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VERS / MOUVEMENTS.

ETHICS OF DIFFERENCE IN FRENCH-LANGUAGE POETRY AND THEATRE

FROM 1970-1982.

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Ethics of Difference in French-language Poetry and Theatre from 1970-1982.

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Vers / Mouvements is a cross-cultural exploration of movement in contemporary French-language poetry and theater from the 1970-1982. The study focuses on poets Anne-Marie Albiach (France) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), and playwrights Werewere Liking (Cameroon/Ivory Coast) and Ariane Mnouchkine and her *Théâtre du Soleil* (France).

Major texts produced in the second half of the 20th century are often characterized as ambiguous, apathetic and open to suspicion. Yet if we turn toward what French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call “minor literature” – works that use language as a “heterogeneous, variable reality” where “authors are foreigners in their own tongue” – we discover affirmations of specificity, vitality and intensity, conveyed in each instance by a new emphasis on movement that involves dance, ritual and performance. Through their sensational movements, and in a surprising turn from “cultural vacuity” and “intellectual nihilism,” the primary works of the dissertation not

only gesture toward, but also put into motion *and practice* performances of difference. Such diverse and dynamic performances, while remaining particular to the work from which they emerge, are spurred through a movement or movements – encounters – that manifest in, through and even beyond the literary text. These encounters are remarkable for several reasons: they are sensory/corporeal; they span the French-speaking globe; and they occur cross-genres and even shatter the notion of literary genre. Further, from these encounters, ethics emerge. These embodied and cosmopolitan ethics are unlike conventional ethics, for they do not correspond to a set of rules or obligations. They “move” by way of active practices, and transform how *we* move, know, become and live in the world.

It is in these ways and through minor tones, therefore, that the texts in *Vers / Mouvements* move as practices. In turn, the practices that emerge from the texts actively and affectively carve out ways for a new, intense and life-affirming future *à venir*.

Dedications

To my mother and my sister.

In memory of my father.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960s was a decade of political unrest, liberty and change in the French-speaking world: several African countries, including Cameroon, Senegal and the Ivory Coast, broke from French colonization and initialized their *Indépendances*; Quebec underwent a *Révolution Tranquille*; and in France, the student revolutions of *Mai '68* took center stage. Shifts of power and eruptions of emancipation shook these societies and created fissures where newfound creativity surged through literature of French expression. Artists and writers seized the dynamic and creative forces that overflowed from these fissures, or gaps, and with them, interlaced their hope and intentions to make a new and different future. Forceful and creative gestures such as these – and the works of art that emerged from them – destabilized identity, genre, tradition and meaning, and also provoked art and literature to call itself into question, leaving traces both on the page and the stage for decades to come.

As a result of the social, historical and cultural *bouleversements* that transpired in French speaking worlds during the 1960s, as well as the disappointments that ensued particularly after the revolutions of *Mai '68* and the African *Indépendances*, literary texts produced in the second half of the twentieth century are often characterized as ambiguous, apathetic and open to suspicion. “We live in an age of cultural and ideological vacuity” pronounces Jean-Louis Hippolyte in regards to the end of the twentieth century.¹ Virginia La Charité writes in a similar vein of the “sense of

¹ Jean-Louis Hippolyte, *Fuzzy Fiction*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) 1.

dislocation, incompleteness [and] at times intellectual nihilism” of the post-1968 climate.² Yet if we turn toward what French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call “minor literature” – works that use language as a “heterogeneous, variable reality” where “authors are foreigners in their own tongue”³ – we discover affirmations of specificity, vitality and intensity, conveyed in each instance by a new emphasis on movement that involves dance, ritual and performance. Through their movements, and in a surprising turn from “cultural vacuity” and “intellectual nihilism,” these works not only gesture toward, but also put into motion – *and practice* – performances of difference. Such diverse and dynamic performances, while remaining particular to the work from which they emerge, are spurred through a movement or movements, which we can also call encounters, that manifest in, through and even beyond the literary text. These encounters are remarkable for several reasons: they are sensory/corporeal; they span the French-speaking globe; they occur cross-genres and even shatter the notion of literary genre;⁴ and, finally, their ethics of difference, which emerge in acts of “moving-with,” can become practices of “living-with” in the world.

Foreign tongues

Each of the authors we will meet in this dissertation is a foreigner in his or her own tongue. Anne-Marie Albiach speaks through energy writing, where white space is the “force majeure” of the poetic text, which explodes (out from) the dominant male

² Virginia A. La Charité, *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907-1990*. (Lexington: French Forum, 1992) 20.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 100, 105.

⁴ Please see *L'Eclatement des genres au XXe siècle*, Ed. Marc Dambre et Monique Gosselin-Noat. (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001).

