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Polyamorous ventriloquy: Loiterature as textual cruising

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Abstract

I would like to address the potential of a critical project for the generation of creative work, deploying Ross Chambers' concept of 'loiterature' as a mode of textual cruising, and to consider the kind of polyamorous ventriloquy which this practice can catalyse. While the paper draws on my own recent experience of this dialogue between critical and creative enquiries I hope that it works as an argument for the nurturing space the academy can offer for experimentation and for new creative departures. I also hope it challenges the romance of the 'creator' as individual; implicit throughout this paper is the idea of 'creativity' as polyamorous receptivity.

Keywords: loiterature, revolutionertextuality, poetics, subversive writing

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Ce livre je le mets en suspension dans la vie, je veux qu'il soit
mordu par les choses extérieures, et d'abord par tous les
soubresauts en cisaille, toutes les cillations de *mon moi à venir*. / I
want this book that I suspend in life to be gnawed at by external
things and first of all by all the shearing jolts, all the eye-lashings
[blinking] of *my/self to come*... (Artaud 1968: 54) [1]

These words from Antonin Artaud conjure for me the text-to-come with its spectral nervure, a phantasmagorical organism: all aperture, a dream-catcher, a text-sampler – the device that is the draft, and beyond, future anterior selves, which will-have-come, which will feed on it, disrupt it and traverse it *with their s/hearing jolts*, multiplying fissures though which new texts will perhaps be spawned. The draft is an intersection of infinite virtual pathways and in wishing to be buoyed by this

fragile thing that I suspend before me *in life* I'm in a state of radical passivity. I send partial selves out without specific agency, to attract encounters, to undergo encounters, to suffer encounters with alterity. To start with I need to welcome what unsettles my knowing.

To turn what seems like a terminus into points of departure I await accidents on an under-written bench at the airport concourse, for example, an inevitably perforated bench. It's here, in this porosity, that it begins, but for the moment, it's holding its breath and the mesh which suggests the surfaces of the text-to-come is tenuous indeed, a sticky blow-away emulsion from dream but carrying, like Kristeva's semiotic chora (Kristeva 1974) that pre-linguistic, libidinous pulsation, and rhythmic echoes of all the writings one has slept in and with. One way of doing this, while one suspends this draft and those selves-to-come, is to engage with others whose minds and knowledge might be radically unsettling of one's own, whose intellect and ethical engagement excite something beyond mere respect, whose energies and enthusiasm promise a dialogue of reciprocal provocation to pass beyond oneself, of myriad encounters through the scrupulous, attentive reading of a wide range of texts, re-inflected and intensified through this exchange. These 'others' might include any interlocutor, any writer one reads, whether philosopher, critic or poet, collaborator, mentor – or, indeed, supervisor.

Not wanting a PhD project to be an onerous task but rather a most pleasurably unsettling and radical make-over, I sought out for supervision, Professor Michele Grossman, a person I fiercely admired for her rousing enthusiasm, political engagement, super-quick intellect and her streetwise straight-talking, and most importantly for me, her fabulously irreverent sense of humour, all of which promised to catalyse the intellectual and artistic renovation I was looking for. I had, through the cumulative effects of the increasingly market-driven nature of the so-called Australian literary 'industry', and of my own internalisation of publishers' and editors' cautionary advice, lost quite a bit of the experimental verve I might have once had and, thanks to Grossman's extraordinary mentoring, I soon felt exhilaratingly re-emboldened. In this sheltered place I need no longer heed calls for compromises, realignments, greater textual cohesion, realist suturing and to foreswear from the poetics of the fragment.

I wanted to drive the project by the question of the subversive text, how it might harness the intertextual to get a disruptive, critical purchase on its host culture. The generative power of 'the problem of the poetic revolutionary' would take me I didn't know where, if not to a new 'pathlessness'. There's at once risk and a certain euphoria in this aporia, since as Ross Chambers points out, in his *Loiterature* (Chambers 1999: 92) if aporia implies etymologically 'pathlessness', it also implies a potential infinity of new pathways. In my early study of literature I'd been enthused by the research and practice promoted by the Parisian group of intellectuals, artists and writers constellated around the *Tel quel* review (Brandt 1997; Forest 1995; Ffrench 1995; Fallon 1997; Marx-Scouras 1996) funded by Les éditions du Seuil, and which began in 1963 and endured until Philippe Sollers' editorial leadership until 1980.

