313). The text’s fragmented narrative of a lesbian encounter is situated in a geo-cultural context of extensive displacement, where the narrating “je” moves uneasily between *Andalusia*, Maghreb and Oranie, engaging her Arabic-named lover Fatma in a series of meditations in which the exilic, hybrid and (un)traceable aspects of her own Sephardi Jewish ancestry figure prominently. As mentioned earlier, the text recalls *Sous la langue/Under Tongue* in more ways than one. Take for example the following two paragraphs, under the section titled ‘le secret de la femme’:

pol(ys)émique tu effleures elle je dis fluviale *netilat yadayim* la frontière bois les deux
mains nage mémorielle les jambes ouvertes non pas ça fatidique secrète *famulus* divines
le racines mais

laila féconde rêve la trope errante dis Fatma sororale je judaïque (re)tranchée (mixte)
grito le corps captif je te veux *isha* ma langue dissonante dans le replis de ta vulve la
mienne bleutée sacre l’(a)filiation tu m’as rêvée nuit blue à découvert (dé)lyrique la mer
dévale mes migrations ma ancestrale (101-102)

Together with the extensive use of fricative, liquid and bilabial alliterative sequences, the sexualized marine imagery in the text strongly recalls *Sous la langue/Under Tongue*. Just as noticeable, however, is the text’s jagged *multilingual* texture, which both fragments the orgasmic surge described therein and forcefully draws attention to the tattered webs of diasporic memory, which situate this lesbian body’s trajectory of desire between the cracks and fissures of more territorialized belongings.

Unlike *Sous la langue/Under Tongue*, this lesbian body's "revolutionary" potential does not reside in an orgasmic surge toward the *fusional* u-topian image of a common language, as in *Sous la langue/Under Tongue*. Rather, it manifests through a no less orgasmic delving into the *painful* dissonances of *broken* tongues and a-topic belongings. Conversely, the water imagery, dispersed as it is among a range of different languages (the text is scattered with fragments of Spanish, Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino and Arabic) attains a wider range of connotations than the exclusively sexual emphasized in *Sous la langue/Under Tongue*. In the quote above, for example, the Hebrew *netilat yadayim* signifies ritual hand washing with a bowl, connecting religious ritual to a transgressive sacralising of lesbian sexuality. It is the sea (la mer), however, that acquires poignant significance throughout the text as a radical (non) space of deterritorialized identity. The sea "dévale" (hurtles, rushes over) the narrator's own "migrations" whose "ancestral" lover ("ma ancestrale") shares a "dreamy" and "sacred" space of "(a)filiation." At the crossroads of erotic and genealogic affinities the text's multilingualism gestures towards a space of *collapsed translation*, where the ideal "fusion" of tongues evoked by De Lotbinière-Harwood morphs into a jagged, painful and yet necessary con-fusion of languages marked by minor, transversal and provisional alliances that anchor the text's "je" to the provisional *rootedness of diasporic memory*.

I should specify here that such con-fusion shares nothing of the nostalgia for an original unity of language (and consequently, identity) typical of the patriarchal narrative of translation and multilingualism encoded in the myth of Babel. Rather, it can be seen as inscribed within a painfully productive and *heterotopic notion of translation*, which was in many ways the hallmark of *Tessera* all along. In "Millennial Musing on Translation" Barbara Godard meditates on the possible different topoi of translation for the 21st century: as Babelian "confusion" of languages

Elena Basile

or Jeromian “transmission” of meaning or as Pandoral “production.” Godard shows partiality towards the idea of translation as “‘*production*’ under the sign of Pandoral heterotopic spaces, whose box released the gift of proliferation, variation, source of all the world’s woes, according to some versions, or all of its wisdom, according to others” (“Millennial Musings on Translation” 46). Godard’s neutral appraisal of Pandora’s double edge *gift of translation* can be invoked here to show both the distance and continuity between early and new incarnations of feminist translation poetics.

