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Linguistic Uprisings: Toward a Grammar of Emancipation

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Elles disent qu'elles ont appris à compter sur leurs propres forces. Elles disent qu'elles savent ce qu'ensemble elles signifient. Elles disent, que celles qui revendiquent un langage nouveau apprennent d'abord la violence. Elles disent, que celles qui veulent transformer le monde s'emparent avant tout des fusils. Elles disent qu'elles partent de zéro. Elles disent que c'est un monde nouveau qui commence.

Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (1969, 120-1)

In this essay, I analyze the multi-semiotic processes through which gender minorities use language for political purposes. The focus on language as a grammatical, multilingual, and artistic resource gives me the possibility of shedding light on political and aesthetic issues at work in the analysis of the relations between language and gender minorities. By “gender minorities,” I refer to communities marginalized and dominated by patriarchy through discourses, laws, and social norms because of their gender and their antagonistic position with respect to hetero- and homo-sexism, misogyny, trans/intersex/lesbo/homophobia, and patriarchy. In this framework, the meaning I attribute to “minority” is obviously not quantitative. Rather, I read gender minorities as the result of a system of oppression – what Didier Eribon calls “ordre majoritaire” (2010, 13) – against some minoritized groups and not an intrinsic quality of them. In this sense, gender minorities as a category are conceived less as a result than as a process. This is similar to what Eribon – quoting Jean Genet, in particular from *Journal du voleur* (1949) and *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (1944) – refers to as an effect of a system of abjection that produces subjects as pariahs through words, naming processes, and social judgments (2001, 69-71). However, the process of abjection does not exclude the possibility of re-subjectification. Language plays a crucial role in the processes of re-invention that social actors display through their interactions. Language, through naming or re-naming, has the power to transform the injury (“Fag!”) into pride (“Yes, I’m a fag and proud of it”) and to give new meaning to our lives and to the ways we think about friendship, love, sexuality, and politics.

Political uprisings cannot be detached from speech. One might say that there is a constitutive relation between social uprisings and taking the floor in a public space. In the history of feminist movements and LGBTQIA+ political activism, language has always been mobilized by social actors in order to accomplish re-subjectification against injury and shame. Language occupies a very strange and interesting position in society. It is through language that we can reproduce sexism, transphobia, lesbophobia, and homophobia via a reification produced by the speech itself (“S/he is a dyke, a faggot, a tranny!”); yet it is also through language that we can open a space for resistance to gender norms and patriarchy, and we can re-invent our existences through re-signification and the creation of new ways of talking about ourselves. Thanks to language, we can reconstruct ourselves or (re)write our his/her-stories, as some feminists showed when they decided to change the morphology of the word “history” into

“herstory” (Morgan 2003, xxxix), highlighting the role women play in the construction of (another version of) history.

There are numerous examples of speech practices used by sexual and gender minorities in different contexts in order to produce re-subjectification: coming out practices, which include self disclosure in public and familiar contexts through which the self becomes public and agentive; slogans, texts, and new forms of graphic routines through which feminists have taken the floor in public spaces and troubled morphology, syntax, and discourse (Gérardin-Laverge 2018); forms of inclusive writing (*écriture inclusive*) in francophone areas, a linguistic and political strategy aiming to demasculinize language and to unveil the ideological nature of the masculine as the unmarked morphological resource (Viennot 2014; Abbou, Candea, Arnold, Marignier 2018); consciousness-raising groups, social occasions created by women in the 1960s through which they had the experience of talking freely together in non-mixed groups in order to find a new language to formulate their particular lived experiences; abortion speak-outs, which can be an act of civil disobedience in contexts in which admitting to having an abortion effectively makes the speaker an outlaw; and finally, the “[Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt](#).” In this last example, through the writing and verbalization of the names of people who died from AIDS, participants (relatives, friends, lovers) built an archive of feelings, a sense of belonging to a community, and create a shared memory (Cvetkovich 2003) through naming, touching, and occupying a space for remembering.