Rising to the wager of revolutionising literature and transforming society, as cultural historian and theorist Danielle Marx-Scouras argues in her critical history (Marx-Scouras: 1996), under the aegis of *Tel Quel* some of the most provocative reflection on literature, art, and society was published from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, including key interventions by Roland Barthes, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleynet, Philippe Sollers, and Tzvetan Todorov. These names suggest an intensive confluence of lines of thought: from the theorisation of the gift and sacrifice in Malinowski and Mauss via Bataille, to revisitations of Nietzsche by Foucault and of Hegel and Husserl by Derrida, through Bakhtin's dialogism critically reworked

in Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (Kristeva 1969) and the critical reappraisal and dissemination of key works of Russian formalism via Tzvetan Todorov (Todorov 1966). One of the most exciting aspects of Tel Quel's work in the 1960s and early 1970s was its refusal to hierarchise the relation between textual theory and practice. In fact, these two modes of enquiry were mutually driven and imbricated. Tel Quel's experimental practice drew inspiration from writers as diverse as Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Artaud, Joyce, Kafka and Ponge as much as from their own colleagues' theoretical practice. They emphasised *text* as against *literature* and virtually abolished – as reactionary – generic demarcations, promoting instead writing as *lutte et rature*, (Sollers 1972) as struggle and erasure, and 'intransitive' process (Barthes 1984: 975). Noticeably, towards 1967-1968, this collective work drew increasingly on Marxism through the lens of the Lacanian theorisation of the *desiring subject in language* (Kristeva 1974; Kristeva 1980). A landmark event for avant-garde Paris was Bulgarian-born Kristeva's 1974 defence of her *Doctorat d'état* thesis *La Révolution du langage poétique*, attended by a who's who of French intellectual life, and in which she trove to deliver to the Tel Quel group (Kristeva 1992) a theorisation of a revolutionary poetics, and in particular of *le sujet en procès*, the subject-in-process and -on-trial enabled by the disruptions of the semiotic in the symbolic and by the repudiations of negativity. Post-1968 she was certainly aware of the European history of these hyphenated propensities: poetics-revolution, and the fact that their articulation had *not* led to the hoped-for social transformation. The theoretical kernel [2] of the thesis translated into American English as *Revolution of Poetic Language* (Kristeva 1984) has proved vastly influential in the Anglo-sphere for textual theory at large. Kristeva had already by 1966 introduced the anti-formalist 1930s work of Mikhaïl Bakhtin to a France still locked in the thrall of structuralism and formalism, promoting the concept of intertextuality to cover parody, textual dialogism and heteroglossic practice, which crucially restored the socio-political context to poetics. With *Le mot, le dialogue et le roman* (1969: 143-173) Kristeva argues that the text's availability to radicalism and polyphony is orchestrated by the reader, and thus her version of intertextuality announces and feeds what will become the Barthesian model. In fact, almost word for word, Kristeva anticipates Barthes's famous 'tissue of quotations' in his polemical 'Death of the Author' (1983): 'Every text is elaborated as a mosaic of quotations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text,' (Kristeva 1969: 146) [3]. Barthes will maintain in *S/Z* that

[a] text is ... a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His [sic] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (Barthes 1970: 46)

In drafting aspects of this thesis I took my cue from *Tel Quel's* promotion of 'text' rather than genre and its attack on 'literature' as institution, not to be hemmed in by what was so-called critical and what was said to be creative: all texts are susceptible to provoke writing which might just as easily end up in the creative intervention as in the critical. In fact I saw it as one of my tasks to create a chiasmus, as it were, a cross-over in the heart of each by the other so that their dialogue might be palpable in image, motif and rhythmic pattern. I remembered the euphoria with which Kristeva and Sollers tried to build on May 1968:

We have to amplify this struggle, also give it its avant-garde writing, rapid, allusive, a deeper historical insight into those attempts whereby for a century our society has learned to call itself into question, to interrogate its outside, its logic, its languages, its past. If played out on these three linked sites, May 1968 will never

end, not in France, nor anywhere else, ever. (Forest 1995: 336-337) [4]

This is Philippe Sollers flying very optimistically the red flag here. Avant-garde catch-cries predicated on the hyphenation of poetics and revolution, as mapped in their staggering variety from the left and the right by Laurent Jenny in his wonderful book *Je suis la révolution: histoire d'une métaphore* (Jenny 2008) can now look violent and absurd when we reflect on how soon each avant-garde gesture becomes canon fodder, if not an exhausted t-shirt icon, when it is remembered at all.

So, picking up on these energies, contradictions, and frustrations I wrote from the perspective of a barely emergent persona:

They wanted to sample and spin and mix all their scripts in the disassembly of nation. They asked us to put our stethoscopes to these pleasure texts and to mark the harmonics and the syncopations and the intoxicating buzz, the polyrhythmic pulsing there. Oh and we did, we loosened up to the friction of textual bodies and pulverised subjectivities. We were rehearsing a way beyond war, beyond capital, beyond strutting sovereign subjects. Remember Babel, our opponents sneered, as if all that babble wasn't war to start with. Well, we said yes, maybe, but only in the sense that fascistic thought wants to impose the One over the many. We pointed to our friend Luce-Lips-All-Over-Irigaray (Irigaray 1977) composing her ludic mimicry of male philosophers. Many languages jamming are an incitement only to those who'd impose central authority, clear the stage, to testify that all is in order. The absent body of Christ, for example, testifies to his ascension. *Quem Quaeritis?*

Whom do you seek?

Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified.

This empty tomb you are looking at is testimony to His Elimination.

