MULTIMODALITY IN THE POETRY OF LILLIAN ALLEN AND DIONNE BRAND: A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis develops social semiotic theory by asking it to account for the meaning-making practices of African-Canadian poets Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand. Its primary aim is to develop the theory, though it attempts to describe in new and interesting ways certain moments in these oral / written texts at the margins of the literary. The research question, what is the relationship between spoken creole and English writing? is an entry into the political issues raised by the texts themselves, and larger issues of disciplinarity and the epistemologies of linguistic and literary studies.

After giving an account of their literary-historical and black feminist contexts and an overview of the poetry of Allen and Brand, I look for a post-structuralist semiotic model of the relationship between letter and sound in Derrida's "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing". Finding his version phonetic writing too restricted to account for the practices of Allen and Brand, and deconstruction only a partial explanation of Caribbean feminist poetics, I develop a critical sociolinguistic / social semiotic account

of language standardisation, conventionality, and grammar. With the aid of Saussure's Cours de linguistique generale, I work out the formal properties of the sign necessary to account for these, and then go on to explain how they work in the texts of Allen and Brand using two social semiotic principles of production: "projection" and "embodiment". My thesis is that orality is a mode, as is dialect (including standardised language), the English grapholect, and the semiotic body. Each of these has certain meaning-making affordances not accessible in the others. The writing of Allen and Brand, as well as Allen's performance, use each of these modes to create different meanings.

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This thesis is dedicated to Lillian Allen, who started it all.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The texts of Allen and Brand dance at the edges of the capacities of linguistic description. Since some of them are performed, meanings are made in non-verbal ways (e.g., gesture, body-language, vocal sounds that are not verbal). Allen and Brand also insist on the black, female body as an inerasable presence in their meanings and therefore in their meaning-making. They insist on using oral language, whether it is recorded, performed, or transcribed. They insist that these material realities not be folded into dominant categories, such as "woman", or "language"; they ask me, as a participant, to consider what these categories hide.

This is therefore a project with a dual ambition: to work out a suitable approach for reading these texts; and to use this process to make revealing readings. It asks, what kind of linguistics, broadly conceived, is adequate as an explanatory framework for the description of these oral / written texts at the margins of the literary?

In order to focus the argument further, I follow a research question thrown up by the texts themselves. Allen writes her poetry, but also composes it for performance; many of her poems are in both print and audio technologies. The print versions often have phonetic spellings for

Jamaican English Creole words. Brand transcribes a light Trinidad English Creole, avoiding phonetic spellings but adapting a creole syntax and morphology. The written texts of Allen and Brand are therefore an ideal, socially-situated test-case for exploring the question: what is the relationship between spoken creole and English writing? This question is also an entry into the political issues raised by the texts themselves, and larger issues of disciplinarity and the epistemologies of linguistic and literary studies.

Though stylistics is considered to be the linguistic analysis of literary texts, in this thesis I move from the linguistic analysis of a literary text to a social semiotic approach. I build on and expand social semiotics, in a search for a metalanguage capable of describing the oral / written poetry of Allen and Brand.

What is the relationship between spoken creole and English writing?

My interest in the connection between creole sounds and writing came from previous literary-linguistic work I did with a thirteen-page prose poem by Dionne Brand called "No Language Is Neutral" (Casas "No Language"). The task was to look at the writer's movement back and forth between Canadian English and Trinidad English Creole (hereafter TEC).

Linguistically, these movements are known as "slides" (Labov Language in the Inner City) or "code-switches" (Gumperz). The

linguistic approach raised a series of fruitful questions. First of all, the linguistic models were from a tradition that focuses on non-literary language. The literary equivalent of these switches is called "dialect writing". Dialect writing in literary studies is treated unproblematically as the written equivalent of the dialect it is supposed to represent, while the Standard Written variety that usually contextualises it represents the imaginative status of the hero or narrator. This applies throughout English literary history, including even colonial literatures: the speaker of dialect is lower class, or an outsider; at best, the dialect speaker's identity as a member of the group that speaks that dialect is more salient than his/her individuality. The Standard Written foil to this represents a "classless" speaker or narrator. Often literacy and Standard Written dialect are in a strong connotative association, so that another dialect represents not just orality in a written imaginative world, but illiteracy[1]. A dialect speaker in English literature is often the buffoon.[2]

However, in Brand's poem, the consciousness of the dialect speaker was the same as the consciousness of the Standard Written passages. That is, the entire poem is written in the first person; it is a lyrical, highly personal narrative of the speaker's immigration from the Caribbean to Canada, with all of the international class issues this entailed (issues embedded in colonial history, in neo-colonialism, and in class, race, and

1 In short, the fact that literature is written in itself conditions the meaning of representations of non-written language.

gender oppression). Here was no "standard English" narrator sending up, or subtly objectivising, a speaker of dialect; in this highly literary and literate text, dialect was central to the thesis of the poem that "no language is neutral". Standard Written language is also a dialect, loaded with socio-political associations.

The code-switching model brought this point into relief in a way that a literary treatment would not have done. Sociolinguistic descriptions of code-switching (Auers; Blom and Gumperz; Gibbons; Gumperz; Myers-Scotton) describe people in naturally-occurring situations who speak first in one language/dialect and then another, switching back and forth either during a conversation or according to the situation in which they find themselves.[3] The fact that I was transposing from a tradition that focuses on spoken language (linguistics) into the analysis of a written text, though, raised issues that I was unable to attend to within the terms of that project.

TEC is an oral language/dialect: it has no written counterpart. Therefore, technically, there can be no code-switching into creole in a *written* text. The transformation that brings TEC speech into English writing is at first glance a simple transcription, from systematised vocal speech sounds (an

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2 See also Jaffe and Walton, in which they used Gile's matched-guise technique to show that low-socioeconomic status is a strong symbolic referent of non-standard spellings.

3 Labov's "sliding", a term used to describe American Black youth gliding from Black English Vernacular to American English or vice-versa, suggests (within the terms of reference of linguistics) that they are not speaking two languages, but sliding between varieties of one.

inventory of phonemes/morphemes/syntactic patterns) into any system for writing phonetically (e.g., the International Phonetic Alphabet). However, the further transformation from a phonetic writing system into some of the systems of English (spellings and morpho-phonemic patterns) makes the writing of creole a double transformation. It is, in fact, a transcription/translation, translating TEC as a language partially into the English language in order to place it in scribal English culture.

Each and every word is written in "English", that is, according to the spelling rules of standard written English:

> When Liney reach here is up to the time I hear about. Why I always have to go back to that old woman who wasn't even from here but from another barracoon, I never understand but deeply as if is something that have no end. ... (Brand No Language, 24)

What is not "English" is the grammar (and one special term, "barracoon", raising the question of where the lexical boundary can be set on a language). This is not bad grammar, but another grammar, reflecting another pattern of speech, with its own rhythms and sounds. How do we know this is not ungrammatical English (in the formal linguistic sense), but a different language? The answer cannot be found within linguistics. The division between dialects, the difference between dialects and national languages, and the very definition of a dialect / language must be placed in a social and political world. At the same time, the question makes no sense without reference to specific words

and their placement in relation to each other – their patterns of distribution, or grammar.

There are puzzling contradictions and the tensions around Brand's written treatment of creole. Her transcription of an oral language with no official written code raises the following questions: why did she take the trouble to transcribe creole, an oral language into a highly literary work? Why did she use exclusively English spellings, staying within the official code of standard English? What does her use of creole say; what does her spelling of creole words say; what is the message carried by her treatment of creole as a code in writing? In the terms of social semiotics: if Brand's treatment of creole were a text in itself, what would it say?

Allen's written Jamaican English Creole

Then I came across Lillian Allen's 1993 collection of poems, Women Do This Every Day. Allen began as a dub (performance) poet, publishing versions of her works in print along the way. Like Brand, she uses a written version of a Caribbean English Creole sometimes and, at other times, an unmarked written English. However, her written version of Jamaican English Creole (hereafter JEC) includes phonetic spellings, a more common practice for creole poetry. These spellings are meant to indicate the sound values of particular words. For example,

An' him chucks on some riddim
an' yu hear him say
riddim an' hardtimes
riddim an' hardtimes (63)

This passage contains some specialised terms, such as terms from the subcultures of reggae and dub ("riddim"). It could be argued that these are not spelling variations from English, but loan words, just as we might use words from the Latin such as *subpoena*. Other spellings, however, are clearly meant to steer the reader to a specific pronunciation (pronunciations of very common words like "you" and "and"). Like Brand, Allen also uses small markers of JEC grammar to condition the "sound" of printed words: in this case, she places what in English would be an object pronoun in subject position ("him chucks on some riddim").

Because Allen adapts standard English spellings to recreate certain speech sounds of JEC, her work seemed to offer a more concrete entry into the problem of the relationship between written English and spoken creole. As in Brand's case, the dialect "speaker" is not a buffoon or stock ethnic character, but the poet, whose Jamaican identity is almost equivalent to that of the consciousness behind the passages in standard written English. This removes the element of objectification that makes dialect writing an inappropriate frame.

Allen's poetry is so overtly political, so much an act of protest, activism and inspiration for social change, that there is no chance to miss the message that these spellings are part of a political message – and a

political practice. The question of what exactly the conversion is between writing and JEC is clearly bound up, in Allen's work, with emancipatory politics. For example, as a dub poet, Allen depends on the spoken Jamaican word for her effects; so that when she writes poetry, she is driven to incorporate those effects somehow on the written page. The problem is that the "phonetic" Latin alphabet in which English is written is anything but phonetic. In Chapter Three, I make the point that English spellings are so highly standardised that their most important function is to do with group membership, with power and solidarity within the dominant (written) group, and only secondarily with representation of sound. Allen's position in relation to this group – the group of "literate", English-speaking poets – is conditioned by her membership in another group – JEC-speaking political activists.

It is from the latter position that she is able to criticise the literary establishment. Her position/practice raises a number of important questions such as: what is the relationship of literature to writing? How does this relationship shape the things that can be said in literature and in writing, by women, black people, poor people, migrants, and other culturally and economically marginalised people? What are the meanings that are missing from the written and high literary, from what is normally called poetry? Allen's work is partly an attempt to say the things that can't be said in written, literary ways, because those ways do not allow these things to be said.

However, Allen's spellings are also meant to evoke JEC, an oral language. Because all Caribbean English Creoles are oral languages, they are a powerful symbolic resource for the subversion of colonial grammars on many levels. One is the grammar of standard English, which is a codification of the verbal patterns of colonial and post-colonial Britain and neo-imperial English North America. Another is the grammar that structures relationships between people of different social categories such as class, race, gender, age, and so on. In Chapter Five, I look at the properties of signs that allow one to say that the grammar of "a language" works in the same way as the grammar of a social category system such as "gender" or "race". For it is on this level that there is a connection between the oral /written nature of Allen's and Brand's poetry and the expression of a black feminist sensibility. In Chapter Two I will expand on black feminism.

Why Social Semiotics?

In what follows, there is a tension between social semiotics conceived of as a type of linguistics and social semiotics as an alternative to linguistics. It is as an expansion of linguistics that I develop social semiotics in the direction necessary to talk about these texts. [4]

4 Whether the resulting approach can be called "linguistics" will depend on the reader's agreement with the statement that linguistics is a range of different approaches to the study of "language".

Although most linguists would not consider semiotics an "expansion" of their discipline, semiotics is a natural direction for linguists who find the object of formal linguistics too restricted (by disciplinary-political concerns) to be useful in certain applications. The application of linguistics – as the study of the structure of language – to poetry seems reasonable, but it has not fulfilled its potential within the criteria of literature as a discipline because literature is interested in interpretation – in meaning-making – whereas "meaning" in linguistics is a much more limited affair. (On the other hand, in its focus on interpretation, literature in the early 21st century lacks a formal method, in the way in which method permeates formal linguistics.) One of the key differences between linguistics and semiotics, then, is that formal linguistics does not really concern itself with meaning, whereas semiotics both does and does not. In Chapter Five I explore the classical Saussurian sign from the point of view of several different formal paradoxes relevant to this initial contradiction.

However, a fundamental limitation of classical semiotics is that Saussure left undeveloped the social side of his vision of semiotics, which he introduced as semiology, "the science of signs *as part of social life*" (15, emphasis mine). Except in social semiotics, this limitation has persisted in semiotics and structuralism, so that Derrida's post-structuralist sign (Of Grammatology), based on a structuralist reading of Saussure, is an a-social formalism for the discussion of meaning-making. In Chapter Three

I look at the Derridean sign and its possible application to the problem of the transcription of creole in the written work of Allen. It is the social and political aspects of the problem of creole transcription that cannot be grasped using the Derridean sign.

It is not enough to make a linguistics "social" to make it useful for talking about politically-committed texts such as Allen's and Brand's. Classical dialectology (Chambers and Trudgill), or variationist sociolinguistics (Labov), for example, are "social" in the sense that they rely on social categories (class, age, urban / rural, occupational status, education, etc.) for their descriptions of language in social life. But these categories are unexamined, untheorised; as such, they incorporate into these linguistics relatively conservative visions of social organisation. These are in turn implicit political analyses, which in both their hiddeness and their support of the status quo preserve social inequalities (see also Williams).

Social semiotics developed out of the critical linguistics (Fowler et al.) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, van Dyke) movement in the 1980s. One of the main objectives of these projects was to focus on the ideologies that motivated texts – ideology in the sense of false consciousness – and to produce text analyses aware of the specific political motivations both in its own operations and in the operations of object-texts.

A third limitation of traditional linguistics centres on materiality. Systems of signs are everywhere in social life, and can be studied apart from language. Saussure's original vision of semiotics inspired studies of a range of objects as texts in Barthes, Levi-Strauss, and others. That fact that these texts are made up of non-verbal signs—images, food, music, narratives – shows that a linguistic method might successfully be applied to non-verbal texts. Semiotics extends its focus beyond the verbal, and within a formal paradigm that allows an analysis of both verbal and non-verbal meaning-making at the same time, in the same text.

Paradoxically, the fact that their methodological basis was a kind of linguistics has stopped many semioticians from considering the very materiality of signs. Whereas it is the assumption of linguistics that the form and content of a sign are divisible (and linguistics studies form only), it is the assumption of literary studies that form is *motivated* by content. That is, the form of a text is shaped by its content, or the content intended by the author. In this, social semiotics has adopted the assumption of literary studies that there is a motivated relation between signifier and signified (see Kress "Against arbitrariness"). But it has gone further and included the materiality of the text as a motivated signifier. Kress and van Leeuwen call this "the means and processes of inscription" (230), rightly pointing out that "the same" text written with pen and ink or written with a word processor are not the same text (231). It is this last step that makes social semiotics particularly suited to talking

about the difference between written and oral versions of the "same" text – and about the social meanings created by these different means of inscription.

What is Social Semiotics?

Theory

In previous work I undertook on code-switching in Brand's "no language is neutral", it became evident that a "code" is anything socially agreed on as a separate language / dialect / style / lect / variety / etc. In other words, a code is not a linguistic entity, but a social one carried in perceptible (verbal) reflexes. However, Brand's two codes were also indexical of ethnic identities (Trinidadian, Anglo-Canadian); and also race. These two social entities (ethnicity and race) are linked through historical relations of power between the British (to whose language these terms belong) and peoples of what is now the Third World. In addition, because of her political analysis, Brand's perception is that gender is deeply affected by – co-constructed with -- race (see Black Feminism, Chapter Two); and sexuality is also socially constructed within a network of identity relations.

From the point of view of "switching", or meaning-making by reference to perceptible codes, all of these referents (ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality) are codes in themselves. They are codes just as a language is a code in the sense that gender is a system for making sense of the world,

as is race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and others. Like a language, they are constitutive (as wholes) of personal identity. Like a language, they contain terms that are meaningful only within the terms of reference of the system (e.g., "femininity" has meaning in relation to "masculinity"). Like languages, they are sets of markers of social identity, conditioning the meanings made *with* them.

At the very beginning of Chapter Five I give a short account of semiotics; I will refer the reader unfamiliar with semiotics there with the explanatory statement that a code is a metasign (a type of sign). Social semiotics is semiotics informed by a social-theoretical critical position. It sees any instance of meaning-making as first and foremost a social event embedded in relations of power.

Kress' version of social semiotics takes interaction as a starting point for analysis, rather than structures (of language or meaning); texts are understood as collections of signs, signs as social practices. Hodge and Kress[5] aim to theorise "the social processes through which meaning is constituted and has its effects" (viii). These social processes are carried out by social subjects as agents of meaning-making, though always constrained by their social position and the context of the interaction. For Hodge and Kress, "... texts and contexts, agents and objects of meaning,

5 As I often cite Social Semiotics but rarely the other volume by Hodge and Kress listed in the bibliography (Language As Ideology) "Hodge and Kress" from now on will refer only to Social Semiotics.

social structures and forces and their complex interrelationships together constitute the minimal and irreducible object of semiotic analysis." (viii)

In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen see all texts as multi-modal – constituted through different media, or modes. A spoken text, for example, is visual and aural (sound based) as well as verbal. A printed written text is visual in the different modes of page lay-out and typography, as well as verbal. A complete description of how specific meanings are made must include a description of all the modes of the text.

Others' names have been associated with social semiotics, notably Halliday (Language As Social Semiotic), Hodge, van Leeuwen, Lemke, Thibault, Threadgold, and their students and associates. They certainly share the critical social-theoretical orientation crucial to the "social" in social semiotics; Lemke, however, takes a slightly more social-functional approach, Thibault slightly more text-based in Social Semiotics as Praxis, Threadgold explicitly feminist, and so forth. At the same time, their interest has been in pushing forward the project of creating a critical theory and practice of text analysis that sees "text" as meaning-in-the-making in socio-political context.

I have found specific aspects of the social semiotic theory of Kress useful as an entry into the work of Allen and Brand. In Social Semiotics, style is essentially social in function, by sustaining difference and identity. It

corresponds to Labov's use of "style" (in Sociolinguistic Patterns) to mean the linguistic features that identify the social provenance of speakers. Hodge and Kress take the term "style" further by designating it a "metasign", so that style and accent are not only social in origin and function, but also central to meaning. As carriers of group identity, metasigns declare a specific version of social relations, within a context in which language is normally dialogic. Multi-lingual texts are only one (obvious) site of negotiation within and between groups.

For Kress, the doctrine of the motivated sign is central, as I have said. In addition, signs can be opaque or transparent signifiers, depending on the social positions of the interactants. This makes signs texts in themselves, and not the simple tokens described in Saussure. In "Against arbitrariness" Kress argues that critical analysis must reject the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign prevalent in mainstream linguistics and semiotics. In Chapter Five, however, I will try and recover the arbitrary sign for social semiotics.

Methodology

There is the methodology for "reading" specific passages in the poetry of Allen and Brand; then there is the methodology for arriving at this methodology. Since this is a project with a dual ambition (to work out a suitable methodology for reading texts which constitute a challenge to established methodologies; and to then use this new tool to make revealing readings), more than half the project is taken up with an

argument in support of an emerging methodology. Chapter Three, for example, is a first attempt to find a methodology in the sign theory of Derrida; it contains a close reading of selected passages in "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing". This close reading is simply a recorded attempt to reason out his meanings. Various branches of sociolinguistics aid in my attempts in the same chapter to correlate Allen's practice with Derrida's description of the relationship between speech and writing. In Chapter Four I turn to the same mix of sociolinguistic variation and creolistics to explore social notions of verbal error and correctness, and their function both in meaning-making and in the social construction of "a language". The strongly interactional and discourse-analytic bent of this chapter is social semiotic.

However, social semiotics lacks the formal resources to account for the systemic nature of some kinds of meaning-making. In Chapter Five I turn to Saussure's semiotics, which relies on the sign *as part of a system*, to explain how the social-interactional work that goes into creating language boundaries on the level of the everyday is a part of more general meaning-making dynamics.

The social semiotics of Kress in its methodology is essentially ethnographic. In Chapters Six and Seven, I follow this ethnographic approach to read selected passages in the work of Allen and Brand. Chapter Six uses the notions of markers and stereotypes, introduced in Labov's Language in the Inner City, adopted for social semiotics in

Hodge and Kress, and extended here through the production principle of *projection*, for readings of passages by Allen and Brand.

Chapter Seven takes up a second fundamental production principle, *embodiment* ("experiential meaning-making" in Van Leeuwen's Speech, Music, Sound). In Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics, it is an explanation of meaning-in-the-making according to the physical actions actually or potentially made to produce it. To anticipate my argument in the next section, I take up the point from feminist theory (and Lemke's social semiotics) that semiotic bodies are socially constructed; I argue that, in light of this, even physical sensations and actions are experienced through a filter of personal, corporeal identity as shaped by power / gender / race relations. The implication for social semiotics is that as much attention has to be paid to the social ways bodies are shaped in their negotiations of meaning with the world as to the way meanings are produced through universally experienced, a-social bodies (as "experiential meaning-making"). Like Chapter Six, Chapter Seven is a reading of selected passages in the work of Allen and Brand in the light of both preceding theory and simultaneous discussion of production principles in social semiotics.

Summary of the argument

In Chapter Two I introduce the poetry of Allen and of Brand by placing their work in Caribbean literary-historical context and in the context of

Black American women writers, and finally in the context of black feminism. The point of black feminism is that in other feminisms all women are not really equal; ignoring the effect of race on the position of a woman perpetuates the implicit racism of society at large, which "erases" blacks in the same way it "erases" women by assuming a white, male point of view. My argument is that this may also lead to an awareness of the contradiction between the contingency of all social categories (but especially gender and race) and the concreteness of physical characteristics that seem to define them (especially skin colour, in the poetry of Brand).

This preliminary work gives the reader a cultural and textual context for the following argument. Recall that the guiding question of the argument is, what is the relationship between spoken creole and English writing? An obvious place to start is with phonetic spellings; here, with an imagined moment when a performance poet such as Allen wants to re-produce Jamaican English Creole in written form. The primary, taken-for-granted connection between a standardised letter and its sound is precisely what is at issue in dialect writings.

In Chapter Two I look for a model for thinking about the formal relationship between speech and writing in order to understand as precisely as possible how Allen's spelling choices might create a specific political and social position against a matrix of standard English spellings. Since this is a roughly deconstructive project, in Chapter Three

I approach Derrida's "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" (in Of Grammatology) with the expectation that a post-structuralist model of the sign based on writing[6] would help track the relationship between speech and writing.

My hopes for the explanatory power of Derrida's sign are frustrated, however, by the narrow view of meaning which informs the premise of his argument. Derrida's *arche-writing* is based on the following-through to its conclusion of an overly-simplified version—an ethnocentric version—of phonetic writing[7]. Although he argues against this ethnocentrism in several different guises (logocentrism, phonocentrism, the metaphysics of presence) and he identifies it as a key problem in the Western metaphysical tradition, he believes he is forced to remain within it (Writing and Difference 280-81).

In thinking about orality and literacy in relation to Derrida's work, I began to see more concretely how creole as an oral language might have a profoundly destabilising effect on certain codes. Dub poets such as Allen make a fallacy of Derrida's *arche-writing* through an emphasis on "versions", on local meanings, and on the materiality of their poetry. In her writings Allen is careful to retain the status of the ephemeral

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6 In polemic opposition to linguistics, which has claimed to be based on sound.

7 Since Derrida's work has been taken up at very theoretical levels in American literary scholarship, one might think that this is a mis-reading of Derrida to start with; but in "The End of the Book" Derrida's justifies "the necessity of the communication between the concept of arche-writing and the vulgar concept of writing submitted to deconstruction by it."(60)

"version" for the printed poem. Creole spellings invoke local -- contingent, historical -- knowledges through linguistic stereotypes, and they use the power of a very strong norm (standardisation of the English spelling code) to strengthen the meaning of deviance from the same norm. Although Derrida's post-structuralist sign does not, in the end, explain the relationship between creole speech and English writing, it does push forward a far more contextualised approach to the question of why Allen's transcription of Jamaican English Creole (hereafter JEC) "works" in making certain meanings in her written texts. She uses verbal stereotypes of Jamaicanness to signal 1) a cultural and political position outside the written standard, and 2) specific speech sounds.

These two "meanings" of written creole are inseparable because of the social semiotics of highly standardised languages such as English. The use of creole evokes its speakers, who hold a certain position in the postcolonial Anglophone world. At the same time, any verbal utterance, spoken or written, takes part in the positioning of its speaker by reference to standards of error / correctness. These are two different poles of reference for relative meaning: conformity to a norm and cultural identity. The situation of creole speakers in relation to writing in fact combines the dynamics of both, for recreating creole through English writing demands breaking norms of correct writing (orthographically, morphologically, and syntactically).

Chapter Four is a discussion of methodology in the light of these preliminary findings. It looks more closely at the description of certain Caribbean English Creoles as a set of dialects which can be arranged on a continuum between two poles, the local English standard and the local creole (e.g., Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican English Creole). However, the local creoles incorporate many lexical and other elements of standard English; so it quickly becomes evident that at least for creoles, continua are in fact not entities but a set of social practices in which speakers in a single community use two idealized "languages" (e.g. a Standard and a creole) as points of reference for a huge amount of communicative variation. It is a small step from dialect continua to the realisation that, if there really are such entities as bounded languages, they are mythical – or semiotic.

A treatment of languages as semiotic entities is a focus on a language as a popular notion, and the perception of the distinctness of a language as a result of a group-member's need to symbolise a standard (in the non-linguistic sense of the word) and to position themselves in relation to it. The rest of the chapter explores the implications of this in the development of an interactional approach to text analysis rather than an approach based on the notion of "language" as an abstraction of a discreet language.

The description of a text through its "language" rests on a description of that language through a grammar, and this in turn depends on a notion of

grammaticality: an utterance is either grammatical, that is, belongs "in" a language or it doesn't. But if there is no such thing as "a language", but only an idea of a language, then these grammaticality judgements have more do with a social standard (notions of error / correctness) than with "a language" in itself; and it is very easy to show that, without an entity by which to judge correctness (such as a bounded language) such judgements are social rather than absolute. That is, "correctness" in verbal meaning-making is generated not by reference to a standard (national) language, but by the relative social status of speakers. It is the higher-status speaker who speaks correctly.

The boundaries of a language (or other codified verbal entity such as a grapholect, or written version of a language) are where judgements of correctness are the same as judgements of inclusion on two different levels. On the first, marginalised or lower-status speakers are marked by their usage as Other, while their status marks their usage as such. In other words, there is a double play characteristic of semiotic phenomena in which material distinctions (usage) both create and are created by mental (and in social semiotics, social) distinctions. The boundary of a language is thus a crucial site of status-negotiation between participants in any exchange.

On another level, judgements of correctness are also judgements for the inclusion or exclusion of any particular item or pattern "in" the language / code of the community. Thus, in any exchange (including the

production/consumption of literary texts), this boundary, this attention to marked items, functions *not just* as a mediator for the positioning of writer and reader in relation to one another, but also as a joint re-definition of the language / boundary – and a re-creation of the code.

But if there is no such thing as "a language", what is this "code"? Since it is a term from formal semiotics, in Chapter Five I go to Saussure's Cours de linguistique generale to find out. In Cours a code is a "system" – a term that will become useful for working out the relationship of implicit codes to each other and to the terms within them (signs). I find evidence in Saussure for two different and seemingly contradictory models of the sign – the sign as unitary, and the sign as a duality. However, both aspects of the sign are necessary to explain how the sign works and how it functions in a system.

Every sign is really a sign-function during which two symbolic systems are generated at the same moment and only for the purposes of the immediate interaction. In order to do this, the two systems must be closed systems. What creates a sign-function when they are simultaneously generated is the strength of the boundary between the signifier and the signified, which is constituted from the boundaries of the closed systems.

This is the very same boundary that speakers in social interaction negotiate in establishing their standing through verbal error / correctness;

they make reference to the perceived boundaries of a national language (whether some verbal pattern is "inside" the language or excluded by the language i.e. incorrect), or to some sociolect as a sub-set of the language. It is also the boundary between material phenomena (such as grapheme and phoneme, or thought and sound, as in Saussure's example). Material phenomena are always semioticised in social terms.

The implicit references to systemic boundaries in the everyday deployment of social categories such as national language, "race" and gender, the boundaries people use to position themselves and each other socially, are the very same boundaries that constitute these categories; so that, contrary to the common-sense belief that these categories "exist" transcendentally, Saussurian semiotics can show that they are constituted and re-constituted *as systems* in every moment of interaction. The same applies to modes such as languages, the voice, writing, the semiotic body; by looking at the sign, we can see that material distinctions are socially-defined and maintained.

This last insight explains how materiality, such as ink on paper or vocal sounds, becomes semioticised as modes: from this point of view a mode is a socially-constructed, bounded set of potential (material) signs, acting as a sign in itself and inevitably participating in different discourses. A dialect (including a national language) is a mode; a grapholect is a mode; a voice is a mode (especially in literary studies); a body is also a mode.

From the formal model in Chapter Five we can take away some explanations of how meanings are made *in production*. In Chapter Six I look at projection, a practice that relies on the very same perceived boundaries of dialects I have been theorizing. Brand makes full use of code-switching of various types and on various levels to make meaning. When applied to modes (speech and writing, in this case) as well as dialects the model begins to make better sense of transcribed creole not as written, but as *written to be read as if heard*. That is, the very same formal and social semiotic principles that come into play in the making of meanings across two "languages" come into play in the making of meaning by reference to different juxtaposed modes. Allen's phonetic spellings rely on the same principles of projection, with the added element of visually-iconic markers of difference from the orthographic standard (such as "dun" (done); "yu" (you)); these visual reminders create the same differences in mode by reference to a matrix of standard English spellings.

The move from considering the written texts of Allen and Brand as multilingual to multimodal (although still written) opens up an enormous range of material connections in their texts. Although still written, their poetry is also oral; if oral, then also embodied; if embodied, then also participating in discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and a host of other systems of social organisation and individual identity. But crucially, seeing the semiotic body as a mode (that is, as a resource for making

certain meanings that cannot be made in any other way) allows certain meanings to be made in the English grapholect that cannot be made in any other way.

In Chapter Seven I take up this and further insights from Chapter Five in relation to embodiment and codes of identity: what I call social category grammars. Like the grammars of languages, social categories are not transcendent and immutable, but constructed in interaction in the everyday (i.e., in texts such as Allen's and Brand's). "Race" is the name of a set of grammars that includes the terms black, white, Asian, Latin-American, Oriental, and so forth, in different combinations, including some potential terms and ignoring others according to the history of a particular place. These are not essential terms – there is no such thing as "a black" or "a female" – but relative terms – "black" as "non-white", "female" as "non-male". People behave *as if* these terms are "true"; and that is the fundamental insight of semiotics.

The term "metasign" from Social Semiotics is useful as a way of remembering the contingent qualities of these codes: their constituent signs, which are very often embodied (dress, posture, skin tone, voice quality, and so forth) are signs about signs, that is, they are indications of how signs denoting content are to be read; they are not (just) signs in themselves. In other words, instead of "whiteness", there is a quality or style of "white" conditioning all meanings made under its aegis. The analogy to keep in mind here is that of the popular notion of "a

language" – the content of an utterance may be comparable in French or English, but the mode is different – making the meaning different. And, just as speakers' negotiation of the boundaries of "a language" is a way both of establishing their relative status as well as mutually re-creating the language, speakers negotiating their identity in terms such as "American" or "black" are taking part in the re-creation of these systems of identity metasigns while negotiating relative status.

This last step is crucial as an explanation of the role of embodiment in the poetry of Allen and Brand. Their aim is not to destroy discourses of race and gender, which would not only be an impossibility but also a loss to their sense of self; their aim is to bring these discourses, which circulate in embodied signs, into both literary culture and the written mode.

Work done in the area

While there have been no major critical studies focusing on the language of African-Caribbean women's poetry, in recent years there has been a fair amount of activity focused on Afro-Caribbean women writers in diaspora (Chancy, Hoving). Prior to that, the focus had been more generally Caribbean women's writing, collected in for example, Wisker, Cudjoe, and Davies and Fido; and on "Black women's" writing as a rather arbitrarily defined corpus encompassing African-American, -Caribbean, -British, and -Canadian writing in all genres (e.g., Nasta).

Fiction tends to receive more attention than poetry: there have been a number of articles and at least one book-length study of West Indian women's fiction (O'Callaghan). Female dub and reggae poets and calypsonians are excluded from these literary groupings, with one exception: Cooper's Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body in Jamaican Popular Culture.

An academic in literary studies, Cooper in this book ventures onto the more slippery terrain of theorising and "reading" Jamaican oral performances and song lyrics. Texts by Louise Bennett, Jean Binta Breeze, and the Sistren Collective receive attention (only Jean Binta Breeze is a dub poet); the remainder of the performers in the study are men. Cooper looks at Jamaican verbal art, both written and as embodied performance, in the light of current literary and feminist theory. Her thesis is that oral and scribal[8] culture are a continuum for verbal artists in Jamaica, and that the functions of orality in Jamaican popular culture include an attempted reversal of colonial hierarchies of gender, ethnicity (African vs. European) and "taste". It is a thesis similar to my own (about the connection between grammars of language and those of gender and race), developed in a more generalised, post-modern discourse.