In this essay, referring to case studies taken from a corpus composed of experimental verbal performances by feminist scholars and artists in the 20th century as well as examples drawn from my ethnographic study of a francophone drag king community in Brussels, Belgium (Greco 2018a), I will show how a grammar of emancipation is possible in the face of the fixed and binary nature of conventional linguistic forms in the French language. What I mean by the word “grammar” is not a closed system of rules governing the use of words and sentences but a “Do-It-Yourself Grammar” in which social actors use language rules in an aesthetic way, mobilizing creativity and improvisation. In this framework, rules are the effect and not the cause of the production of new words and new ways to interact in social contexts. It is a grammar constructed *post hoc*, context-sensitive, and politically productive of new emancipatory forms of life.¹ My investigation is supported and structured by two different registers and units of analysis. The first, *morphology*, with a focus on pronouns, nouns, and adjectives, I will consider alone or when situated in broader contexts such as sentences or texts in French and Italian. The second, *discourse*, will be approached as a general mode of semiosis, a complex form larger than the sentence (Bloomaert 2005, 3), such as texts or verbal exchanges.

I will begin with morphology through a focus on pronouns, adjectives, and nouns before turning to discourse through a focus on definitions in dictionaries, multilingual practices, and ways through which participants create links between language and artistic practices. I will conclude with some remarks on what I call “Do-It-Yourself Language Strategies” (DIYLS).

¹ A part of this praxeological view of grammar is inspired by the work of Wittgenstein (1958) and Capps and Ochs (1995).

I. *Morphology and lexicon as political and linguistic performances*

The writer and feminist theorist Monique Wittig (1935–2003) worked extensively on pronouns as a site of gender emancipation. S/he used grammatical forms such as the French impersonal and indefinite pronoun “on” (Wittig 1964) to create a universal subject outside (and against) the gender binary norms, connected to the magical and utopian world of childhood and raising a sort of linguistic choir.² In the novel *Les Guérillères* (1969), s/he uses the feminine plural third person pronoun “elles” to question binary gendered linguistic norms, to create a new form of revolutionary subject and to render visible the minority point of view. In this framework, “elles” ought not to be read as a feminine pronoun supporting a supposed “feminine writing” (*écriture féminine*); it exceeds gendered and binary forms of language and life. In the following excerpt from “La pensée straight” s/he offers a view on the relationship between gender and language with a focus on inclusive writing or feminine language (*féminisation*):

[...] la tendance actuelle (comme dans écrivaine adopté récemment) me paraît, non pas aller vers un dépassement des genres comme il est souhaitable si on veut les abolir, mais [...] aller vers son renforcement [...]. (Wittig 2001, 137).

This skepticism toward a “féminisation” of language – in addition to a strong political aversion to a binary vision of the world and therefore against binary gender categories such as “he” and “she” – allows Wittig to work in a more experimental and creative direction. It is within this framework that s/he invented new forms such as “j/e” (I) in the long poem *Le corps lesbien* (1973) addressed to a woman and, as s/he noted in *La pensée straight* (1992), was inspired by Emile Benveniste's linguistic analysis of “je/tu” (I/you) pronouns. Starting from the morphology of “je” (I), Wittig inserts a slash (/) within its original form to trouble the grammatical form as she did with the pronouns « m/e » (me), « m/oi » (me), or the adjective « m/es » (my). In this way, s/he contributes to perceiving language as a laboratory within which one can experiment with new subject forms, and puts into question the stability of the narrator and of the grammatical forms.

In this theoretical and analytical framework, other feminist scholars and activists including Céline Labrosse (2005), Thierry Hoquet (2011), Anne Larue (2013), Katy Barasc and Michèle Causse (2014), and Alpheratz (2015, 2018) have created new pronouns in order to dismantle the binary order of the French pronouns “il” (he) / “elle” (she). *Table 1* below shows some examples of these new and interesting forms of non-binary pronouns (Coutant, Greco, and Marignier 2015):

² I use the pronominal and the graphical form « s/he » (or “h/er”) as a tribute to Wittig, who used the graphical forms « J/e » in *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

Table 1. Linguistic forms.³

	3rd subject personal pronouns	Stressed pronouns	Defined determinants	Undefined determinants	Alphalecte
Binary Forms	Il(s) vs. Elle(s)	Lui vs. Elle	Le vs. La	Un vs. Une	
Queer forms	yel, Ille, iel, iles, els, iels, <i>al</i> , ol, ul, uls, yol....	Ellui, ellues...	Lo, lu, li, le-a...	Uno unu...	α
Examples with queer forms	Yel s'appelle Andrea	Je parle à ellui	Lu stylo/étudiantE est....	Unu fantastique personne	Li étudiantα privas de moyens