This is the heart of the theatre of terror in the West (Kubiak 1990), we said the claim to represent an authority through the eliminated body, murder as the foundation of the Law. You must believe in this elimination as a rule. Those *Tel quel* intellectuals wanted us to untell it; to quell the will to narrate and to represent, to refuse to make over woman as man, as a blank to be written on, for example, in the economy of the phallic. Our insurrection was revulval, we said, give up your relation to lack that you call Symbolic Order, that you call the Name-of-the-Father, that you call God, boys, oh lay down that gun, once and for all, we said. We're sick of lacking even lack, we'll lack-dance around you no more Papa Lacan, Ladies Man though you may be (Gallop 1982). Oh anyone who looks at Bernini's St Teresa can see she's coming, you said (Lacan 1975). Your look testifies to our *jouissance*, thank you Doctor. But in the background the shiny gun multiplied, like an Andy Warhol fetish, we said no, it was just lacklustre simulacra, and anyhow an unarrested signifier couldn't fire a bullet. Could it? But it turned out representations kept on killing. (Campbell 2013: 19-20)

Revisiting the cultural politics and the theoretical issues which sought to catalyse new practices then, the thematic weave of my fiction started to emerge and I gladly

took on this charge. But simultaneously the features of the writers I investigated for the relationship of intertextual practice and subversive force: Jean Genet (2007; 2001), Monique Wittig (1973), Angela Carter (2006), Kathy Acker (1984), Kathleen Fallon (2001), Kim Scott (1999), and Brian Castro (2003) emerged as key elements of a radical practice: what I found there I began, by more or less pre-conscious ventriloquy to apply. Building on Hutcheon's concept of *ironic trans-conceptualisation* (Cheetham & Hutcheon 1991; Hutcheon 2000) whereby parody gains critical force when it activates the political context of the text parodied or what Genette has called the *hypotext* (Genette 1983), I looked into how the confluence of these strategies can draw attention to the violence that grounds representation and the claims to universality of the sovereign patriarchal subject. Across this range of texts certain features were significantly recurrent: macro-structurally, radical montage was the dominant compositional mode; syntactically, parataxis or simple coordination rather than subordination, was pervasive and the asyndeton or syntactical 'jump-cut' was strikingly manifest, especially in Wittig (1973), Acker (1984) and Fallon (2001). In terms of what stylisticians and discourse theorists call 'discursive cohesion' (Halliday 1976), there were frequent occurrences of radical interruption, or of the non-sequitur, at times delivered through strategies I've mentioned; at others, through intense heteroglossia, involving a jamming of registers from gutter slang to high lyricism and back, segueing from pop cultural slogans to quotes from philosophers; ways of insisting on text as *material practice* by visual interrupters like font changes, through the insertion of graphics problematising reference, through the intersplicing of parodied and 'plagiarised' texts, and the narratorial switching of grammatical person and tense.

In all these works, the 'disappeared' and abjected body is re-semanticised: absence or 'disappearance' is inscribed as active, scandalous hole or lesion, and the grotesque treatment of the pathologised body magnifies the perversions of colonial and sexist affliction. On the other hand, it is the body positively celebrated through the endless turns of animal-becoming that delivers a concerted challenge to humanism, to anthropocentrism and phallogocentrism. All the writers I looked at, from Genet to Castro, remind us in their synaesthetic raucousness, with their appeal beyond the merely visual to all the senses – auditory, tactile, olfactory, kinesic – how the purring of the visual machine operates in realism to hold us in the sway of the well-sutured spectacle. All of the texts considered put mimesis on trial, drawing attention through these myriad interruptive devices to the forms of discursive seduction that subjugate diversity and subordinate the heteroglossic to the aesthetics of harmonic integration, assimilation and resolution.

I closed my study by suggesting that textual practices that counter the teleological imperative of the 'well-made' story, that foreground the body's metamorphic power, along with its corruptibility, that exploit compositional montage, heteroglossia, as an interweaving of often clashing registers, and a scenography (or spatial practices on stage or page) calling into question these 'insides and outsides' invoked by Sollers, can still deliver potent and critical parodies of oppressive modes of representation. By comic derision and the protest of grotesque magnification, by displaying at what violent expense power and capital seduce, subjugate or exclude, by foregrounding the play of contradictions and voices within its own productivity, radical textual practice can, at the very least, fuel critique and empower resistance.

So what I needed was to explore equally in my 'creative' work was the relationship between language and revolution and I decided to explore the case of the German *Rote Armee Fraktion*, the Red Army Faction, partly because the first RAF generation coincided with the rise of *Tel quel* and shared the same intellectual climate. To re-coin the cliché, these would-be revolutionaries held the Bundesrepublik of Western Germany to ransom from 1970 through to the late

1990s and beyond, and I wanted both to channel and to parody their leaders of the ‘first generation’ of the RAF, in particular the feminists with whom I might have had a dangerous identification, had I known them at the time: Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, who struck me as the most interesting since they were initially driven by high political passion and ethical ardour, yet ended up apparently as cold-blooded killers. But I wanted to stage them for us now, because nostalgic revisitation of this ‘armed struggle’ as such, and not as terror, is dangerous indeed; and in any case the romantic recycling and commodification of revolutionary icons is, as everyone knows, one of capitalism’s great success stories. I took my cue from my investigation of parody, and especially from Bakhtin on Rabelais (Bakhtin 1970), who saw laughter (by which I understand comic derision and parodic magnification) as the mode resisting sublimation, unlike say pathos, or mere romantic irony. First I had to invest by entering their *Umwelt* through their texts and texts about them and then disinvest, as my supervisor encouraged me to do, through laughter.