8 I borrow this term from Cooper, who uses it in a general way through her collection of essays to mean the discourses and practices of written literary texts (in the specific context of Jamaica). See "literary" in Terms, below.

Cooper considers the question of the transcription of creole: "...Popular orthographies for Jamaican depend exclusively on English orthography: colonialism inscribed."(12) Like Habekost, she points out that a perfectly consistent phonetic spelling makes reading difficult "for readers literate in English. The words on the page look strange; they don't 'sound' [create subvocalisations?] like they would in English" (12). This is an interesting reversal of my experience with Brand's transcription, which is *not* phonetic however; and it is true that Allen's phonetic spellings very occasionally seem to thud (sub-vocally). My best guess is that readers subvocalise their most familiar orthographic system and have trouble 'hearing' the sounds of others. Cooper supports the project of writing creole, however, experimenting with various systems in her own writing..

Separate articles can be found on the work of Allen and Brand, although Allen's work tends to receive more attention from reviewers of her performances and albums than from literary critics. Even Rogal's article in Books in Canada says more about performance poetry as an alternative to high literature than about Allen's texts in themselves. There is, in effect, a telling silence about Allen's actual texts in the serious literary and academic press.

An exception is Eldridges's analysis of the race and international class politics of Allen's poetry and its critical reception. Eldridge is an academic working in cultural studies; and of the writings on Allen's work, this is the most critically sophisticated. Its location in disciplinary-methodological space is at a junction of political analysis, contemporary history, and text analysis, inspired by the cultural studies of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. Deeply embedded as the text analysis is in commentary about the contemporary political and social issues that motivate Allen's texts, it is perhaps the only satisfying reading of Allen's texts from a literary point of view, in that it interprets her texts insightfully and thoroughly, with attention to performed aspects of meaning as well as purely verbal ones. Significantly, it does not use the traditional tools of the literary critic, either of literary theory or of close reading. Eldridge's article is a partial answer to one of my questions, which was, what approach is adequate to talk about Allen's texts (and implicitly, why is a traditional literary / language-based approach not sufficient)? The essay, however, is mostly silent on the issue of Allen's treatment of standard, written English, and her transcription of sound.

In the popular music press, there have been a fair number of reviews of Allen's work (e.g., Tompkins, Carr, Doran), especially in two the years in which she won Juno (Canadian pop-music industry) awards (1987 and 1988). In the Fall 1988 issue of MUSICWORKS, an interesting interview with Allen by Bartley gives insight into the genesis and spirit of dub

poetry, especially as created by Allen, and into her philosophy of meaning-making. One of Allen's responses, about dub and about phonetic spellings, is referred to in Chapter Six.

Habekost's rewarding book-length study of dub poets, Verbal Riddim, can perhaps best be described as pop-musicological. It contains two chapters in which Allen's work (with that of other dub poets) receives attention. His interpretations are interesting for the equal attention he gives to the written and performed versions of the same poem (e.g., Allen's "I Fight Back", 148-58). For example, he makes remarks about Allen's choice to render the written version of "I Fight Back" in standard written English, without phonetic spellings, even though on the Revolutionary Tea Party album the poem is performed in JEC. One line, quoting a white ethnic Canadian, is performed in standard Canadian English; Habekost makes the interesting point that the original, Jamaican persona replies to this white speaker in standard Canadian English as well. But this is a passing observation; my own interests would pursue this observation to ask, what meanings are made at that point by Allen's changes in code? Even more fascinating, how does Allen make decisions as to what to render as JEC in writing and what to present in a neutral written standard?

Habekost also gives attention to the transcription of dub as performance, and to the transcription of "Patois" (JEC). The inconsistencies in the transcription of creole, even in the work of one poet, can be accounted

for by the need to compromise between "dialectal authenticity and lexical intelligibility" (107), (though it can also be "carelessness". Habekost takes the performance as the basis for the transcription.) Habekost summarises the issues in the debate about standardizing a creole orthography in Jamaica. He ends with a quote showing Linton Kwesi Johnson's transcription, which, he says, "not only use[s] Patois as a means of linguistic/oral resistance to the standard form of (colonially rooted) English, but ... also effectively transfer[s] this idea to the page in an endeavour to make visible the African base of [his] language." (107-108).This is the "deviance" role for phonetic spelling I have mentioned.

Brand has been given more attention by literary critics (e.g., Sarbadhikary, Zackodnick). Among the most developed literary-critical commentaries is Hunter's essay, which points out that, in common with two other Trinidad-Canadian women poets, Brand's work paradoxically depends on hegemonic modernist poetics (of fragmentation) to develop an alternative position from which to articulate her experiences of racism in Canada. Kaup focuses on the literary-historical position of Brand and other West Indian writers in Canada, tracing their evolution from expatriate writers to members of Canada's literary community. Both are silent on the technical choices made by Brand in rendering TEC in writing.

Meira uses a Lacanian approach to read "hard against the soul", Brand's lesbian love poems in No Language Is Neutral, creating an extended

reading focused on Brand's treatment of the body in her writing. Her perception of the body in Brand's poetry is perhaps similar to mine:

> the binary as a structural device is replaced by the fold so that there is consequently no distinction made between subject and object, context and content and finally between body and gaze... she refuses all such significations so that the writing subject is collapsed within the body of the text (89).

She concludes: "... Brand's writing constructs the female body as a site of performance, whether of the gaze or of the voice, the embodied/enacted textual body, the body constructed by language..." (91) These descriptions redound with mine, but they are embedded in a different approach to description (Lacanian) which makes her explanations for these characteristics of Brand's poetry quite different. The contrast is interesting.

In sociolinguistics, the current climate of acceptance for critical sociolinguistics in the UK has facilitated my own construction of a bridge between sociolinguistics (especially interactive sociolinguistics) and social semiotics, one which furthers my thinking about the textual practices of Allen and Brand. LePage's work on "acts of identity" has been enormously influential, both on my MA research as well as its expansion and development here. Rampton and Hewitt also do ethnographic work at the borders of languages, and of identity groupings;

however, they do not look at written texts, and the connection they make between language and identity as processes is less carefully articulated as a theoretical statement than LePage's. Sebba's work on a specific creole in the metropolis (London Jamaican) is useful as general background, bearing out my own findings in the practice of Brand; however, his work on creole spellings in the UK "Phonology meets ideology" has direct relevance for my interests here.

Following Street's "ideological" analysis of literacy practices, he examines the approaches to phonetic spellings taken by contemporary British Creole writers, from data in his Corpus of Written British Creole. He points out that certain phonetic spellings, such as "k" for /k/ where English would use "c" (e.g. in "kool") have no function in indicating a different sound value for the grapheme, but do have symbolic meanings linked to the indexicality of the reference: not-English (he calls it "distance", or, following Kloss, *Abstand*). In contrast to "autonomous" approaches to orthography, which argue for orthographic systems for oral languages based on learnability or accessibility through neighbouring systems, an "ideological" approach to orthography would take these sorts of practices into account.

It is a great article, and I have not done full justice to it here; however, in this research I start from Sebba's observations, arrived at independently, and use them as premises in an argument for something a little different, or perhaps larger; that an "ideological" (social semiotic) approach to

written creole in some texts by femininist African-Caribbean writers reveals principles of meaning-making that are applicable more generally.

Another more recent article about the ideological aspects of spelling is Jaffe's introduction to the special issue of Journal of Sociolinguistics on orthography (November 2000). She covers much of the same ground, very quickly, that I do in this research, without of course, finding implications for social semiotic theory.

In social semiotics, Kress is the primary influence, and this thesis is an elaboration of his work in Social Semiotics (with Hodge), especially Chapter Four "Style as Ideology". Less to the foreground in this thesis, though still influential, is his work in Reading Images (with van Leeuwen); and the ideas in this thesis were developed while Multimodal Discourse was under development, so although there are few explicit references to Multimodal Discourse and its terms, a close reader of both texts will see the parallel paths of research. At the same time, my aims were both smaller in scope (what is going on in the space between creole and writing for Allen and Brand?) and different in disciplinary orientation (how can this work help bring together linguistics and literature?).

Other social semioticians have been mentioned above: Lemke, Thibault, Threadgold, Halliday. Halliday's Social Semiotics was an important point of departure for many social semioticians; in the twenty-five years

since its publication, in which social semiotics has been pushed forward, many functional linguists, ethnographers of communication, and critical discourse analysts have also made particular concepts in it their point of departure. One example is Halliday's notion of anti-languages. I do not apply it to creole because it appears to me that creole is more than an underground sociolect, even in diaspora; and because it leads to the same one-dimensional text analysis as code-switching, neither of which account for the connections between language, mode, and gender / race evident in Allen and Brand's texts. Creole spellings might be considered attempts at a written anti-language; but again, mode is not considered in Halliday's anti-language, and my focus has been the oral / written political relationship. Consideration of this relationship deconstructs unitary entities such as "an" anti-language, although in Chapter Four I mention anti-languages briefly as an example of the connection between prestige – even covert prestige – and the shape of "a" language.

Thibault's Re-Reading Saussure would seem to be of central importance for Chapter Five, which contains close readings of passages in Saussure's Cours. I agree with many of Thibault's readings, and with the project of reclaiming Saussure for social semiotics; I disagree with Kress' reading of Saussure in Social Semiotics (seeing more honest ambiguity in the Cours than Kress allows for). However, I found in the end that my own purposes in re-reading Saussure dictated a different path through these ambiguities than Thibault's.

Threadgold's Feminist Poetics was helpful in suggesting connections between social categories, linguistic categories, and levels of metalanguage; and of the importance of including the gendered, raced body in a materialistic theory of meaning-making such as social semiotics. It led to my further researches in Butler, black feminism, and to much of my attempt in Chapter Seven to connect bodies, grammars, and meanings. Threadgold's writing on metalanguages, and on linguistics as a metalanguage, was also supportive of my own thinking represented in this thesis by the notion of grammar as a powerful, meaning-making contradiction in terms; and of its essentially representational character.

Terms

Diaspora: this word in its generic spelling can refer to several historical dispersals of a people. Throughout this thesis, unless indicated otherwise, it refers to the emigration of a large number of people (in roughly 1950-1985) from the formerly-English Caribbean to London, Toronto, and New York.

Orality: In my usage, orality is a *mode*. Here I am using a distinction presented by Gregory and Carroll between the actual material of the message (the medium) and the "distinctive set of linguistic features associated with a particular, recurring relationship" (38). That is, a text

such as script can be in a written medium but an oral mode if it employs many of the linguistic (syntactic, lexical) features usually associated with speech. Speech is the medium; orality is the mode.

Mode: Mode is employed in this thesis to mean a socially-defined constellation of means of inscription as one material genre, or mode, e.g. film, photography, writing, page lay-out; but also the semiotic body, the voice, gesture, etc. Mode is also a term in the most recent work of Kress and van Leeuwen (Multimodal Discourse), defined as

> ...semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action. Designs then use these resources, combining semiotic modes, and selecting from the options which they make available according to the interests of a particular communication situation.
>
> Modes can be realised in more than one production **medium**. Narrative is a mode because it allows discourse to be formulated in particular ways (ways which personify and dramatise discourses, among other things), because it constitutes a particular kind of interaction, and because it can be realised in a range of different media.
>
> It follows that media become modes once their principles of semiosis begin to be conceived of in more abstract ways (as 'grammars' of some kind). This in turn will make it possible to

realise them in a range of media. They lose their tie to a specific form of material realisation. (21-22)

Literacy: I use "*literary*" in the traditional sense, with connotations of high literary culture, in order to retain its etymological link with "literacy" and the written mode. "Orality" includes both the mode and any works that would be called "literary" if they were written. This avoids the oxymoronic "oral literature" and retains the link between writing, literacy, standardisation, and the British nationalist-imperialist projects associated with training in literacy, literary canonisation, and literary education. I do not use the term "literacy" to mean control of specific cultural knowledge or social practices (Street).

Contingent: implicitly contrasted to transcendent or a-historical; as *contingency*, a quality of temporariness, but also dependence on and interconnectedness with numerous features of the social space that together construct meanings at any given moment.

Creole: I am aware that with this term I am eliding the difference between many different English-based creoles[9] in the Caribbean, as well as their diaspora counterparts. (See Sebba for a description of London Jamaican, popularly known as "creole" among its users.) However, since my remarks are most often about the relationship between any one of these historically and lexically related languages and standard written

9 Not to mention the French-, Spanish-, Dutch-, and Portuguese-based Caribbean creoles.

English, I use "creole" to designate the generic political entity. Depending on the context of use in the following chapters, "creole" means either London Jamaican or one of the Caribbean English Creoles used either in the Caribbean or in Toronto. I reserve the proper name *Caribbean English Creoles* when connoting their status as autonomous linguistic entities within the discipline of linguistics.

Black. Although I find this term racist, I use it because it has the widest currency amongst the poets under discussion. I find it racist because of the connotations of the colour black in European culture (the unknown, the negative, the impure, etc.), which are emphasised when one considers that "[B/b]lack" is used in the UK and the U.S. to designate recent immigrants from many parts of the world besides Africa. This creates the lexical sets: black/non-white/not-us and white/us, which is the semantic structure of the dominant group. "Black" is the American spelling; it is most often spelled with a lower case ("black") in the UK.

Western. Again, a compromise term denoting Europe and its settler colonies (Canada, the United States, Australia are the largest UK settler colonies), which have become the sources of hegemonic culture in the Third World. Of course it ignores the fact that the "settler colonies" are merely extreme forms of the European invasions of established cultures all over the world.

"Race" is almost always in quotes to remind the reader that this is a purely social, and very shifting, category. It is not a scientific category – in biology the human species has no sub-divisions by race, unlike spiders, which species contains several races.

Positioned practice, a term from Thibault's Social Semiotics as Praxis, one of whose concerns is subjectivity in social semiotics. It is a useful term for "person" when I wish to emphasise the embeddedness of subjectivity as a practice in the social categories I discuss in Chapter Seven (see also Thibault Social Semiotics 8).

Poetics is the philosophy of literary meaning-making; I most often use to refer to a specific philosophy (e.g., the poetics of Allen).

Chapter Two

LITERARY CONTEXTS

In Chapter One I sketched a set of contrasts between linguistics and literature. Linguistics is here considered a range of different approaches to the study of "language", which is the object of study that all the different types of linguistics have in common (as well as being the construction of the discipline). Literature must be distinguished from literary studies, which is the discipline; literature is its object, constructed in the same way as the object of linguistics (i.e., circularly, by the discipline for its own consumption). My approach is to inhabit the space between these two disciplines, using each to look at the other.

This strategy is suggested by the texts under analysis. The poetics of Allen and Brand are partly driven by their perception of a gap between the nature of their own expressive strategies and (especially in the case of Allen) those considered literary or acceptable. Many times this gap is seen as a lack of participatory legitimacy; in many cases they feel their "language" (both national and personal) is constrained by dominant socio-political forces permeating their world. These are the forces arising out of European colonisation and neo-colonial cultural and economic

exploitation. Brand especially is aware of a dominant "language" whose function is to silence alternatives.

But my dual approach is also necessitated by the diverging epistemologies of linguistics and literature. Stylistics is traditionally the application of linguistics to literary texts. However, to "apply" linguistics uncritically to literary texts almost certainly misappropriates the linguistics, as well as creating a reading that falls below the standards of a bona fide literary reading. By that I mean that in literary studies one reaches for the most plausible readings of texts, with (often) no prescribed method; this creates the condition for very rich readings, readings that cannot hope to be equalled by an approach developed within linguistics for another object of study (e.g., dialects; the structure of a national language; code-switching; Universal grammar). In order to "do" both disciplines at the same time, I have found that, as a linguist, I must explore fully the cultural context of the text in my analysis: this is one defence against reductive readings.

In this chapter, then, I discuss the literary-historical context of the work of Allen and Brand. I set their work in Caribbean literature to start with, gradually narrowing the focus to other African-Caribbean women poets, and then looking at Black American feminist literature and politics as explanatory contexts. I discuss a common theme of exile amongst women African-Caribbean poets in diaspora, excluding those who have settled in the United States. Next, I supply an overview of the themes and

concerns in Brand's poetry as a corpus; and then of Allen's. Finally, I describe two important literary/semiotic innovations that have influenced the work of contemporary African-Caribbean women writers: nation language, and dub poetry.

Literary-historical context

Because Allen and Brand are African-Caribbean, as well as Caribbean-Canadian, I set their work in the Caribbean canon and in diaspora. Below, I discuss their poetry and politics in relation to those of Black American feminists.

Perhaps the strongest canonical[10] influences on contemporary Caribbean poets are Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Both are African-Caribbean poets, one relatively Eurocentric in style and thematics (Nobel Laureate Walcott), the other steadfastly Afrocentric (Brathwaite). Writing from an educated middle-class position within the Caribbean since the mid-fifties and sixties, they have been internationally recognised as talented and sensitive poets, but they have not been particularly interested in re-examining dominant structures of patriarchy. The conflicts that give energy to their writing are about race and class, as these have been constructed by the official history of the Caribbean.

10 This historical schema refers to works published and considered canonical because of their inclusion in Caribbean Literature course syllabi, especially in North America; women of African descent in the Caribbean have been writing all along, but 1) publication has been overwhelmingly dominated by men, and 2) poets working in nation language like Louise Bennett have until recently been excluded from the canon.

Phrases such as "the people" and "the African race" in Brathwaite's seminal epic-poetic narrative of the African-New World diaspora The Arrivants refer exclusively to men.

Brathwaite and Walcott belong to Birbalsingh's "third stage" of English Caribbean literature, which lasted from roughly 1965 to 1980 (although both remain active). According to Birbalsingh, writers at this stage espouse post-Independence interests, in contrast to their predecessors, who were concerned with probing their predecessors' colonial outlook. The post-1980 generation on the other hand, Birbalsingh's "fourth stage", are concerned with their experiences as citizens of the "external frontiers" of the English-speaking Caribbean: London, New York, and Toronto (xi-xii). Although Birbalsingh does not say so, most of the diaspora poets of the 1980's are women.

Most of these women poets live and work in Canada (e.g., Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, Nourbese Philip, Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior) and England (Merle Collins, Grace Nichols, Amryl Johnson); but within the English Caribbean, poets such as Lorna Craig and Opal Adisa Palmer have also established themselves. This grouping has been recognised in the critical literature[11]. However the literature almost always excludes the women dub poets (see below for a description of dub). Within the self-defined enclave of dub poetry, a strong group of poets (Lillian Allen,

11 See Cudjoe, Davies, Davies and Fido, Williams, Wisker, Thompson, Mordecai and Wilson, Hoving, Bloom, and Chancy.

Ahdri Zhina Mandiela, Afua Cooper, Jean Binta Breeze[12], among others) developed very similar themes and concerns to those of the women poets who distribute their work primarily in print. Of these, Allen was performing in Canada in the seventies, although her commercial debut album Revolutionary Tea Party was not released until 1985. Her first commercially-distributed collection of print poems, Women Do This Every Day, was published in 1993. [13]

Female and black

> The concept of the simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality and, I believe, one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black feminist thought. (Smith, xxxii)
>
> We ... find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. (Combahee River Collective, 275)

Although the gender stereotypes that pressure relations between people make them complex, it is a fair generalization to say that Black men have

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12 Breeze spans generic boundaries, having begun as a dub poet and moved into a less restricting sphere of poetry in any style.

13 There are many other women writing poetry in the Caribbean and in the Caribbean diaspora (see Espinet). The fact that they are not included here by name contributes to the manufacture of "literature" as a body of texts created by positioned subjects. It also highlights the fact that the written literary is created by the positioned-practices of editorial selection, and relatively wide distribution.

often tried to maintain a patriarchal relationship to Black women; and white feminists have often maintained a race hierarchy amongst women by ignoring the effect of race on their theory and praxis (for example, see Smith xxv). The special point of view of black feminism is not just that Black women are doubly oppressed, but that race and gender, as simultaneous oppressions, create a special position for Black women in which they are often excluded from the identity "woman" (often meaning white women exclusively; in itself it is a non-raced term); while also excluded from the identity "Black".

In Inessential Woman, Spelman uses the example of a 1986 New York Times article about "women and Blacks" in the U.S. army to illustrate this point, which she calls the "ampersand problem" in feminist thought. In the article, it is clear that the 'women' referred to are white, the 'Blacks' referred to are male (114) . She makes the point that since it is a group of men and women who are being contrasted, it makes no sense to see Black women as a composite of the two categories. The category 'woman' in this usage excludes Black women, while "the men in question are not called men. They are called 'Blacks'." (115)

This leads to further insights. The first is that it is impossible to participate in a system of race metasigns without also participating in a system of gender, and *vice versa*. In "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory", hooks writes:

> ...Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favour their interests and support the continued oppression of other groups. Black male sexism has undermined struggles to eradicate racism just as white female racism undermines feminist struggle. As long as these two groups or any group defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling-class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others.

> Black women with no institutionalized "other" that we may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress often have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology. This lived experience may shape our consciousness in such a way that our worldview differs from those who have a degree of privilege (however relative within the existing system). It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and makes use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counterhegemony.... (145)

hooks is imagining a way out of all sorts of oppressions based on "ism-s" – that is, she draws a connection between anti-racism and anti-sexism movements through their common strategy of shoring up their power base by identifying with one set of oppressions in order to escape another. She is right to point out – and this is a point that can most easily be perceived through the lens of system-based semiotics – that as long as these movements exploit any Other, they contribute to the system they seek to change. This is a point that is applicable to all North Americans (and British – hooks is writing exclusively of the United States); no American can escape their participation in systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, just as they cannot escape

their positions at different intersections of these systems. The point of view of black feminism is inclusive in its insistence on confronting the oppositions of "female" (male) and "black" (white) and pointing out that every term depends on its opposite (this semiotic dynamic will be discussed at length in Chapter Five).

In Inessential Woman, Spelman goes on to discuss "somatophobia" (fear of and disdain for the body) (126), arguing that in Western culture both women and Blacks, independently, have been identified with the body, in a view of the body as essentially negative, more animal-like and sexual in a scheme of values that disdains the body. I would add that politically-conscious Black women are in a unique position to understand the role of somatophobia in the oppression of both Black men and white women; and to understand the contingency of the basis for that oppression. Faced with the contradictions of being black but not female and female but not black, the social underpinnings of the meanings of a "black" body and a "female" body become much more salient.[14]

Though these signifieds are culturally relative, in lived experience their meanings are part of the body-as-self. Given the somatophobia of

14 A further contribution to the perception of the contingency of social categories specifically by African-Caribbean women in diaspora is their experience of displacement from one set of local social categories to another. As is the case for other immigrants, often the first social reality they have faced is a new social positioning, in this case as a different kind of black woman in a different set of social category grammars (see theoretical section for more on social category grammars). The transferrals and transmutations that "race" signs and their referents undergo when social subjects are displaced has been brilliantly explored by Fanon within the framework of psychoanalytic psychology (1986).

European male culture, black women run the risk of carrying a double burden of self/body-hatred, by constantly confronting the damaging aspects of representing a range of negatives. The following extract from Brand's "no language is neutral" describes the subject-position:

> ...A woman who
> thought she was human but got the message, female
> and black and somehow those who gave it to her
> were like family, mother and brother, spitting woman
> at her, somehow they were the only place to return to
> .....
> ...and it was
> over by now and had become so ordinary as if not to
> see it any more, that constant veil over the eyes, the
> blood-stained blind of race and sex. (No Language 27)

Brand plays with names for the social subject here, starting with "woman", from whose point of view woman and human are synonymous. However, all meanings made around her and to her, meanings which are aggressions in themselves ("spitting woman / at her"), make her "female and black", that is, the opposite of human, that is, animal (by virtue of the semantic implications of the conjunction "but"). In the last few lines Brand shows the circularity, the mundane nature of these meanings, by capping her narrative with an unstable referent for "now", so that the narrative past tense is modified with the phrase "it was over by now". People think they "are" somatic meanings (those meanings entailed by race and sex) in a timeless way.

As Black Power and other movements have done in the New World, African-Caribbean feminist poetics turns the object of prejudice into one of pride—in this case, pride in the body. However, these bodies are female, and it is this particularity of experience that flowers into a strong, female sense of self. Brand has written with attention to the link between racism as an issue of physical appearance and sexism as a force that targets the female body, while showing the effects of social and political oppression on her sense of body-as-self. She identifies as Black lesbian, which is a complex resolution to a wide range of difficult positions. Allen's poetry is also strongly woman identified, though her political protest is on behalf of those who are oppressed for any reason: race, class, age, immigration, and others. As performance, however, it clearly locates poetry in her own body. Her favourite piece is "Birth Poem" (p. interview), a re-enactment of her labour-and-birth experience in sound and movement.

Exile

The Black American feminist and African-Caribbean feminist response to sexism within the Black Power movement developed roughly concurrently and with many cross-influences. An important literary influence on the African-Caribbean women poets that has not so far been noted is the contemporary work of African-American women writers, such as Morrison, Lorde, Angelou, Cliff, Walker, Marshall, Brodber, and hooks. Brand and Allen have named some of these as their influences

(e.g. Brand qtd. in Morrell, 170). Although I would include American Michelle Cliff in my literary-historical grouping, other Caribbean women poets who have acculturated in the United States (such as Audre Lorde) do not write about the same things in the same ways and their work is not therefore, to my mind, quite comparable (notwithstanding Davies 59-60).

For example, the theme of exile in the writings of this generation of Caribbean women in diaspora is poignant and acute. African-Caribbean women have emigrated through most of the twentieth century because of political/economic oppression, but this generation has articulated a strong sense of dispossession (see Chancy 3-7). Their position as black women in Canada, for example, is not one of alienation just because they are excluded from economic opportunities as female and black, but because the transition from outsider/émigré to insider "Canadian" was in many cases (and for good reason) made only very slowly. The same thing happened in England in the nineteen seventies and eighties. Emigration to the United States did not produce this extended sense of geo-political alienation.

Exile is, among other things, an emotional state. Chancy describes the social and emotional position eloquently, starting with a subjective definition of exile as: "irrevocab[le]...an irreparable fissuring of self from homeland" (2). Exile arises from whatever

> makes remaining in one's homeland unbearable or untenable: ... poverty enmeshed through exploitative labor practices that overwork and underpay; social persecution resulting from one's dehumanization because of color, gender, sexuality, class standing...; the flickering wick of hope extinguished through despair. Such indignities lead to suicide, violence, more poverty, a vicious cycle of hopelessness, or, finally, self-imposed exile, that is, emigration. (2)

The response of many women writers from the Caribbean, including Allen and Brand, has been to politicise this dispossession, to extend the experience of exile as/because female and black into an awareness of how oppressions based on race, class, gender, and sexuality function together. This awareness is not just awareness of oppression; its flip side is a renewed awareness of self through a focus on the Black, female body, its position in the world and its power to make new meanings. Chancy sees this as a route to accepting "what it has meant for Afro-Caribbean women to take control of their bodies, their lives, and, in order to do so, to have removed themselves from their roots... for, if the Caribbean islands represent for most the site of home ...they also represent in part what they have had to flee." (6-7) There are reflexes of these meanings throughout the poetry of Allen, Brand, and a sizable group of others; the only American among them is Michelle Cliff.

When I started this project, heavily influenced by Brand, the poets I focussed on were still (or had written their most dynamic work) working out their relationship with the metropolis. Although some (such as Brand) were not recent arrivals, the emotional energy of their poetry was based on the shock of displacement into very specific times and places (Toronto, Calgary, Brixton, Coventry) and on a sense of disillusionment, outrage at the local racisms, loss, and nostalgia for the Caribbean. In the years since, their position has evolved. Brand, for example, has published another collection of poetry and two novels (Land to Light On; In Another Place, Not Here; At the Full and Change of the Moon), which show her much more at home in the cold white North; her position is now very much more of hybridity, a term from a different paradigm of subjectivity (Bhaba).

Allen has always felt herself a hybrid (p. interview), relatively at home in the metropolis and in the Black Power movement; however, in her most recent collection of print poetry, she displays a more introverted persona in poems of identification with the Canadian landscape (see, for example, "Song for Newfoundland", Psychic Unrest, 59). The dub poets Mandhiela and Cooper seem always to have been more or less at ease as Jamaican-Canadians: according to Allen (p. interview), they are the "second-generation" of Canadian feminist dub poets. The British poets Nichols and Amryl Johnson are also, at this point, at home in Black Britain, while Breeze, who went back and forth between Jamaica and the

UK for the sake of her work, did not confront the challenges to her identity in quite the same way.

The themes of dispossession, exile, and alienation I have traced in the larger grouping of African-Caribbean feminist poets of the diaspora as well as Allen and Brand are therefore those of a specific historical moment for social subjects at a particular intersection of political and social forces, rather than any essential "blackwomaness" that transcends time and place. It is important to repeat: these are not essential poetics of women, of African descent, of Caribbean identity, of lesbian identity, or of any such contingent groupings; these are the poetics of a particular experience lived in the late 20th century, resolved through the terms of reference of that time and place.

Brand's work: an overview

Brand was born in Guayguayare, Trinidad in 1953, emigrating to Canada in 1970. She is a critically-acclaimed Canadian poet and public intellectual. She published early in magazines and in 1978 with a small press, going through a hierarchy of bigger and more prestigious literary presses until her seventh book of poetry won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1997[15]. Meanwhile, she also published short stories, alternative journalism, and non-fiction arising directly out of her political involvements with the black and feminist communities in Toronto. Her

15 The Governor General's awards are the most prestigious literary awards in Canada.

four films and documentaries include Older Stronger Wiser (1989) produced by the National Film Board of Canada, Studio D. It is an oral history of / by older black women in Ontario; Chancy gives an eyewitness account of its emotional reception by the African-Canadian community in Halifax, Canada, adding that it contributed to her own awakening to the personal realities of racism / sexism against African-Caribbean women in Canada.

Since first being short-listed for the Governor General's Award in 1990 for No Language Is Neutral (her best book of poetry), Brand has written another book of poetry, two novels and published two collections of essays.

In the rest of this section I will trace the themes and styles of her poetry, as it is her poetry that is the most relevant to this project, but also because poetry has the longest trajectory in her work. The earliest collection, 'Fore Day Morning, contains many of the themes and styles of later work; but her political commitments (Marxism, anti-racism), though evident, are not as much a driving force as in later poetry. The strong feminist anger of the later poems is not evident. Several familiar, related images are here, however: the old black woman, careless of her naked body, appropriating the right to sit on a tropical beach by herself and bathe; and the soucoyant, a supernatural, female being from the folklore of Trinidad who rolls up into a ball of fire at night, leaving her

skin behind. There is also the trope of slavery, here as later personalised and linked to skin colour:

> No, I see the ship of sugar in your eyes,
> My blood like sweat on your hands clasped in prayer.
> .....
> No this is life you color less, gutless...!
> My reality!
> The nightness nestles up against my skin,
> We two, we live in unison. ("Past" 29)

There are also a couple of poems that have the conversational style and strong voice of later poetry, in which irony and wit play a large role. Finally, in terms of technique, there is the synaesthesia evident also later ("Paint moonlit nights, / lay on like whispers, colours thick, / orange inflections of half promises..." (22)), with a facility for transcribing creole in evidence, although only two poems are "in" creole (one the interior monologue of the old woman on the beach, another an embodied memory of tropical rain). There is one phonetic spelling ("yuh"), which is *not* in the "creole" poems. All other poems are in standard, but also literary, English. Many poems are memories of tropical scenes, experiences, landscapes.

Primitive Offensive, published four years later, begins to show the more acute analysis of class, colonialism and race that creates some of the huge emotional projection of Brand's poetry. The conflict of race and gender allegiances which perhaps obscured her earlier political analyses

also gives way to a direct condemnation of black male violence. Graphic, sometimes shocking images of the violence of political oppression and poverty add to the emotional volume. Line breaks (which I think are Brand's particular technical brilliance, apart from her vivid voice) begin to count for something. The mode is standard written English, but the style is less literary than before.

Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense [sic] of Claudia, a collection of two poem cycles, shows Brand in control of her technique. Each set of poems is a dialogue, the first with the Canadian winter, the second with Ernesto Cardenal. The "Winter Epigrams" are witty, fine-grained, inward-looking descriptions of Toronto life and WASP culture and attitudes through her own relationship to winter; the poetic persona is sometimes self-mocking about this relationship, e.g., "Just to sabotage my epigrams, / the snow fell, / these three days, / softly. / ..... / no one can be thinking of how to oppress anyone else / they will have to think of how silent it is" (41)[16].

The epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal include (tongue-in-cheek) Marxist feminist queries ("How do I know that this is love / and not legitimation of capitalist relations of production / in advanced patriarchy?", 12), liberal feminist statements ("...so they still think I should be in charge / of the refreshments", 14); statements describing the "bitterness" of the struggle against racism in solidarity with black men (35); and against

racism in the mainstream feminist movement ("you say you want me to... / to what? / no I can't tap dance / at the International Women's Day rally." (47)) All of the epigrams are witty, short, disciplined; the language is relaxed, perhaps spoken in mode, but not creole.

Chronicles of the Hostile Sun (1984) contains descriptions based on Brand's work in Grenada during the Revolutionary government's tenure and the American invasion of 1983. There are poems in standard (dialect and mode) of the island's human and physical geography, intertwined; of the politics of the neo-colonial Caribbean; and poems describing the American invasion, and Brand's experience of Canada immediately after her return. The sense of existential and political dislocation in these poems is very strong; in most of her poetry Brand voices the Caribbean immigrant experience, but these latter poems contain a concentrated moral indignation linked to the disorienting gap between the privileged (oppressors) and the oppressed.

In between the two sections containing these poems is a short section of poems, "Sieges". It contains a long poem, "*Amelia*", describing her grandmother in the following terms: "...she withered and swelled / and died and left me / after years of hiding, / ..... / swimming in the brutish rain / at once she lost her voice / since all of its words contained her downfall. / she gargled instead the coarse water from her eyes / ..... / breathed, in gasps / what was left in the air / after husband and two

16 The references in these two paragraphs are to the numbers of the epigrams.

generations of children." (24) The following poem, "*I am not that strong woman*", contains the lines: "I am the one with no place to live / I want no husband / ..... / I want nothing that enters me / screaming / claiming to be history..." (26) In "*Amelia continued*", "I am in love with an old woman / who bequeathed me a sentence or two / "don't grow up and wash any man's pants / not even out of kindness" ..." (28).

No Language Is Neutral develops this radical feminist position, though not in isolation from all of the other themes Brand is concerned with (partially noted above). These are completely beautiful poems: some are lyrical love poems to a lesbian partner; some are poems to older women with whom she feels in feminist solidarity (including "Amelia still"); and there are a couple of poems, "return I" and "return II", in which the landscape of Trinidad is perceived / re-imagined and re-created in female terms; in effect, Brand writes a female language of description in these poems ("return I" receives a fuller treatment in Chapter 7, below). "return II" skilfully and unobtrusively weaves TEC syntax in and out of its lines.

The title poem, "no language is neutral", is a long prose-poem, which Brand has said (in Listening for Something) is her attempt to explain her lesbian coming-out. In fact it reads like both autobiography and a summary of themes and concerns, feminist, Marxist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, with a stress on history, memory, the relationship between landscape and the identity of a people, and the alienation of the

Caribbean immigrant in a cold Toronto. It is, finally, a writer's witness to her artistic coming-of-age. The poem ends:

> ... I have come to know
> something simple. Each sentence realised or
> dreamed jumps like a pulse with history and takes a
> side. What I say in any language is told in faultless
> knowledge of skin, in drunkenness and weeping,
> told as a woman without matches and tinder, not in
> words and in words and in words learned by heart,
> told in secret and not in secret, and listen, does not
> burn out or waste and is plenty and pitiless and loves. (34)

For the first time since 'Fore Day Morning Brand uses written creole, in some of the most evocative passages in Canadian poetry. I will discuss her transcription of creole; suffice it to note here that her transcriptions are contained in a number of poems in this collection as well as in Land to Light On, her last collection of poems.

Allen's work: an overview

Allen's career has been a double play of performance and publication. The cultural space she occupies together with other dub poets is unique in Canada, and it sometimes requires a push against the literary as a centralising, homogenizing force. In the following "One Poem Town", she characterises Canada's literary establishment as elitist and exclusionary by virtue of its orientation to the written; and (perhaps) written because of its intention to exclude:

Hey! Hey! Hey!
this is a one poem town
.....

.....
keep it kool! kool! kool!
on the page
'cause, if you bring one in
any other way
we'll shoot you with metaphors
tie you cordless
hang you high in ironies
drop a pun 'pon you toe
and run you down, down, down
.....

so don't come with no pling, ying, jing
ding something
calling it poetry
'cause, this is a one poem town
and you're not here to stay

Are you?
(Women Do This 117)

In this (printed) poem Allen equates the coldness / passionlessness / bloodlessness of the written mode with its medium, the page. The Western literary figures she lists ("metaphors", "ironies") are the semantic effects of written language rather than the sound effects of oral poetry (in performance or writing). She also makes the point that the

word "poetry" is both defined by and synonymous with the poetic practices of the dominant players ("so don't come with no pling, ying, jing / .... / calling it poetry"). These dominant players are characterised by the central trope of the poem as the smug burghers of a Western town – that is, there is a close link between the centralising practice of high literature and the central cultural and social positions of its practitioners. The plingyingjing poet is a newcomer greeted with the same negative attitude expressed by the stereotypical injunction to immigrants: "Go back to where you came from!" The coda ("Are you?") can be either a menacing final threat against the poet (as in one recorded sound version, "One Poem Town", Conditions Critical), or, as a sly projection by the plingyingjing poet, a sign of doubt from the kool poets.

Allen was born in 1951 and grew up in Spanish Town, a neighbourhood of Kingston, Jamaica, emigrating in 1969 and settling in Toronto in 1974. She published her first book of poems, Rhythm an' Hardtimes in 1982, and subsequently recorded the cassettes Dub Poet: The Poetry of Lillian Allen, as well as De Dub Poets with Clifton Joseph and Devon Haughton. In 1986, she made the album Revolutionary Tea Party and in 1987 Conditions Critical with members of the Canadian band Parachute Club; both albums won Juno awards for best calypso/reggae in 1987 and 1988. Women Do This Every Day: Selected Poems of Lillian Allen was

published by the Women's Press in 1993 and in 1999 Psychic Unrest (by Insomniac Press).[17]

Allen champions those who are oppressed because they are black (of African descent), because they are poor, or because they are female. These conditions do not always intersect in one subject in her work; there are poems about black men, poor men, refugees and refugee families, women of no specified colour, victims of social assistance bureaucracy, homelessness, and police brutality. Sometimes, however, they do intersect, and the contradictions can be painful:

> Oh gee OJ
> Oh say can you see
> I swear
> I would never take a pen to OJ
> pour out anger and fear
> .....
>
> Nothing can be as terrible as being murdered
> nothing can be as painful as losing a loved one
> nothing can be as dread as poverty's noose
> nothing is as ugly as racism
> noting is simple in a fucked-up America
> being woman and black
> with no relief in sight

17 This is not a comprehensive, but a representative listing of Allen's work, as much of her earlier written poetry was self-published, and numerous poems are reprinted as different versions (although under the same title) in different collections. She has also produced audio-tapes along the same principles; clearly the version is an important part of her aesthetic.

(Psychic Unrest 21-22)

There are also poems about the larger picture: international and neo-colonial politics ("I Fight Back"), politics of racist and capitalist oppression ("Freedom is Azania (South Africa Must Be Free)"); environmental politics ("Born to Log", "Redwood"), feminist politics ("Battle Scars") and different encounters with the spirit of protest and revolution ("Nicaragua", "Conditions Critical", "Why Do We Have To Fight", among others). The breadth of the targets of her protest are linked by her socialist feminist political analysis, which sees capitalism at the root of international racism and ubiquitous sexism. Black women are doubly oppressed: "a woman's work is not recognized / if she be black makes it doubly-dized" ("Why Do We Have To Fight"; all references to poems in Women Do This)

Allen's poetics both nurture and feed from her conviction about the primal connection between physical and political/spiritual realities. Her 1993 collection, Women Do This Everyday, is bracketed by two poems which she has said (in Performance; Personal interview) are among her favourites. The first is a feminist ballad, "Nellie Bellie Swellie", in which she tells the story of a young girl raped by a village man, then hidden away as her pregnancy becomes evident and finally sent away to give birth to the rapist's child. This specific narrative is illustrative of the social position of young women during Allen's adolescence in Jamaica. The double standard and the shame about woman's sexuality contrasts

with the pride and happiness of the last poem in the collection, "Birth Poem", which in print is minimal but in performance is the extraordinary dance/chant/song of a woman in labour. In this performance of the realities of childbirth, the female persona's "labour" is physically illustrated in its sense of physical work; and the pride she takes in the newborn is the climax of the labour and song.

Allen has said that "giving birth is the most important thing a person can do in life" (Performance). In "Revolutionary Tea Party", a chanted poem of solidarity for the working class, "work" is used in the sense of anyone who "labours": "We who create the wealth of the world / [and] only get scrapings from them in control" (Women Do This). In other words, the "labour" of carrying and giving birth to a child is comparable to labours of the working class. But since women of all classes "labour" in the sense of give birth, there is an unrecognised kinship between women and the working class; indeed, between all those "who create with yu sweat from the heart" (134). The traditional work of the labouring classes, the work of giving birth, raising, and supporting a child, the work of the artist, the work of the political activist: these can all be consecrated as labours of hope for a better future.

Allen has also said that having a baby is like making a revolution (Performance). A revolution is a break with history, with a time line. This connection between reproductive labour and revolution stresses the redemptive aspects of childbirth. Finally, revolution is motion (Allen,

Performance). Here revolution must be taken as part of a cluster of important concepts in Allen's work (and in dub poetry in general) which comprises revolution / motion / emotion / riddim. I will expand on this below.

Nation language

> Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. (Brathwaite 1984:13).

In essence, Brathwaite is referring to Caribbean English Creoles, coining the term "nation language" to negotiate complicated ambiguities in the naming and definition of the Caribbean English Creoles as nascent languages.

All the women dub poets and many of the more high literary African-Caribbean women poets of the nineteen-eighties and nineties are aware of the aesthetic and political possibilities of nation language. There has scarcely been a young woman Caribbean poet who has not used nation language at some point. It is also worth pointing out the influence of

Louise Bennett (who has performed and written her work since the late nineteen-forties almost exclusively in Jamaican English Creole) on many Jamaican poets, performance and otherwise. As Cooper has pointed out, the space between the oral and the scribal, performance and print, in Jamaican popular culture is a "literary continuum along which both 'performance' and 'non-performance' poets operate [today]" (81). This is applicable to most poets of the Anglophone Caribbean.

Caribbean English Creoles are "oral" languages because it has been difficult for them to develop an officially recognized standard variety or a grapholect (e.g., Written Standard Jamaican Creole) in functional competition with Standard English. The creoles continue to be associated with speech, both in the English Caribbean and in diaspora. Although the relationship between orality and creole in writing is complicated, the use of creole in Caribbean poetry remains one of the most important aesthetic / political / technical features of formerly-English Caribbean writing.

Standard written English is not just the metaphor of an ideological centre; the technical linguistic, graphic, and graphological choices these poets make in writing nation language are the product of a complex social relationship with the body of norms called "English". In that sense, every time a creole-speaking poet sits down to write, they must not only choose between two poles of reference in their "English-speaking" linguistic world (creole and English), but, if attempting the transcription of creole through English, they must negotiate a middle

way between reproducing the creole as "broken" English with iconic signs (e.g., the "breaking" of morphemes, a practice of many male dub poets) and fashioning a new written "language" unintelligible to English-speaking readers. D'Costa ("Expression and Communication"; "The West Indian Novelist") has written from the creole-speaking writer's point of view on this middle way; her experience has been that, in order to be accessible to non-Caribbean readers, she is able to use only a few markers of JEC.

Dub Poetry

Dub poetry is a performance genre that developed under the inspiration of reggae, both politically and aesthetically. Its combination of syncopated rhythms, attention to the beat and in both writing and performance, and emancipatory activist content is what makes it characteristic. Dub is

> ..."WORD, SOUND & POWER". This self-proclaimed credo of the dub poets points to the double dimension of the art form: dub poetry epitomises the antagonism between writing and orality, between WORD as text and WORD as SOUND. Dub poetry is neither a literary genre nor exclusively a musical style. Yet it is almost everything in between. ...On all occasions the SOUND of the spoken WORD gives rise to a musical "riddim," the central

> formative aspect of the genre. Yet the POWER of dub poetry, though most obvious in the context of a live or recorded performance, is prevalent also in the written text—if one knows how to trace it. (Habekost 1993:1)

In the dub community it is common to draw a connection between the rhythms of Jamaican speech and the rhythms of dub. "The rhythms of Jamaican speech, sustained by and reflected in the musical beat, constitute the dub experience." (Habekost 92) In describing her methods of composition, Allen says that she relies on the sounds of JEC words as much as their denotations in creating a poem (Bartley).

According to Habekost, "riddim" has larger connotations in Jamaican popular culture. It is a specialised term central to reggae as well as dub; in Jamaican popular culture it connotes " 'the heartbeat of the people,' or 'the pulse of life.' Moreover, riddim... is frequently associated with violence, blood and pain; but, at the same time, it can be 'food' for the suffering people..." (93) Habekost adds that repetition in dub, as a technique for achieving riddim, harks to an African philosophical conception of time:

> While the European poetic tradition tends to conceal the repeating constituents of its forms, the black tradition emphasizes them as a crucial means of distinct improvisation and extemporization; they become an expression of one of the fundamental formative principles of black culture, which is based on the idea of

> circulation and cyclical development, as opposed to the European principle of progression. (94)

Revolution in Allen's conceptual cluster: revolution / motion / emotion / riddim, is both a cycle, based on the word's etymology (from the Latin *revolvere*, from *re* + *volvere*, to roll, turn) and an interruption of the European "forward march of progress", a cut in the linear time line. Motion is riddim in the sense of (rhythmic) dance, physical motion, the motion of the body, but also the rhythms of the body, its heartbeat. Emotion is also motion, but a more organic motivation for political and moral decision-making than the measured linearity of reason.

In "De Dub Poets", Allen describes the genesis of dub poetry:

> ...[I]n the dance halls of Jamaica, competing sound systems with speakers the size of refrigerators would vie for the biggest crowds. DJs – the mighty U-Roy, Big Youth, and I Roy – chanted their messages *over* the instrumental versions on the flip side of popular [reggae] songs. DJs were so totally marginalized (reggae was not completely accepted for air-play on the island's radio stations until the late seventies) that they talked about anything and everything in the society – from the private and personal to social and political taboos...
>
> The studio mixers of the music, meanwhile, became conscious of the way in which the live DJs worked with the

> music. They attuned their techniques to create re-mixed versions of the instrumentals. The mixers' techniques of echoing, repeats, fades, dropping in and out of instruments to create internal rhythmic dynamics [characteristic aural features of dub], caught the imagination of the emerging dub poets. (17)

It is an interesting though rarely acknowledged fact that about half of the best dub poets are women, and that most of the these feminist dub poets are living and working in Toronto rather than England (London is the centre of the Jamaican diaspora). What is feminist dub? Dub poetry by women of African-Caribbean descent whose lyrics implicitly redirect the meanings of the male-centred pop-musical and dub industry. Dub poetry by women tends to be socialist-feminist or womanist in its politics. The group includes performers such as Jean Binta Breeze, Lillian Allen, Afua Cooper and Ahdri Zhina Mandiela.

Allen has been called the birth-mother of dub because of her role in establishing dub poetry in Canada and internationally in the nineteen-eighties and early nineties (Allen "360 Degrees Black"). But she is also in my opinion the best of the dub poets, surpassing the better-known male poets Oku Onuora and Linton Kwesi Johnson in the breadth of her political analysis, and surpassing the other women dub poets in mass (popular) appeal.

Chapter Three

ORALITY / LITERACY AND THE DERRIDEAN SIGN

What challenges are posed when a performance poet such as Allen wants to re-produce Jamaican English Creole in written form? When she "commits" her poetry to the page (Women Do This 9), she is faced with the paradoxes of working in a "phonetic" alphabet which, in English, is anything but phonetic. Instead, English spellings are so highly standardised that their most important function is to do with group membership and power, and only secondarily with the representation of sound.

In this chapter, I look for a model for thinking about the formal relationship between speech and writing in order to understand as precisely as possible how Allen's spelling choices might reflect specific political, social, and historical conditions and desires. For these texts especially, the model must allow a certain amount of slippage between signifier/letter and signified/sound (from modified English spelling system to creole sound). Since this is a roughly deconstructive project, I approach some of Derrida's texts, particularly Of Grammatology, with the expectation that a post-structuralist model of the sign based on writing will help track the relationship between the oral and the written.

Orality and literacy

The relationship between orality in these texts and creole as a symbolic resource is intimate and multidimensional. Since it has been difficult for creole to develop its own written code, it is associated with spoken registers. Spoken creole is a powerful carrier of group identity, especially within the metropolis (Hewitt; Rampton; Sebba). The representation of (creole) speech in writing therefore reinforces the symbolic force of creole by confronting two of the most powerful forces of English imperialism: its national language; and literacy in its script.

The symbolic use of creole language in the metropolis negotiates social relations through a complex network of intertexts. By evoking its speakers, the representation of creole in written poetry creates an intersection between these texts and images of creole speakers in the mass media and in different discourses. These images are complex: they include the romantic, with its roots in Montaigne's noble savage; youth culture, with the covert prestige of its "sound", house music, rap, and hip hop; reggae as a culture, lifestyle, and protest tradition; and other images of creole speakers as the underclass, the poor, and the Other. All of these connotations are the baggage that make creole a strongly marked "other" language.

As for literacy in the Latin alphabet, it was a favoured tool of colonisation by the British Empire, both through missionaries, and through the working styles of colonial administrations. The latter had a

preference for establishing colonial bureaucracies consisting of specially-trained local agents. This "special training" was a training in English literacy.

The task of learning to read and write is partly the memorisation of prescriptive spelling rules. If a learner employs an orthography different from the standard, their "literacy-ness" will not be understood as such, since an important marker of literacy in the European languages is control of standard spellings. Those who do not employ any standard code correctly "are classified as imperfect members of the dominant group, or as members of [the colonised] group one of whose defining features is their imperfection." (Hodge and Kress, 82) An important consequence for colonial administrations is that prescriptive spelling rules in written English create a powerful group boundary between the coloniser and the colonised.

This boundary is the site of struggle in these particular texts. The use of eye-spellings and other markers of difference in print declares an alternate version of social relations, making concrete a resistance to exclusion on its own terms. The fact that this struggle goes on in the narrow field of English spelling reflects the particular history of creole: its birth as a hybrid language (Holm) and its survival in close contact with standard English.

These are the historical circumstances in which creole eye spellings and syntax are deployed as strategies of anti-colonial (even postcolonial) resistance; but this is still a description of semiotic relationships at a fairly general level. What is the semiotic relationship between the actual letter and sound in a written text? And how does the intervention of another interest in this relationship leave its own trace? The next section considers the written-spoken relationship at this level of detail.

The grapholect English

In semiotic modalities involving words, the medium always affects the typical patterns of syntax (order of words) and lexis (word-choice) of the language. We do not write the way we speak, and we certainly do not speak the way we write, even though, technically, it is the same "language", e.g. English (Gregory and Carroll). In Spoken and Written Language, Halliday has shown that the syntactic patterns of spoken English are much more complex, with far longer chains of clauses in one "sentence", than written English. At the same time, a complete unit of thought in spoken English does not necessarily have both the subject and verb required in written English.

There is, then, provisionally, that which one may call Written English and that which one may call Spoken English. Written English corresponds to Ong's grapholect:

> [A] national written language has had to be isolated from its original dialect base, has discarded certain dialectal forms, has developed various layers of vocabulary from sources not dialectal at all, and has developed also certain syntactical peculiarities. This kind of established written language ...[is] a 'grapholect'. (107). Where grapholects exist, 'correct' grammar and usage are popularly interpreted as the grammar and usage of the grapholect itself to the exclusion of the grammar and usage of other dialects. (108)

Ong is abstracting from the wide range of types of written language to posit an idealized written language. However, it must be said that in each medium (spoken and written) there are in practice many registers, or degrees of formality and functional styles, so that ritual language such as liturgy and formal greetings are spoken, while stream-of-consciousness writing (closely imitating casual speech and thought) is written. Each of these versions presumably has a written/spoken counterpart. We can always read aloud what we have written; in a poem such as Allen's "The Subversives" (partially quoted in Introduction), the taped oral version is very close in syntax/lexis to the written version. Other written texts can be spoken precisely as written.

However, registers are closely associated with a typical medium. "Casual" is associated with speech; "formal" with writing. "Formal"

liturgy is precisely that which is read directly from a page; the written medium has preserved each and every word, and they have become typical of that register (e.g. King James English). "Casual" writing is reserved for the imitation of speech or thought in fiction (even the imitated speech/thought of the narrator) and for personal notes and letters. It is as if the imitation of some of the features of spoken English in written English brings with it an associated level of informality. The distinction that Ong makes between the "language" of standard writing and that of a wide range of other diatypic varieties is in practice, if not in principle, workable.

Let us start then, with a distinction between first-order writing, which is a typical pattern of syntax and word-choices (the grapholect), and second-order writing, or the translation into writing of a more typically spoken style. I say "translation" because even in highly verisimilitudinous transcriptions of thought by skilled novelists such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf (as monologue, or self-speak), it is always a representation/translation rather than a transcription. A faithful transcription of a real monologue or conversation reveals numerous hesitations, false starts, filler words and expressions, that are edited out of Joyce and Woolf's imagined monologues. The representation of speech or verbalised thought in writing demands a certain type of editing to accommodate the product (the final text) to the medium.

Partly this is because the activity of reading is different from that of listening to speech. Words and morphemes are recognised as whole units rather than composites of letters (unless a wholly new word is in the text). And, "sentences are not perceived as linear sequences of independent lexical units, but rather, key words are selected and relationships established to their environments through morphological and syntactic particles." (Hellinger 1986:65) Many of these key words, in addition, are not "read" phonetically—they are merely recognised visually. It is extremely important for efficient reading that words and morphemes (such as "is", "and", "the" "-tion", "-ty") remain visually consistent for pattern recognition; and that syntax, also, not deviate wildly from the typical patterns of the grapholect (which has, as Ong has argued, a syntax of its own).

Thus second-order writing is a translation, not a transcription.[18] But what happens when a writer wants to represent certain sounds in writing? We have seen that the patterns of spoken syntax and lexis can be represented in writing (with the aid of conventions). What about spoken sound patterns, typical of a marked dialect, for example? This would be a third-

18 Transcriptions such as those written by conversation analysts, which include the length of pauses, laughter, and sometimes intonation, could conceivably be called third-order writing. Like second-order writing, such a transcription is a written version of speech. However, this type of transcription can convey a range of styles depending on situational context. It captures the word-order of spoken language, but can also "transcribe" the speech of a pastor reading liturgy -- that is, transcribe speech read from writing meant to be spoken at a very formal level. Thus, formal linguistic transcriptions using the graphic signals agreed on by a community (i.e., a community of phoneticians, ethnographers, conversation analysts, etc.) to convey specific aspects of a text of interest to that community are not located on the same style/medium axis as first- and second-order writing.

order writing: if first-order writing is the grapholectal pattern of syntax and word-choices, and second-order writing is the translation into writing of a more typically spoken lexicogrammatical style, then third-order writing is the attempt to represent sound-patterns. This is closer to the task of the poet in writing creole, as in, for example, Allen's "Riddim An Hardtimes":

> An' him chucks on some riddim
> an' yu hear him say
> riddim an' hardtimes
> riddim an' hardtimes
> music a prance
> dance inna head
> drumbeat a roll
> hot like lead
>
> Mojah Rasta gone dread
> natt up natt up
> irie
> red
> (Women Do This 63-64)

In this text Allen has chosen to represent some sounds phonetically but not others. For example, the word "chucks" in the first line, Allen pronounces in a taped oral version as "chooks", with a rounded vowel, rather the Canadian English "ch∧ks"[19] or "chaks". This is the most common strategy that creole speakers employ when writing: the

19[Λ] roughly corresponds to the vowels in Canadian English "duck", mud", etc.

orthographic base is English, with only a few adaptations used to convey specific sounds. Often the variations are unsystematic and inconsistently spelled (Hellinger 60-62). This is not "phonetic" writing in the way that one normally conceives of the term (and in the way that Derrida does as well).

There *is* a stability in the spellings of this text, however—the stability of the standard English spellings. English orthography must be one of the most standardised and policed of semiotic systems. If the modern grapholect of English, as Ong writes, "has been worked over for centuries... by normative theorists, grammarians, lexicographers, and others," (129) so has the orthography of English, as codified in printed dictionaries since the sixteenth century. This was the time of the discovery of printing; the standardisation of spelling was not only fostered by the technology of the printing press (Steinberg), but also, according to Ong, "[p]rint produced exhaustive dictionaries and fostered the desire to legislate for "correctness" in language." (130).

In English, the wide distance between the "one sign, one sound" rule of phonetic writing and the actual spellings is due to drastic sound changes in spoken British English from the time the first presses were invented. Our present-day spellings reflect pronunciations current in the sixteenth century. Subsequently, even as spellings were being standardised, final e's in speech became silent, most long vowels changed in value (due to the Great Vowel Shift, see Millward 218-220), and r's became silent at

the end of stressed syllables (although they remain in North America). These are only a few of the major changes in the sound of British English since the early Renaissance. None of them are reflected in spellings.

Superficially, this analysis of the speech-writing relationship is similar to Of Grammatology's in that it sees writing as having a tenuous relationship to the speech it is supposed to "transcribe". Derrida's route to the same conclusion, however, incorporates the formal doctrine of the sign. It is therefore worth tracing his argument in order to find a more precise formal model for the speech-writing relationship.

Derridean writing

Of Grammatology begins with a statement of intent to establish a science of writing, of "grammatology", because it has been neglected in linguistics, and because it would correct the "logocentric" bias of Western scholarship. By logocentric, Derrida means a bias towards the spoken word in linguistics; and therefore towards a conception that the most developed and "civilised" writing is phonetic.

"Exergue" introduces the first chapter as a "meditation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called "writing"" (4). The meditation is carried out on the phrase "signifier of the signifier" as a description of phonetic writing. Although Derrida does not go into detail, the phrase "signifier of the signifier", in relation to "phonetic"

writing, is conceived to work on these principles: a letter is the signifier of a sound: for example, the grapheme "t" signifies the sound [t]. A simple example of a sign, one might say. The problem is that the grapheme "t" is not sound itself – it is only the signifier of the phoneme [t]. [T] in turn has no meaning in itself—it is only the smallest unit of sound possible in speech, i.e., another signifier. Letters in writing are thus the signifiers of the signifiers[20]. (This is the most common notion of phonetic writing. The International Phonetic Alphabet is based on the same principle of one letter/one sound equivalence.)

Derrida then describes "signifier of the signifier" as a movement rather than a static state such as a sign. This is because he begins to realise there is no signified that is not always already a signifier. This has been discussed already in this chapter with the analysis of the grapholect English, and second- and third-order transcriptions of speech in writing. From this point of view, however, everything in which we find meaning—film, football, political strategy, any semiosis—is "writing" in the sense that the mode is always a signifier for another mode or level of meaning, which points to another level again and again. There is no sole signified: there is only the perpetual movement from signifier to

20 "...even if one wished to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier (which would be strictly speaking impossible, since formal identities isolated within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible), it would have to be admitted that the immediate and privileged unity which founds significance and the acts of language is the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonie. With regard to this unity, writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, doubling the signifier: phonetic. "Sign of a sign," said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel." (Grammatology 29)

signifier. Derrida coins a term, "arche-writing", to refer to this more general principle of meaning-making .

Armed with the powerful concept of arche-writing, Derrida then draws on the tension between one's conception of phonetic writing (the "vulgar" concept of writing, 56) as derivative, a secondary semiotic system, and his discovery that arche-writing actually gives each semiotic modality—speech and writing—an absolute autonomy. This is because there is no way of bridging the formal gap between signifier and signifier. It is partly in order to explore the radically autonomous aspects of writing as semiosis that he in fact goes further, and privileges "writing" (now arche-writing) over speech. "Writing" is the perfect metaphor for semiosis, he says: it is the most obvious demonstration of the general semiotic principle that there is no signifier, no originary, only the movement from symbol to sign, and only the perpetual trace.

One will have noted a slippage towards the end of this argument, from writing as a specific technology of a specific time and place, to arche-writing as a new term that describes a theory of meaning-making. As I discover while reading closely this text, the argument goes along carrying an ambiguous sense of the word "writing". Yet Derrida takes pains to point out—and he is right to do so—the contiguity between all aspects of "writing", from the phonocentric, "vulgar" notion of how the technology works, to the highly philosophical arche-writing: "I have already begun to justify this word ["writing"], and especially the

necessity of the communication between the concept of arche-writing and the vulgar concept of writing submitted to deconstruction by it."(60)

Vulgar vs. arche-writing

What exactly is the link between the common-sense notion of writing as phonetic and arche-writing? Since the answer is difficult to isolate within the circularities of Derrida's style, the best approach seems a close reading. In order to spot the exact moment of transition between the "vulgar" concept and a more philosophical conception of writing, I find that I must search back and back. The passage on pages 6 and 7, under the subtitle "The Programme", seems a promising start:

> By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarised under, the name of writing. (6)

I find, as in most other passages on these pages, that key words must be searched for in the text that comes previous to the passage under examination. In this case I wonder if any special features have already been attached to the words "everything" , "language", and "writing" that can make better sense of this sweeping statement.

The second of the three terms, at least, "language", can be referred to a small passage in the previous section, which is part of the opening paragraph for Chapter One: "at present [the problem of language has] invaded, as such, the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourse, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method, and ideology."(6; italics in original) As evidence, Derrida offers "The devaluation of the word "language" itself, and how...it betrays a loose vocabulary". But is the over-extended use of the word "language" evidence that "the problem of language" has "invaded" the horizon of as Derrida implies) every research and discourse? Rather than evidence, it seems a concomitant event. Not only the question of which could be cause and which could be consequence is left open, but also that of controls: are there any other (unmentioned, unnoticed) phenomena that accompany this movement?

Thus, as far as identifying terms goes, "the problem of language" so far is unglossed but central. As a lay reader and a linguist, I take the philosophical statement that there is a "problem" of language on trust, as the following are a part of my lifeworld: the problem of language and meaning in literary texts, and the problem of language in a philosophical tradition of semantics (which includes propositional logic and speech acts).

Later in the same paragraph, there is a description of language that is reminiscent of Eco's unlimited semiosis[21]:

> ...a historico-metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. It must do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play, but also because... language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness... (6)

Knowing what comes later, I can easily decode "all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language", as, in essence, the transcendental signified. But again, the word "language" is left tantalisingly unglossed.

In the search for Derrida's "vulgar" concept of writing, and how it relates to *arche-writing*, I press on:

> ...the concept of writing—no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general...*the signifier of the signifier*—is beginning to go beyond the extension of language. In all senses of the word, writing thus comprehends language. (6-7; italics in original)

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21 Eco 68.

What is language, here? If it is semiosis, as implied in the use of "play of language" in previous passages ("It must do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play..."), then where does writing finally take up residence? Does it reside in a transcendental space, beyond the previously posited totality of the "problematic horizon...a historico-metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language" (6)? In this case, the argument is positing an expanded horizon, which writing offers, beyond the "play of language". That is, perhaps, and paradoxically, the desire weaving through the rhetoric of these two pages - that there is some transcendence over the "threat of limitlessness".

A small meditation follows on the phrase "signifier of the signifier" (7). The phrase describes a movement rather than a static state such as a sign. There is in fact no signified that is not always already a signifier; and "The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general...There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language." (7) The flow of this statement again depends on several ambiguities, which achieve its rhetorical passage between writing and the expanded horizon of language while leaving the logical passage less than clear. Whereas writing earlier had "designated" the "signifier of the signifier", it is now a "signified". This movement is justified by the contents of the small meditation on the signifier of the signifier. Writing,

like all other signifieds (that is, everything that has meaning, as an object, in semiosis), is subject to the "play of signifying references that constitute language."

But the metaphorical movement from "vulgar" writing to all other elements of semiosis, here labelled "language", is what seems to constitute the relationship I wish to explore. It is a relationship of analogy: the feature of writing, or the characteristic of writing, that is "secondarity", is also a feature/characteristic of "all signifieds in general"; and "all signifieds in general" enter the play of "language".

Here, "language" is the totality of the "problematic horizon" of our epoch. The next logical step, then, as in a syllogism, is the conclusion: therefore, writing is language, which is the totality of the horizon of our (historico-metaphysical) epoch. Note, however, that writing, by this analogy, does not go beyond the "extension of language". It does not so far, as Derrida has stated, "comprehend" language. It is only analogous to language, working on the same principle of secondarity.

Con/version

And yet, creole transcription suggests that secondarity is not a characteristic of writing. Writing is like any other semiosis in its acquisition of immediate significations; in its engulfment of secondarity; and in its move to complete identity, from symbol to sign, and, within the sign, from binariness to the collapse of the signifier/signified distinction.