Ol, ul, uls, and al are pronouns that, morphologically and phonologically speaking, try to escape the binary forms of “il” (he) and “elle” (she). As such, they create other ways to think about non-binary morphology, using the letters “o” and “u” instead of “i”, even if they maintain the letter “l” of the lexemes “elle”/“il.” Moreover, the new language “alphalecte” created by Michèle Causse (2000) is worthy of interest. The Greek letter α (alpha), the symbol of a new humanity (what Causse calls the “néo-espèce Sapiens”), is used to short-circuit the binary gendered forms in nouns, adjectives, and verbs and against the “[androlecte](#)” (1998). Defined as a common language respectful of all the speakers, the alphalecte allows us to speak as subjects and not as gendered individuals. It breaks the boundaries between poetry and theory, feeling and thinking, language and body, and it questions in a new (a)gendered way the communication model “sender-receiver” in which *Andros* is the sender and the receiver of the same message (Causse 2000).

Along similar lines, in the last chapter of their book, Barasc and Causse propose a sort of manifesto advocating the usage of *ul* that refers to all possible bodies without assigned gender, which produces the possibility for everyone to live in an egalitarian context (isonomia) and opens new political, epistemic, aesthetic, and poetic enjoyments (*jouissances*) (2014, 176-77).

Michèle Causse, like other feminist activists and artists, created new forms of language through a lexical intervention. For example, just before *ur* death, *ul* wrote the following statement on *ur* website: “Le 29 juillet 2010 à 13h, Michèle Causse est allée dé/naître auprès de l’association *Dignitas* à Zurich”.⁴ Here, the verb “mourir” (to die) is replaced by “de-naître” (un-born), clearly conceived as a sort of antonym of “naître” (to be born) created with the negative prefix “dé”. In this case, Causse’s “dénaître” works in the same vein as the Italian feminist artist Chiara Fumai’s use of the verb “slavorare” (unwork) which replaces “lavorare” (to work) in her poetry/politics: “Nata a Roma nel 1978, vive e “slavora” a Milano” [Born in

³ In particular, the queer form *al* was created by the writer and linguist Alpheratz in *Requiem* (2015). In a similar vein, Suzanne Haden Elgin, a linguist and science fiction writer, created a dictionary and grammar of a new anti-patriarchal language called “Láadan” that aims to dismantle sexism in and through language (1984, 1988). Within this framework, she proposed, among other innovations, a new neutral pronoun “Be.”

⁴ Inspired by the form “ul”, I decided to use the French form “ul” to refer to Michèle Causse in English, and to create the genitive “ur” instead of the gendered pronoun “her”. The presence of the form “ul” or of a code-mixing form such as “ur” (ul + her) troubles or destabilizes the female gender of Michèle Causse.

Rome in 1978, [Chiara Fumai] lives and ‘de/un/works’ in Milan]. “Slavorare” is a mixed form composed of “lavorare” (to work) and the prefix “s” (“de-,” “un-”). Here, “S,” like the Latin prefix “ex” from which it is derived, means “to come out (of)” from the patriarchal conception of work. These new lexical and social forms of “work,” or “(de/un)work” are done outside the gendered and capitalist forms of expropriation and they propose new critical forms of work.

New grammatical forms have emerged in recent years in non-binary contexts that are sensitive to gender and queer theories. In email conversations I collected from non-binary friends, I note the following interesting written forms. Here are three examples (the first is in Italian):

– *Carao*, dolce creatura, che c’hai fumato ieri sera?

[Darling, sweet creature, what did you smoke last night?]

– A vendredi alors les *amiis*!

– Profite bien de la Queer Week, moi, un peu *fatiguéi* (Personal email communication, emphasis added).

The juxtaposition “ao” in the Italian singular adjective “carao” (dear) creates a hybrid and ad hoc adjectival form, whereas in the French plural noun “amiis”, or in the French singular adjective “fatiguéi,” it is the morpheme “i” that does the work of questioning and dismantling binary forms (see table 2 below for a comparison) and creating unexpected and creative forms.

Table 2.