Part of this process involved reading their texts in German; the body of my German always anorexic and long since comatose, had to be painfully jolted back into life and tube-fed with lexis gleaned from Meinhof (2008; 1995; 2009), Ensslin (Ensslin and Vesper 2009; Ensslin 2011) and their commentators and biographers (Becker 1989; Aust 2008; Röhl 2007; Sontheimer 2010; Steinseifer 2011). I began with reading Meinhof’s essays (2008). My German-English dictionary was soon black. In the novella developed from this material I have a writer Angel Beigesang, whose name means parody, or what is sung alongside, confess:

You know, crawling my way through the thicket of Meinhof’s German in those *konkret* articles, in the early hours of the morning on my brokeback sofa, inching, shivering and miserable, along the endless trenches of her arguments, coming up under the barbed wire and crossfire of her demonstrations, trying to breathe life back in there somehow, to bring the ardour back that had been there in her living voice, that was for me something close to love. Scary exercise, too, getting ventriloquised by that either/or mentality. (Campbell 2013: 43)

But how to make this present, speak to us in 2012? In terms of my project on Intertextuality and Subversion I had occasion to re-read Ross Chambers’ *Loiterature* and, while this went underground for me in a kind of cryptamnesia, I realise it catalysed me into letting my perambulatory other, the cranky old crone, my crony, my sister, walk the streets of contemporary Paris. What *Loiterature* suggests as a pleasurable mode of textuality, is to take the chronotope of the road (Bakhtin 1981) or of the pavement, and to make the constant ‘trivium’, of the Y, the three prongs of the forever-bifurcating pathway, into an improvisational and digressive practice of reading and of writing one’s readings. As Michel de Certeau points out, the ‘rhetoric’ of walking in the contemporary city is a practice of both the asyndeton, or radical jump-cut of jolting impressions, with the synecdoche, or the fragmented glimpse, where the part stands in place of the all (de Certeau 1984: 101). If digression is ‘trivial’ it is only in the etymological sense of the ‘trivium’ as constant invitation to the pleasure of straying. In Chambers’ practice *loiterature* is like a contemporary version of *flânerie* or cruising for the serendipitous encounter. He argues:

Digression *changes the subject* in more senses than one; but if it substitutes for social identity the knowledge that subjectivity is constituted by self-alterity and experienced, therefore, as digressive drift, it does not permit the subject to attain ultimate freedom from social identity: a subject of digressive writing

remains a writing subject and, as such, attached by however a tenuous thread, to the order of culture. (Chambers 1999: 93)

My main character, whose name itself would make me digress endlessly – Monique Piquet ex-commo Aussie, formerly Monica Picket, who's *fleur-de-lysed* herself to *pass* as French – would be moving towards an encounter with Angel Beigesang, the former student she once tempered in her own revolutionary fire, Angel Beigesang, who has just brought out this dramatic reimagining of Meinhof and Ensslin, the two feminists as I mentioned behind the kernel original membership of the Red Army Faction. Monique Piquet, curmudgeonly, grief-numb, a writer who thinks of herself as having been 'disappeared', is going into freefall breakdown and heads towards this re-encounter with her ex-student, forgetfully contemptuous of the idea of romancing revolution which she once instilled in her students.

Paris, map of revolution and repression, of imperial boast and crushing defeat, of fearless sustained insurrection and bloody suppression; Paris where every second demo ploughs the avenue of blood from Nation to Bastille; but Paris is also like any city in offering a proliferation of chronotopes of the threshold, of the road, and of the encounter (Bakhtin 1981) which enable one to encounter subjects and texts: the aleatory, the unforeseeable, along with the scripts bent on sinister *telos* which state power would write in – all inflect the trajectory of the loiterer. The loiterer's subjectivity is endlessly playing host to and falling hostage to; being captivated and seduced by the voices of the other, the stories of the other. So seismographically I wanted to enable my perambulatory character to pick up histories through her bone, as it were, putting them into montage with the material she is reading about the RAF, thus spatialising stories from the past, turning back-stories of place into *practised space* as de Certeau would have it (de Certeau 1988). As mentioned, aporia is pathlessness; wiped-out by grief and failure, my character is radically passive, her breakdown in freefall. She is moved by the contingency of place acting on her, pressing stories into her circuitry.

There are many chronotopes or space-time matrices of the threshold or liminal type, some of which were suggested to me by the pragmatics of where I started, at arrival: the airport travelator at Paris-Charles de Gaulle, the pavement along Rue de la Convention (a revolutionary street name if ever there was one), where accidents and pick-ups happen, Le Divan bookshop window busy with intertexts, the bus stop Rue Vercingétorix, the escalators in the Great National Library, the Bibliothèque National Site Francois Mitterrand. These liminal chronotopes can be productive in tripping things into elsewhere; these bring past time back into active space.