In the previous exploration of writing within the traditions of register and dialect variation, I stressed its autonomy (from a phonetic point of view). But, in fact, there is a relatively stable sound system to English spellings. As Millward points out,

> The fact that most of us spell most words correctly is evidence of this. Moreover...the conversion of spelling to sound is highly predictable. Most of us know how to pronounce most of the new words we encounter in reading. For example, when I asked a group of thirty native speakers to say the nonwords lape, morantishly, permaction, and phorin, there was virtual unanimity in their pronunciation, including even the placement of major stress. (203)

The key word here is "conversion". The speakers she tested have internalised the rules of this conversion from spelling to sound in order to decipher the pronunciation of the new words. In order for the conversion rules to operate, each of the two systems the rules link (sounds and spellings) must be internally consistent. What is not required is that the connection between the two systems be more than arbitrary, in the Saussurian sense.

A speaker of Jamaican, Indian, and Australian English will produce different sounds from the same combinations of graphemes. They will produce them systematically, according to their internalised orthographic

grammar; but it is never the case that there is a one-to-one correspondence, across all users of the same grapholect English, between the graphic signifier and the spoken signified. What is regular is the system of differences between the grapheme clusters; there is another system of differences among the phonemes; and, as in Saussure's wave analogy, there is a "mysterious process" by which the two systems, when put together, "evolve divisions":

> The characteristic role of a language in relation to thought is to supply the material phonetic means by which ideas may be expressed. It is to act as intermediary between thought and sound, in such a way that the combination of both necessarily produces a mutually complementary delimitation of units. Thought, chaotic by nature, is made precise by this process of segmentation. But what happens is neither a transformation of thoughts into matter, not a transformation of sounds into ideas. What takes place, is a somewhat mysterious process by which 'thought-sound' evolves divisions and a language takes shape with its linguistic units in between those two amorphous masses. (Saussure 111)

I am suggesting this as an analogy for thinking about phonemes, *not* as a model of language. The same "mysterious process" that Saussure envisions segmenting thought-sound would act to link sound patterns to

graphic signs. Every English dialect has its own inventory of phonemes, related to, though slightly different, from the others.

These sound patterns, or phonemes, are quite close in nature to "thought"; as Saussure explains elsewhere, when linguists speak of phonemes, they are speaking of a conceptualised sound rather than a sound "in the raw". This is because phonemes as such have no physical reality. They are aggregates of different but related sounds that are conceptualised by speakers of the language as one sound:

> Phonemes are no more than convenient symbols for groups of allophones. Phonemes represent a form of linguistic knowledge. Even though we never pronounce a phoneme, only its allophones, there is ample evidence that speakers mentally store the phonological system of their language in terms of phonemes. It is not surprising, for example, that English spelling uses only one letter for both [ɬ] and [l]...Generally, spelling systems ignore phonetic variation that is non-distinctive. (O'Grady and Dobrovolsky 63)

For example, Canadian English speakers have two sounds which they conceptualise as one. In words such as "loud", "loot", "lottery", they pronounce the first sound [ɬ] (called a dark l, with the back of the tongue raised); in words such as "lead", and "leek", they pronounce the first sound [l]. Neither is a version or a variation of the other; they are both

real sounds, which Canadians think of as one. They do not often perceive these sounds as different, since the difference creates no meaningful variation in the words. For example, [ɬayt] and [layt] do not have different meanings.

However, English distinguishes [r] and [l] as separate phonemes; they are the distinguishing sign between the words "right" and "light", and the distinguishable meanings of "right" and "light" in turn help to maintain the perceived difference between the sounds [r] and [l]. It is in fact due to the contingencies of history—the dominance of the European scholarly tradition in the twentieth century—which codifies this distinction into the "International" Phonetic Alphabet. If the alphabet had been devised by Japanese speakers, the IPA grapheme "r" would perhaps have been visually presented as a member of the "l" family—with a diacritic by the "l" perhaps.

In the same way that different groups of European speakers have different values for the Latin alphabetic grapheme "r" (e.g., Spanish trilled /r/, French uvular /r/, the English "flap" version of /r/), different groups of English-dialect speakers have different values for the English grapholectal sign "a". In both cases, the dialects can be mutually unintelligible. What matters is not the raw sound, but its role in anchoring a segment of difference in the total phonemic inventory of the dialect. (I will take up formal aspects of this in Chapter Five).

Deconstruction

As "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" continues, it makes an interesting statement about the relationship between phonetic writing and arche-writing. Before taking it up, I would like to call attention to a major element in alphabetic writing systems. English orthography is based on a large number of sight units, morphemes which are pronounced differently but spelled the same. Examples are the plural marker "s" (pronounced variously as [s] in "cats", [z] in "cars", and [ə̆z] in "judges"); the past marker "ed" (pronounced [d] in "played", [t] in "worked", and [ə̆d] in "hunted"); and consistent syllable spellings in alternations such as "electric/electricity" ([ilektrik]/[ilektri̲siti]) which facilitate sight recognition of meanings but do not belong in an alphabetic system of the type Derrida envisages as "phonetic" writing. The most prominent of morphophonemic devices, according to Venezky, are the vowels a,e,i,o,u, which remain visually consistent in order to preserve the sight-meaning correspondence of their morphemes, but represent different sounds in environments such as "sane/sanity", "meter/metric". In English, there are fourteen different phonemes (plus all of their allophones) represented by these five visual vowel signs.

In many cases visual morpheme representation is a product of diversity in pronunciation not just over time but over space. An American knows the visual sign "bar" is pronounced [bar]; a Briton, with the same certainty, knows it is pronounced [ba:]. The Briton notes the written "r"

as a clue to the meaning of the grapheme "bar", but treats it is a graphic signal of meaning only, without ever comparing his knowledge to any others' system of phoneme-grapheme correspondence.

Derrida treats graphic signals of meaning, without mediation through sound, as features of superior systems of writing and as signals of the limitations of "phonetic writing":

> I have already alluded to *theoretical* mathematics; its writing—whether understood as a sensible *graphie* [manner of writing] (and that already presupposes an identity, therefore an ideality, of its form, which in principle renders absurd the so easily admitted notion of the "sensible signifier"), or understood as the ideal synthesis of signifieds or a trace operative on another level, or whether it is understood, more profoundly, as the *passage* of the one to the other—has never been absolutely linked with a phonetic production. (9-10; emphases in original)

The paragraph points out first of all the impossibility of escaping the identity of signifier and signified ("absurd...the 'sensible signifier'"); but then attempts a reformulation of that sign relationship as a "synthesis" of signifieds; or as the product of sign activity on different "levels"; and finally, as the movement of a trace from one of these levels to the next and the next... It is still not clear why this type of writing challenges the

"ideal of phonetic writing and all its implicit metaphysics" (10), unless Derrida, together with the thinkers he is criticising, conceives of phonetic writing as a one-to-one relationship between letter and sound, in which the grapheme is merely a "detour for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence", as he describes the metaphysics of the alphabet (10).

Adds Derrida:

> But beyond theoretical mathematics, the development of the *practical methods* of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the "message" vastly, to the point where it is no longer the "written" translation of a language, the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity. (10; emphasis in original)

Presumably, by "practical methods of information retrieval", he means methods such as those used in computerised library catalogues, where pushing a button on the keyboard is a sign of the command "go to the next screen"; or computer programmes, whose languages depend on a relatively small group of tokens signifying similar commands, as well as on elements of a simplified syntax. There is no difference, however, between this aspect of these languages and the grammatical functions of any natural language; the word "is" in English, to take a powerful example, means "a link of identity is hereby made"; it has no other meaning, even in philosophical statements such as "God is". The point is that the nature of English sight spellings and of orthographic signifieds

across diverse English dialects renders problematic the assumption that a "'written' translation of a language [is] the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity."

There is thus a weakness in Grammatology's representation of "phonetic" alphabetic writing as a phonemic transcription of spoken sounds.[22] But why does it matter that there is an overly-narrow working notion of phonetic writing as a first step in Grammatology's argument for the perpetually evasive signified? If this narrow version of phonetic writing, this phonocentrism, is a straw man, surely there is no point in knocking it down?

The phonetic writing presented in Of Grammatology is not just a straw man. It is the foundation of the argument for the perpetually evasive signified, and the argument itself is a demonstration of the formal principles of deconstruction. Arche-writing—the deferral of meaning—is based on following through the implications of the original phonocentric "phonetic" version of writing which Derrida argues against. He shows that it is untenable by bringing the logic of secondarity—that a letter is a signifier of a signifier—to its furthest conclusion—that the signified is never reached, either in phonetic writing or in any other kind of "writing".

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22 Perhaps a more nearly phonetic alphabet exists in French, or rather, French spellings seem more regular to speakers of French such as Derrida. But my observations about the relationship between a standardised orthographic code and its relation to dialects holds for French as well.

This is an argument whose conclusion—that writing is autonomous—contradicts its premise—that writing is completely phonetic (i.e., dependent on a simple one-to-one relationship between letter and sound, in all environments). And yet, the conclusion depends on its premise for validity. If writing were not conceived of as phonetic to start with, there would be no ground for establishing its autonomy. If one concedes that contradictions can be true—and I do—then the argument is airtight.

Unless: writing is not autonomous. Unless one argues against both sides of the contradictory formula: that the technology of writing is not the simplified phonetic one that is presented in Of Grammatology and that writing is not a code which is independent of historical time and place for its meaning.

What happens when a dub poet wishes to write her songs?

When a speaker of creole chooses to write a text in an English-based orthography that is nevertheless distinctive for being not-standard, what they are doing is calling attention to a perceived difference in two dimensions. The first is standardness: any deviation from the standard is, as I have said, a powerful signal of the meaning potential "Other".

The second dimension is cultural identity on a phonetic level: the written text of "Riddim" contains graphemes for key, identifying sounds of Jamaican creole (e.g. "yu", an iconic representation of the shortened but tense vowel Jamaicans use in the second person pronoun). Writers of

creole seem to feel that "identification of a text as creole must not rest on morphological, syntactic and lexical clues alone" (Hellinger 62). That is, creole writers seem to feel that an important creole identifier is its sound.

However, only a few phonetic spelling variations are necessary to suggest a dialect in writing. Speech communities use "stereotypes" to identify social groups (Labov, Language 248), which are the linguistic variables that are popularly ascribed to a group, both internally and externally. Compared to the number of features that really distinguish dialects from each other, the number of stereotypes necessary to suggest a dialect are really very few.

For example, this is the novelist Chaim Potok's rendering of French with the help of French stereotypes:

> "Mrs. Levy," I said. "Where do the wife and two children of Lucien Lacamp live?"
>
> "Wife and one child. The other child died."
>
> "I am sorry to hear that."
>
> "She had the asthma. They live now on the Rue d'Aboukir in the Second Arrondissement...."
>
> "Thank you," I said. "I am in your debt." (Potok 197)

The stereotypes of French in this text include the use of the definite article in front of the name of an illness and of a street, a periphrastic

possessive, and frequent, unfamiliar politeness formulae. Although the text is in English, stereotypes of French convey the intention of the writer to signal that the language is French. Note that variations are both symbolic and mimetic (in the sense that they imitate real French phrasal structures). In the same way, only a few stereotypes of creole in "Riddim An' Hardtimes" convey an impression of creole.

Speakers who feel the need to convey certain sounds within a highly standardised orthography such as written English necessarily feel themselves to be bi-dialectal (and not just to control different styles and registers), and have attached one set of sounds to the standard English orthography. This is because they are aware that the orthography is meant to represent an internally consistent inventory of sounds; they conceive of dialects/languages as unitary. They also have a sense that another highly identifiable and "focused" (LePage "Projection") set of sounds needs expression in a grapholect. They are, in practice, expanding the registers of the creole, making it and making for it a written language.

The emergence of European written languages, as Ong and others have pointed out (e.g. Alleyne and Garvin), has involved the consciousness by vernacular speakers of the status of the speech community as a nation state, and the desire to dignify the vernacular with the roles and functions formerly associated with a separate, written language (in the case of the European vernaculars, Latin; see Winford for a comparison of Caribbean creole speech communities and classically diglossic situations). Bound

up with all of this, in the case of a very standardised grapholect, is the choice of representing the creole as "deviant" (in the context of standardisation). Deviance in this context is a strong signal that the new writing is not the same as the old, which is represented as a whole by the standard orthography.

The sociolinguistic situation of JEC is that most speakers of it control at least one other dialect of English and sometimes more:

> Nearly all speakers of English in Jamaica could be arranged in a sort of linguistic continuum, ranging from the speech of the most backward peasant or labourer all the way to that of the well-educated urban professional [who speaks Standard Jamaican English]. Each speaker represents not a single point but a span on this continuum, for he is usually able to adjust his speech upward or downward for some distance on it. (DeCamp "Social Factors" 82)

However, the continuum can be correlated with other features besides social class, education, and geography. Functional varieties can also be placed on the continuum: writing is associated with the end of the continuum closest to Standard Jamaican, while protest songs and oral genres such as dub are associated with the end closer to "the speech of the... labourer." Making the distinction more concrete, it can be said that orality is in the dialect of one end while literacy is in the dialect of the

other (a dialect, not coincidentally, much closer to the grapholect in syntax and lexis).[23]

The transplantation of Caribbean creoles to the metropolitan speech communities creates a wider range of dimensions on which to draw symbolically, as well as a more emphatic division between speech types. With some interesting and important exceptions (see Rampton), the use of creole is restricted to members of a specific ethnic group. This reinforces its status as a distinct linguistic entity. However, the fact that this language is excluded from the print mass media and other vehicles of mainstream literacy means that those of its poets who wish to participate in central institutions of literacy—and who wish to participate in literature as an institution of power—must somehow create the creole through the medium of written English.

Therefore, Allen's representation of JEC in "Riddim An' Hardtimes" is both a defiant gesture and a technical *coup de force*. She does succeed in aurally evoking, to some extent, a certain set of sounds. She cannot have done it, however, without reference to very specific, even ephemeral public knowledge: the sound of Caribbean creole in diaspora in the 1990's. Spelling deviations thus partake of the "play of signifying references" (Derrida 7) *within particular times and places.*

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23 This is an idealisation for the present purposes; one important function of the continuum model is to emphasise the artificiality of dialect boundaries.

For much of her career Allen thought of herself primarily as a performance artist, and she is very aware of the differences in essence and technique between oral and written versions of the "same" text. In the Preface to her 1993 publication of selected poems, she writes,

> Because words don't (always) need pages, I have published extensively in the forms of readings, performances, and recordings. I have been reluctant to commit my poetry to the page over the years because, for the most part, these poems are not meant to lay still.
>
> As I prepared poems for this collection, I was required to "finalize" pieces I had never imagined as final. Like a jazz musician with the word as her instrument, reading and performing these poems is an extension of the creative and creation process for the work... (Women Do This 9)

Her emphasis on the process of creation, on "versions" rather than on a final written artefact, is part of a resistance against language forms that are relatively rigid. Fighting social structures symbolised or even propagated by writing as a Derridean metaphor, she subverts the process of codification of her signs by creating multiple oral versions.

There is never any spoken version of a text that is not its own text, with features that make it not an object on the same order as the "phonetic" part that corresponds to a text written in alphabetic script. For example,

at the end of each of the last two lines of the first stanza, in performance Allen draws out the last syllable of "hardtimes" and raises her voice steadily in pitch, so that each line ends on a shriek:

> An' him chucks on some riddim
> an' yu hear him say
> riddim an' hardtimes
> riddim an' hardtimes

Then a third line of "riddim an' hardtimes" is added, before music starts, and a final line of "riddim an' hardtimes", with the same final shriek, is added on top of the music. The final syllable of the fourth repetition of "riddim an' hardtimes" then echoes until there is a final silence. These sounds, not "language" and not included in the written version, make the oral "Riddim an' Hardtimes" a different sign.

Dub poetry is a protest genre. A shriek is an eminently transparent signifier (Kress 1993) of protest. Other sounds, expressing essential experiences of a female body, are used to break taboos about women's experience, to make an emotional link with female listeners, or simply to speak in a way that short-circuits the codings of a male-dominated world in a dominating language.

Conclusion

Deconstruction essentially displaces the links made by a phonocentric sign; its method is to constantly remind the reader that these links are not

made by the necessity that the metaphysics of presence claims for them. It carries out this project in constant awareness of the interests of the status quo served by as-yet undisplaced links of signification; but it does not have a logic to re-establish links. Its project is therefore perpetually reactive. And, as necessary as the first step of destabilising meaning is to any resistance against oppression, the aims of resistance must include a subsequent rewriting – a reconstruction—of the links between specific, historical signifiers and the experiences of the present day.

Because all Caribbean English Creoles are oral languages, they are a powerful symbolic resource for the subversion of colonial grammars at different levels. One is the grammar of standard English, which is a codification of the verbal patterns of colonial and post-colonial Britain and neo-imperial English North America. Others are the grammars that structure social relations: class, race, gender, age, and so on. These categories in themselves are culturally and historically relative: the term "race" is embedded in the history of European expansion and exploitation, while "gender" (as opposed to sex) is central to a long-standing system of patriarchy. In the following chapters I will make the connection between grammars of language and grammars of gender and race.

25 Here, DeCamp conflates the speakers with the samples. To describe the speech of a community in terms of discrete "varieties" placed on a spectrum, all that is necessary are several different samples, all of which may be from one speaker. However, the scale should compare the same thing along its length: either idiolects (speakers) or samples of

Chapter Four

WHAT IS A LANGUAGE?

On Methodology

Language is subject to highly political symbolic appropriations, as we have seen. One of the strongest appropriations, in the European tradition at least, has been in the service of standardisation. Standardised systems in turn are intimately involved with relations of power: non-standard regional and class dialects are living systems nourished by resistance to all the tangible, daily implications of standardisation.

As both consequence and cause, the common-sense notion of writing as phonetic is a powerful symbolic vehicle for spelling standardisation: the notion itself is the upholder of the standard. That is, without a belief that there is a very necessary and inevitable connection -- a metaphysics of presence—between letters and sounds, the possibility of alternative spellings could be imagined; once imagined, they are a challenge to the myth of "phonetic" writing, and thus to standardisation.

In this chapter, I turn again to the metaphysics of presence that fuels the standardisation of verbal patterns. I will propose that speakers' awareness of social difference and social change encourages their

perception of an idealized code, or *a* language. This perception is crucial in interaction between members of a group as semiotic tokens of attitude, position, identity, and even of the inferential content of messages. An analysis of languages as semiotic entities is a focus on a language as a popular notion, and the perception of the distinctness of a language as a result of a group-member's need to symbolise a standard (in the non-linguistic sense of the word) and to position themselves in relation to it.

Allen, and as we will see later Brand, manipulate this social and semiotic dynamic in order to make the meanings they do. In order to place their written version of creole in a position that is not within the English grapholect, but in some kind of meaningful relationship to it, they must uphold the English system of spelling, morphology and grammar while at the same time dislodging it enough to position themselves as both different and as having a certain identity. That is, they cannot just be outsiders (deviant); they must also be identified as creole speakers. Their stereotypes must make their meanings *within the English grapholect*, to readers accustomed to written English.

The chapter is an application of a specific version of social semiotics (Hodge and Kress Social Semiotics, Hodge and Kress Language As Ideology, Kress "Against arbitrariness", Kress Before Writing) to these sociolinguistic questions. It treats macro-level questions of language variation and change by reference to micro-level interactions.

Creole continua

The classic definition of a creole is largely historical: a creole is a pidgin (a simplified language adapted for use between two groups of speakers who cannot otherwise understand each other) which has become the native language of a group, that is, the language children learn first as they grow up. A recent textbook on pidgins and creoles contains this rule-of-thumb definition: "A creole has a jargon or pidgin in its ancestry; it is spoken natively by an entire speech community..."(Holm 66).

The language originally simplified is called the "lexifier language" because most of the vocabulary of the related pidgin/creole is from that language. The morphology and syntax of the creole, however, can be quite different from the lexifier language. Some linguists consider creoles to be mixtures of two or more languages; others see creoles as having diverged from the original (lexifier) language, and developed rapidly into what one would normally call a separate language.

In the case of the Caribbean English Creoles, the fact that the original pidgin and Creole speakers were African as well as European has given linguists some idea of the origin of their syntax's. According to Holm, Boretzky has shown that there are widespread parallels between the phonology and syntax of certain West African languages and the Atlantic Creoles (66-7). Caribbean English Creoles, then, are probably a mixture of some features of the syntax and phonology of several West African languages together with the lexicon of English.

When a creole remains in direct contact with its lexifier language, a "restructuring continuum" sometimes develops. As a collective, speakers employ a wide range of variation that, over time, restructures both the creole and the lexifier language (Mühlhäusler 11). Individual speakers also control more styles than is usual in non-creole communities. DeCamp was the first to apply the word "continuum" to describe this type of creole variation (see Chapter Three, p. 111)

Theoretically, as I have said, there is a "pure" creole and also a non-creole variety, but in practice these are rarely, if ever, heard in continuum communities (Rickford 22). In Trinidad, where the creole (Trinidad English Creole) is quite close to the local English standard there is no "pure" extended creole: every utterance includes elements that are not necessarily creole as well as elements that are undoubtedly creole (Winer).

One example of this mix can be found in paragraph four of Brand's "no language is neutral". As a text it is cohesive, a narrative of the Trinidadian grandmother's dream; yet it has both creole forms, non-creole forms, and, most predominantly, forms that are shared by both codes:

> This time Liney done see vision in this green guava season, fly skinless and turn into river fish, dream sheself, praise god, without sex and womb when sex is hell and womb is she to pay... (No Language 25)

Thus the Caribbean English Creoles do not fit easily into the linguistic concept of a "dialect", "system", "language", "variety", "lect", "style", or any other word denoting particularity (hereafter "code"). DeCamp's later comments about the device of a scale in relation to the model of a continuum illustrate his difficulty with conceptualising the continuum from the point of view of discrete dialects:

> The linguistic variation in Jamaica is, of course, not literally a continuum, for the number of speakers is finite. Furthermore, the number of variable linguistic features is limited. By calling it a continuum I mean that given two samples of Jamaican speech which differ substantially from one another, it is usually possible to find a third intermediate level in an additional sample. Thus it is not practicable to describe the system in terms of two or three or six or any other manageable number of discrete social dialects. ("Toward a Generative Analysis" 354)[25]

According to DeCamp, "The same linguistic features that distinguish styles can, and frequently do, also distinguish dialects. Furthermore many speakers have mastered two or more social or even geographical dialects, and they switch from one to another exactly as they switch between formal and informal styles" ("Locus of Language" 49) Variation in these creole-speaking communities seems to correspond more easily to

25 See bottom of p. 115.

Labov's notion of style-shifting, in which speakers use variables that correlate to different social classes according to their own social class and the formality of the situation (Labov Social Stratification)

However, because of our awareness of the history of English Creoles in the Caribbean and their co-existence with Standard English, the continuum model throws into high relief the question, "what is a language?" In 1974, DeCamp asked the question, "Where do we find a language: in the mind of the individual speaker or in the speech community?" (46) This question is crucial to creole continua, he added, "where differences between languages, dialects, and styles are difficult to distinguish and where these three concepts seem to merge as only relative terms within some larger system." (46)

The terms that DeCamp does use: "system", "speaker", "sample", "variety", "feature", are particulate. They correspond to his use of the term "discrete social dialect". As in folk-theoretical notions of language, he depended on the notion of "a language" (or dialect, variety, speaker, etc.), but his data seemed to contradict it:

> Assume, too, that each sample is relatively homogeneous, or may be subdivided into homogeneous sub-samples; this is a necessary but indeed questionable assumption, for a speaker's stylistic level keeps varying during an interview, no matter how hard the interviewer tries to keep the atmosphere of an interview constant. ("Toward a Generative Analysis" 354)

Other field linguists in the English Caribbean also observed great variation in the language used by speakers. In 1980 LePage suggested a multi-dimensional continuum model that would explain the nature of variation he was observing in Belize. He made this analysis of the language of three informants in Cayo District:

> Neither the linguistic description of such speakers, nor of the collective corpus of texts culled from their utterances, is scaleable... because there is not two-dimensional linear progression from basilect to acrolect. One can only characterise their behaviour in terms of co-ordinates referring in a relational way to neighbouring cultures or internal models. The neighbouring cultures, such as Guatemalan Spanish or Coastal Carib, or Belize City Creole or teacher's English are again in their turn related to other cultural models such as Castilian Spanish or Island Carib or West Indian creoles or West Indian Educated Standards, or Standard British or American or written English. (as qtd. in Rickford 26-27)

Further fieldwork and analysis convinced LePage of the validity of this approach. In 1985, together with Tabouret-Keller, he published an account of language variation and change, introducing the notion of the "focusing" (homogenisation) and "diffusion" (proliferation of sub-varieties) of dialects based on available community models for ethnic identity. Codes (as expressions of ethnic identity; that is, "languages") do not have rigid boundaries, and continua exist wherever there is instability or change in the self-image of the community. Since there may be more than two models of identity available to a community, the continua may have more than two poles.

Thus, the range of "mixing" between the poles can be infinite; but at the same time, there exist in the minds of speakers idealized, bounded varieties that give meaning to variation, that tell readers "this is more creole" or "this is more English"; and these idealisations are thought of as relatively invariable. Research into creole-community variation in fact depends on the existence of these idealized "languages" in the perceptions of speakers. The focus of interest in these studies is not just the flexible range of variation that does in fact exist in multilingual communities, but on the implicit references by speakers to idealized codes.

In 1992 Carrington suggested an alternate model for "creole space" which looks like

> an integrated mass of soap bubbles, each of which has the unusual feature of a penetrable skin. The feature allows clusters of bubbles to penetrate one another without bursting. Some bubbles will be spherical, others elliptical; some will have the top bulge of hot-air balloons, others the bottom-heavy appearance of rain-drops; yet others will tilt sideways, elongated in whatever direction the wind blows, much like the soap bubbles leaving the wire hoop of the child/linguist. The overall shape of the mass would be arbitrary and irregular.... (98)

Carrington is a native speaker of a Caribbean English Creole. In the same article he also draws attention to the way in which creole variation is determined by networks of communication: since speakers use creole according to addressee as well as situation, variation determined by communicative networks is an important element of social interaction.

Carrington's view is reminiscent of Halliday's perspective on language as a social semiotic, with verbal patterns (texts) that encode, or even create, situations:

> Language actively symbolises the social system, representing metaphorically in its patterns of variation the variation that characterises human cultures. This is what enables people to play with variation in language, using it to create meanings of a social kind... from backyard gossip to narrative fiction and epic poetry. (Language as Social Semiotic 3)

Carrington's "arbitrary and irregular" boundaries to a language would in this case not be arbitrary, but reflections of concrete situations in social space. The case of creole-speaking communities is just an extreme example of what happens in every community: the very *idea* of a language shapes verbal patterns so that they become redundant with the social structure of the speech community.

In sum, patterns of variation are both symbolic and functional: communicative networks shape that variation, and the variation in turn "symbolises" or reflects the structure of those networks. Once they have become symbolic in this way (not a chronological progression, but a logical one), they are also functional: they are deployed to make meanings "of a social kind".

What is a language?

Popularly, "a language" would be defined this way: it has boundaries (i.e., some item or rule is either "English" or it isn't); it is spoken by/belongs to an ethnic group or nation; and speakers of it understand one another but do not understand speakers of a different language (unless they are multilingual). But in language contact situations (such as creole continua) there are many items shared by two or more languages, and it can't therefore be the case that "a" language has fixed boundaries; nor is it true that speakers always understand one another through dialect differences; and an entity recognised socially as one "language" can define more than one ethnic group to itself (e.g. American and British English).

Language boundaries are policed through notions of error and correctness. Although in practice there is no such thing as making a "mistake" in speech or writing (Kress Before Writing), in the abstract, error and correctness are considered absolutes. The idea of a standard of

correctness in relation to rules that define "a" language allows people to work out their social relationships against that backdrop. The tokens (the words, sounds, grammatical or morphological rules) that they talk about in order to work out these relationships enter "the language" (i.e., "English") according to the social position of speakers involved in the exchange. By entering "the language", they become its rules. (This is because rules are the abstraction of verbal patterns; but I will get back to this later.)

Suppose a writer to the editor of a newspaper complains about a grammatical "error" in the paper. If the editor can muster enough authority in her reply, then the contested usage becomes, retroactively, a part of the language rather than an error; but if the editor cannot, or cannot appeal to institutions such as grammars or usage guides, then the letter-writer succeeds in re-defining the boundaries of the language. Not only that; the new boundary to "the language" (that is, their estimation of where the boundary is) marks in a very concrete way the relationship between letter-writer and editor. The new usage becomes almost a historical marker of the transaction that took place between them, in their joint redefinition of the boundary.

I say re-definition because every exchange is a re-definition, even if it seems to one or both of the participants to be a defence of norms. "The language" is constantly being re-defined in this way, as well as in numerous unremarked exchanges between speakers. In the example of

the letter-to-the-editor-writer, the notion that there is a wrong way and a right way to speak or write "a" language allows her to enter the metalinguistic (about the language) exchange in the first place. In turn, the correctness/error social principle about usage implies that there is "a language" in which items belong or don't belong.

The exchanges do not have to be metalinguistic: consider a lecturer using a word a student has never heard before; the student will introduce it into her speech in the indicated way, and if she has enough authority among her peers, they will introduce in their speech as well. This happens very often within the smaller speech communities that are academic movements, schools, and disciplines. That is how new, "specialised" words are added and old words are dropped. A specialised lexicon can be considered a map the nodes of power within a group. As speakers interact in exchanges unavoidably imbricated in power, their usage, their "language", contains the concrete tokens that allow them to position themselves, contest the position of others, and generally take part in the flux of power/solidarity within the group.

In a larger speech community dictionaries, grammars, and usage guides are normally important fixers of error and correctness. Their authority is sometimes limited with counter-appeals to notions that contest them, such as the notion of local speech communities, or legitimised "variation from" a language (e.g. "that's an American spelling") or the notion of a special framing context (e.g., to a publisher's copy-editor: "it's poetic

license"). "Street language" or antilanguages are particularly fluid because the covert prestige that underwrites new words coined by speakers of high status must be asserted and defended constantly; we can think of these speech communities as having super-heated or accelerated relations of power, perhaps under pressure from the contextualizing community of legitimacy.

Although speakers may be aware of the fuzzy boundaries of "languages", they behave as if the differences they perceive are categorial rather than not. For example, villagers on the border between the Netherlands and Germany speak mutually intelligible dialects. But on one side of the border they say they are speaking Dutch and on the other side of the border they say they are speaking German. This is in spite of the fact that there are more similarities between them than between the local variety on the Dutch side and Standard Dutch and the local variety on the German side and Standard German (Wardhaugh 27-8). There are similar continua at the borders of France and Italy and France and Spain; and in each case "languages" are similarly distinguished.

Thus the second criterion—that a language defines a social group—is interwoven with the idea of the boundedness of a language; for the "language" is as bounded as the group is. The fuzzier the boundaries allowed on the group, the fuzzier the boundaries allowed on the notional language; but if the distinction between social groups must be very clear,

very small verbal patterns then become definitive. This principle will become important to my discussion of projection in Chapter Six.

Intelligibility - the third criterion - is interconnected with the first two. There are relationships between varieties in which the speakers of one do not understand the speakers of the other, although the speakers of the second understand the speakers of the first (e.g., Swedish and Danish; Wardhaugh 28). These asymmetrical relationships of intelligibility have to do with an estimation of collective openness or standing towards another group. Not surprisingly, educated evaluations of lower class speech in British English is that it is "unclear" or "restricted"; of upper class speech, that it is "precise". These subjective measures of intelligibility incorporate, again, the relative standing of the speakers (a speaker using lower class speech to another member of the group presumably would not describe her speech as "unclear").

But intelligibility is also important in the error/correctness principle. In the case of the letter-to-the-editor-writer, when the principle is invoked (i.e., "you made a mistake"), the letter-writer is probably concerned about several issues having to do with boundaries. Often such an "error" signals to the letter-writer that changes which she has identified as incorrect and therefore often as uneducated, foreign in ethnicity or variety, or simply inappropriate (to the context, although often this type of error is not considered a matter of context), have "entered" or crossed

the boundaries of the language as she perceives them[26]. In defending the boundaries, she is not only defending a principle of exclusiveness, but also of stability, one being inextricable from the other in this case. And in defending stability, she is also defending clarity—a point often made in defences of conservative usage. A defence of "clarity" is a defence of intelligibility for an in-group.

We can deduce, then, that varieties diverge into what becomes ultimately an unintelligible "other language" (this could take many centuries or perhaps just a decade or two) when clarity/correctness is not defended; and it is not defended when it is more important to identify speakers as non-members, that is, when verbal markers (Hodge and Kress 262; see also Labov Sociolinguistic Patterns) are needed in order to signal distinctions which have become important. I will elaborate on this process below. For now, suffice it to note that, although there is no such thing as an "error" in verbal patterns, there are usages which are not intelligible to all speakers. But again, they will be often be associated with particular, identified styles and provenances (many speakers of British English can identify Cockney but not understand it); a truly unintelligible usage is rare from a social semiotic point of view.