Both the *inter-linguistic sexual arousal* of translation exemplified in *Sous la langue/Under Tongue* and the *langue dissonante* of “elliptique héréditaire je” participate of the Pandoral impulse towards hetero-topic cultural production, but in Stephens we need to note how such heterotopic productivity *inhabits* the text in a radically *irreducible* way. Amidst the multifaceted violence and stratified erasures of belonging it attends to, her jagged deployment of multilingualism reckons more forcefully than ever before with the aporetic dis-placement of body in (territorialized) language(s) and the foundational impossibility of pulling translation entirely away from the question of *loss*. There is no question that this constitutes a marked departure in the affective tones of *Tessera*’s translation poetics, from the elated arousals of early experiments to these sobering explorations of translative *collapse*, marked by an insistent exploration of the painful aporias attendant to *dwelling* in that in-between space that in earlier years had been heralded as a *positively* seductive and appealing space of trans-cultural feminist production. I want to suggest that such an intense insistence on negativity—which is everything *but* sentimental—be not pushed critically aside (or outright avoided), but on the contrary acknowledged for how it powerfully forces us to confront contemporary predicaments and ethical impasses when it comes to accounting for the grossly uneven power differentials that

obtain in our complex trans-national, trans-lingual, trans-cultural and trans-embodied trafficking in meanings.

Working the Negative

“Language is not a place, but a translation” (Delvaux 10). This is the very final sentence in Martine Delvaux and Catherine Mavrikakis’ introduction to the very last volume on *Tessera*, aptly titled “Languages.” We can read the last statement in *Tessera*’s very last editorial as echoing the journal’s inaugural theorizations of translation as a primary rather than derivative act of semiosis (Godard, “Theorizing Feminist Discourse / Translation”). In light of the considerations put forth in this paper, however, this final statement also contains a powerfully ambivalent affective resonance, which signals the ongoing virtual presence in language of what Emily Apter calls “zones of linguistic indeterminacy” that produce “a kind of exilic space in language, a netherworld [that eludes] nominalism, or the essentialism of cultural labels and proper names” (“Arch Literary Journal / A Roundtable with Emily Apter”). Apter suggests that we understand such exilic space via the ancient Latin concept of “*translatio*,” which she redeploys to designate “de-nationalized” zones of cultural transmission and re-generation (ibid.). While I am intrigued by the possibility of using this term to describe the unexpected transversal connections and fissures addressed and performed in *Tessera*’s translative experiments throughout the journal’s *whole* history, the notion of an “exilic netherworld” contains affective undertones that resonate more powerfully with the textual production of *Tessera*’s later years than its earlier ones.

Indeed, it is tempting to argue that the production of multiple zones of feminist (infra- and trans-national) *translatio* is at work *both* in early experiments such as *Sous la langue/ Under Tongue* and in the work of Nathalie Stephens. Such an assessment, however enabling it may be

Elena Basile

in terms of allowing me to offer a unified picture of *Tessera*'s unique brand of translational feminism, runs the risk, however, of passing over and underestimating the ongoing critical challenge that the more negative affective orientation of *Tessera*'s later years still poses.

For this purpose, I want to turn to two important statements about translation and about feminism, made, respectively, by Nathalie Stephens and by Catharine Mavrikakis in the Quebecois magazine *Spirale* approximately around the same time they were both publishing in *Tessera*. Stephens implicitly echoes Apter's exilic space of "translation" when, meditating on the constitutive relation that any identity (linguistic, sexual, cultural) entertains with the State, she articulates her poetic practice as operating "extra-state" and "extra-geographic" displacements, a kind of

reconstitution deleuzienne de l'espace langagier, stratifié, c'est-à-dire ouvert. À la place des langues frontières, je conçois des langues embrasures (embrasées), ouvertures, brèches, césures, dans le matériau de la littérature, des lieux de passage, d'entrée, d'accès, des seuils langagiers qui viendraient bouleverser la fermeture de la frontière sans en oblitérer l'existence. ("Correspondances: Montréal...Chicago...Wherever" 43).

Stephens' articulation of language "embrasures" rather than language "frontiers" resonates with the open-ended "dérive/drift" between languages theorized by writers such as Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt, but significantly differs from it insofar as the metaphor itself underscores the defensive vulnerability—and implicit violence—of language border-openings. Notable is also a certain ambiguity in the metaphor's sexual connotations, as an "embrasure" is an architectural opening whose very shape can recall a vaginal opening, and yet it is also functional to the hosting of cannons and other phallic weapons of penetration. "Embrasure" becomes thus a richly textured metaphor for a mode of writing, simultaneously *open to being penetrated* and *open to penetrate*, which actively pursues an ambiguously gendered space beyond the exclusive valuation of the *feminine* present in earlier experiments.