So Monique Piquet sips a *pinot gris* on a cafe terrace, Place de la Bastille and finds it

oddly empty of traffic for six pm: only the occasional bare-headed, leisurely cyclist, and on the footpath, shoppers and homebound workers, quick, intent, scarfed and belted, coat collars raised, their breath fogging. The cold's grip has tightened. Through the heavy plastic of the terrace enclosure the lanterns hang blurry spheres of light. The illumination picks out the winged Génie de la Liberté alighting, like a miraculous gold precipitate, on the Colonne de Juillet at the square's centre, his torch flame streaming from the speed of his descent. Under the gas heaters Monique toys with her *salade composée*, a compromise late lunch, early dinner. Faint, almost subliminal, there comes a thudding through the pavement, driving into her bone, and the heavy plastic of the enclosure is trembling, the *poulet bio* under the latticing of mayonnaise is trembling, the mixed leaf salad of *feuille de chêne rouge*, *mâche d'Italie*, *rocket*, and *chicorée scarole*, is trembling, under what comes at first as a roar, but starts to take on rhythmic definition;

through the shrilling of toy trumpets, the chanting is ever louder, louder, hoarse and furious: *nous sommes tous des Pa-les-ti-ni-ens! Nous sommes tous des Pa-les-ti-ni-ens, we are all Pal-es-tin-i-ans.* The demonstrators bear a forest of flags and banners, red, green, black, white; *Gaza assiégée! Gaza affamée!, Gaza bombardée! Gaza besieged! Gaza starved! Gaza bombarded! they shout. Is-ra-ël ass-ass-in! Sar-ko-zy com-plice! Israel murderers! Sarkozy their accomplice!* They wave swaddled, blood-spattered dolls, indicting the infanticidal airraid. Now Monique sees the CRS, the riot police grouped ready, watching, shields aligned, in their huge black boots, mediaeval in their exaggerated breadth, black, yellow-trimmed helmets, as poised as mannequins turning on the catwalks. Right now, one is before the cafe terrace, looking like any mother's son, bored, eyeing Monique's poised fork. (Campbell 2013: 40-41)

The world of pan-capital, of repression and violence informs the transnational *salade composée*: these elements are set in montage with the self-parodying romantic revolutionaries of the RAF. To stage them I sampled their language and pushed it towards parody, for example by turning Goethe's 'Wandrer's Nachlied II: ein Gleiches' (von Goethe 1964) as representative of Germany's most 'noble' canon, to make it work like escapism into the 'peace' of shopping. Gudrun Ensslin, evangelical pastor's daughter is retreating from the cops who've caught her current wig in their cameras, into the changing booth of a luxury boutique, where she'll try to buy a new disguise. As in a confessional alcove; she addresses herself as 'you'. I had earlier on written in Gudrun Ensslin, as a product of my own binary entrapment, as almost entirely lacking in compassionate warmth, *vis-a-vis* a mixture of depression and passionate ardour that are there in Meinhof, until I was able to read in Berlin a recent German publication of her correspondence with her then husband Berward Vesper when she was in prison for the department store arson in protest against napalm bombing in Vietnam. This enabled me to mix the sentimental and adoring young mother with the revolutionary discipline she forced on herself, in deciding to turn all Ten Commandments upside down, for the sake of revolution:

but here all is pastel all is peace –
 calm calm
 rub your hand slowly over
 your Twiggy-small breasts
über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh
in allen Wipfeln spürest du
kaum einen Hauch
 over all the peaks is peace
 on every treetop
 peace you trace scarcely a breath
 in this womby alcove
 & on these boyish breasts
 beguile yourself with softer things
 a cashmere shrunken pull
 on special now –
 is really so Parisian
 so cool to beat a retreat in this
 to sip & smoke
 in the Café de Flore
 once more with Andreas
 the sirens wail &
 the choppers are beating
 & the shop assistants murmur

low like nuns
 your dark blonde hair
 such a petal helmet
 waif thin transparent
 ach no scarcely a breath
 betrayal what a marshmallow
 you swallow
 mellow Pastor's daughter
 pull it down try it on
 the dusty pink, why not?
 this mini-skirt in Chanel tweed
 something nice to run'em down in
 the dirty industrialists
 the banker pigs
 the nuclear soldiers
 & you catch in the glint of your eye
 that radiance of your own son's look
Felix?
ach dein Sohn!
 how you baptised him, for his happy eye!
 you're pastelised in this warrior's dawn
 here all is peach; in the mirror's cashmere
 dream, on your skinny legs, suede flares
 are merely a breath
 so far now from the leather coat
 soft blue-grey with the pocketed
 guns you left on the bench
 they twitter like young birds out there
ach Schwaben in der Frühling
was für 'ne Haarfarbe kriegt er nun?
 what colour's his hair now?
 You asked of Felix
 what there is of it's a gingery blond
 Bernward wrote back
paßt Ihnen der Pullover?
 does the pullover fit?
 the salesgirl sings at the curtain
 don't answer her!
paßt Felix meinem Peusche-Meusche
der Pullover – meinem Herszeschmerz wie
paßt er ihm? Does the little sweater fit
 my mousie wousie *Felixchen?*
 you wrote from the Frauen Strafanstalt before the
 arson trial dann ich häkele ihm was anderes
 then I'll crochet him something else
 crochet needle they let you have
 no matches for the arsonist
 how many teeth? you asked Bernward
 again does *mein Peusche* have?
 four on top & three below
 reply came two weeks later
 he helps himself in puts up
 his little arms like so! he wrote
 tell me – is my *Wieg-und-Schmieg*
 crawling better now
 does he work those little sailors'
 legs around the grass blades or still
 topple over them *mein Pütsche Mütsche*