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26 Note that the boundary of the language is not portable: its place differs according to mode and context, so that, although a certain usage may be "in" the language in an informal spoken greeting ("hiya, howya doin'?"), in writing the same usage is not correct English (hiya is not an English word).

Intelligibility is an experience of semiosis that cuts close to the bone. Confronted with a stream of sounds or marks on a page which are interpreted as "meant to be meaningful but completely unintelligible", and with no interpretative clues to base a reading on, most speakers will feel 1) frustrated, 2) defensive, 3) threatened, and/or 4) put off. Perhaps that is why, in the continuum between unintelligibility and clarity, social evaluations are mostly negative: if you sound strange but can be understood, you are either speaking a dialect, or you are mentally deficient, or you are a child (see also Hodge and Kress 82). "Dialect" very often has a pejorative connotation. This, again, depends on the relative status of speakers—immigrants, travellers, or any speakers aware that speakers of usages around them far outnumber them, will feel the four things I listed above as well as a powerful motivation in decoding and re-producing others' verbal patterns. This leads to another type of asymmetrical mutual intelligibility.

In situated verbal exchanges, speakers do not produce unintelligibility, nor do they interpret anything as "meaningless " except as a last resort. Back to the letter-to-the-editor example: If the copywriter had actually used a verbal pattern that was not socially inappropriate but truly unintelligible, there was probably a (communicative) reason for it. Chomsky's famous example of a grammatically correct but meaningless sentence: "Colourless green ideas sleep furiously" -- does actually have a meaning. It is an example of "meaninglessness", and therefore it conveys

the correct meaning. Chomsky's point, that on the mimetic plane (Hodge and Kress 5) the sentence "has" no meaning, is actually also erroneous—the sentence "has" meaning in the appropriate context (a book of poetry); but in a monograph on the science of linguistics, its meaning is paradigmatic (as an example of semantic non-sense) rather than mimetic.

The sorts of "performance errors" Chomsky appeals to (Aspects 3) in order to make a distinction between competence and performance are also usually very meaningful. Hesitation phenomena, pauses, and repetitions in a monologue fulfil an important role in creating emic rhythm and clause-internal stress; the same "errors" in conversation are crucial in turn taking and the creation of links (agreement, interruptions) between speakers.

Finally, let's take an example that seems an undeniable "error": I am typing a letter to the telephone company, and I hit the "R" key instead of the "T", creating the opening line: "Ro whom it may concern:" I will type up to a dozen or so more keys in order to go back and fix the error on my word-processor; while tapping keys, I will hold the thought in my mind that the letter must be changed to the "correct" one, otherwise the telephone company will not take the rest of my letter seriously, and perhaps neglect my request or give it a low priority.

Although hitting one key instead of another was not "wrong" in isolation, it is the context, on several different levels, that creates the motivation

for me to go back, erase it, and hit another. On the first level of context, I know that a "T" is expected at that spot rather than an "R"—such distributional rules being syntagmatic, which create a context for each graphemic sign. But the force of this syntagmatic rule rests on the force of a different level of context—the social expectation that everyone will conform to this rule if they can—and if they don't then they are "rule-breakers" and not full members of the group, not "one of us". "Us" as a group is an internalised abstraction of the body of rules. In practice, "us" consists of all those who, noticing the "R", read the meaning "broken rule".

Why isn't breaking the rules the same as making an error? Because breaking the rules is an event motivated by the participants' interest. Rule-breaking exists in a universe of choice, of free will; the constraint on this free will is, as I said, the participants' interests, which are in turn constrained by their social positions. In changing my typed "R" to a "T", I made the choice of not breaking a rule. If I had made a choice of breaking a rule, I would have left the "R", perhaps with an interest in signalling my busy life, or my disdain for bureaucracies.

If I did not notice the typed "R", then I did not make an error (recall that "us" consists of all those who, *noticing* the "R", read the meaning "broken rule"). Further, if the reader does not notice the "R", then no error has been made (an error is a social event, not an empirical fact). If, on the other hand, the reader does notice the "R", they will then interpret

the interest behind this broken rule.[27] If they read the "R" as an error, they will have disallowed my innovation. If they read it as an innovation, with attendant meanings, it enters their language. Their imagined social position in relation to me, the writer, will have a large impact on their decision.

Conventionality and uniqueness

How can the string "Ro whom it may concern" enter "the language" of an individual? For, surely, there is a difference between unique signs that make meaning in unique contexts, and that body of highly conventional signs thought of as "the language"? At what point do unique signs gain a wider circulation? Where is the dividing line between unique signs/contexts and conventionalised ones?

Every meaning must have an element of uniqueness and also an element of repetition. This applies to meaning on every level, whether we look at the formal structure of the sign or at an intricately structured visual or musical text. Every utterance, therefore, seems to the speaker to be unique as well as conventionalised and to the reader to be the same, although they may read different things in the "same" utterance or text.

The uniqueness of signs, and meanings, rests partly on the fact that every context of meaning-making is unique, and that meanings are made as an

27 The issue of the reader/writer relationship is also a part of semiotic phenomena of language boundaries, but will not be taken up here.

inseparable amalgam of text and context. For example, "Can I have a cup of coffee?" has vastly different meanings depending on the social positions of speakers, their social/physical space (restaurant, home, street), time of day, previous events, etc. From a three-year old, it may mean, "I would like to remind you that I am a member of this family too." No analysis of meaning-making can bypass a description of the context of an utterance.

But the uniqueness of signs depends also on the fact that every speaker and reader is unique, with a unique social position and set of motivations and interests. In principle, any conventional sign can be co-opted by the speaker/reader to mean something new (Kress "Against arbitrariness" 176). Unconventional signs (scribbles, seemingly random body movements, seemingly unmotivated sounds) are more obviously carriers of unique meanings. The point in that case is the same, but from the other side: there must be some aspect of repetition, similarity or difference, some patterning produced or read, for these meanings to be possible.

As I have said, the "rules of the language" – the patterns built up by repetition and social convention when supported by specific relations of power—are re-defined in every exchange. Innovation—a change in the rules—is constant. But in order to have both uniqueness and repetition, a certain proportion of conventionality must be maintained in all exchanges. Since social relations depend on the exchange of symbols, the exchange of symbols always affects these relations (Lemke "Action").

Social and semiotic exchanges are then inseparable, and a necessary degree of conventionality in verbal exchanges supports/produces a necessary degree of stability in the socio-cultural system.

Although patterns are not rules, rules are easily deduced from patterns. The presence of a new element in any verbal pattern necessarily changes that pattern, and also the rule deduced from it. As Saussure puts it,

> ... the language system as such is never directly altered. It is in itself unchangeable. Only certain elements change, but without regard to the connexions which integrate them as part of the whole. It is as if one of the planets circling the sun underwent a change of dimensions and weight: this isolated event would have general consequences for the whole solar system, and disturb its equilibrium...It is not the system as a whole which has been changed, nor one system which has engendered a second. All that happened was the element in the original system changed, and that sufficed *to bring a new system into being.* (84-5; emphasis mine)

It is in this sense that we can say that the entry of a new element in a language both changes the rules and becomes (part of) a new rule. As a new rule, it is the element that "brings a new [language] into being".

Linguistic rules are thought to bind the language from the outside, rather like a national border, but in effect change works from inside out. If rules are re-defined in every exchange, innovation at the "deepest" most conventionalised level of "a language" is effected through unique signs in unique contexts.

Rules

By allying themselves to a set of verbal patterns called "French" or "Finnish" (which can be described or defined with rules), speakers constantly re-create those patterns. This reinforces their ability to discriminate the set of patterns that follow the implicit rules and those that don't. The fact that wordings are patterned, and that a finite set of rules can temporarily be abstracted from these patterns (temporarily because the patterns are always in a process of change), doesn't mean that the rules "exist"—only that speakers, by maintaining patterns, behave as if rules exist.

Speakers also behave as if the rules are quite fixed. Folk-theoretical notions of language (as well as theoretical linguistics, whose foundational assumptions are based on these notions) would assign to verbal rules two important and related functions: 1) as characterisers of a language, i.e., French, Swahili, Tagalog can each be distinguished from the others by its own specific set of grammatical, morphological, and phonological rules, so that French "is" its constitutive rules; and 2) an

internalised set of tools, so that all speakers who "know" the rules can make meaning with those rules.

In theoretical linguistics, an important function of the rules is to delimit a circle, similar to that of a Venn diagram, which contains the set of all and only all of the correct patterns of a language (Chomsky Syntactic Structures). This device from set theory captures especially well the first of the three popular criteria for identifying a language: boundedness. However, as we have seen, boundedness is closely related to the other two criteria, collective identity and mutual intelligibility. I should like to stress again that the Venn diagram is what speakers (and linguists) imagine to be the case; and, since they behave as such, it is, semiotically, the case. However, the important element of innovation comes in when we realise that verbal patterns outside the circle are not necessarily meaningless.

In order to make the sentence "It was sunny and the seagulls careened above the boat", the speaker patterns words from which certain rules of word order and morphology can be deduced. But the speaker can, in addition, make the sentence "Twas brillig and the slithy toves / did gyre and gimble in the wake", a string both intelligible and recognisable as derived from the first sentence. However, this second verbal pattern could not be created from the same rules deduced from the first. It is made by transforming the patterns of the first with a small set of analogies, oppositions, and other simple conversions. In order to read it,

the reader must know the patterns of the language as well as be able to follow simple, innovating transformations (e.g., brilliant → brillia → brilliy → brillig).

The "rules" are thus only one aspect of every utterance, and not necessarily the most basic, the first, or the most important aspect. "Colourless green ideas sleep furiously" has a certain meaning in a certain context, though it lies outside the boundary/circle created by the constitutive rules of a language. Its context must be a book of poetry, or other social context in which innovation is sanctioned.

Much of everyday speech, as well as poetry and song, may at any one moment lie outside the imaginary boundary created by the rules at that moment. In the conception of speakers, the inside of the circle contains the patterns that can be said, (c.f. Halliday Introduction xxiv) -- those that are believed to be sanctioned and productive of social cohesion and intelligibility. But they also understand verbal patterns that flirt with the rules, invert the rules, even break the rules with no reference to the rules; patterns that, strictly speaking, can't be said, but which are produced and understood anyway.

A good example is this poem by Gertrude Stein:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

> A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt colour and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading. (461)

Sometimes avant-garde poets flirt with the socially defined boundary between error and innovation in texts that present the reader with distressing choices. The reader must choose between: admitting failure as a reader with a confession that they do not read the text as innovative, but as error-ridden or meaning-less; or joining the establishment in proclaiming the 'innovation' as poetic, aesthetically pleasing, interesting, powerful, etc. Nine times out of ten, readers choose the latter, since the poet has the sanction of scribal culture (writing), cultural centrality, and in some cases canon-membership (e.g. Stein).

Poetry, dramatic dialogues, written imitations of thought or speech, sermons and other oral performances, are all possible contexts for breaking the rules of written language. They take part in social institutions—literature, theatre, religion—legitimising verbal (and social) patterns that break the rules. This explains why literature, theatre and religion are as socially powerful as they are, in their different ways. They temporarily re-define social relations and their attendant power configurations, recontextualising verbal patterns so that error/correctness is based on a different—varying, fluid, and very local—set of criteria. In turn, the criteria for error that prevail in each of these local communities are more visibly set by relations of power between their participants.

Without some legitimising institution, however, the same "innovations" are "mistakes". The difference between the two is that innovation is sanctioned and error is not. Error is a disallowed innovation. It is therefore necessarily disallowed after its production, and it is disallowed by the reader[28].

Both "error" and innovation produce verbal patterns that lie outside the rules. Each may produce exactly the same patterns, breaking the rules in the same way. The error judgement depends on both participants' context in time and space, their relative social standing, the mimetic content of the message... in short, their interest (Kress, "Against arbitrariness" 172) in allowing or disallowing a perceived rupture of the rule-space. One component of the process, however, is always the working-out of power relations.

What is a grammar?

But where do these implicit rules "live"? The rules of "a language" are thought to be transcendent, immutable; yet they are also thought to be capturable with the aid of formal devices such as paradigms and other taxonomic arrangements (as in systemic-functional linguistics), with rules of calculus (e.g., transformational-generative rules and move

28 I use this term as shorthand for the participant in the verbal exchange (either spoken or written) who is on the receiving end of the message but who takes a much more active role in making meaning out of the message than is suggested by terms such as "receiver", "recipient", or even "addressee". The producer of a text can also be its reader, as when, for example, I notice the "R" in "Ro whom it may concern". I may disallow this innovation myself, and simply read it as an error which I then fix.

alpha), with statistical methods (such as quantificational variationist methods), or with topographic representations and symbols (as in connectionist neuro-pathway mapping). The resulting text or map is called a "grammar".

A grammar is a text that abstracts general structures from verbal patterns and recasts them with one or another of the formal devices I just mentioned. Typically, but not always, the abstraction of these patterns is done by segmenting and categorising the verbal patterns of written language (i.e., "parts of speech") as a prelude to describing the distribution of these parts in relation to one another. A traditional English grammar uses a nomenclature borrowed from Classical Latin for parts of speech and their relations to each other. Twentieth-century grammars, on the other hand, in their attention to formal relations of meaning common to all languages, imply a relationship of homology (formal mimicry) between the formal patterns of the grammar and their object "language"—whether "language" is considered a mental configuration (e.g. Universal Grammar) or a cultural system (e.g. Systemic-Functional Grammar).

The word "grammar" is also used for the reification of these descriptive grammars, so that it often refers to an imagined *a priori* system thought to exist "behind" verbal patterns. This system would be similar to the inferred patterns in natural events (e.g., the "laws" of mechanics, or of meteorology), with verbal usage as the analogy to nature. Metaphors of

mechanical and computational design are often also used to talk about this grammar that lies "behind" verbal patterns:

> The grammar is the central processing unit of a language, where meanings are accepted from different metafunctional inputs and spliced together to form integrated outputs, or wordings... It is always difficult to keep grammar in focus of attention, because it is a purely abstract level of coding with no direct input-output link with the outside world... (Halliday Introduction xxxiv-xxxv)

The similarity of this approach to that of the natural sciences is obvious. The neo-classical philosophical roots of the natural sciences create the assumption that natural phenomena are rule-governed; and that the role of the scientist is to observe these phenomena and perceive, or tease out, the order in apparent chaos. During the European Enlightenment, the laws of a rational system replaced the laws of God as the Prime Mover. In the same way, the role of the linguistic scientist is to describe the "laws" (in the sense of rules) that structure verbal patterns.

It is not uncommon to conflate this second sense of grammar as an *a priori* structuring principle with the sense of grammar as a written abstraction of posited rules, i.e. the descriptive grammar. In systemic-functional linguistics, an influential school in the formation of social semiotics, Halliday often conflates the difference between the two senses

of "grammar". Hence, the second paragraph of Introduction to Functional Grammar states:

> It is a short introduction because, despite any illusion of length, it is no more than a minute fragment of an account of English grammar. Anything approaching a complete grammar would be hundreds of times this length. In fact there can be no such thing as a 'complete' account of the grammar of a language, because a language is inexhaustible...(xiii)

This slippage between the two meanings of grammar takes place over three short sentences. The first "grammar" is the a priori system "behind" the verbal patterns of English: "it is no more than...an account of English grammar". The second is the next usage, in, "a complete grammar would be hundreds of times this length". That is the second meaning of grammar—the description, a special kind of text written by a linguist in a special language with special notation. The conflation also works in this paragraph through terminological substitution, so that in the third sentence, the two kinds of grammars can be placed in relation to each other by substituting "account" for "descriptive grammar": "a 'complete' account of the grammar of a language".

From Halliday's remarks on the "complete account of the grammar", we can see that both types of grammars share with "a language" ("English"

in this case) the qualities of boundedness, stability through time and space, and transcendence.

Conclusion

Against this analysis, the object "language" has a very real existence, but not as a collection of clausal structures. Just as "a language" is a symbolic device for working out relations of power, the linguist's generic object "language" is deployed by writers of grammars in the negotiation of relative standing. I have heard linguists say, "That's not language", when faced with unfamiliar or unwanted data or formulations of data. The phrase is reminiscent of the one used by writers of letters to the Editor; they protest that such and such is "not English", as if English has unmoveable boundaries in time and space; and as if those boundaries are not the very ones being contested by the writers themselves. The meaning of the term "language" (i.e., what phenomena should or should not be covered by this term) is both assumed by and constructed by different mainstream linguistics in their descriptive models. But more to the point, it takes enormous social power to call one's own object of analysis in linguistics "language", for the term is hotly contested and defended. In disciplinary battles over this collective object of analysis the real battle is political and the power to invoke the symbolical object "language" goes to the victor.

I shall use the term "grammar" in opposition to its strong connotations of stability and transcendence. Although people think of a grammar as the baseline of correctness, a grammar must change at the same rate as the language (or system of signs) that it describes – which is sometimes quite fast. Therefore, as I have stated, correctness becomes a moving target, settling exclusively on users with high status. It is these who are in the best position to control grammatical rules *as markers*, although the grammar is continuously subverted by (low-status) users with covert prestige. All the while, a metaphysics of presence (Derrida Of Grammatology) controls the notion of grammar, so that the fluidity of grammars remains hidden to their users.

Chapter Five

A SIGN THEORY

In the previous chapter I explored creole continua, discrete languages as social symbols, and language boundaries. Speakers create language boundaries through notions of error and correctness, but only in relation to the context and to the configurations of power in the situation. However, social semiotics lacks a formal model for this kind of system-oriented meaning-making.

My aim in this chapter is to create such a model of semiotic – that is, symbol using -- behaviour. It is a way of describing the dynamics of the realities that speakers set up which are not empirical, but are nevertheless structured by their behaving "as if" (as if there are such things as languages; as if there is a one-to-one correlation between grapheme and sound). If I can describe the sorts of dynamics that these symbols undergo, then I can also approach the work of Allen and Brand with a firm grasp of how the integrity of a range of notional "languages" as systems guide their textual rebellions.

Focusing on the sign rather than the phoneme, the morpheme, or the clause, also allows me to think "linguistically" about two or more systems of meaning-making at the same time: about the differences

between them, about the translation and transliteration of one to the other, and about similarities in meaning across differences in mode (speech / writing, verbal / vocal / performed). It also implicitly allows me to pick up where I left off, at Derrida's post-structuralist sign. Having rejected the post-structuralist sign, I go back to the original structuralist, Saussure, whom Derrida was writing against.

Semiotics and the sign

I have used the word "symbol" loosely up to now in order to put off an explanation of the technical term "sign". And yet, a sign is initially very simple: "A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else" (Eco 7). Further on, Eco elaborates,

> I propose to define as a sign *everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else.* In other terms I would like to accept the definition proposed by Morris (1938) according to which "something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter".... Semiotics, then, is not concerned with the study of a particular kind of objects, but with ordinary objects insofar (and only insofar) as they participate in semiosis. (16; emphases in original)

The condition that the sign means something "on the grounds of a previously established social convention" raises the social aspect of semiotics, and the issues I discussed in Chapter Four: what are the limits of innovation in social meaning-making, is there really a stable set of social conventions, and on what basis do they evolve and change?

But Morris' definition adds another aspect. Traditionally, a science is defined by / defines its object of study (e.g., language (linguistics), insects (entomology), genes (genetics)). Saussure, the founder of semiology/semiotics, described semiology as "a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life... the nature of signs and the laws governing them." (15) However, in Morris' definition, a sign is not an object, but an interpretation. In this interpretation, objects have an instrumental function only, as participants in the interpretation. According to a recent reference work on literary theory, the underlying concern of semiotics is *semiosis*, or the production and interpretation of signs (Stout).

In Social Semiotics, Hodge and Kress define semiotics as "The general study of semiosis, that is, the process and effects of the production and reproduction, reception and circulation of meaning in all forms, used by all kinds of agent of communication" (261). This definition completes a historical move from Saussure's science, defined by its object of study (the sign), to semiotics as a convenient label to designate the study of semiosis as "the circulation of meanings". It is true to the spirit of the

semiotics of Peirce and Eco, but it side-steps formal issues to do with the relationship between semiosis and the sign. The definition substitutes "meanings" for "signs"; what is the relationship between the two?

A final important point is that, with "signs" as an object defined by its science, the role of the observer of these signs is that of a non-participant; that is the role of the scientist. However, with "meaning" as the endpoint of the study ("...the process...of the production... of meaning"), the role of the observer becomes an issue. Some would say the role of the observer is central in the production of meaning.

Kress' discussion of the transparent sign in "Against arbitrariness" begins to account for the positions of participants in semiosis, including, implicitly, that of the observer. He points out that the relationship between a signifier and signified is always completely accessible to a particular person in a particular place and time with a particular interest. The issue here is one of analytical positioning: since the reader / interpreter (the observer) is usually not the subjectivity creating the signs, "meaning" is a theoretical construct that makes a link between system and subject(ive) meaning. I will take this up in a later section.

The Saussurian sign as a duality

Saussure's Cours de linguistique generale is often considered the foundation of modern semiotics, semiology, and linguistics. Saussure's

definition of the sign is "a two-sided psychological entity, which may be represented with the following diagram" (66-7):

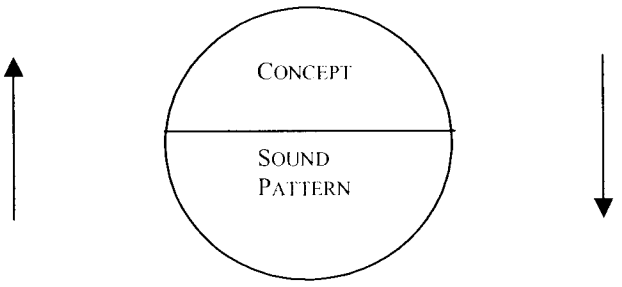

Figure 1: Saussure's initial model of the sign

But this is only the beginning of Saussure's description of the sign; concept / sound pattern it is essentially a bridging step between the "naïve view" that a sign is a link between a "thing" and a "name" (66), and the subsequent discussion of the sign as an arbitrary link between signifier and signified[29]. The essential points Saussure is making here are that 1) there is duality involved, and 2) the sign is a psychological entity.

Saussure's psychologising of the sign allows a step back from the empirical world and a step towards signs within their systems. It is also a move away from what Eco calls the "referential fallacy" (58). The referential fallacy is the supposition that there is a necessary correspondence between the "thing" part of the sign and a "real state of

29 In fixing the terminology, "[w]e propose to keep the term sign to designate the whole, but to replace concept and sound pattern respectively by signification and signal" (67; emphasis in original). In later semiologies, signal and signification become signifier and signified.

things [to which it] corresponds"). The difference between Saussure's "concept" and the "thing" of the naïve view is that a "concept" is an internalised version of a thing, not meant to refer to the real world.

The referential fallacy obliterates a distinction which is crucial when considering representation, between the represented and the representation. This distinction must be in play at all times, for the decision to consider the relationship between one entity and another as representational creates a cyclical dynamic. As soon as the idea of representation enters the picture, the "realness" of things becomes an issue.

Representation is like the serpent in the garden of Eden: once it is introduced, there is no going back. What if we are fooled into believing something is "real" when it is "only" a representation? How can we know if the represented thing is "real" if we know it through its representation? Which is the more "real"?

For example, a line drawing of an apple is a representation of a "real" apple; but only of certain of its aspects, and the "real" apple remains apart from its representation with all its roundness and sweet apple-smell intact. That is how we know the difference between a drawing of an apple and the real apple. But the drawing of the apple is also a "real" thing, which can be represented with a photograph of the drawing, or a verbal description, or even a sound sequence (as in Disney's Fantasia).

So right away, we are dealing with two "real" entities in the original representational relationship (line drawing and apple), each of which can be the represented in their own right. Going the other way, the "real" round, sweet-smelling apple that we perceive is a representation of a certain bio-chemical phenomenon, selected elements of which are "represented" to us through our senses. We cannot know other characteristics of the apple beyond what we perceive ourselves. A bat will perceive an apple in another way. Every represented is also a representation.

What we are left with is simply a distinction, always kept when considering representation, between any object as representation and any other as represented – in other words, a barrier between one order of reality[30] and another ("real" and representational). Each of the two entities in the representational relationship must be on different sides of the barrier. But in formal terms it does not matter which is on which side: each of the apple and the line drawing can be the "real" or the "representation".

There is also a chaining effect in play. Every representation can become a represented; and what is the representation of it in turn? Consider the charcoal drawing of a black-and-white photograph of a Cezanne still-life

30 I owe this term to Bateson's Steps to an Ecology of Mind, but do not discuss it here as it is not a technical term in Steps and it seems self-explanatory in the context of this discussion. Saussure also uses the term "orders" for the elements of this relation: "... one is dealing with the notion of value. In both cases, we have a system of equivalence between things belonging to different orders." (80)

painting of an apple amongst other fruit, the painting being recognizable as "apple" only to viewers familiar with the conventions of Western art. What does a "real" apple have to do with any of that? And which of the entities in this chain is the represented and which is the representation? It does not matter where you stop in a chain of representations. That is what makes the relationship dynamic: switch them around, follow the chain of representations of representations, either way, we are talking of relations as much as (rather than?) "things".

When I say "switch them around", I am referring to the actual objects designated by the signifier or signified, not the signifier or signified themselves. In other words, it is the "ordinary objects" of Morris' definition of semiosis that can be manipulated in these ways in their relationship to the sign, not the signifier and signified as elements of the sign structure. However, the signifier or signified can also be rearranged. For example, a further diagram in Cours gives the example 'tree' as the concept of the Latin word (sound pattern) "arbor" (67):

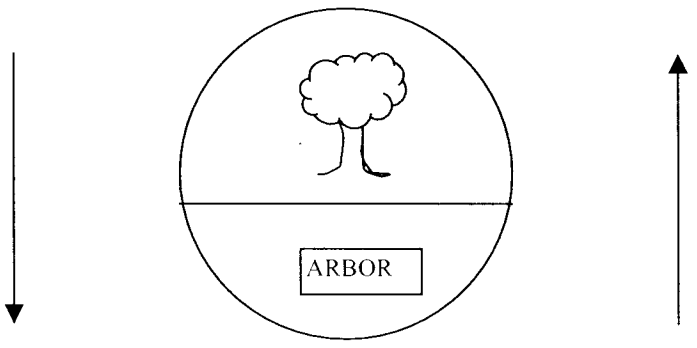

Figure Two: Saussure's second model of the sign

But the concept "tree" can itself be divided into signifier and signified. A "concept" is some belief we have in our head: that there is a thing called a tree, with certain semantic features (has roots, has trunk, has branches, has leaves or needles). So we have a cultural unit (Eco 66) "generic tree"; but in fact we do not have images in our heads of generic trees—we always think of a specific tree, so that everybody's concept "tree" is actually a specific tree, all of these images having enough in common so that people agree, in rough terms, on what word to use when confronted with a "real" tree. From this point of view, the signifier is the specific tree-image people carry around in their heads to exemplify to themselves the cultural unit "tree" and the signified is the cultural unit "tree".[31]

But the specific image people carry around in their heads as a sample "tree" rarely corresponds to the trees they meet in the world. Therefore, we can think of the tree-image as a signified and the patterns of sensory impressions that people organise into "tree" (if they perceive that these sensory patterns are to be classed as trees—think Impressionist landscapes) as the signifiers. Or vice versa. At this point, there's no point in keeping directionality in our chain—and if there is no directionality, then there is no point, either, in distinguishing a signifier as such from a

31 It can be argued that Saussure disallowed this interpretation of his diagram by making the signifier first a "sound pattern" (which, as we will see, is not a sound in itself, but the inner representation of a sound). But semiotics and semiology (and Saussure himself in Chapter [illegible], page [illegible]) explicitly takes non-verbal and non-aural phenomena as signifiers if they are part of a system of signifying conventions.

signified. There are only entities that correspond in some relation of identity—identity across different perceived "levels" or orders of meaning, or systems.

That is the role of systemic boundaries (dialect boundaries, social identities, modes): they create a difference across which we make an identity, the process itself creating, for a moment, a duality which Saussure called a "sign".

The sign as a unity

We have seen that extending the logic of representation to the sign means that the sign can be a chain of entities as well as the duality of Saussure's Cours. Eco, following Peirce, calls the chain "unlimited semiosis" (69). Derrida gets at this dynamic through the logic of the Western notion of phonetic writing (see Chapter 3). Briefly, the dynamic makes every signifier the signified (object) of a further signifier, since you can grasp nothing "in itself". You can, however, keep chaining signifier/signifieds, converting each signified to a signifier as you pass along the chain.

What you can't do as you pass along the chain is stop on any one link. That is, the minute you focus on any one half of the sign (for example, is the imaged tree a signified or a signifier?), the sign collapses—because no one link in the chain is either a signifier or a signified without the other. Saussure says this too:

> Any linguistic entity exists only in virtue of the association between signal and signification... It disappears the moment we concentrate exclusively on just one or the other. We are then left with a pure abstraction in place of a concrete object. There is a constant risk of taking one part or other of the entity and believing that we are dealing with the totality. (101)

If you flip this around, any entity analysed as a sign is an entity that MUST be taken as a whole, and cannot be divided into a signifier and a signified. A signifier has no meaning by itself, and therefore no existence except as an empty functive: "the X that stands for Y". The same goes for the signified.

Eco following Hjelmslev calls the sign a "sign-function" (48-9) instead, for this reason: "Properly speaking there are not signs, but sign-functions... A sign-function is realized when two functives (expression and content) enter into a mutual correlation; the same functive can also enter into another correlation, thus becoming a different functive and therefore giving rise to a new sign-function..." (48-9) Eco's formulation is tricky because with his terms "functives" he reifies again the two parts of the sign – which actually don't exist unless they are "functioning" (recall that "something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something", above).

Thus, in every conceptual effort, one must focus on a pair to have a "sign". There can be no signified without a signifier, and vice versa. The sign in this sense is always already, just as meaning is always already: there is no way to grasp non-meaning. Try this thought experiment: think of a signifier without its signified. If you have managed that, give an example. Now try the same thing with the signified – is it conceivable without being signified by a signifier? I cannot do it.

To go back to the link between sound pattern and concept: the phonetic identity ("sound pattern") of syllables is based on the differential meanings of their phonemes. A phoneme is a phoneme only because of its value in relation to all of the other phonemes in a particular system. For example, in its phonemic system English distinguishes [p] and [b] as separate phonemes; they are the distinguishing sign between the words "pat" and "bat", and the distinguishable meanings of "pat" and "bat" in turn help to maintain the perceived difference between the sounds [p] and [b]. This is distinctive variation – a variation in sound which maintains a variation in meaning. English does not, however, distinguish between [b^h] and [b] – although Thai does, and in Thai the words [b^hat] and [bat] have different meanings solely by virtue of a significant (i.e. meaning-making) difference in the sounds of the two syllables.

My point is that we cannot say which comes first – the difference in sound (value) or the difference in meaning. Each maintains the other. A differentiated sound cannot exist, even as an analytical abstraction,

without a value or meaning. Otherwise it would not be perceptible as a differentiated sound. The sound [tri] has no significance if it does not "mean" anything; and the "meaning" tree does not exist unless there is a sound-signal (or other material signal) for it.

Referring to Saussure's diagram of the sign which heads the previous section, the arrows on either side of the divided circle representing the sign illustrate that the link between sound pattern and concept is two-way: "... each triggers the other" (66). It is not that concepts have sound patterns attached, or sounds have concepts attached—every linguistic unit is value/meaning in the same instant.

The signifier and signified cannot be conceived of, do not exist in any possible world, without a prior relationship having been established between them. So, although the sign is fundamentally a duality, it cannot be taken apart.

Value

If the sign cannot be taken apart, how is it that we perceive it as a duality? As Thibault points out, Saussure's shift from the terms concept/sound pattern to signification (signifier) and signal (signified), "marks a shift to the system perspective" (158) or to the sign in its system. This perspective is crucial to Saussure's sign. The sign exists ONLY in relation to neighbouring signs within a closed system:

> ... it is a great mistake to consider a sign as nothing more than the combination of a certain sound and a certain concept. To think of a sign as nothing more would be to isolate it from the system to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with individual signs, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the contrary, the system as a united whole is the starting point, from which it becomes possible, by a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements. (112)

For Saussure the sign is created when a system is analysed into its parts. Those parts are signs. It is the division between neighbouring signs that identifies them in their singleness (thus giving their individual meanings – the transparent sign), and also in their duality[32] (in their value – opening up the possibility of transformations[33]).

It is value which also makes the sign "arbitrary" (67), according to Saussure. The term "arbitrary" has unfortunate connotations. It does not mean that the meaning of the sign is arbitrary; it means that the connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary. This latter connection has more to do with semantic value than with meaning.