Plural Queer Form	Binary Form (F)	Binary Form (M)
Carao (singular form)	Cara	Caro
Amiis (plural form)	Amiche	Amici
Fatiguéi (singular form)	Fatiguée	Fatigué

Alpheratz, a non-binary linguist who creates new and original queer forms and dismantles binary forms in French, sent the following announcement to a francophone gender studies mailing list regarding a performance drawn from their 2015 novel *Requiem*:

Chaers Touz,

Sur invitation de l’association Bicause, je lirai un extrait de Requiem ce soir au centre LGBTQI Ile-de-France dans le cadre de l’événement Poètes du printemps.

Centre LGBTQI Ile-de-France, 63 rue Beaubourg 75003 Paris, 20h.

Au plaisir de vous y retrouver

Alpheratz

[...]

Doctoranx en langue française à Paris IV Sorbonne

Autaire de Requiem, roman sans hiérarchie entre les genres (E-mail communication, emphasis added).

In this text, Alpheratz uses many new forms: the morpheme “z” in the word “touz” (all) instead of “tous et toutes,” or “touteS,” both of which are relatively known inclusive-writing forms used in French; “Chaers” (dear) as an alternative to “chers et chères” or “cherEs”, and the nouns “doctoranx” (PhD student) and “autaire” (author). The latter two are very interesting neologisms in that they dismantle the binary “doctorant/doctorante” or “auteur, auteure/autrice.”

In some queer contexts such as the francophone drag king community based in Brussels, participants regularly employ non-binary forms as “yel” instead of “il”/”elle” (he/she) and “Toustes” instead of “tous” and “toutes”. These forms are mostly used in written contexts. But what’s going on in oral encounters? If we take the example of “toustes”, participants can pronounce the word with a pause between “tou” and “stes” or between “tous” and “tes.” In the following conversation I recorded between Frédérique (F), a person who was attending the drag king workshops for the first time, and two leaders of the workshops, Aurel (A) and Max (M), the participants were focusing their discussion on the political goals promoted by the group, and particularly on the right to linguistic auto-determination:

- 1 F: mais en fait vous voulez promouvoir quoi
 2 en gros/⁵
 3 A: le droit pour chacun de se définir tel que
 4 il elle ou/
 5 M: yel
 6 A: tout ce qu’il y a entre les deux

After a question from a person who was attending the drag king workshops for the first time – “Mais en effet vous voulez promouvoir quoi en gros” (l. 1–2) – Aurel, one of the drag king leaders who performs and is very knowledgeable in bodily transformation practices, responded with: “le droit pour chacun de se définir tel que il elle ou” (l. 3–4). The syntactical incompleteness of their reply,⁶ as shown by the place of the conjunction “ou” at the end of the response (l. 4), allows Max, another drag king leader, to offer a non-binary alternative to Aurel’s utterance (l. 4) by proposing the pronoun “yel” (l. 5). This overture offers a space for Aurel to take the floor again with « tout ce qu’il y a entre les deux » (l. 6), a reformulation or definition for the non-binary pronoun “yel.”

Drag king workshops are a wonderful occasion in which people can not only experience gender transformation but also create new ways of using language in social encounters. They can use pronouns such as “yel” and “toustes” but also “celleux,” a queer form for “those” derived from “celles” et “ceux,” and “nombreuxses,” a derivative of “nombreuses,” and “nombreux,” a queer form for “numerous.” The possibilities of morphological or prosodic recombinations seem potentially infinite, and they offer an incredible space for linguistic improvisation and creativity. Moreover, they can even avoid any gender marks in discourse as Anne Garréta did in her novel *Sphinx* (1986), in which the genders of the main characters are never discovered by the reader.

⁵ The slash symbol marks a rising intonation in conventions used by sociolinguists to transcript oral encounters.

⁶The singular possessive adjective “their” and the singular pronouns “they”/”them” are the gender neutral forms most used in Anglophone non binary and queer contexts.

II. Discourse as linguistic and political performance

In this section, I will focus on three different relevant discursive practices: dictionary definitions, multilingualism, and interactional episodes in which participants consider language as an aesthetic resource.