ach to feel his weight his alpine legs
 climbing up your chest
 shoulder-high his fingers in
 your hair – until all on this planet
 can have the personal
 we've got to bracket off
 our personal you told Ulrike
 or she told you – the aghast running
 girlchild wrapped in gelled gasoline
 her back a napalm fire her scream –
 a baby's skin in shreds must
 cling to our general – until we've turned
 this world around forget your personal
 you threw Felix to that fire no
 wandering babyfingers in your hair
 the gun will speak
 the saleswomen find oddly heavy
 the leather coat you dumped out there
 how Andreas joked of the cute
 revolver he gave you silver
 in-lay mother-of-pearl
 cunts love shiny things!
 their singsong voices on the phone
 & lower now
 those hulking shadows
 are surely theirs
 the cops they've summoned
 no time to pull it out on them
 the pocketed gun will not be dumb
 the pocketed gun will not –
 (Campbell 2013:73-77)

The text places this in immediate montage with another scene of would-be sale in Paris, Porte de Montmartre in which impoverished North Africans offer digital age junk for sale and are scattered by the police.

For Meinhof's voice and key imagery, I translated this from her German prose poem, effectively a protest against the sensory deprivation she endured in prison, and in this intimate slithering inside another's language one cannot help but identify...

the feeling that you're left standing unendingly, impalpably, under
 a river, as if you were being remote-controlled.

the feeling that all your associations are being slashed away.
 the feeling that you are uncontrollably pissing your soul out of
 your body, like when you can't hold it in any more –
 the feeling that the cell is spinning. You awaken, open your eyes:
 the cell is spinning; afternoons when the sun shines brightly, it
 suddenly comes to a halt.
 You cannot get rid of the feeling of spinning. You cannot make out
 whether you are shivering from fever or from cold –
 You cannot make out why you are shivering.
 You are freezing. –

(Meinhof 1972-1973) [5]

Here against the convoluted syntax of her earnest and thoroughly researched Marxist analyses of *Bundesrepublik* political culture in the Cold War, she is writing from the body and it struck me that if only she had had a more playful attitude to

language not caught in the wild veering from *Mehl im Maul Hoch Deutsch*, mealy mouthed High German, to the gutter slang she ventriloquised from Gudrun Ensslin and the young women in homes she tried to help, she might have avoided taking the fatal step into terror. A lot of the expressions are taken from actual Info notes passed to the other RAF prisoners in Stuttgart Stammheim prison:

why I was so envious of Gudrun
 there I've said it – she's not infected
 by 'cunt chauvinism' like me
 does not have to crawl around
 Andreas seething with the need
 to take his place she wants rather
 to be alongside of him
 no blind snuffling sow
 talking *scheiße*
 talking verbiage *Wortschwall* drivel
 I've sprayed useless talk I've frothed and
 foamed what I need is to fly it flat
 and clean as sharp waterstone
 flat and slim to hike it through the air
 but I launched myself in endless peroration
 typing sentence to sentence
 embedding parentheses
 stepped subordination hierarchies
 it was knitting it wasn't typing
 and when I tried to make it plain and
 crude dynamic like those kids
 they saw the stretch marks
 of fakery saw thirty-seven year old woman shooting
 her mouth off like a rude foster kid
 oh you know the limits of my language
 the limits of doing Wittgenstein
 inside – it was thatcell in a way
 I was ventriloquised by
 my incarceration in ideas
 I was spoken by my cell
 like every cell in my body's a mad
mise en abyme of that sensory
 deprivation OK they didn't get it then
 they never get it: was it me
 or Gudrun or Gudrun's
 voice in me who penned that thing
 our manifesto after we freed Andreas
die rote Armee aufbauen
 building the red army
 that travestied voice pipes
 through my dreams I tried
 to tell them all is movement
 our knowledge now comes from praxis
 before preach but
 how I'd worked the furrow
 from left to right and back again
 I stuck at it she stuck at it and who was
 I and who was she? I listened
 to the disconnect then between the foster kids
 and me the so-called delinquent kids
 in foster care whose care who cared
 for them – who knows