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32 It identifies them in their duality because it is only the coming together of two orders of reality that articulates them in the first place.

33 I use the term transformation following Hodge and Kress, 162-203.

Saussure explains the distinction between meaning and semantic value thus: meaning corresponds to the "concept" part of the original sign; value, on the other hand, is the "meaning" of the sign when the sign is seen in juxtaposition to all of the other signs in the same system (112-13). A now famous example of value is the difference between the English word "sheep" and the French word "mouton". Although they seem to have the same meaning if each is taken in isolation, they have different values when their respective language-systems are compared. The French word covers both live sheep at pasture and the meat served at dinner, while the English word sheep is only the live animal and a different term, "mutton", covers the remainder of the value of the French word "mouton" (114).[34]

Semiotics is concerned with value; as such, every sign, without exception, functions only from within a system. It is the entire system, all of the signs taken together, that create the value of each one. At the same time, value and meaning are not opposites; in any given context, meaning and value will be seen as the same.

In Chapter Three I argued against Derrida's conception of writing as the purest example of the principle of secondarity in semiosis by saying that semiosis involves a move "to complete identity... within the sign, from

34 This difference between the two sets of values only becomes clear when we set up the two languages as closed systems; that is, assume that all terms within the system of French are in a fixed relationship to each other, maintaining each others' place in the system; and that all terms in the system of English operate in the same way.

binariness to the collapse of the signifier / signified distinction." This "collapse" is not an event in time, but rather a rhetorical device to convey (as Derrida does) the dynamic nature of the sign-function. Creole transcription shows that any particular signifier (e.g., the graphemes and grapheme clusters of the English spelling system) can be linked with any particular signified (e.g., the phonemes of the creole inventory). Once linked, they become meaning-ful; and as meaning, they do not stop and say to the reader "I am a signifier standing for a signified"; they simply mean. Value can only be perceived by an observer of the entire system; or by an observer juxtaposing two separate systems in order to arrive at the value of a single entity.

In context, one does not compare two entities to arrive at the meaning of each, or indeed, look at the entire system to establish the value of a single token; in context, value is meaning. This is because the context is both the defining limitation for the value of the sign as well as the key to changes that re-create entire systems. This follows from my observations in Chapter Four about error and innovation in relation to the boundaries of a linguistic system.

Finally, single signs in their contexts (the sign as a unity) are transparent – their meanings are completely accessible, but not their values. On the other hand, when a text analyst is working out transformations, it is the arbitrariness of signs that is more salient. Put another way, meanings are always contextual, while values are always the artefact of analysis.

The place of the analyst

There is another aspect to the transparency and opacity of signs, and that is the social position of the reader of the signs in relation to the producer. In "Against arbitrariness" Kress correlates the transparency of signs with access to the meaning: what I called in the previous chapter "intelligibility". Intelligibility is of course always relative to the reader of the signs, not the producer. But the term transparency allows for the position of the producer as well in accounts of intelligibility: a sign is transparent to the degree of social closeness or distance between producer and reader (178).

Transparency has a different but related meaning in Social Semiotics (88-9): it is a certain connection between the sign and its meaning. Hodge and Kress use Jakobson's phonological energy / constraint code, as well as his colour symbolism to exemplify the type of connection they mean. Energy / constraint refers to the way in which sounds in human languages are produced in the vocal tract (vowels are produced with an open tract, unconstrained by larynx, glottis, tongue, or teeth – energy; consonants are produced in different ways, on a cline between a relatively open and relatively closed / constrained vocal tract). The "transparency" of this symbolism springs from the human body and its role in the production of all meaning-making.

These types of signs (motivated signs) are only meaning-potentials, however: they do not "mean" anything until they appear in context. This

fact creates the theoretical relationship between motivatedness and transparency; for meanings are only recoverable from the context of the sign, *not* its sign-function; and the sign-in-context is only transparent to the degree of social closeness between producer and reader of the sign.

Nevertheless, the sign is the entry to the meaning of a text for the analyst / reader. For the analyst of social semiotic transformations, motivation and transparency are working hypotheses: there is a recoverable relationship between the meanings intended by the producer of this sign and the characteristics of the sign itself (c.f. "Against", 177). But, since the interest of the sign-producer is always different from that of the reader, opacity (or arbitrariness) is the analyst's mode of operation.

This is what I meant in the first section to this chapter when I said that "meaning" is a theoretical construct that makes a link between system and subject(ive) meaning. According to Saussure, meaning is the link between concept and sound pattern in a word; it is the sign outside its system. But since signs cannot exist outside their systems, meaning is a working hypothesis leading a reader (or observer, or text analyst) to search for that meaning from a position in which they can only really talk about values. Values allow the analyst to extrapolate meanings and re-contextualise them, thereby ultimately creating their own text.

This is necessary to sign theory because arbitrariness is the only thing that allows for interpretation: unless the sign is arbitrary, or theoretically

free to "mean" anything, there is only one possible reading, which it is the analyst's job to recover (i.e., recover the meaning of the sign as opposed to its value). Recall Eco's "Every time there is possibility of lying, there is a sign-function: which is to signify (and then to communicate) *something to which no real state of things corresponds.*" (58; emphasis in original). Eco does not mean that there is no reality; he means that an arbitrary sign allows for different versions of it.

Kress' rejection-in-principle of the arbitrary sign leaves the position of the text-analyst out of social semiotic theory, for the analyst is a reader like any other, and must allow that hers is only one of a number of possible meanings. Denying this (that is, claiming that a text analysis is the only one possible) gives the text analyst a different theoretical status than any other reader, which is a state of affairs that must be covered by the theory. Otherwise the theory is incomplete:

> If I am building a theory of how people make meaning socially, can I build a theory of my own theory-building? If I can't, my theory can never be complete, and since my theory-building is just the sort of thing I want to make a theory of [i.e. social meaning-making], a theory that didn't cover that wouldn't be much of a theory at all. (Lemke Textual Politics 156)

Implicit in this passage is the assumption that a theory is a part of the system it describes; that a theory does not appeal to a different

ontological order. This problem is more obvious in the construction of theories about semiosis than in the construction of theories about, for example, space debris. Most theorists do not reflect on the ideas/assumptions/categories implicit in the code they use to describe and explain phenomena. The code, or meta-language, or "grammar" an analyst uses to talk about the phenomenon she wishes to explain and describe is only important when the focus of explanation and description is meaning-making; when the focus is some other phenomenon, we happily and quite rightly assume that the most comprehensive or satisfying meta-language to hand, given an acceptable degree of conventionality or social circulation, is good enough for the purpose.

But when the problem is how to find a way of describing texts that allows for the multiple interpretations we know are the result of readers' differing social positions, the problem of theoretical self-reflexivity comes into focus.

Systemic boundaries are recreated with and within every sign

Each sign is doubly articulated; for each sign is not just the coming together of two entities, a concept and a sound pattern, but of two orders of reality, which, because of their juxtaposition, are "articulated" into parts. The following passage was quoted in Chapter Three to explain how very different dialects can share the same grapholect. Here I am

more interested in the precise mechanism of articulation, according to Saussure:

> The characteristic role of a language in relation to thought is to ... act as intermediary between thought and sound, in such a way that the combination of both necessarily produces a mutually complementary delimitation of units... But what happens is neither a transformation of thoughts into matter, nor a transformation of sounds into ideas. What takes place, is a somewhat mysterious process by which 'thought-sound' evolves divisions and a language takes shape with its linguistic units in between those two amorphous masses. (110)

What is also important about this passage is that Saussure draws on the notion of different orders of reality (thought and sound) or different natural elements (air and water) in order to stress their fundamentally dissimilar nature and the strength of the boundary between them. In order for signs to exist at all, there must be a coming-together of two perceptibly dissimilar phenomena. The distinctiveness of material phenomena is social; that is how contrastive analysis in phonetics, for example, works. (See Chapter Three on distinctive variation, e.g., "right" vs. "light").

In a previous section, I also said social / material distinctions are the role of systemic boundaries (dialect boundaries, social identities, modalities):

they create a difference across which we make an identity, the process itself creating, for a moment, a duality which Saussure called a "sign". A sign in our bi-dialectal written texts is created by our awareness of the boundaries of standard English; but more generally, any sign consists of elements from two perceptibly different spheres. They can be "amorphous masses"; or they can be already segmented masses (as in the juxtaposition of any English dialect with the English grapholect; see Chapter Three).

Eco seems to suggest something similar in his re-working of the Hjelmslevian sign (50-2). However, he understands a "code" to be always in place before the juxtaposition of two orders of reality. This code correlates an already-structured system with a second already-structured system; and once these systems are "aligned", the sign-function is what correlates individual signifier and signified (50)[35]. In an elaboration, Eco goes on to define a code in semiotics as that which "establishes the correlation of an expression plane (in its purely formal and systematic aspect) with a content plane (in its purely formal and systematic aspect)... " (50-51). That is, a code is a convention or device that puts two previously-established systems together. Their alignment creates the conditions for the signs of any particular system.

35 I am simplifying somewhat to keep to the line of my argument; in this model Eco is also concerned with type/token relations.

To be sure, in each of Eco's two "planes" or orders of reality, there is a pre-semiotic continuum, Hjelmslev's "purport" (51), or what Saussure called "amorphous masses" (above). But, while this purport "remains, each time, substance for a new form" (52), it is never articulated directly, as in Saussure's vision of semiosis. It remains amorphous, "the unformed material from which the [semiotic actor] obtains discrete elements to be used as expressive devices" (50); and the expressive devices are in turn given value by a further system or structure of "empty positions". Thus Eco sees the sign as generated by a pre-given code, in several different stages, while I, with Saussure, see the code (i.e. system) as the result of the same social processes which create a sign.

We have seen that an important quality of the sign is that neither signifier nor signified exist outside or beyond their instantiation in a sign. If a sign-function is really the coming together of two amorphous masses, then the system itself does not exist except at that moment when the sign comes into being. A further conclusion must be that this moment of instantiation *creates the entire system*, just as a sign-function creates a sign.[36] My interpretation of semiosis, then, is not that a third system arises between two already-structured systems, but that, at the moment of perceived contact, both original masses become systematized in an

36 This correlates with my observations in Chapter Four about every utterance being a re-definition of the boundaries of the language. If every utterance is a new sign, and every new sign creates a new system, then the boundaries of the language – and the grammar – are re-arranged in every utterance.

arrangement dictated by the particular difference at play in the particular sign.

The "particular difference at play" is in turn dictated by the interest of the sign-producer. This means that Kress' transparent sign is also part of a system – a system that is constantly being re-created according to a motivating sign. That is why a language is a practice rather than a "thing", for, as argued in Chapter Four, each instance of meaning-making is a re-definition of the rules / patterns, starting from the individual sign and reaching outwards to every part of the system in which it is an element. I quote the relevant passage from Cours again:

> ... the language system as such is never directly altered. It is in itself unchangeable. Only certain elements change, but without regard to the connexions which integrate them as part of the whole. It is as if one of the planets circling the sun underwent a change of dimensions and weight: this isolated event would have general consequences for the whole solar system, and disturb its equilibrium...It is not the system as a whole which has been changed, nor one system which has engendered a second. All that happened was the element in the original system changed, and that sufficed to bring a new system into being. (84-5)

This can only happen if the system is a closed system, that is all terms within the system are in a fixed relationship to each other, maintaining

each others' place in the system. It is because each term is defined by all of the others in the same moment that a change in any one term necessarily changes the entire system.

This explains why Allen and Brand must uphold the grapholect while breaking its norms; there would be no other way to recreate the creole, except through English writing.

This is the principle behind contrastive relations in semiotics and linguistics. It is a principle involving materiality-as-meaning as well as closed systems. Any one bit of matter acquires systemic meaning if it can be contrasted with at least one other bit. An example would be a hypothetical two-term system of red-green on traffic lights: red means not-green (not-go); green means not-red (not-stop). The two bits are a closed system of two; and any material variations, such as different shades of red or green (pink, orange; or turquoise, blue) become co-opted by the system to mean either one of the terms already there.

However, if a new item enters the system as a *differentiated* [37] token of material / meaning, it will change the meanings already in the system; so that if yellow enters the system, it will change the meaning of red (now red means stop right away); and of green (now green means you are clear to go). Yellow takes up some of the "territory" of the closed system, some of the meanings of the former red (yellow means slow or stop

37 Through a negotiation in social context.

because the light will soon change to red) and of the former green (yellow also means go, but only if you cannot stop, and go carefully). The process in a closed system would look like this:

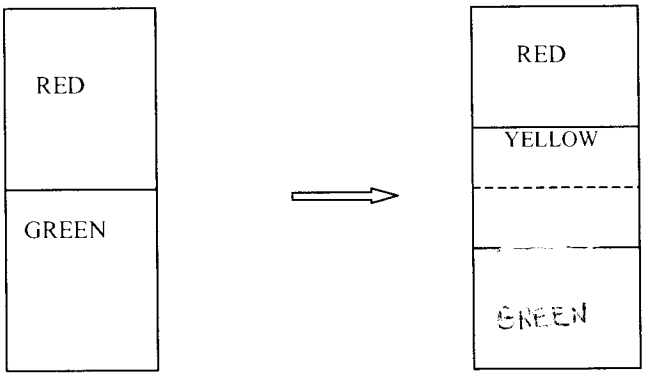

Figure 3: new terms change
value / meaning of old terms

In both Eco's and Saussure's models, "[t]he value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others" (Saussure 113).

Conclusion

So far, we have established that value and meaning are present in every sign. Any time value, indeed a sign, is created, a closed system is also created. This closed system has been confused with things like "a

language" and therefore "the" grammar of the language[38], but in fact the system is only momentary, and any system which is created by a sign/value only "exists" (semiotically) for a moment.

In this chapter as well, we have unearthed some formal principles in the relationship between materiality and meaning. In order for a meaning to be perceptible, it has to be carried by a material distinction – which must be motivated by social forces (e.g., conventionalised material / meaning distinctions such as phonemes, social categorial distinctions). This will become important in Chapter Seven, when deconstructing social categories such as gender and "race". But it is also important in the next chapter, when we consider which aural / social / political characteristics of spoken creole are transferred to written texts by Allen and Brand.

38 It has been expanded in theoretical linguistics in to a Universal Grammar which is homologous to the configuration of the human mind

Chapter Six

PROJECTION AND MODE

In Chapter Five I looked at the behaviour of signs, alone and within their systems. I explored systems in order to discover how the boundaries of systems or codes participate in semiosis. This was a way of explaining why and how "a language" as a conceptualised closed system creates social meanings; what happens formally and symbolically when a term within the system is changed; and how social / material distinctions arise.

In this chapter I look at the role of systems as signs in the work of Allen and Brand. The working notion "a language", when translated into the language of sociolinguistics, becomes dialects, diatypes, and (in this chapter) modal patterns.

Brand makes full use of code-switching of various types and on various levels to make meaning. When applied to modes (speech and writing) we begin to make better sense of transcribed creole, not as written, but as *written to be read as if heard.* That is, the very same formal and social semiotic principles that come into play in the making of meanings across two "languages" come into play in the making of meaning by reference to different juxtaposed modes.

Allen, on the other hand, uses the strong standard of the English spelling system to give force to her spelling "deviations"; the choices she makes about when and where to use phonetic spellings has most to do with local emphasis and with connotations of Jamaicaness or of the reggae / dub sub-culture (i.e., the meanings of these connotations at that particular point in the poem). Like Brand, her practice is clearly a projection from one material context to another.

Projection

Up to now, I have been implying that each speaker speaks one language, controls one variety. Traditionally, as well, descriptions of sociolinguistic variation are monolithic, according to region and/or social class: geographical dialects, social, and temporal dialects (see Gregory and Carroll). I generally speak middle-class Canadian English of the 1990s; my grandmother may speak lower-class New York City English of the 1950s. A character in a Henry James novel may "speak" upper class Boston English of the eighteen-nineties.

These categories are meant to describe sociolinguistic variation as if each speaker controls one "language"/dialect with one set of signs—a relatively discrete, unitary system. But speakers actually manipulate more than one perceived "language"/dialect, or set of verbal patterns. Speakers produce as well as understand a number of dialects, each of which is considered a bounded system. Changing between these systems

allows speakers to say the "same thing" in different social contexts. While delivering an academic paper at a conference in Cardiff a few years ago, I used (quite unconsciously) London English to a largely UK audience, even though I had only recently moved to England. When I moved back to Canada three years later, I quickly dropped a relatively large number of British English lexical items from my everyday vocabulary and replaced them with the Canadian semantic equivalents (e.g., washing up liquid / dishwashing soap).

These changes might be described as situational variation: people use different dialects according to their general social context. But the dialects I use are not just indicated by the context. I may use dialects metaphorically, in a marked, unexpected way to create an implicit meaning that is added to my message. For example, though I generally use middle-class Canadian English, I might use a quasi-British accent while reading a Beatrix Potter story to my son, to stress the narrative function of my voice: "In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lappets..." My projection of British English into a non-British situation carries meanings indexed by a different accent, modifying the references of my sentences (in this case, the inferential meaning is "this takes place in another world").

Here I will bring in a useful distinction from social semiotics, between semiosic and mimetic meaning. In the following passage, Hodge and

Kress have been discussing the message as a unit of analysis for social semiotics. Then they make the following distinction:

> ... [The message] is oriented to the semiosic process, the social process by which meaning is constructed and exchanged, ... [it] takes place in what we will call the *semiosic plane*.... [the message is also] connected to a world to which it refers in some way, and its meaning derives from this representative or mimetic function it performs...[on] the *mimetic plane*. (Hodge and Kress, 5)

In other words, the mimetic meaning is what we would normally think of as the "what" of the message; and the semiosic meaning is the "how" of the message, or the style of the message, which determines the ultimate meaning of the message. It is not until we understand the message on the semiosic plane (for example, what is the dialect it is delivered in; what are the paralinguistic cues signalling "irony") that we can say what the message "means". This is an aspect of context; and context, as I said earlier, is an indispensable part of the meaning of any message.

In the story-reading example above, the direction of the projection, or code-switch, as well as the fact of switching itself, makes a difference to my message. If I want my son to come to me in a public place, and saying "Come here" (in English) doesn't work, I will switch to Spanish to reinforce the command, because Spanish is the language of family interaction: "Ven" (c.f. Gumperz).

In the sociolinguistic literature on code-switching, these two examples are two types of code-switching: participant-related, and discourse-related (Auers). Participant-related code switching functions to modulate the relationship between speakers. According to Myers-Scotton every speaker in a multilingual society knows the usual, or "unmarked" choice of dialect for each type of interaction, given also their social position or identity in relation to that of the other participants in the interaction. Code switching is "a strategy which is followed when speakers perceive that their own costs-rewards balance will be more favourable for the conversation at hand through engaging in [code switching] than through using a single code" (152).

For example, a speaker may wish to emphasise their own high status when dealing with a traffic policeman, using a code indexed for high status in that cultural context. But they may code switch into the policeman's own dialect when they want to renegotiate their relationship with him and put the exchange on a basis of solidarity. All marked code-choices, Myers-Scotton says, "can be subsumed under one general effect: to negotiate a change in the expected social distance holding between participants, either decreasing it or increasing it" (132).

Discourse-related switching is used for the communication of non-verbal nuances or of inferential meanings. The focus here has usually been on the local meaning of the switch rather than on the identity or relationship

of the participants. Gumperz lists six such discourse-related functions of code switching:

- quotation or reported speech
- addressee specification—directing the message to one of several possible addressees
- interjection or sentence filler
- reiteration—to clarify or emphasise the message
- message qualification—to add information about the main part of the message
- personalization versus objectivization (93-94)

The last is more than a single function, because it changes meaning depending on the textual context. It can distinguish talk about action from talk as action; the degree of speaker involvement or distance from the message; whether a statement reflects personal opinion or public knowledge; or whether it refers to specific instances or "has the authority of generally known fact" (94).

Largely in the light of the last function, Gumperz comments that

> ...the direction of the shift may... have semantic value. In a sense the oppositions warning/personal appeal [in a command]; casual remark/personal feeling; ... personal opinion/generally known fact can be seen as metaphoric extensions of the "we"/"they" code opposition. (93-4)

The over-arching communicative principle of code switching, in Gumperz's view, does not have as its goal just signals of social identity between participants, but, by extension, signals of communicative intent about the referential message. This reinforces the fact that meaning and social identity are linked in every message.

I might accent a word with a Midwestern American twang in order to bring out a certain aspect of my meaning: "That's OK baa me", I might say if I want to say, "in a very relaxed way, that's very much OK by me". The stereotype of the indexed social identity (mid-Western American) modifies the meaning of my "referential message" or mimetic meaning.

I would in fact expand the dualistic schema of code-switching to "projection" (see also LePage "Projection", LePage and Tabouret-Keller), so that speakers may project any of a large number of dialects through markers, stereotypes, and styles. Essentially, we have a social universe in which different, marked types of verbal patterns (accents, dialects, even languages) conventionally index different social groups or activities, and therefore verbal behaviour may "project" these indexical patterns into any context to create different meanings.

Code-switching in Brand's "No Language Is Neutral" is often a very clear demonstration of this principle of production. In verse paragraph four of "no language is neutral", there are code-switches between creole

and standard that re-create speakers as well as define their relationships:[39]

> This time Liney done see vision in this green guava season, fly skinless and turn into river fish, dream sheself, praise god, without sex and womb when sex is hell and womb is she to pay. So dancing an old
>
> she to pay
>
> man the castilian around this christmas living room
>
> castilian
>
> my little sister and me get Ben to tell we any story he remember, and in between his own trail of conquests and pretty clothes, in between his never sleeping with
>
> pretty clothes
>
> a woman who wasn't clean because he was a scornful man, in between our absent query were they scornful women too, Liney smiled on his gold teeth. The castilian out of breath, the dampness of his shrunken skin reminding us, Oh god! laughing, sister! we will kill uncle dancing! (No Language 25)

In the first sentence, Liney is rendered in free direct speech by a passage in creole, from "This time" to "she to pay". Creole elements include

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39In the following layout, creole words and passages are underlined, standard are not, and words and passages that may be read as either creole or standard (i.e., they are code-ambiguous) are repeated on two lines, once underlined, once not. Although code-ambiguity is a very important issue in considering the themes of this text, they will not be taken up here; the ambiguities in the data, on the other hand, have been represented.

"done see", "guava season", "sheself", and past tense "fly", "dream" and "is". "Womb is she to pay" is both word-play in standard and left-focusing of "womb" in creole: an existential copula is inserted to transform "she to pay [for] womb" into "womb, [it] is she to pay" (Winer, p.c.). In the second sentence, a switch to standard, from "So dancing" to "living room", establishes a change in speaker from Liney to the original speaker. In the main clause of this sentence, another switch to creole, from "my little sister" to "remember", establishes a child speaker. Creole markers in this clause are: the first person object pronoun "we", past tense "get", and third person past "remember".[40]

The participant-related switching I would like to draw attention to is between this child-speaker and Ben. The exchange goes something like this:

- children (**creole**): ask Ben to tell them a story

- Ben (**creole**): tells stories; remarks that he never slept "with a woman who wasn't clean because he was a scornful man"

- children: (**standard**): ask whether the women were scornful too

Ben's creole speech is indirectly represented in either the entire phrase "his never sleeping with a woman who wasn't clean because he was a

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40The tense of the verbs "get" and "remember" may be ambiguous, because the main verb of the next clause |("and in between ... Liney smiled on his gold teeth") is in the past, but the free direct nature of this child-dialect encourages a present-tense reading of the actions of getting and remembering.

scornful man", or perhaps only in "because he was a scornful man". The creole marker is "scornful man": in Trinidad, to be "scornful" is to be fastidious or easily disgusted.

In reply, the children switch to standard. The switch is emphasised by the formality of the introductory noun phrase: "our *absent query* were they scornful women too". We know the children's direct speech is in standard because creole yes/no questions do not have the reversed verb-subject order of this standard question. Also, the creole third person plural pronoun is "them", not "they" as in this sentence.

This passage creates a speech exchange in which participant-related code-switching takes place as a marked choice: one set of participants, the sisters put as much social distance as possible between themselves and the other participant, Ben, by switching to a different, unexpected code. Their reasons for creating this distance are embedded in the complexities of the verse, which I will not comment on, since my purpose here is simply to illustrate an extended passage of code-switching by Brand

Modal projection

Descriptions of variation can also be carried out according to the *function* of the speech act.

Gregory and Carroll have schematized a set of "diatypic" (functional) varieties. The first type of functional variation is field: it roughly comprises the specialized items of vocabulary or clause patterns I might use to talk about a specialized object or field of activity—or the lack of these items in my speech. For example, I might speak with the specialized vocabulary of my academic field to my colleagues, using a higher proportion than normal of passive clauses. Or I may speak in the field of aviation when discussing repairs with a mechanic at the hangar.

The second diatypic variety is tenor, or the style or level of formality I might use depending on my relationship to my addressee: I usually speak in a very informal, intimate style to my partner, but would address a judge in a very formal tenor. Baby talk is a specific, well-defined tenor.

The third and final type of functional variation is mode: I use different types of verbal patterns depending on the medium (speech, writing, etc.) Mode refers to the patterns rather than the medium: I might use speech to make meaning in a mode which has been written to be heard (play script) rather than read (novel).

These three functional types of variation—field, tenor, and mode—are aspects of one speech event. People use verbal patterns according to time, place, and social space as a whole. If the field of a verbal pattern is academic, its tenor is likely to be formal and its mode more often written, or spoken as if written, than spoken.

Diatypic patterns can be projected, so that the field of military terminology can be used by police to lend authority to its part in a controversial arrest. Baby-talk projected out of context, to a peer, for example, would be considered mockery. Mode as it is defined by Gregory and Carroll already recognises the possibility of projection: according to them, certain widely recognisable features of spoken verbal patterns can be written to project "speech", and all of its social meanings and associated tenor, into a written text (e.g., play scripts, speeches, fictional interior monologues).

These projections, as with projections of dialect, can be either the projection of an integrated body of signs (or text) into an unexpected context; or merely the projection of a few "stereotypes" (the linguistic variables that are *popularly* ascribed to a group; see Labov Language 248; and Chapter Three). In the first case, I might speak Spanish in a context in which English is expected; in the second case, I might use a few variables of Spanish only to sketch "Spanishness". The novelist Potok's projection of French stereotypes into an English text, signalling that the dialogue is in French, is a good illustration of the latter. Although I quoted it in Chapter Three, it is worth another look:

> "Mrs. Levy," I said. "Where do the wife and two children of Lucien Lacamp live?"
>
> "Wife and one child. The other child died."
>
> "I am sorry to hear that."

"She had the asthma. They live now on the Rue d'Aboukir in the Second Arrondissement...."

"Thank you," I said. "I am in your debt." (Potok 197)

While "markers" (Hodge and Kress 79, and see above, page 131) carry social significance, and thus are always recognised, "stereotypes" are not only recognised, but recognised *as such*, that is, as a kind of joke or explicit sign of a group considered Other. Markers are, by definition, accurate: the moment they do not mark the meaningful group any more (because members do not actually use them), they cannot function as markers. They tend to be used within groups in which social roles are in flux and therefore differences need to be marked. Stereotypes, on the other hand, may be inaccurate, and they are often used of groups with whom the speech community is no longer in contact.

Stereotypes thus hold an interesting position beyond the implicit signals given by speakers to each other about their social position at any given moment (markers). The use of a stereotype can signal a wish by the speaker to have her utterance understood for the moment as produced by a member of an out-group while she retains her membership in her own group through the "matrix" verbal patterns.

For example, Blom and Gumperz noticed that for the university students among the subjects in their 1972 code-switching study, "the distinction between dialect and standard is not so sharp... their behaviour shows a range of variation rather than an alternation between distinct systems"

(431). During an informal conversation these students used a modified "standard", which was not a complete shift to the standard, while speaking of public events outside of the village or while making authoritative statements. Blom and Gumperz perceived "an erosion of the linguistic boundary between [standard dialect] and [local dialect]...the tendency is to switch toward standard phonology while preserving some morphophonemic and lexical dialect features of [the local dialect]" (429).

There are striking similarities between this description of the students' linguistic behaviour and Gibbons's description of the behaviour of Hong Kong university students. Gibbons calls this behaviour "code-mixing" and adduces the work of Kachru (see Gibbons 8 or Myers-Scotton 63) who first gave currency to the term. Code-mixing "entails transferring linguistic units from one code into another..." (as qtd. in Myers-Scotton 63). Mixing is thus felt by speakers to be a single code, rather than a series of rapid switches. This is the case of Gibbons' and Blom and Gumperz's university students, who did not want to give up either their status as university students or their membership in the local community. A stereotype allows a kind of *double-entendre* that a marker does not.

Projection in the written texts of Allen and Brand

This point is especially relevant for media such as alphabetic writing, which make references to another substance (sound, through the spelling system) without actually being that substance. The verbal patterns of the

written mode can be the matrix to stereotypes of speech. That is, written English is a "language" in which certain grammatical and morphological rules apply regardless of the speaker's native dialect (see Chapter Three, Ong's "grapholect" p. 86). Any speaker must follow these rules when writing regardless of what rules they follow in their speech. I may be a speaker of Canadian English or Standard Jamaican English, but I will always translate the verbal patterns I use in my speech into the verbal patterns of written English.

To signal "plural" in written English, for example, I would use the graph "es/s" on the end of a regular noun, regardless of how I signal its plural in speech. The same nouns in speech will have a range of endings to signal plural, from [s] to a selection of [z] [iz] [ɔz] [Iz] [Is] [ɔs] [Ø] among others, according to convention. An even better example is French: the French grapholect signals plural with a word-final "s" on the noun, but in speech word-final sibilants ([s], [z]) are never used (to signal number on the noun).

Thus, diatypical patterns of speech cannot be projected as an integrated mass into the matrix patterns of writing. This limits the meanings that either semiotic material, or mode, can create. At the same time, the notion of the boundedness of writing as a self-contained system with a very strong standard at all levels (from syntax to spelling) *in itself* allows the matrix/stereotype meaning-relation that lets the writer project one mode onto another.

The following is a passage from Brand's long poem "no language is neutral":

> ... Nothing is a joke no more and I right
> there with them, running for the train until I get to find
> out my big sister just like to run and nobody wouldn't
> vex if you miss the train... (No Language 29)

In this extract, the morphology of Trinidad English Creole (which is an oral language) is written: double negatives ("nothing is a joke no more"; "nobody wouldn't"), a zero copula ("I ... there"), and Creole person and number agreement ("my sister... like" [to run]). And yet, in writing, these meanings would *normally* be represented with the following signs: a single negative, the copula "am", and the suffix "-s" on the verb to indicate it agrees with a third person singular pronoun.

The perceived boundary of writing, policed as rigorously as the boundaries of "languages" are policed, allows Brand to insert clearly recognisable stereotypes of creole – which is both an ethnic variety and a spoken language. Her use of stereotypical creole morphology signals which set of verbal patterns she has in mind as a spoken correlate to these written patterns. That is, here she is not interested in "writing" us a message; she is interested in "speaking in writing" to us a message.

Stereotypes can be inserted into matrix patterns at various linguistic levels. Special lexical items are often stereotypical, and for these the writer must make a decision as to whether to render the stereotypical

word with English spellings, as a part of the grapholectal system, thereby claiming it, and the indexed group, as partially (but only partially) members of the in-group; or to render it as a non-word of the grapholectal system.

Consider the aspect marker [d^n][41], rendered in writing by Brand as the English perfect past tense marker "done":

> ... How to fly gravity,
> how to balance basket and prose reaching for
> murder. Silence done curse god and beauty here,
> people does hear things in this heliconia peace
> a morphology of rolling chain and copper gong
> now shape this twang, falsettos of whip and air
> rudiment this grammar. (No Language 23; emphasis mine)

The projection of TEC in this very lyrical passage is accomplished with the insertion of the stereotypical "done", signalled as partially written because its spelling does not break the orthographic standard. This creates a projection whose function appears to be a sudden increase in emotional intensity for a native creole-speaker / writer, rather than a projection of a different identity.

Allen, on the other hand, uses phonetic spellings. This is for two reasons. Firstly, disrupting the boundaries of the spelling system paradoxically makes the spelling system "sound" again, because it dislodges the

41 Since creole is not a written language, I am using the IPA to represent the spoken word which is the stereotype.

integrity of the system. In disrupting its boundaries, the function of individual elements in the (phonetic) system can once again be the focus of reading.

> So what so what so what
> So your years of schooled craft
> have created fine poems
> so it ended pollution
> so it stopped wars
> (Women Do This 127)

Dub poets in general spell creole morphology[42] as outside of the grapholect. [D^n] is rendered in writing by Linton Kwesi Johnson and others as "dun", iconically signalling with a "broken" standard a "Broken English" (the name for creole in the Caribbean through much of the twentieth century). It is a powerful visual reminder of the social agenda of dub poets, and of their very strong differences with the Eurocentric cultural establishment.