Elsewhere Stephens insists that we acknowledge the double-edge nature of gift economies in translation, reminding us that in the “in the reciprocity of giving there is an implicated reciprocity of taking and here [...] are questions that implicate the whole of the fractured, displaced self” (22). Such a reminder of the presence of “taking” in “giving” sheds a more realistic light on the unachieved utopias of the feminist gift economies of the 1980s. It also speaks to the ongoing need to think *sideways* about the unachieved temporalities of cultural change present in feminist (and not only feminist) cultural activism across three decades. Commenting on such unachieved temporalities in 2003, Catherine Mavrikakis corrosively writes:

Bien sûr que je suis nostalgique [...] mais pas du passé, surtout pas du passé. Je suis nostalgique de l'avenir, parce que ça, je l'ai éradiqué, mais ce qui n'aura pas eu lieu devra aussi régler ses comptes avec ma mémoire [...]. Je fais les poubelles du futur en quête de l'esprit qui ne vient plus à ceux qui l'attendent. Je suis dans la soif de l'avenir et rien ne me désaltère. Plus je bois et plus ça me manque. Une douleur: l'âme qui se meurt.
(7)

This statement of lucid despair, however starkly in contrast with the deep-seated trust in the performative powers of the “future perfect” which characterized so much of *Tessera's* First Collective's output, remains profoundly indebted to the impatience of its desiring ethos. Mavrikakis is nostalgic of the unachieved future her generation was supposed to inhabit already. Her short-circuiting of past and future into a “cris-de-coeur” about a murderous/suicidal present may sound extreme, and yet it cogently speaks to urgent cultural and political challenges that plague our contemporary “precarious public sphere” and the “crisis of fantasy” that the forms of life of late capitalism entail, feminism included (Berlant). As readers, Mavrikakis' statement compels us, I think, to take a second hard-look at our un/sustainable present. And continue in our efforts to cultivate it otherwise

WORKS CITED

- Apter, Emily. "A Roundtable with Emily Apter." *Arch. Literary Journal* 2 (Spring 2009). Web. June 29, 2013.
- Arrojo, Rosemary. "Feminist 'Orgasmic' Theories of Translation and Their Contradictions." *TradTerm* 2 (1995): 67–75. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. "On her Book *Cruel Optimism*" Cover interview, June 5, 2012. *Rorotoko. Cutting Edge Intellectual Interviews*. Web. June 29, 2013.
- Bertacco, Simona. "Bilingual Explorations: Reflections on Canadian Poetics." *Open Letter* 12.8 (2006): 118–131. Print.
- Brossard, Nicole, and Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. *Sous La Langue*. Montréal: L'Essentielle/Gynergy Books, 1987. Print.
- Brossard, Nicole, and Daphne Marlatt. *Mauve*. Montréal: nbj/writing, 1985. Print.
- Capperdoni, Alessandra. "Acts of Passage: Women Writing Translation in Canada." *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 20.1 (2007): 245–279. Print.
- De Lotbinière-Harwood, Suzanne. "Deux mots pour chaque chose." *Tessera* 6 (Spring 1989): 24–26. Print.
- Flotow, Louise von. "Sacrificing Sense to Sound: Mimetic Translation and Feminist Writing." *Translation and Culture*. Eds. Katherine Faull and M. Cranbury. NJ and Mississauga, ON: Lewisburg Bucknell UP, 2004. 91–107. Print
- Gentzler, Edwin. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. 2nd edition. Multilingual Matters, 2001. Print.
- Godard, Barbara. *Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2008. Print.

- . "Millennial Musings on Translation." *La Traduzione*. Ed. Susan Petrilli. Vol. 2. Roma: Meltemi Editore, 1999. 46–56. Print.
- . "Theorizing Feminist Discourse / Translation." *Tessera* 6 (Spring 1989): 42-53. Print.
- (ed). *Collaboration in the Feminine: Writings on Women and Culture from Tessera*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1994. Print.
- Markotic, Nicole. "Introduction." *Tessera* 27 (Winter 1999): 6-15. Print.
- Mavrikakis, Catherine, and Thierry Hentsch. "L'intellectuel dans l'espace public: Censure et autocensure." *Spirale: arts, lettres, sciences humaines*. 191 (2003): 7. Web. 7 Feb. 2013.
- Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.
- Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Stephens, Nathalie. *At Alberta. Essays*. Toronto: Bookthug, 2008. Print.
- . "Correspondances: Montréal...Chicago...Wherever." *Spirale: arts, lettres, sciences humaines*. 210 (2006): 41-43. Web. June 26, 2013.
- . "Echoes Enough of Echoes of Enough of Me: In Favour of 'Not Going Anywhere.'" *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*. Ed. Mary Burger et al. Toronto: Couch House Books, 2004. Print.
- . "elliptique héréditaire je." *Tessera* 31 (Winter 2002): 100-102. Print.