I foster child should know
 when I see the notes I send
 via the Infoto other cells of the RAF
 come back bleeding slashed sarcastically
 spiked by Gudrun's pen my
 inflation pricked
 if I had her style her rough
 cat's tongue
 when we had to send it out to those armchair
 lefties plangent and clear I slung
 their slang back through my sling
 and tried to smash our careful rhetoric back
 to pieces where once I'd politely passed
 the stones for others to hurl
 at the Axel Springer installation
 no Palestinian David then
 like an old stutterer with the pebble
 held in reserve on t-t-t-tongue –
 no the next time I didn't prepare speech
 I slung the sling David this time
 to the Goliath machination
 and we planted the bomb in the *Hochhaus*
 of that rapacious filthy capitalist press
 who'd called for readers to root out
 as *Volksfeinde* our passionate prime
 movers like Rudi Dutschke – I saw his shoe
 left there on the Kurfürstendamm
 his dark blood pooled
 his bike flung his briefcase
 tossed –
 oh yes Adolf is still here and treacherously
 the managers chose not to heed
 our twice telephoned
 three times telephoned warnings just
 to exploit their print workers
 to the last second of the working day and
 they'd have me wear the blood
 of the casualties they caused
 then I slung it back to *konkretion*
 that's what I call
 my slow convoy of intentional tanks
 building from article to article
 on cumulative persuasive caterpillar tracks
 against the massive blockage of their
 mendacity hypocrisy their systematic
 violence
 but nobody read my protest there
 in clauses nested in clauses
 no one saw in their carefully researched
 and engineered concatenation
 the bludgeons teargas the assault
 dogs and guns of 'democracy' their terror
 wall between us and authentic
 governance – the Bundestag
 was still – is still –
 the Third Reich celebrating
 US puppets Shah and Diba
 with their tiles flown into Persia

from Carrera for their swimming
 pool while starving kids
 eat mouldy straw and roots
 while Farah's gown is shot for *Bild*
 and in *der Deutschen Oper die Königin der Nacht*
 trills the 'Wrath of Hell' through three octaves
 and the Shah's police take their bludgeons
 to the protestors outside
 it's human flesh exploding
 to Mozart
 and four-by-four the tactic
 four-by-four their wit
 think of 'em as Leberwurst our own cops said
 stick 'em in the middle they're going to burst
 at the ends
 till a bunch of kids take off
 and that's when the 'Fox Hunt' begins
 because this running guy's
 moustached got a red shirt on and sandals
 he's got to be the rabblrouser
 and in this his very first
 demonstration Benno Ohnesorg's
 shot dead at 26 on Krummestraße
 Charlottenburg
 to resist violence is to refuse
 the violence of passivity
 to refuse the violence of complicity
 our oppositional action our *Widerstand*
 is therefore not
 violence
 our criminality
 legitimate
 it's plain to see
 and purl and plain I see
 I've knitted a long
 long scarf – hang me
 if I know where words
 can get me now

(Campbell 2013: 79-85)

Being radically passive, as my envoy into this virtual, tenuous world, Piquet is textually provoked by Beigesang's reimagining to seek out 'what remains' of all that miscarried revolutionary passion: she's in a sketchy bus shelter, which is a 'draft image', just as the perforated metal bench was at the airport. The history is active everywhere around; impossible not to be interpellated by the proper names like the Rue Vercingétorix and the violence or courageous resistance they can offer:

One last time Vercingétorix rears on horseback and, cavorting around his smugly lounging vanquisher, his flying moustache buttered like his hair, that fierce blue eye defiant, he throws his weapons down. Oh, he learned ruthlessness early on to subjugate those tribes who wanted to lie low rather than rise up to Julius Caesar. Like the US in Vietnam, he instigated the scorched earth policy to starve out the wintering legions, many of whom were Gauls.

And here's one of the valiant Gaul's descendents in domed bone beanie, with her lip-hung fag unlit, her faux fur collar grimy, watching the other, honed and styled, old bottle-blonde, bangs looping carved cheeks, isosceles eyebrows ironic, over the Puritan's lace collar. She's squinting at the unfolded script. *Vous avez été chez le médecin? You been to the doctor's? Bone Beanie is gravel-voiced, Vous avez de quoi vous faire soigner?* They give you something for it? You know I just go directly to the Outpatients. Mind if I smoke? Flame leaps from the lighter. You ever ... smoke?

No haven't smoked for thirty-eight years. But go ahead, please do.

Oh me, my husband worked in the tobacco, you know. So you understand I had free tobacco and cigars. Used to roll the fags myself. What can one do? Her finely cross-hatched face breaks out in mirth: the lines scurry and swarm like tadpoles into the deep dimples. Hack hack wheeze.

Now a blonde – huge in astrakhan coat – and her jockey-sized companion sidle up; he in his zipped silky blouson, with baseball cap reversed like a kid's. They ride their silence contentedly. Monique sees him riding her; her cheeks bellowing as he pleasures the great domes and valleys.