Another visual flag of identity is the dub term "riddim" (see Chapter Two, "Dub"). "Riddim" is the motivating, creative force for any poem but also for social action and political protest; for the "roots" (Africa) oriented poets, it is also a reference to a quintessentially African inheritance. It is synonymous with "dub" (the original title for "Riddim

42 A fair number of JEC particles and prepositions have apparently English lexical origins but are markers in a different system of tense and aspect (the JEC), which is closer to West African systems (Winford Predication).

an' Hardtimes" was "Riddim on Hardtimes" (Allen "360 Degrees Black")).

"Riddim" is also the phonetic spelling of "rhythm" in JEC; and it is in fact an accurate rendering *through the conventions of English spelling*. For example, as [θ] ("th") is phonemic in English but not phonemic in JEC, "th" is replaced by "d" (ridim). The second vowel receives full value in this spelling as well, indicating the syllable-timed pronunciation *as opposed to* the stress-timed English one which reduces the value of the second vowel. Finally, since inter-vocalic [t] in American and Canadian English is habitually reduced to a flap, an extra "d" is inserted to stress its full value (which would be heard as an extended [d] by North American ears).

Its phonetic qualities are not the whole story, however. In the following poem, "rhythm" and "riddim" are placed one above the other. "Rhythm" has enormous visual emphasis:

R h y t h m

riddim

rebel revolt

resistance

R e v o l u t i o n

44 The UK system of race on a very general level.

if these words are not poetic
then poetry has no means to free me
(Women Do This 31)

It seems Allen spaces out the letters in the first "rhythm" to stress the printed word-as-object; and it is tempting to read the phonetic spelling of "riddim" as a code- (or mode-) switch. But the meanings of this poem do not support such an interpretation, because all of the other words in the poem are in standard spelling. "Riddim" here comes to mean another word, with a different meaning from "rhythm". It has thus evolved into *not* a phonetic spelling of a JEC word, but a new English word (it has been lexicalised, within Allen's idiolect); it has become, in a sense, silent. As in the following poem, "rhythm" is a larger philosophical term, while "riddim" is symbolic of a sub-culture (see discussion of "riddim", p. 80).

In "Dis Word", the word "rhythm" is spelled in standard within a poem in which all words *but one* are standard:

dis word breeds my rhythm
dis word carries my freedom
dis word is my hand
: my weapon
(Women Do This 87)

The only word spelled outside of the conventions in this poem is "dis". Again, "dis" is an accurate rendering of its sound; but again, this is only a small part of the function of the spelling. By referring to its sound, and

to its status as a term in an oral language, Allen is making a reference to its concreteness. When we read "dis word", we are meant to realise it refers to the very ink on the very page we are holding in our hands.

On the mimetic plane, "dis" has the meanings of the English "this" – it is a deictic, a concrete grammatical index of a very specific time and place, which cannot be referred to in any other way (specifying the time and place in other words immediately invalidates the reference when the time and place changes; and Allen means whichever time and place the reader is reading the poem). However, on the semiosic plane, "dis" is a Jamaican word, not an English one; the meaning then becomes "this Jamaican word breeds my rhythm", etc.

The function of emphasis for this phonetic spelling means all of the other words, which are spelled in standard orthography, are meant to recede in focus. With reference to "rhythm", then, the decision to render the same word in phonetic spelling or in standard spelling depends most on local decisions about emphasis and meaning, as well as sound.

Allen's account of her practice is similar:

> WB: ... In some of your poems you spell the words phonetically, and in others you don't. Why do you shift back and forth?

> LA: That has to do with what I think is the best vehicle to carry not only the message but the artistry of the piece. It's like the medium, the form – it creates part of the form. ... (Bartley 19)

We can say that Allen and Brand are manipulating the boundary between orality/writing and creole/English, or that they are hovering at the "edges" of the standardised codes (writing; English). In both cases, it is the very existence of the boundary, the very notion of systemic integrity, or signs within systems, that allows them to make meanings in this way.

Orality and the body

Brand never writes entire poems in creole. The function of creole passages in No Language Is Neutral and Land to Light On is to create the conditions for code-switching. In some passages, Brand even blends creole and non-creole English in a sort of code ambiguity:

> I lift my head in the cold and I get confuse.
> It quiet here when is night, and is only me
> and the quiet. I try to say a word but it fall...
> .....
> ... I did not
> know which way to turn except to try again, to find
> some word that could be heard by the something
> waiting. My mouth could not find a language.
> I find myself instead, useless as that. I sorry.
> I stop by the mailbox and I give up. (Land to Light On 5)

Her use of code ambiguity gives Brand access to meaningful syntactic ambiguities. In this passage, since the creole past tense and the non-creole English present tense have the same structure (e.g., zero dental suffix on the end of "lift", "confuse", "try", "stop"; unmarked tense in "get", "find", "give"), the consciousness of the speaker constantly and easily shifts between narrator (past tense) and participant (present tense) of the action; but it also shifts in the same manner (but not in the same moments) between a literary, relatively assured persona, and a creole-speaking, apologetic and "sorry" persona. It is both of these who "give up" in the final line.

The line "My mouth could not find a language" captures Brand's conception of the relationship between the grapholect, orality, and the body. The cultural duality I have been describing, that of the object "language" (the official version, the grapholect, the prescribed grammar) versus the alternative but severely repressed "word that could be heard" (speech, orality) is strongly linked to the body in her poetry, so that orality is "the language" of the body ("my mouth"), which, however, is not an official object "a language", but "myself, useless..."

Creole, even written creole, is strongly tied to orality even though it can be transcribed, because the material affordances of writing and speech can be and often are subordinated to the social meanings of each technology. In Brand's poetry, the body has a way of saying things that is not the public language of "the something / waiting". Her body ("my

mouth could not find a language") speaks creole. By implication, creole is not a language; and the meaning of "a language" suddenly becomes historicized and politicized.

The next step is to note that orality, in itself and as part of a cluster of symbols, is the embodiment of verbal meaning-making. In performance the connection between orality and embodiment is direct: if a text is spoken (oral), there is a specific body with a specific somatotype and movement style, with a specific voice quality, timbre, and pitch, making its sounds (the text is embodied).

Orality is not necessarily spoken, however. As discussed in the previous chapter, orality can be written in medium but spoken in mode (that is, writing meant to be read as if spoken). Just as we can "speak" writing (reading aloud a bed-time story, for example), we can "write" speaking.

Writing speech forces the writer to choose who is speaking. This is because the verbal patterns of present day written English are much more uniform than those of the range of Englishes spoken throughout the world; and any one set of spoken verbal patterns (dialects) is a trace of the provenance of its speaker.

Speakers are unavoidably embodied. Each one of us is white, Black, Asian, woman, man, child, old, young, or on continua between with these or similar identities as idealized references. This is not to say that the grapholect does not have its own varieties signalling social identities;

only that the English grapholect, because of its uniformity across different English dialects, is used to signal or connote universal disembodied values in contrast to the emphasis on the local, embodied nature of spoken verbal patterns.

Since Caribbean English Creoles are functionally oral languages (that is, they have no official written counterpart), they are an even better resource for signalling orality in writing than most other spoken verbal patterns ('dialects'). However, using creole also means negotiating a complex network of intertexts in the mass media and in different discourses. As stated in Chapter Two, these include images of creole speakers as the underclass, the poor, and the Other. Stereotypes also include connotations of Black identity as unlettered and ultra-somatised (Fanon 1986), as well as other chestnuts of the essential African in the European Orientalist imagination.

For Allen and Brand, these stereotypes are double-edged, because it is precisely these images they turn to in re-creating their position as black women in diaspora. For example, in "I Have Been Losing Roads", Brand uses written creole on two levels: as an interior, private language; and as the language of a publicly "raced" woman:

> If the trees don't flower and colour refuse to limn
> when a white man in a red truck on a rural road
> jumps out at you, screaming his exact hatred
> .....

"Is really so evil they is then
that one of them in a red truck can split your heart
open, crush a day in fog?" (Land to Light On 4)

Hinting at the vulnerability of the speaker, Brand shifts from written English to Trinidad English Creole at the creole third-person plural ending on "colour" (not "colours" as in written English). This creole in the line suggests an inner emotional reality contrasting with the outer reality of events in the third line, which is rendered in unambiguously written English.: "jumps out at you, screaming his exact hatred". The final three lines, placed in quotation marks, are of course in Trinidad English Creole. Through this more emphatic code-switch, bolstered by the conventions of print (quotation marks), Brand performs the switch in identity the racist in the truck has forced on her. The speaker has gone from a neutral written identity to a marked, embodied, spoken-in-writing identity, effected by the obscenity of the racist.

Conclusion

In this chapter I applied the view of language developed in Chapter Four, that is, that speakers create language boundaries, but only in relation to the context and to the configurations of the situation. I made the point that working with more than one "language" deploys the language as a metasign, allowing negotiations of meaning on the semiosic plane. However, projecting one perceived 'language' (whether dialect, national language, or verbal mode) into another requires a working notion of systemic boundedness. With this crucial working notion, we produce and

understand things like dialect projections, modal projections, and phonetic spellings.

Allen and Brand's non-standard spellings and syntax disrupt the standard of the grapholect, without, however, destroying the integrity which allows it to function as a marker of group identity. They also draw attention to an order of difference on the same scale as the difference between standard orthography and non-standard – that is, a difference in mode (speech / writing).

The move from considering the written texts of Allen and Brand as multilingual to multimodal (although still written) opens up an enormous range of material connections in their texts. Although still written, their poetry is also oral; if oral, then also embodied; if embodied, then also participating in discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and a host of other systems of social organisation and individual identity. In the next chapter, I will explore this aspect of the relationship between spoken creole and written English in some texts by Allen and Brand.

Chapter Seven

EMBODIED METASIGNS

Recently, while waiting for calaloo in the Caribbean take-out shop around the corner from our flat, I had a conversation with the dark-brown-skinned cook. Where did I live, he asked? "Up near Ruskin Park", I said, wishing to share my pleasure in the park, and belatedly aware that I was also overtly indicating privilege. On the edges of Brixton as we are, one's choice of names is a statement of social allegiance. Did I like London? Yes; well, I liked Brixton (again, impulsively sharing my pleasure, but now aware of the signalling of allegiances). Where was I from? As always, a second of hyper-awareness, of computing contexts: if I had been speaking Spanish, I would say "Cuba", though I was an immigrant to Anglo-Canada at age five; when I lived in bilingual Montreal I would say "Ottawa", the bilingual border-city where I grew up; but here in London, I say "Canada", letting the semiotics of dialect and skin colour convey erroneous signals. I am only white English-Canadian in certain times and places.

Was I here alone? "No, with my partner, you might have seen him around, he's from Guatemala..." here I stopped, at a loss, since my partner has roughly the same migrant history as I. Why did I say he was

from Guatemala, while I was "Canadian"? I tried to explain: "You might have seen him pass by... He has black hair, sort of dark, looks very Latin American."

But the cook didn't know what "Latin Americans" are supposed to look like. "Black?" he asked. "Dark white," I firmly replied, and found myself facing yet another of those moments of grinding gears, of referential vertigo. The first I ever had was when an American roommate in university asked me, "So, how does it feel to be non-white?" "I'm not non-white," I protested immediately. But if I lived in the United States, as a Cuban immigrant I would be a "minority" (an alternative American term for non-white). My quick response revealed to me then the size of the investment I had in being on the "right" side of white.

A few weeks later, I happened to be in the take-out shop with my partner and I introduced him to the cook. I asked, "What would you call him?" The cook formed his lips to say "Bl-", and then asked him, "What's you name, anyway?", and when informed, "I'd call him Eduardo."

Despite the cook's grace and my own hapless embroilment in "race"-ist categories, I realized that the cook subscribed to a larger British binary, that of "white" and "Black". "White" is "us" by whomever it is used; "Black" is everybody else, or, as they say in America, "non-white" (non-"us"). Even for the cook, although "Black" has strong inclusive

connotations, it is an Other to a more powerful, and therefore exclusive "us"—white.

In this chapter I describe closed-system grammars of social identity that are always in flux according to changing historical and geographical contexts. These grammars are very similar to the grammars of languages in the sense that they are maintained in very local negotiations of error and correctness; fundamentally, these are negotiations of social position, which in turn affect the grammars used to carry them out. At the same time, a metaphysics of presence relating to embodied signs of identity drives the energy with which people manipulate the grammar, in the sense that they believe embodied signs are transcendent. Just as the personal is political, the socio-political is personal.

I will be using the term grammar in the revised sense developed in Chapter Four: a description of the realities people set up by behaving "as if". But a grammar is also a medium of exchange (of ideas, relationships) and that is why its shape changes quickly, in accordance with changing ideas and relationships. In other words, a social semiotic grammar cannot describe an object such as "a language" without also describing how people make and change terms such as English and creole, black and white, man and woman; and how they define themselves by reworking the terms in systematic ways.

Metasigns

In Chapter Six, my explanation of projection depended on the notion of homogeneous codes. That is, in order for projection to work, there has to be in the minds of speakers both an idea of a certain dialect, style, language, or other such "code" as well as what that code "means"—e.g., "Frenchness, or "upper classness". Hodge and Kress refer to such codes as metasigns, or signs about signs (77).

What the code often signifies is a group of people, socially distinguished within a community that agrees to distinguish that group. Thus the group of people distinguished as "American" by the verbal markers they use (accent) are distinguished by all English speakers for a variety of reasons having to do with history and collective identity, but not with any necessarily objective feature of American-ness.

How these conventions of social identity and their indexical verbal patterns are then used to mean even more specific things depends, as I have said, on the specific context of the interaction. Recall the American twang I mentioned before: "That's OK baa me", I might say if I want to say, "in a very relaxed way, that's very much OK by me".

An American accent is a good example of a metasign. A metasign is a sign or set of signs which acts as a marker of group allegiance (Hodge and Kress 79). As such, metasigns are signs that "primarily refer to relations in the plane of semiosis (the production of meaning) rather than

the mimetic plane (what is referred to)" (82). That is, they are about the identity of the speakers or the context of the utterance; these are both necessary indicators of *how* a message is to be read.

A metasign is a sign in itself. As such, it behaves within the same constraints and with the same contradictions as all signs, discussed in Chapter Five. For example, a national language is a metasign that, formally, works as an element in a system of signs that might be called "languages" (Swahili is one element of a system composed of numerous languages). The reason it is crucial to insist on the place of Swahili as only one metasign taking part in a system of metasigns / languages is because it is only through the constant awareness of the difference of Swahili in relation to other languages that its "Swahiliness", its identity (and that of its speakers) is maintained.

By emphasising the systemic context of metasigns, I draw attention to the work that goes on every day in maintaining, adjusting, and redefining metasigns, through the deployment of markers. Any use of a marker – and markers are unavoidable in any utterance – constitutes a redefinition of the metasign in relation to all of the others in the same system. This is how the boundaries of English are negotiated, as I showed in Chapter Four. At the same time, it is the relative status of participants in an interaction that determines what is (re)defined as group membership, i.e., whether one is or is not a member, whether a material signifier is or is

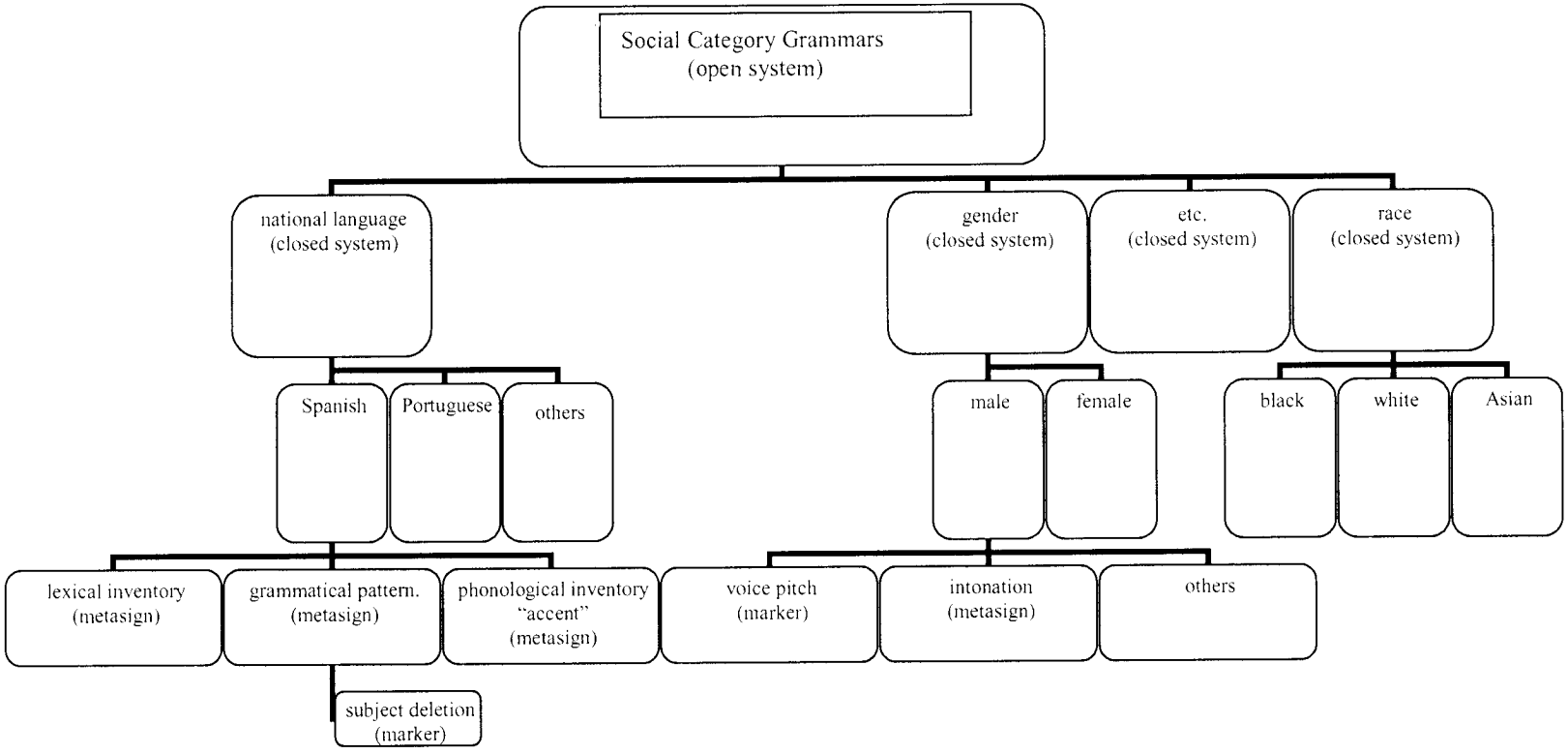
not a marker. Like languages, social groups, that is social identities as metasigns, are constantly being (re)defined.

Metasigns are not always linked to verbal production (accents, dialects). Some metasigns are embodied, that is, are physical characteristics that are used as social identity markers. Embodied markers of race or gender can be deployed as signs in themselves. And, just as speakers' defence of the boundaries of a language is a way both of negotiating their relative status as well as mutually re-creating "the language", speakers negotiating their identity in terms such as "American" or "black" are taking part in the re-creation of these systems of signs while negotiating relative status.

Metasign systems, or grammars

Just as a conventional grammar is the description of a set of patterns acting as markers (socially identified as "a language") a grammar of social categories is a description of a set of patterns acting as markers. However, each of these patterns has (collectively) already been identified as a metasign, e.g. "Irish". That is, a grammar can be a set of markers or set of metasigns at different levels of complexity (see Table 1).

Table 1 -- Grammars of social categories: metasigns and markers



A grammar is a closed system. A closed system is a set of metasigns or markers, each of which structures the system as a whole through its sign-function. Sets of metasigns (i.e. social category grammars) are logonomic systems (Hodge and Kress 266-7), which are constraints on (and offer possibilities for) and who is able to say what under what circumstances and how. In this aspect as well, logonomic systems are "grammars" in the popular sense.

Social category grammars are generated by systems of differences similar to Saussure's "system[s] of pure values" (110). There are grammars of ethnicity, of dialect/language, of colour, of nationality, of religious allegiance, of gender, of sexuality, of "race, of age ... There is no exhaustive list of these metasign systems, since they are extremely local and also contingent on changing social and political relations.

They are all, however, closed systems in which each term is defined by all of the others. For example, within a certain grammar of race metasigns[44] the term "black" stands in opposition to "Asian" and "white": "black" is meaningful only in relation to its opposites, "Asian" and "white". In such a scheme, "the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others" (Saussure 113).

This sets up a dynamic of meaning-making rather than a set of (possible or actual) meanings. In such a system based on differences, each sign must be arbitrary (in the Saussurian sense):

4m See bottom of p 193

> The processes of linguistic change amply demonstrate this correlation. It is precisely because two signs a and b are never grasped as such by our linguistic consciousness, but only the difference between a and b, that each sign remains free to change in accordance with laws quite unconnected with their signifying function. (116)

Social category grammars change in accordance with relations of power. It is a highly imbricated process, since social and semiotic exchanges are inseparable: social relations depend on the exchange of symbols while the exchange of symbols always affects these relations (Lemke "Action, Context, and Meaning").

In the rest of this section I am going to deconstruct the term "race"[45] through a description of its constitution in several local grammars. Race is the name of a code that includes the terms black, white, Asian, Latin-American (or Hispanic), Oriental, and so forth, in different combinations, including some potential terms and ignoring others because of the history of its place. For example, the history of the Caribbean includes white Europeans, black Africans, Chinese, and South Asians in various configurations of dominance and subversion; it is this history that participants in the culture live out and carry forward through constant negotiation of their relations to each other in these and other terms

45 In the rest of the section I will not put terms in quotation marks in the interest of visual neatness.

(female, working class, educated, homosexual, Caribbean, etc.). It must be understood from the outset that these are not essential terms – there is no such thing as "a black" or "a female" – but relative terms – black as non-white, female as non-male. People behave *as if* these terms are "true"; and that is the fundamental insight of semiotics. Recall Eco's "[e]very time there is a possibility of lying, there is a sign-function; which is to signify (and then to communicate) something *to which no real state of things corresponds*." (58)

As I have said, at the level of everyday interaction, the local values of the term black are created and recreated through historical relations of power between self- and Other-defining groups. Black in English North America, for example, means a person with any African ancestry; in Haiti, it means a person with wholly African ancestry; in England, informally it means a person with a non-European ancestry, non-East Asian ancestry. This gloss of different signifieds for the term black comes from the history of its usage in each locale. The sign shifts as a function of the shifting relations of power that the use of "black" indexes; for in each of these locales, status / solidarity negotiations are performed in the everyday, and each performance, in theory, changes the system.

Participants in different race systems in different locales may use the same terms, e.g. white. They may use them to denote different things. They will, however, use them systematically, according to their

community's conventionalized race grammar. There is a regular system of differences between the signifiers (terms); there is another system of differences among the denoted signifieds, or values; and the interface between the two is the occasion for the creation of signs.

Since meaning by difference on the signifier plane (e.g., colour terms) is arbitrarily linked to meanings on the signified plane (e.g., skin colour), neither the signifiers nor signified are ontologically prior. Each plane is in constant flux. At times one side of the grammar / social-structure relationship is the more stable (as when the signifier black is widespread, but used of different signifieds); and at times the other (as when signifiers for non-us in the United States shift from non-white to ethnic to minority).

The link between signifiers and signifieds is dynamic in other ways. Race is only one cluster of systems; social identities are practiced across different systems, which sometimes overlap (e.g., class, race, ethnicity). These systems also affect each other through the multivalent signs (Volosinov) that they arrange. For example, the historical enslavement of New World Africans has been construed, in the context of American racism, as identical to the emasculation of African men (see Brathwaite The Arrivants). Black feminism (see Chapter Two) is concerned with the dynamics of this type of intersection and its impact on black women.

It's important to keep in mind that the entire social category grammar is also contingent. This follows from the fact that every value in the system functions only in relation to all of the others and to the system as a whole. The very idea of gender, for example, is a product of a certain binary system in which the terms masculine and feminine define each other (Butler). Without their differential relationship, gender could not exist.

Performativity and the body

As I have said, social identities rely on more than verbal modes in their circulation. Body language, facial expressions, qualities of the voice, and other embodied signs are used to signal and mark identity. Commonsensically, there is a difference between markers that are in our semi-conscious control, such as verbal language and body-language, to those that are not often changed, such as skin colour. But in some gender (Butler) and social semiotic theory (Lemke "Towards a Social Semiotics"), the difference is a continuum between two poles:

> Our community teaches us specific, if often inexplicit procedures for identifying, classifying, segmenting, and evaluating the semiotic body. We read bodies, and with them, patterns of movement, facial expressions and gestures, body lexis, stance, attitude, somatotype, vocal style, etc. We construct, by these social practices characteristic of our community and the subcommunities we belong to, socially meaningful semiotic bodies and their texts. The criteria, the categories, the procedures all have little in common with those of the physicist or biologist. They construct a different sort of material individual. (Lemke 5)

While the examples Lemke uses are oriented to describing how we distinguish individuals, the same mechanism is used within communities to distinguish groups.

The distinctions practiced and read in the body depend on very specific historical contexts. For example, physical features constructing an Irishman in eighteenth-century London were apparently clear to all, as were those constructing a Jew in 1930's Vienna (Epstein). In the same way, physical features constructing a woman are only visible in contexts in which a gender distinction is important. Although the markers are material, it is the signifieds ("Irish", "Jew", "female") which fuel the

semiotic embodiment of the signifiers, since it is only the importance of their politico-historical meanings that gives them semiotic value.

It is important to emphasise here the dialectic between material signifiers and the grammars of identity I have been describing. There is no way to signal embodied identity without a body; on the other hand, there can be no body without, or before, its participation in identity grammars.

The negotiation of a metasign (the boundary of the system of markers that constitutes it) is done through negotiations of group membership. That is, participants in any interaction, sometimes verbally, more often not, establish (and re-establish) their social identity through markers of membership in a social group. This was the point of my introductory anecdote.

In Chapter Five, I worked out that the boundary between signifier and signified is also the boundary between material phenomena within the sign (such as grapheme and phoneme, or thought and sound, as in Saussure's example). Material phenomena are always semioticised in social terms. This explains how the semiotic body works as a mode.

The rest of the chapter looks at texts created by Allen and Brand from the point of view of how they make bodies into meanings, how they put meanings into bodies, and related questions of representation and embodied identity. A significant amount of Allen and Brand's work attends closely to the black female body: the black female body's

constructed nature; blackwomaness in relation to self. They site meanings clearly in their bodies, clearly practiced by their bodies; and these meanings, made as embodied subjects, reverse the perspective of social oppressions aimed at the black female body as object.

Embodied meanings

Allen and Brand are acutely aware of the social constructedness of bodies as objects, and of the instability and contradictions that result. Strictly speaking, in a social constructivist view of the matter, there is no (semiotic) body prior to its "being" in gender and race systems. Their approach sees a body as meaning, and meaning as necessarily embodied. The elision of meaning/body and body/meaning allows them to explore the link between 1) the body as socially constructed (through the performative cultural constructions gender / sex / sexuality and race / colour / ethnicity), and 2) their experience of the body as self.

"Meaning" in this sense is seen as something alternative, subversive, and even radical in relation to dominant meanings / bodies. In these last few lines from "hard against the soul", Brand gathers some of the themes of the book through the terms "body" "myself", "a place", "tongue".

> ...I saw my own body, that
> is, my eyes followed me to myself, touched myself
> as a place, another life, terra. They say this place
> does not exist, then, my tongue is mythic. I was here
> before. (No Language 51)

Tracing the relationships between these substantives with variable first-person pronouns, she begins as subject of the body, the "I" that "saw". Then she adds the body in its Westernized object position, although claimed with a possessive pronoun and intensifier: "my own body". Next, an element of that same object-body – "my eyes" – assumes a subject position, and becomes an agent with the verb "followed". The object of the subject-body is again the self, me, in object position – which, however, is a tangible, corporeal self in "touched myself".

In other words, Brand creates a relationship between body as subject and body as object in which the object is also "another life", a real alternative. The apposition of "a place" and "another life" names the ampersand problem – how to exist as an embodied being in a culture which denies a place to that subject position. Next Brand conflates body and language through "tongue": "They say this place does not exist, then, my tongue is mythic." That is, palpable experiences of corporeality, lesbian sexuality, and oral language share a certain power to bypass the determinisms of Western history.

The allusion to "place" picks up on a theme in Caribbean literature in which the Caribbean is seen as politically and culturally "nowhere", much like other colonies, in contrast to the metropolis, which is "a

place"[46]. In "Return", Brand suggests that the route to circumventing this damaging duality also lies in the link between her body and (its) meaning. She shows how the locale has meaning as a physical impact on ~~the~~ her body; it is not named or spoken, but physically experienced:

> So the street is still there, still melting with sun
> Still the shining waves of heat at one o'clock
> The eyelashes scorched, staring the distance of the
> Park to the parade stand, still razor grass burnt and
> Cropped, everything made indistinguishable from dirt
> ...
> still I suppose the scorpion orchid by the road, that
> fine red tongue of flamboyant and orange lips
> muzzling the air...
> ...still the crazy bougainvillea fancying and
> nettling itself purple, pink, red, white, still the trickle of
> sweat and cold flush of heat raising the smell of
> cotton and skin... (Brand No Language 10)

Introducing each item on the list with the refrain "still", Brand somatises the experience of a return to a tropical streetscape. She recreates the observer, arriving with the exclamation "so the street is still there"; she subtly personifies the street with the preposition "with" in "melting with sun" (by analogy with "she's gone crazy with sun" perhaps, rather than the unmarked "melting in the sun"). She calls up the daily routines that filter the human, social experience of the landscape "at one o'clock"; and

46 Throughout "no language is neutral" Brand has contrasted "nowhere" and "a place", a "place" being a mythic locale in which colonial subjects are valorised, in contrast to "nowhere", a name given by V.S. Naipaul to the Caribbean as a colonial backwater.

she inserts the embodied experience of the heat again with the sensation of "scorched" eyelashes and the effort of keeping the gaze level in fierce sunlight in "staring the distance".

These are not "objective" memories. Both eyelashes and razor grass are repressed by a combination of harsh climate and patriarchy (the latter evoked through the military object "parade stand", as well as the "cropped" grass and the military conformity of "everything made indistinguishable from dirt"). The role of femininity in this locale is captured in the personification of the orchid as a hyper-sexualised woman loitering by the road, whose "tongue" (language) is lipstick ("flamboyant and orange lips"), emblems of a retrograde heterosexuality. Her lips "muzzle" the air – like the grass, the air is a life principle repressed by the history of oppression in this locale. The bougainvillea is a daft, inane ("crazy") poseur ("fancying... itself"), performing masochistic acts of female vanity ("nettling itself purple").

The speaker's body finally "talks back" to the locale, through its flushed response to the heat and the women, its recoil ("the cold flush of heat"), its concrete intrusion into the written passage ("raising the smell of cotton and skin"). These body-memories are gendered in complicated ways. It is the body that "speaks" this landscape, in two senses: 1) what the landscape means, what signs it makes (through its bodies); and 2) how the speaker's body lives in it.

The body draws together more vividly than most modes the tensions between pre-symbolic, sensual phenomena and the inevitability of social structures as part of the sign. In other words, even bodies, as modes, are a positioned practice.

Dub

Although Brand may speak (and "body") to us in writing, Allen actually speaks. In performance, Allen exploits the body as both medium and mode. Whereas the body discussed in the ~~next-to~~-last section (the body in writing) was a mode, in the performances of Allen the body is both medium and mode.

What does the added element of the medium do, what impact does it have on Allen's ways of making meanings, and the things that she "says"? A material body and a written body (as mode, that is, way of saying things) have more in common than might at first be imagined: because a material body is still a semiotic body; it is, in Butler's term, "performed".

A body is performed in the same moment a poem is performed. By performing her poetry and using distinctive qualities of voice, distinctive rhythms, and personal gestures, Allen creates a connection that allows her to explore the "meaning" of her body in two senses: what meanings it creates (in particular contexts); and what these are in relation to the meanings "female" and "black". The latter is because her meanings /

texts / signs are the instantiations of the *semiotic* qualities of her body (female and black as well as others).

As I said in Chapter Two, Allen's poetics both nurture and feed from her conviction about the primal connection between physical and political/spiritual realities. I mentioned "Birth Poem", which in print is minimal but in performance is the extraordinary dance/chant/song of a woman in labour. According to Habekost,

> It is impossible to grasp the full effect of "Birth Poem" in print; marked by a consistent structure of repetition, the text gives but a vague idea of the magic and the power of the poem in performance...the central section is a compelling mixture of chants, groans, signs and word chains. Allen's breathtaking performance of "Birth Poem" never fails to mesmerize her audiences... her face distorts in pain, her gestures provide staccato punctuation as she rants a fast, rolling, wave-like rhythm culminating in the onomatopoeic "baps". (207)

It is the very fact of the physical, not the body as such, that Allen exploits for impact. In other words, in order to make the meaning of this poem, it must be done through the body as a medium rather than just a mode.