Definitions

One of the resources used by LGBTQ minorities and feminist groups to dismantle patriarchal and binary forms is the mobilization of definitional practices in order to redefine a term marked by heterosexism and patriarchy (Greco 2016). Some examples can be found in the feminist dictionary edited by Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler in 1985 in which the contributors redefine terms such as “night cleaning” as “invisible work done by women working for men who have contracts with large offices,” a definition created by the London Women’s Liberation night-cleaners collective (ob., 225).

In this definition, the term “night cleaning” is defined for political purposes. The *definiens* (the definition itself) is formulated to unveil the political and power dynamics at work in social practices like cleaning during night hours. In this context, night cleaning is presented as a neglected and non-rewarding practice, as invisible work, and as a gendered practice done by women for men within a system of economic exploitation.

Similarly, the *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (Wittig and Zeig 1976) is another counter-dictionary co-authored by the French feminist and lesbian theorist Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, a specialist in theater and martial arts, writer, and film director. In this iconoclastic text, they rewrite the heterosexual romance embedded in the well-known fairy tale *Belle-Au-Bois-Dormant* (*Sleeping Beauty*), from a lesbian point of view. In the following excerpt, the fairy tale is transformed – the *definiendum* (*Belle-Au-Bois-Dormant*) is redefined through narrative (the *definiens*)⁷:

- 1 [Belle-Au-Bois-Dormant] se dit généralement d’une amante oublieuse de son
- 2 clitoris. Elle tombe alors dans une espèce de somnolence
- 3 dont elle ne connaît pas le motif. Elle peut rester dans
- 4 cet état un laps de temps indéterminé. On a connu une
- 5 belle-au-bois-dormant particulièrement solitaire puisque
- 6 cet état l’a prise au milieu d’un bois. Cent ans ont passé
- 7 avant qu’une de ses amantes la trouve au cours d’une
- 8 promenade. L’état de somnolence prend fin en principe pour
- 9 la belle quand une amante lui rappelle avec délicatesse
- 10 qu’elle a un clitoris. (1976, 43).

In the above text, the metaphor of drowsiness allows the authors to reveal the constraints of heteronormativity. The *Sleeping Beauty* character is forgetful of her clitoris (l. 1), in a kind of drowsiness (“somnolence” l. 2), and unaware of her condition (l. 3). She is presented as definitely non-agentive, waiting for a pivotal event to awaken her from her state (l. 4-6). Contrary to the heterosexual romance in which it is Prince Charming who has the role of

⁷ In philosophy of language and semantics, a definition is composed of a *definiendum* and a *definiens*. While the *definiendum* is the term defined, the *definiens* is that which defines the word through narratives, statements or texts that one finds in dictionaries.

awakening the girl, in this excerpt, this figure is replaced by female lovers. They remind her that s/he has a clitoris and they reveal unexpected avenues of love and sexuality (l. 7–10).

Multilingualism

Feminist postcolonial theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa have proposed a vision of multilingual and polyphonic identities as constitutive of a politics of emancipation. Her book, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is a celebration of the concept of border, recruiting a plurality of linguistic resources, English and Spanish, and of discursive genres: theoretical essays, poetry, and journals. Within this framework, *La mestiza*, a borderline figure in perpetual transition who speaks and mixes a plurality of languages, has the power to dismantle the monologism and the monolingualism of patriarchy and dominant power. In Anzaldúa's words:

La mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition. (1987, 100).

I wonder if this type of multilingual and polyphonic form, which is deeply hybrid and mixes linguistic codes and discursive genres, is not a constitutive feature of some queer communities situated at the interstices of nations, languages, and genders (Cashman 2018, Provencher 2007). As Rosi Braidotti, a feminist philosopher strongly inspired by Deleuze and Spinoza, states, a polyglot has “many lines of transit, transgression”:

There are no mother tongues, just linguistic sites from which one takes her starting point. The polyglot has no vernacular but many lines of transit, transgression; [...] The complex muscular and mental apparatus that join forces in the production of language combine in the polyglot to produce strange sounds, phonetic connections, vocal combinations, and rhythmic junctures. A sort of polymorphous perversity accompanies a polyglot's accent, which reveals the capacity to slip in between the languages, stealing acoustic traces here, diphthong sounds there, in a constant and childlike game of *persiflage*.” (2011, 41).