And now Monique is off herself, bucking the grid –

Bus-borne, she closes her eyes and travels, a burning spot of ardour, yes, from her encounter with Jacquot the Hoodie, the glowing embers of the brain in its nest of bone, a little red dot amongst millions of little red dots moving through the grids, the scaffolding of lines and angles, these Haussman-inspired triangulated street corners, for instance, to allow canon manoeuvre and artillery fire in case of insurrection, and she courses under the rebel parabola and ellipses made by the bare flexing plane trees and chestnuts, little red riding dot. Inside her lids she tracks the course of her fluctuating fire. Pigment-loaded bristle brush, she wills her particular vermillion along as others' trajectories intersect and mesh, content for the moment to be a nano-element in this big abstracting machine of the city... (Campbell 2013: 89-91)

And incrementally or asymptotically Piquet undergoes accidents through the hauntedness of place until her re-encounter with Beigesang. After being ejected violently from the nightmarish Bibliothèque Nationale Site François Mitterrand, Piquet buses her way towards their meeting place, Le Merle Moqueur café. The bus becomes a glorious ship of fools where laughter releases all from the impoverishment of solitude:

A man shouts from the back of the bus, *Vingt dieux! Vous êtes toutes des connasses qu'est-ce que vous me cassez les couilles! Oui vous! Et vous! Et vous et vous et vous! Putain de dieu j'en ai ras le bol de vous toutes – connasses dégueulasses!* For fuck's sake you're all stupid cunts and ball breakers all of you, you and you and you! Jesus fucking Christ I've had it to here with all of you!

Twittering intensifies into rolls of laughter. One after the other they break and soon the bus is one roar of hilarity.

Oui on est toutes des connasses dégueulasses et on s'en fout éperdument de vous, jeune homme! We're all ruined old cunts who couldn't give a flying fuck about you, young man! It's come from an old woman with glittering eyes, sculpted silver hair, and a fine aquiline nose. Her eyes are milky-jade. The waves of roaring mirth surge, break, and roll again. Onto the bus come twenty-odd kids from the *école maternelle*, all about three or four. They have half a dozen young teachers with them. Each child is holding a teetering cardboard construction with random excrescences made of old toilet roll cylinders, tissue boxes, and cereal packets. The bus lurches and the children also lurch in waves, the cardboard structures trembling and tottering. Soon the old women sitting are nursing the sculptures, Monique included, still wiping the mirth from their eyes.

Et je vous dis merde! Comes the wild man. *And I say shit to all of you!*

The children join in now with their tinkling laughter, their helpless, rippling giggling, building to real *fou rire*. (Campbell 2013: 118-119)

Here contingency and image-suggestiveness wrote a weird solution in. My character's 'little red riding dot' breaks comes out in a rash of red spots at the Merle Moqueur café, when she sees how many paintings on exhibition are signalled as sold. In truth the coincidence of her inner imaging with pure contingency, which only happened unconsciously in the writing becomes part of her own writing, drawing her out to writing a rescue in for her own teenaged lovers in their Valiant Regal Torqueflite.

In the end the text returns to what remains, what survives, and the penultimate word is given over in the dialogue of the two writers, to Felix Ensslin, son of Gudrun, now a professor of art history, who says that 'The measure of our humanity is what we make of the stories we inherit' (Ensslin 2011). No one is *finished business*, no story complete. But the way we reopen and subject to redrafting, radical revision, to polyamorous ventriloquy the stories we encounter against those we inherit and would reroute, he suggests, is the gift and the challenge of existence. Thus also the novella *konkretion* hangs, even in its willed finitude, as merely a draft, open at each end, and through which blow the draughts of the real, as it were. In this way the ending is foremost a vector outwards: its last words are a resolve and a hope: *Maybe in the next draft...*

I have tried to say how the work was enabled by a project of critical reflection and that it was finally an improvisation in the mode of Chambers' *Loiterature* around the problem of language and social transformation. This was all made possible by an ideal supervisory situation in which the productive dialogue was not only between supervisor and supervisee but in which the two-way traffic between critical and creative discourses, encouraged their cross-fertilisation. Whether the market place of texts likes this kind of thing is of course another question entirely.

Notes

[1] Unless otherwise indicated all translations from French and German are mine. return to text

[2] Which was the only part of the dauntingly polymathic work to be published in the American English. The actual, fascinating and intensive analyses of Mallarmé and Lautréamont (alias Isidore Ducasse) were omitted from the American translation. return to text

[3] 'Tout texte se construit comme mosaïc de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte' (emphasis added). return to text

[4] 'Il faut accentuer cette lutte, lui donner aussi son écriture d'avant-garde, rapide, allusive, approfondissement historique des tentatives où notre société, depuis un siècle, a appris à se creuser, à s'interroger sur son dehors, sa logique, ses langages, son passé. Sur ces trois scènes articulées, Mai 1968 n'aura pas de fin, ni en France, ni ailleurs, jamais.' return to text

[5] Ulrike Meinhof's German reads:

das Gefühl, man stünde ununterbrochen, unmerklich, unter Strom, man würde ferngesteuert -
das Gefühl, die Assoziationen würden einem weggehakt -
das Gefühl, man pißte sich die Seele aus dem Leib, als wenn man das Wasser nicht halten kann -
das Gefühl, die Zelle fährt. Man wacht auf, macht die Augen auf: die Zelle fährt; nachmittags, wenn
die Sonne reinscheint, bleibt sie plötzlich stehen. Man kann das Gefühl des Fahrens nicht absetzen.
Man kann nicht klären, ob man vor Fieber oder vor Kälte zittert -
man kann nicht klären, warum man zittert -
man friert. return to text

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