Allen also uses the techniques of concrete poetry to create a physical impact on the page. In the following poem I wish to draw attention to the way in which Allen links "self / race gender / history" in a concrete, visual cross pattern to make an image of her experience of the intersection of these aspects of identity:

> You have taken my abstractions
> broken my images
> carved images-of-broken on my mirror
> data process needs
> package dreams on TV
> separate me from self
> race gender
> history
>
> We who create space
> who transform what you say is
> send you scurrying
> scurrying to the dictionary
> to add new words
>
> **We, we are the subversives**
> **We, we are the underground**
> (Women Do This 40)

There is a concern that post-structural "images-of-broken" separate the poet from "self / race gender / history". This is not a reactionary essentialism, but a recognition that the embodied experience of self is as much a tangible experience as a social construction. In the written

version, Allen creates concrete spaces between the three terms "race, gender, history", or perhaps arranges them on the page this way to avoid a-lining them (as print). The cross pattern they make together with "self", as I have said, suggests an intersecting relationship for all four terms. Again, "space" is created visually; and in the next line, the visual space between "create" and "is" gives two senses to the line: "we who transform what you say "exist" (in creole); and "we who transform what you say is the case", with space around the predicate "is" emphasising its unrelated, unrelating autonomy.[47] The final two lines are in boldface visually to signify not just louder volume, but also a collective voice (signified in sound by a chorus of female voices).

In all of her poetry Allen insists on the connection between words and action. It is a connection that has no spaces between the two entities: words are action:

> dis word breeds my rhythm
> dis word carries my freedom
> dis word is my hand
> : my weapon
> ((Women Do This 87)

As I have said (Chapter Six), the poem is self-reflexive; unless "dis word" is itself rather than a representation of a word, the poem has no

47 I have said elsewhere that Allen is not a post-modernist, but simply aware of crucial relationships between social position, power, and meaning-making.

meaning. When we read "dis word", we are meant to realise it refers to the very ink on the very page we are holding in our hands.

In sound texts, Allen draws attention to the materiality of the moment through "natural" sounds such as screams of protest and protest chants (dub poetry is a protest genre). A shriek is an eminently transparent signifier. Other sounds, expressing essential experiences of a female body (such as birth labour), are used to break taboos about women's experience, to make an emotional link with female listeners, or simply to voice experience in a way that short-circuits the codings of a dominating language.

For example, her vocalisations imitate sounds that bring up strong emotions, such as ambulance and police sirens. Allen's "Rub A Dub Style Inna Regent Park", opens with the sound of a human voice—just perceptibly a human voice—imitating a siren. This sound has an immediate meaning, that of "siren" and all its experiential and emotional associations: fire, urban violence, disaster—and thus, pain and/or apprehension. Interestingly, this sound has ambiguous meanings depending on the addressee. For listeners in dominant social and cultural positions, it has the meanings I have just presented; but for the listeners from whose point of view the ballad is sung, inhabitants of an inner city housing estate who are the target of racist police violence, the sound of a police siren includes the meaning "racist state oppression and community-internal conflict".

In "So What (Perspective Poem)", Allen contrasts the high literary poetic tradition as transmitted through the discipline of English literature (always written, never musical) with the enormous social power of an activist's song:

> So what so what so what
> So your years of schooled craft
> have created fine poems
> so it ended pollution
> so it stopped wars
> so it fed starving children
> so it gave life to the dying
> so it brought peace to one single land
> so no one should imperil its form
> .....
> so, so self assured and turgid
> so what if I write a poem like a song
> (Women Do This 127)

The final line's meanings depend on imagined spoken inflections. "So what if I write a poem like a song" (i.e., what difference does it make if I write a poem like a song? – angry, exasperated); or it might be, "so, what if I write a poem like a song" (i.e., therefore why don't I write a poem like a song instead – suggesting an alternative); or even "so, what if I write a poem like a song?" (i.e., what would happen if I wrote a poem like a song? -- speculative). All of these inflections depend on the spoken voice.

In the centre of the poem there is a turn from the ironic ("so it brought peace to a single land") to the direct ("so no one should imperil its form"). The sudden turn, the juxtaposition of the two lines, and the choice of the verb "imperil" (evoking also "imperial") raises the economics of European canonical literatures as forms of cultural imperialism: the rise of the nation states coincided with the growth of vernacular literatures, followed by the colonial expansion of the European nations. Thus English literature and its forms are not just irrelevant, but, through their role in the colonisation of many parts of the world, life-destroying.

By "life", Allen means human, physical life as well as cultural life. By performing her poetry, through the tension thus created between expressions of local essentialisms (including her and her audience's subjective experience of being there) and political analysis of the link between racism and neo-imperialist economics, Allen is able to show what exactly the connection is between poetry and human life at the most basic level – a level literature does not have a language, a theory, to approach. In the poem, through its performance, Allen shows that literary language excludes her body's language (as performance); and she embodies her poetry to realise a "language" or system of meaning alternative to the colonising literary.

Conclusion

If meaning-making is a practice in social context, bodies are performances played in the everyday. These performances may be in a range of different media; the mode of the body, however, is created and maintained through grammars that are analogous to the grammars of language in their social functions. Extending Butler's notion of performativity and her description of the oppositional system of gender, I have described "grammars" of oppositional relations such as race, ethnicity, class, etc., all of which intersect through the material, multivalent signs they arrange. In this chapter I have also showed how Allen and Brand explicitly perform these grammars, using them to re-create and re-direct meanings about their race and gender through the tangible nature of their experience. They site meanings clearly in their bodies, clearly practised by their bodies; and these meanings, made as embodied subjects, reverse the perspective of social oppressions aimed at the black female body as object.

Allen and Brand explore the "meanings" of their bodies in several directions. Brand is interested in the articulatory power of her body, and the relationship of its "language" with different senses of that term: what language her body speaks; and the relationship of her body's language to languages about her body (see also Chapter Six). She has written with attention to the link between racism as an issue of physical appearance and sexism as a force that targets the female body, while showing the

effects of social and political oppression on her sense of body-as-self. Allen explores similar questions through performance, including a concern with literary language and verbal forms that exclude her body's language (as performance). Thus, Allen and Brand embody their poetry to realise "languages" or systems of meaning that are usually excluded from the written. This allows them to experience their bodies as a primary locus of meaning and to refashion the meaning "female and black".

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

> Post-modernism asks: whose body, whose gaze, whose history, whose personality, etc. etc. The response embedded in my work is not the disembodied "I," nor is it everyone's "I," both of which are rooted in faulty and debilitating versions of history, in notions of power and control over both persons and nature central to modern European culture, to its cult of individualism, and to the Americas. Nor is it the naïve "I" of autobiography. Instead it is the "I" of specific body, the African body, the female African body, as well as the "I" of imagined, and selectively structured, narrative context... (Harris 31)

I begin my conclusion with Harris' clear statement of the role of the body in her work for the larger issues that it raises. Harris is an African-Caribbean woman poet, also Canadian, also, like Brand, a poet, essayist, and cultural critic. The similarity of her concerns to those of Allen and Brand are a reminder that there is a very defined African-Caribbean feminist poetics, although the poets who practice it live in various

corners of Canada, the Caribbean, and the UK[48]. In Chapter Two I used as example of one of the common elements in their work the theme of exile; but the female, African body and its subjectivity, used as a wedge into a denunciation of the specific injustices which prop up the West, is actually far more central to their poetics.

Harris' (and Brand's and Allen's) insistence on the specific body as the ground of meaning is, for me, a white female reader, a liberating experience. Considering my "race" (white) locates my experiences more specifically, and within the context of other "races", other histories and points of view. In this awareness of specific difference lies the beginnings of community. It also inserts the sensorium of my experiences into my explanations of those experiences to myself. This is liberating because, without my realising it, I had missed that sensorium, the meanings of my senses located in my specific body, in explanations of experience that are on offer outside of black feminism.

This was the initial, visceral attraction of the poetry of Allen and Brand. But there were numerous other reasons for carrying out the theoretical work in this thesis.

I originally read in the poetry of Allen and Brand both meanings that speak for me *and* meanings / forms that challenged in specific ways the literary, linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches I had available to me to

48 Harris lives in Calgary.

explicate those meanings. Their practice extended the scope of my search. As I went through the usual socialization of disciplined academic subjects, I kept in mind the original reasons why I had turned to linguistics as a student of literature: to find a way of reading literary texts that was more answerable to their form and context than the language of aesthetics, high literary criticism, or literary theory.

My initial linguistic models of language had to be expanded, sometimes replaced; theoretical (generative) syntax, being purely formal, could not talk about meaning, nor about the uses of language; applied linguistics (systemic-functional), while good on the everyday uses of language, had the severe limitations of its functional roots (and its semantic grammar). Sociolinguistics had the best chance, but I had to mix on an *ad hoc* basis empirical studies based on different underlying approaches (e.g., anthropological-interactional of Gumperz; ethnomethodological of Saville-Troike; variationist of Myers-Scotton - all studies in code-switching, itself a general, under-theorised term for a perceived sociolinguistic behaviour).

Variationist sociolinguistics, probably the dominant school in North America, had a methodology based on a naïve set of social categories (socio-economic class, race, etc., with no theorisation of these terms or development in a social theory). It was also heavily invested in empirical work and lacking a theory, or even a coherent research project - given

that investigating, or even assembling a description of, social variation in language does not seem to justify itself as a project - at least to me. But more to the point, these studies were not meant to be applied to written texts, to imaginative texts, to uses of language that were self-reflexive and sometimes deliberately subversive of the type of language that mainstream sociolinguistics assumes *is* "language" in its investigations, all the while taking the object "language" as a given. In other words, a linguist's notion of what "language" is differs markedly from a literary writer / reader's.

Social semiotics has only recently come under the rubric "sociolinguistics" (see Downes' Sociolinguistics, 2nd edition - at the publication of the 1st edition there *was* no social semiotics, although Downes was involved, also at that time, in the birth pangs of critical discourse analysis and social semiotics). Many (of the more unimaginative) North American linguists, however, would question the critical turn taken by British sociolinguistics, a turn both motivated by and inclusive of discourse analysis and social semiotics. First of all, politics is excluded by the practices and focus of a science (even a social science, in positivist America). That is the "social" of social semiotics. Secondly, non-verbal (and even non-functional) systems of communication are explicitly excluded from "language" by linguists (e.g. visual, musical, mythological, etc.). That is the "semiotics" of social semiotics. Finally, the fundamental unit of analysis in social semiotics is

the sign; and this means that both form and meaning are included in principle in any social semiotic analysis. In linguistics, on the other hand, form is the object of study (the structure of language, or the patterns of language use and variation) and meaning is considered un-measurable or unverifiable.

Literary writers/readers, however, also include meaning and form in any analysis - often as inseparable elements. The statement that form is meaning is commonplace in literary studies, but a severe challenge to the orthodoxy in North American linguistics. At the departmental level, a linguist is a linguist because she sticks to her linguistic system of description. Anything not describable in terms of that system is not considered a part of the object of study of (that) linguistics. Because I have looked for things which challenge those system(s) of description, and modified or rejected them by a literary measure - how can this help me to articulate my response to this text? - I am not a linguist.

Social semiotics, on the other hand, takes any text or semiotic practice (including texts considered literary, or on the borderlands of the literary) as both a challenge to and exemplar for the (social semiotic) theory. So I might have a question, a typical social semiotic question such as, "What affordances (possibilities for meaning-making) does the "same" text have in writing and in sound?"

However, one doesn't "find" a theory and apply it uncritically, like a garden hoe. Every application of a theory ideally changes that theory, sharpens its perceptions, prods it to evaluate both its assumptions and its tenets. A social semiotic project on the surface uses texts to exemplify points in the development of the theory; but in reality, all texts, including the selected ones, are ways of testing a theory (in this case a theory of meaning-making). A good theorist looks for texts that test the theory.

The texts of Allen and Brand have tested social semiotics in specific ways. The research I have carried out has the following implications for social semiotic theory: 1) the model of the sign has been developed to account for the role of systemic boundaries in the textual practices of Allen and Brand. This has meant a refinement of the terms "arbitrary" and "transparent". 2) The influence of this model on a description of generative social category grammars, which incorporate Harris' principle of specificity: whose body? This is turn has implications for the social semiotic production principle of "experiential meaning-making", which could be revised to "embodiment" to account for the shaping influence of social categories on one's perception of and experience of material phenomena. I will expand on these implications below.

Summary of the argument

In this section I will summarise my argument; in the next, I will discuss its implications for social semiotic theory.

In Chapter Two I introduce the poetry of Allen and of Brand by placing their work in Caribbean literary-historical context and in the context of Black American women writers, and finally in the context of black feminism. The point of black feminism is that it is only black women who really have an opportunity to see the function of intersecting categories, in the positioned-practice "female and black". Non-black feminists tend to ignore the effect of race on their position (that is, they forget that to be white is to be in a position of historical dominance in relation to "black"); black men tend to ignore the effect of gender on their position (that is, to be male is to be in a position of historical dominance in relation to "female"). My argument is that this may also lead to an awareness of the contingency of all social categories (but especially gender and race). Both Allen and Brand would reject a view of their thinking on race and gender as social constructivist; they are, however, convinced that race and gender oppression must be fought together; and their approach relies on the concreteness of the black, female body to keep this awareness in the forefront of their meanings.

Chapter Three contains the seeds of much of what follows in the thesis. It is an attempt to find in Derrida's sign theory a linguistic / semiotic model for the relationship between speech and writing – that is, *creole* speech and *English* writing. Without that final modification, it may be that Derrida's argument in "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" (Of Grammatology) explains the relationship between two

autonomous systems (writing and sound); but when put against Allen's phonetic spellings of Jamaican English Creole (through the English orthographic system), it becomes evident that Derrida's *arche-writing* is based on an impoverished notion of representation.

The relationship between the letter and its sound is autonomous; in this I agree with Derrida. In the case of English this autonomy has arisen partly because of the huge temporal and geographical variation that arose in the dialects of English since the initial rough standardisation of the spelling code. However, Derrida is right to ascribe this characteristic of the letter-sound relationship to the secondarity of the sign-function – the sound will always be only represented by letter, and there is no meaning-relationship here to anchor this relationship of pure representation. Derrida then applies this principle to other domains of semiosis, for writing is the perfect metaphor for semiosis, he says: it is the most obvious demonstration of the general semiotic principle that there is no signifier, no originary, only the movement from symbol to sign, and only the perpetual trace.

However, if we look at the success of Allen's creole transcription, we see the proof against Derrida's position. Allen achieves two things with her phonetic spellings – indications of how certain words are to be pronounced, creating connotations of their culture (Jamaican); and the performance of a social position outside the written standard. In order to do this, Allen depends on ephemeral public knowledge – the sounds of

Jamaican English Creole – as signifieds for her signifiers. Allen takes advantage of the power of a very strong norm (standardisation of the English spelling code) to strengthen the meaning of deviance from the same norm. An final important point is that she (and all dialect writers) manage to do this "through" the English system of orthography. The verbal and social standard is a necessary part of the meaning of "deviance".

Any verbal utterance, spoken or written, takes part in the positioning of its speaker by reference to standards of error / correctness. Chapter Four follows up on this insight and ends up considering questions with implications for linguistic methodology: what is a language? and, what is a grammar? It looks more closely at the description of certain Caribbean English Creoles as dialect continua rather than a set of discrete "languages". The argument is by now becoming familiar in sociolinguistics: that creole continua argue for an interactional approach to language study.

However, my focus in this and the following chapter is not on this approach, but on the symbolic dynamics that must be at work in the behaviour of speakers when they create language boundaries. In other words, the aim of Chapter Four is to work out the sociolinguistic theory, guided by social semiotics, which explains how the boundaries established by the notion of discreet languages as well as verbal systems at all levels (spelling, dialectal (standardisation), diatypical, etc.) aid in

making the sorts of meanings Allen and Brand make. The aim of Chapter Five is to create a formal model of how these principles work, with the aid of the sign.

These principles, developed in Chapter Four and formalised through Saussurian semiotics in Chapter Five, are:

- the sign is unique in every production; each instance of meaning-making changes its system

- all signs are created by socially-meaningful similarities and differences; all instances of meaning-making assert / negotiate social identity

- the producer of meaning is always also the reader, and a reader is always also a producer; all readings (signs) are motivated by the interest and social position of the producer / reader

Chapter Five works out the properties of signs within systems that must obtain for these things to be true. (Later, in Chapter Seven, I work out the dynamics of social category grammars; in this chapter, I am working out the generative principles -- motivated by the sociolinguistic theory in Chapter Four. The approach is, in effect, generative-linguistic.)

Every sign is really a sign-function during which two symbolic systems are generated at the same moment and only for the purposes of the immediate interaction. In order to do this, the two systems must be

closed systems. What creates a sign-function when they are simultaneously generated is the strength of the boundary between the signifier and the signified, which is constituted from the boundaries of the closed systems.

This is the very same boundary that speakers in social interaction negotiate in establishing their standing through verbal error / correctness; they make reference to the perceived boundaries of a national language (whether some verbal pattern is "inside" the language or excluded by the language i.e. incorrect), or to some sociolect as a sub-set of the language. It is also the boundary between material phenomena (such as grapheme and phoneme).

The implicit references to systemic boundaries in the everyday deployment of social categories such as national language, "race" and gender, the boundaries people use to position themselves and each other socially, are the very same boundaries that constitute these categories; so that, contrary to the common-sense belief that these categories "exist" transcendentally, Saussurian semiotics can show that they are constituted and re-constituted *as systems* in each moment of interaction. The same applies to modes such as languages, the voice, writing, the semiotic body; by looking at the sign, we can see that these systems of material distinctions are socially-defined and maintained.

Chapter Six shows how boundaries of verbal systems (dialects, diatypes, verbal modes) are re-created and deployed to make certain meanings in the poetry of Allen and Brand. It explains Allen's phonetic spellings as both visual and aural strategies, but, apart from the general principle of boundary-making, each spelling makes its meaning in the immediate context of the poem, the surrounding lines, the surrounding spellings. There is no general interpretation for Allen's phonetic spellings except by reference to the social semiotics developed in Chapters Four and Five: every sign is really a sign-function during which two symbolic systems are generated at the same moment and only for the purposes of the immediate interaction.

In Chapter Seven I take up this and further insights from Chapter Five in relation to embodiment and codes of identity: what I call social category grammars. Like the grammars of languages, social categories are not transcendent and immutable, but constructed in interaction in the everyday (i.e., in texts such as Allen's and Brand's). "Race" is the name of a set of grammars that includes the terms black, white, Asian, Latin-American, Oriental, and so forth, in different combinations, including some potential terms and ignoring others according to the history of a particular place. These are not essential terms – there is no such thing as "a black" or "a female" – but relative terms – "black" as "non-white", "female" as "non-male". People behave *as if* these terms are "true"; and that is the fundamental insight of semiotics.

The term "metasign" from Social Semiotics is useful as a way of remembering the contingent qualities of these codes: their constituent signs, which are very often embodied (dress, posture, skin tone, voice quality, and so forth) are signs about signs, that is, they are indications of how signs denoting content are to be read; they are not (just) signs in themselves. In other words, instead of "whiteness", there is a quality or style of "white" conditioning all meanings made under its aegis. The analogy to keep in mind here is that of the popular notion of "a language" – the content of an utterance may be comparable in French or English, but the mode is different – making the meaning different. And, just as speakers' negotiation of the boundaries of "a language" is a way both of establishing their relative status as well as mutually re-creating the language, speakers negotiating their identity in terms such as "American" or "black" are taking part in the re-creation of these systems of identity metasigns while negotiating relative status.

This last step is crucial as an explanation of the role of embodiment in the poetry of Allen and Brand. Their aim is not to destroy discourses of race and gender, which would not only be an impossibility but also a loss to their sense of self; their aim is to bring these discourses, which circulate in embodied signs, into both literary culture and the written mode.

Implications for Social Semiotic Theory

As I have said, the research I have carried out has two main implications for social semiotic theory: 1) the model of the sign, and 2) experiential meaning potential.

Experiential meaning potential is a production principle in Kress and van Leewen. Production principles use the materiality of the medium, not the conventionalised mode, to make meaning; "[i]n fact, signification starts on the side of production, using semiotic principles which have not yet sedimented into conventions, traditions, grammars, or laws of design" (Kress and van Leeuwen Multimodal, 22). As an example of this production principle, Kress and van Leeuwen give "the textural characteristics of sound qualities (as when singers adopt a soft, breathy voice to signify sensuality)" (22-23).

In Chapter Seven I take up the position of feminist theory (and Lemke's social semiotics) that semiotic bodies are socially constructed; in light of this, even physical sensations and actions are experienced through a filter of personal identity as shaped by power / gender / race relations. The implication for multimodal discourse analysis is that as much attention has to be paid to the social ways bodies are shaped and experienced in their negotiations of meaning with the world as to the way meanings are produced through universally experienced, a-social bodies. Chapter Seven contains a reading of a poem by Brand that verbalises the specific

meanings made by her specific body during a return to the tropics ("return I").

To take up the example of the textural characteristics of the voice: Allen is acknowledge to be a masterful artist of the voice; she is in full control of an astounding range of vocal sound effects during her performances. Yet she would be the first to deny that "a soft breathy voice" signifies sensuality; Allen's sensuality is projected in megawatts at different moments. Her jazz performance poems, in which the quality of sensuality is often the focal point of the piece, (e.g. "Jazz You"), contain few soft, breathy sounds.

The soft breathy sound of Kress and van Leeuwen is the conventionalised sound of the female pop singer during, yes, moments of sensuality. Sensuality here means the quality of sexual attractiveness. This sound is already gendered, shaped by an ideology that prefers its women soft and physically powerless (although I take the point that breathiness is also an index of certain physiological effects of arousal). Our connotations for breathiness are spirituality (breath is the embodiment of the soul), in a cultural semiotics that splits off the body from mind and spirit (see Chapter Two). This vocal convention therefore takes part in the (sexist) virgin / whore dichotomy. Allen's practice gives an alternative for female sexuality. Neither of these expressions of the body's meanings are, however, pre-symbolic; they depend on a semiotic

body that have always already been socialised. The body, as I have said, is a mode; not just a medium.

My point is not that Kress and van Leeuwen are sexist in their analysis; only that they have not accounted for the presence of the symbolic in their conception of the body as ground of meaning-making.

The distinction between medium (the material) and the mode also has a bearing on the first implication for social semiotic theory that I mentioned above: the arbitrariness of the sign. A mode or convention is often seen as arbitrary, whereas the medium or material is considered transparent, or pre-symbolic. As I tried to show in Chapter Five, the arbitrariness of the sign, the transparency of the sign, and the position of the producer and reader of the sign have implications for one another.

In Kress' discussion of the transparent sign in "Against arbitrariness" he points out that the relationship between a signifier and signified is always completely accessible to a particular person in a particular place and time with a particular interest. This is part of an argument against the arbitrariness of the sign, which he reads as a Sassurian overstatement (Social Semiotics 21). However, I pointed out that the issue is really one of social position or point of view, rather than an objective property of the sign. Given the effect of social position on any particular instance of meaning-making (a strong principle in social semiotics), arbitrariness

allows for the multiple readings that necessarily arise around the same material text.

For example, creole transcription shows that any particular signifier (e.g., the graphemes and grapheme clusters of the English spelling system) can be linked with any particular signified (e.g., the phonemes of the creole inventory). The context is the defining limitation for the value of the sign (its meaning) as well as the key to changes that re-create entire systems.

In other words, the transparency and opacity of signs depends on the context, the social position of the reader of the signs in relation to the producer. In "Against arbitrariness" Kress correlates the transparency of signs with access to the meaning: a sign is transparent to the degree of social closeness or distance between producer and reader (178).

For the literary critic, non-arbitrariness and transparency are working hypotheses: there is a recoverable relationship between the meanings intended by the producer of this sign and the characteristics of the text itself. They are therefore theoretical (and popular) constructs that make a link between system and subject(ive) meanings. Arbitrariness, however, also allows for interpretation: unless the sign is arbitrary, or theoretically free to "mean" anything, there is only one possible reading, which we know is not the case.

Stylistics; or, can linguistics really describe a literary text?

This is also a thesis in the theory of stylistics, with social semiotic theory considered a model of language analogous to a linguistic theory. Although it is "about" certain literary texts, its aims are broader than a description or critical reading of those texts: as I have said, it takes the texts as both an exemplar for and a challenge to social semiotic theory. Its primary aim is to develop social semiotic theory, though it attempts to describe in a new and interesting way certain moments in these texts.

If I were writing a thesis from within the discipline of English literature, I would bring into my readings of the texts of Allen and Brand any number of theories and practices in an informal way, relying on plausibility to validate both my readings, and, circularly, the methodologies and/or theories of language that I had used to arrive at these readings. The approach I am using is an attempt to implement a more principled approach to reading literary texts.

My development of social semiotic theory is meant to be a contribution to social semiotics from the perspective of the literary, so that, in the long term, social semiotics includes in its account of meaning-making the sophisticated, fluid uses of literary language and the multivalent, sometimes quasi-ineffable meanings created in literature; and from the other direction, this project will be a contribution to literary studies if social semiotics becomes an illuminating way to account for the

meaning-making practices of literary texts. My idea was to bring two disciplines into confrontation by using a literary text as a test case for a linguistic model and making the linguistic model able to account for the meanings made by the literary text. The result, hopefully, would be a linguistics capable of explicating aspects of interest (from a literary point of view) in the literary text.

A purely literary approach would be comprehensive in its treatment of the material texts - the manuscripts, the extant corpus of the writer, etc. - and of certain contexts of the texts - "influences" of other literary works historically and geographically, cultural conditions of production, etc. It would take the texts as central to the thesis rather than the theory. I cannot create the sort of comprehensive reading of these texts that a traditional literary project would accomplish, because there is no linguistic or textual theory capable of covering as much ground in and around the texts as the traditional informal approach. Partly this is because the focus of the two activities is different (a specific text versus some aspect of meaning-making).

For this project is more specifically an exploration of the applicability of social semiotics to problems raised for literary studies by texts previously considered outside of the canon but, because of rapid change both from within and without the discipline, texts now being consciously used to expand both the canon and literature as a discipline. To include these

texts in anthologies and university courses is only part of an effective move to expand the canon; the other part must include the principled development of a metalanguage to talk about these newly-included texts -- about their language and their meaning-making practices.

My focus on the poetry of African-Caribbean women in diaspora addresses one of the functional roots of English literature as a discipline: to develop the consciousness of students as national subjects. In core literature programmes in English North America, for example, the object "literature" is distinguished into parts by nation-state and art-historical era (i.e., British, American, Canadian; Medieval, Renaissance, Eighteenth-Century, Romantic, Victorian, 20th Century). There is also an unacknowledged definition of the literary by ethnicity, gender, colour, and class - most texts by non-Anglo/American, non-male, non-white, and non-educated writers have, until very recently, been excluded from "the literary". However, post-colonial studies has pushed the historical functioning of this agenda into the limelight, foregrounding the imperial role of literary studies; as a critical turn in literary research and teaching, it has created the need to include in the account we give of (English) literature attention to the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and especially historical and geographical locus within the Anglophone world.

Canon expansion includes, necessarily, expansion of modes and media (performance and sound as well as writing), and time-frames (the very contemporary, even ephemeral texts of orature). These last two areas of expansion are a necessary consequence of the implication of the traditional project and subjects of "the literary" with its medium: printed books. Only white and / or relatively well-off literate males have had a reasonable entry into publication through the printing and publishing industry (have I said this?). This industry is the gateway to "literature" conceived of as a project of national-identity formation and maintenance through the development of a collective aesthetic sensibility in relation to verbal art. In its role as a cultural gateway, book publishing has excluded the oral literatures of indigenous and formerly-enslaved peoples in the Americas right up to the present day; and it still excludes the projects of verbal artists developing an expression of their identity as subjects of both orature and literature. No matter the sincerity and ingenuity of efforts to transpose the sound and motion of orality into print, the meanings of sound and motion are not those of print.

Literature as verbal art

Moving our focus away from the written texts of certain imperial subjects as constitutive of the literary to "verbal art" as constitutive of the literary has certain advantages. However, I am also uncomfortable with the assumptions embedded in the language used to talk about literary texts-as-art. The practice of Western aesthetics, in the cultural practice of

art/literary history and criticism for example, depends on the persuasiveness of the critic. And the particular type of persuasiveness, in much literary criticism, depends on appeals to unstated, unexamined notions about the world.

If we conceive of the literary text, the literary critic (primary reader), and the reader of the literary critic (secondary reader) as being in a triadic relationship, then certain questions arise about that relationship. The authority of the critic rests on her ability to convince the secondary reader that her aesthetic response to the literary text is worth witnessing, that it will add to or stimulate the secondary reader's own response to the literary text. On the surface, it involves the secondary reader in the same aesthetic response that the critic underwent; but since this is an impossibility, it is stimulating an aesthetic response in the secondary reader based on the critic's reading, writing, and invocation of cultural touchstones in her reading of the primary literary text. Thus a critic might emphasize the "compactness" or "brilliance" of the prose of the literary text; she might also appeal to the secondary reader's aesthetic sensitivity, demonstrating where possible her own claim to the appropriate sensibility. But like the conspiracy around the Emperor's clothes, this conspiracy between readers can only work within a secure network of power relations. Beauty is a term used to gather the qualities valued by the culture, and their invocation in proximity to a literary text does not validate the critic's reading, it merely articulates the position of

power she is taking in order to talk about a literary text (itself requiring that such a position be taken because otherwise it would not be "literary").

In any case, a critic's reading is always, in principle, unique. Her function is to articulate this reading for the enjoyment of the secondary reader, and in the process the literary text undergoes a translation, from "itself" to the critic's version of it. What is it that underwrites her authority in this process of translation from literary text to literary-critical text? In the end, only the aesthetic response of the secondary reader, consisting of his/her participation in the *same* process as the critic's. Roughly, this would be a strong engagement with the text's ideational complex (verisimility in relation to the world (for the critic) or to the literary text (for the secondary reader)); and pleasure underwritten by the familiar cultural constructions of beauty, always contextually appropriate. If literary criticism is this derivative, there is not much to choose between a poem and a critic's reading of the poem, in experiential terms; and the only honest response to a good poem is to write another.

It is not that criticism is parasitic; it is that it has not grasped its contemporary social value in the relationship it maintains with literature. What is a literary text? How does it differ from other kinds of texts? The most important point I am making about modern literary studies is that it has not been able to create a better warrant for the practice of literary

criticism than aesthetic value. And, although it has often claimed disciplinary privileges based solely on the special (aesthetic) qualities of literary texts, it has not managed to define or describe those qualities that make a text literary.

An alternative view of the matter, starting from social semiotic principles, would deny the unsemioticised status, but not the reality, of the literary text, so that it cannot be "translated"; the critic's reading is then only an additional text, within the same order of reality as the literary text. The secondary reader is then only reading two different texts about two different things (e.g., for a novel, a "literary" text about narrative events, and an expository text about the critic's imaginary). There is no translation, and no literary text "itself". This re-construction of the triadic relationship as dyadic does away with the power differential between critic and the secondary reader, because there is then no appeal to the authority of the primary text. From this point of view, then, the illuminating focus for considering the literary is not some essential object "literature" as such, but the framing of this debate (the "real" meanings of the literary text, the "real" essence of literature) in specific, local relations of power. In other words, literature is co-constructed through a filter of disciplinary, national, racial, gender, and personal politics.

Although both Allen and Brand have worked at the boundaries between speech and print, performance and script, the trajectory of their technical

development has been from opposite directions. Allen for a long time presented her poetry as performance, printing "versions" privately along the way; only her last two books of poetry have been widely distributed by independent publishers. Brand, on the other hand, began by writing poetry for print publication and only later developed extended passages transcribing Trinidad English Creole to bring a more defined orality to her work. Brand's orality is the familiar reader's subvocalisation, and her work raises the question, "how does material sound come off the page"? Allen's orality is concrete, and her printed work raises the question, "how does literature read this page?" In other words, how do the familiar categories of Western meaning-in-print confront Allen's determined transduction[49] from embodied performance to print?

Allen's confrontation is one of the reasons I have been working towards an embodied social semiotics: a metalanguage that includes the raced, gendered body in its account of meaning-making. Such a semiotics, as theory, should offer a platform from which to critique entrenched Eurocentric linguistic interests (in the sense that traditional linguistics recreates the ampersand problem (see Chapter Two) across all social categories by ignoring, and therefore perpetuating, the social divisions that Allen and Brand problematise). However, it also offers an alternative poetics and grammatics, whose text analyses avoid recreating the very meanings deconstructed by these writers / artists. My hope is that such an

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49 See Kress Early Spelling, 2.

approach gives us a chance to read with more depth these important texts.

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