We also find this polymorphous linguistic perversity in the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951–82), a Korean feminist artist who lived in Paris and Berkeley, multilingual due to both her education and family origins. In the course of her short career, she wrote a quasi-autobiography of her family, *Dictée* (2001), whose title reminds us of the traditional and typical exercise that teachers of French give their students: dictation (*dictée*). In this text, as in Anzaldúa's work, we witness a plurality of discursive genres including poetry, the autobiographical journal, fiction, drawings, sketches, and French grammar exercises, as well as a diversity of languages: Korean, English, and French. Strongly influenced by linguistics lectures given by Bertrand Augst, and by the writings of the semioticians and linguists Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, and Christian Metz, (Zabunyan 2013), Hak Kyung Cha mobilizes language in *Dictée* as a plastic and hybrid resource evoking an “in-between” identity, and a minority becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1975; Zabunyan 2013).

Another example of multilingualism or pidginization – a process through which social actors create and mix new linguistic forms coming from different languages – can be found in the work of Amelia Rosselli (1930–96), an Italian poet who wrote her poems in Italian (the paternal native language), English (the maternal native language) and French (the language she spoke in France during her childhood). Her life was characterized by a sense of loss and by exile (her father was one of the most important opponents of the Italian fascist regime and exiled in France) and by continuous movements from one language and country to another (France, Switzerland, United States, Great Britain, Italy). Rosselli uses several procedures to

mobilize grammar and language in a very creative way. For instance, she changes grammatical gender of some words – for example “castelli” (castles) into “castelle” – thus echoing some ancient dialectal forms. Or she juxtaposes two or more languages to create new words, as in the following example drawn from Sciarrino (2014):

(Elle se fouilla un petit beurre gate
gatà)

(elle se foya (fudrà) un petit bird gâté (piccione).

In this context, language is a constitutive feature of the creative process in which code switching, code mixing, or speaking a language that is not one’s native tongue produce (and are a reflection of) spaces of linguistic, existential, geographical, and gender hybridity.

Language as an aesthetic resource

Since the futurist and Dadaist *avant-garde* movements in contemporary art and performance, language, through its vocal, prosodic, interactional, and textual dimension, has constituted a very important conceptual and material resource (Greco 2017, 2018b). Moreover, through repetition, improvisation, and creativity, as it is deployed by participants in social encounters, language is constitutive of socialization processes, (Duranti and Black 2011) and creates a sense of belonging between members of the social group (Goodwin and Cekaite 2018).

In the next excerpt drawn from my corpus of drag king workshops, Camille, one of the participants, takes the floor and produces a narrative in which we witness a connection between language, body, and art:

1 C: je m’étais filmée mais il y a longtemps en me
2 coupant les cheveux j’avais pris une caméra et
3 je me coupais les cheveux et je me servais de
4 la caméra pour me couper pour me faire ma coupe
5 et au même temps je regardais dans la glace et
6 j’avais un truc comme ça et à la fin j’avais
7 envie de y avait les mèches par terre et ça
8 faisait comme des lettres et j’avais envie de
9 prendre les mèches et d’en faire une espèce de
10 je sais pas un poème

In the above excerpt, Camille’s narrative accounts for a lived-experience during the activity of cutting their hair. They videotape this activity, transforming it into an artistic endeavor and gender performance, in which the shorn locks, fallen on the ground, are perceived as, and become, letters composing a poem.

Camille’s aesthetic project – to make poems with locks as if they were letters – is structured through two temporally organized phases. In the first phase, they direct the activity of cutting their hair as if they were a video performer, recording their actions. In the second phase, the discovery of the locks on the ground gives them the opportunity to draw a parallel between locks and letters from which to make a poem. In this case, the hair loses its conventional meaning and is transposed to another context in which it is interpreted as letters.

This procedure reminds me of Dadaist poetry as it emerged in the project of Tristan Tzara (1896–1963). In Tzara’s work, poetry becomes a daily activity, composed of letters and pieces of texts cut out by participants – much like Camille’s hair – and recomposed through the chance criterion:

Pour faire un poème dadaïste
 Prenez un journal.
 Prenez des ciseaux.
 Choisissez dans ce journal un article ayant la longueur que
 vous comptez donner à votre poème.
 Découpez l'article.
 Découpez ensuite avec soin chacun des mots qui forment cet
 article et mettez-les dans un sac.
 Agitez doucement.
 Sortez ensuite chaque coupure l'une après l'autre.
 Copiez les consciencieusement dans l'ordre où elles ont quitté
 le sac.
 Le poème vous ressemblera.
 Et vous voilà un écrivain infiniment original et d'une
 sensibilité charmante, encore qu'incomprise du vulgaire.

Language in Dadaist performances is deconstructed through phonetic poetry, or poetry composed of a series of syllables that are pronounced one after the other. Two examples can be found in an extract drawn from an acoustic performance by Kurt Schwitters of *Ursonate* (1932), and a poem by Hugo Ball, "*Karawane*" (1917).

The linguistic deconstruction we witness in these experiments is political in that they question the meaning of language and that of artistic oeuvres. In my view, this approach is quintessentially queer. There is no first or original meaning in gender and language. Gender, as language, is also what you do with words, with syntactic structures, through mixing of codes and discursive genres.

With h/er novels, Monique Wittig proposes linguistic and graphical possibilities in which the reader is permanently troubled and invited to create new existential possibilities with language. What s/he creates with language is not restricted to grammatical forms, but also, as we have seen in the previous excerpts, with and through graphical forms. They involve pronominal and adjectival forms (J/e, m/es) as well as new ways of marking reported speech by integrating the symbol of parenthesis in the text as in the following example from *Virgile, non*:

A bout, je leur crie :
 (Misérables créatures, écoutez moi !) (1985, 16)

In the case of *Les Guérillères*, the narrative is interposed with pages in which the circle as symbol – referring to the vulva and to the circular form of the narrative – or some words (proper names) are written in capital letters and occupy the entire page. In this context, the narrative is composed and intertwined with at least three different types of texts, each one distributed in different graphical spaces (pages): the narrative itself, the names of the *Guérillères*, the symbol of the circle, as she describes the book in *La pensée straight*:

Il y a aussi les labyrinthes en forme de cercles que je dessine comme nouveau éléments constitutifs. J'imagine elles perdues dans ces labyrinthes concentriques [...]. Et peu à peu le cercle se vide de son labyrinthe pour devenir une simple ligne circulaire". (Wittig 1992, 116)

The same processes are at work in the *Le corps lesbien* (1973) in which the reader is confronted with a polymorphous text with two different and yet closely intertwined reading

experiences: the poem itself is punctuated by pages in which the body parts are enumerated in large capital letters.

III. Do It Yourself Language Strategies

All of the examples I have cited thus far are invitations to change our linguistic and existential habits through what I call “Do-It-Yourself Language Strategies” (DIYLS): experimental linguistic performances in which morphology, syntax, and discourse, but also phonetics and prosody, can be mobilized in order to create and/or validate subject forms outside patriarchal, heterosexist, and binary norms. With this perspective of local language policy and poetics, we could mobilize some of the strategies I have presented in this paper in order to dismantle gendered binary norms so as to:

- i) use linguistic forms in creative, always-changing, and unexpected ways;
- ii) make poems with and through language and life, as Camille did in our excerpt;
- iii) create no- or non-sense and a form of un-intelligibility to become ungovernable, not recruited by the system for all practical purposes as did the Dadaists, or some radical feminists, through their linguistic experiments;
- iv) build multilingual repertoires, mesh linguistic codes, and create hybrid discursive genres against the monological, monolingual, and protectionist vision of the world, and finally,
- v) think about language and gender as unstable and poetic forms more like processes than results.

I would like to propose that we consider DIYLS as a constitutive feature of a grammar of emancipation. It is conceived less as a finite set of rules governing the production of words or sentences than as an open space for the deployment of linguistic improvisation and creativity. The linguistic *bricolage* emerging in all of these DIYLS examples I have cited is never detached from the most binary linguistic structures and forms. If pride can emerge from injury (Eribon 2001), then we can think about joyful “Spoken Pride Parades” in which DIYLS subvert and re-signify the injuries and the binary linguistic and social norms we experience as gender minority subjects during our lives.

Let us break the linguistic and gender rules, and let us think in a grammar of emancipation constituted by DIYLS and celebrated in Spoken Pride Parades. Let us make our lives beautiful sites of linguistic, poetic, and political experimentation in a perpetual and astonishing becoming.

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