French poetic tradition of the avant-garde of the late twentieth century. Her dynamic poetics also call into question philosophical concepts of the binary and synthesis by illustrating interplays of difference, turning philosophy inside-out and thus showing us other ways to “think” poetry and “move-with” difference in the world.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, though closely linked to the French language, spoke in many tongues as a politician, poet and philosopher; as Senegal’s first president after its independence from France in 1960; and as one of the country’s most prominent writers. Wandering between European and African territories and oscillating between tradition and modernity, Senghor channeled his philosophical, poetic and political vision into his final work, the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba*. Here, a sensational and cosmopolitan ethics of “moving-with” surfaces through corporeal movements and encounters with the other which, although articulated in a minor key, resonate a major living philosophy – an “éthétique senghorienne.”

Ariane Mnouchkine’s multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and overall multi-faceted Théâtre du Soleil uses the minor tones of being a foreigner in one’s own tongue to create a theatre that is just as much a practice as it is a performance. Akin to Senghor’s elegy, the Soleil’s interplay of philosophy *and* practice that we refer to as “faire ensemble” demonstrates a sensational and cosmopolitan “moving-with” that results from its performances of difference. The performances thus become *modes d’emploi* on “living-with” for both performer and spectator alike.

As a Cameroonian living in the Ivory Coast, Werewere Liking’s minor-toned “lunatic language” reflects not only her diverse national affiliations, but also “the tensions of the cultural-translational movement between Africa and the West, between an

ancestral philosophy and wisdom and a modernity offering women in particular and Africans in general a more creative identity.”⁵ Liking’s heterogeneous language, which she articulates sensually and semantically, reaches toward the public and brings them “in touch with the forces of the past and future, with the forces of the universe.”⁶ This gesture provokes the public – including us, the readers – to take the artistic turn, which opens up paths toward new ways of living *à venir*. This is Liking’s ritual theatre’s greatest – and most ethical – gesture.

Methods, movements

Movement is not a new phenomenon in art and literature. In French speaking worlds, for example, it has manifested in medieval France as the popular court dance, the *basse danse*; in Rousseau’s *promenades solitaires*; in Loie Fuller’s *dance serpentine*; in Bassa ritual from Cameroon; and in the Haitian music and dance called *Compas*. The works that are part of this dissertation give movement a unique character, however, in the ethical dimension – a perspective from which it has yet to be explored. The genres of poetry and theatre lend themselves best to such an analysis for their rhythmic and corporeal characteristics. Moreover, each of the texts included here have an inherently performative nature: the works by Mnouchkine and Liking were created specifically for the stage and often as performances first before becoming recorded as texts; Senghor makes it clear that the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* is to be set to performance with music; and Albiach’s energetic poetry, even though the most abstractly performative of

⁵ Michelle Mielly, "Werewere Liking and Aesthetics of Necessity: 'The past of Africa, it's the future of the world'," *African Postcolonial Literature in the Postcolonial Web*. 04 October 2002. Web. 02 February 2012.

⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 189.

the entire corpus, was constructed in the manner of a *chant graphique*,⁷ which explains why it resembles a musical score where “the text is a corporeal trajectory [...] the text ‘is’ its performance.”⁸

Yet movement, the *fil conducteur* that courses through the veins of the chapters, is also significant to our analysis in its conceptual form, for the *difference* it embodies and engenders. The term “difference” is weighty, especially in regards to its philosophical implications as articulated by philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz, and Luce Irigaray, for example.⁹ Difference is also explained and employed “differently” from philosopher to philosopher. For this reason, I have outlined the concept of difference in the context and particularity of the corresponding text/s and its/their chapter. As we navigate the pages of this dissertation, it is of utmost importance that we understand “difference” as “pure difference” along the lines of the philosophies of Deleuze and Grosz: difference that is singular – not in reference to any “other,” but a *particularity* in and of itself; a *process* that produces itself; the *force* “that underlies all temporary

⁷ Jean-Marie Gleize mentions the notion of *État* resembling a “chant graphique,” which he takes from a line of poetry that Albiach writes in her later work *Mezza Voce*. Regarding the importance of the vocal in *État*, Gleize states: “On n’oubliera pas que qu’*État* a été travaillé par Anne-Marie Albiach sur magnétophone: la mise en page répond (correspond) au *souffle* (autre terme très recurrent) ; ‘la disposition’ a un rythme corporel qui est rythme ‘de lecture, ou de pensée, ou de respiration’ ou de ‘vibration’ [...] D’où l’importance, pour Anne-Marie Albiach, de la lecture, de l’oralisation, de la vocalisation de son texte : pendant et après l’écriture.” Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 91-2.

⁸ Virginia A. La Charité, *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907-1990*. (Lexington: French Forum, 1992) 164.

⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). See also Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*. (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984) and *Speculum, de l’autre femme*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974) and Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 92-98. Derrida’s “différance” is more closely linked to representation than I uphold in this dissertation. It is important, however, and some aspects of his philosophy are employed throughout the chapters (as noted). For more on Derrida and difference, see *Speech and Phenomena and other essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, Trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1982); and *Positions*, Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971).

cohesions as well as the possibility of their dispersion.”¹⁰ To ensure that the concept of difference is outlined clearly from the start, I will rely on Elizabeth Grosz’s definition, whose philosophies compose the major theoretical foundation of the dissertation:

Difference is determination, specificity, particularity. Difference in itself must be considered primordial, a nonreciprocal emergence, that which underlies and makes possible distinctness [...] Difference is internal determination. [...] This pure difference in itself, this process of self-differentiation that has no self before it begins its becoming, is the undermining of all identities, unities, cohesions, under the differing movement that both distances and decenters all identity. This difference is both ontological and moral, both the ground and the destination of thought. [...] It lives in and as events – the event of subjectivity, the event as political movement, the event as open-ended emergence. ... Difference is the generative force of the universe itself, the impersonal, inhuman destiny and the milieu of the human, that from which life, including the human, comes and that to which life in all its becomings directs itself.

Thus difference is not, as the intersectional model implies, the union of two sexes or the overcoming of race and other differences through the creation or production of a universal term by which they can be equalized or neutralized [...] For Deleuze, ... difference cannot be equalized, and social marginalization cannot be adjusted directly except through the generation of ever-more variation, differentiation, and difference. Difference generates further difference because difference inheres the force of duration in all things, in all acts of differentiation, and in all things and in terms thus differentiated.¹¹

Why is such a notion of difference important for our analysis here? Conceiving of difference as outlined above – as singularity, particularity, force, process, and otherness – allows us to think of concepts like cosmopolitanism, for example, in new, exciting and ethical ways. Cosmopolitanism as it is generally understood today has roots not only in Greek philosophies, but also in Early Modern and Enlightenment theories, including those of Immanuel Kant. The term “cosmopolitanism” is as weighty as “difference” and explaining it in detail would require at least another dissertation. It cannot be summed up in one sentence, or even one paragraph, for it extends over vast time periods: the Greeks until today; and diverse contexts: cultural cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism, and moral cosmopolitanism are some of the most notable

¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 94.

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 93-4.

examples. Nevertheless, for our purposes, I would like to outline the major difference between “cosmopolitanism” as it is used here, and “cosmopolitanism” as it is more commonly understood, as articulated by the contemporary philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. The major difference between these usages is precisely *difference*. Common conceptions of cosmopolitanism do not fail to recognize difference – at first. In his book entitled *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Appiah states:

People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way.¹²

Yet despite his insistence on the significance of difference, including using the model of conversation between “people from different ways of life” to emphasize dynamic interactions of difference, Appiah’s cosmopolitanism falls back onto common ground and thus shows the traces of Kantian cosmopolitanism, as well as cosmopolitanism’s ultimate dependence on the universal as a unifying factor of differences:

As I’ll be arguing, it is an error ... to resist talk of ‘objective’ values. [...] In the face of this temptation, I want to hold on to at least one important aspect of the objectivity of values: there are some values that are, and should be, universal, just as there are lots of values that are, and must be, local.¹³

Unlike Appiah’s theory of cosmopolitanism where there “are some values that are, and should be universal,” and unlike the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism that envisions the human as part of a larger, moral society, the notion of cosmopolitanism to be understood here is defined through the interaction of two terms: “difference” and “the encounter.” Cosmopolitanism is the encounter, or the interplay, of difference/s. In the

¹² Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. (New York and London: WW Norton Press, 2006) xv. See also Eric Quiñones. “Appiah issues ‘cosmopolitan challenge’ to freshmen,” *Princeton Weekly Bulletin*. Vol. 95, No. 2. 19 Sept 2005. Web. 06 June 2006.

¹³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. (New York and London: WW Norton Press, 2006) xxi.

chapters that follow, the term often manifests in relation to an aesthetic form (in fact, it acts as an adjective) such as the “cosmopolitan” fertility dance between the poet and the Queen of Sheba in Senghor’s elegy, the “cosmopolitan” theatrical production of *Richard II* by the Théâtre du Soleil, or the “cosmopolitan” ritual gestures that Werewere Liking uses in her ceremonial theatre. Most importantly, though, cosmopolitanism illustrates the encounter with difference, with the “radical other” that Avital Ronell explains in Chapter One, which is its primordial movement. In this respect, the cosmopolitan movement is ethical not because it is based on a pre-determined value system, morals, or set of rules; not because I look at the other and “understand” her; and not because “in the end, we are all the same.” The movement can become ethical precisely because, in the encounter, the difference is artful, wonder-ful and awe-inspiring. Our encounter with the Théâtre du Soleil’s production of *Richard II*, for example, destabilizes our expectations and notions of a Shakespearean play, but it does so through artfulness and enchantment: its unusual cosmopolitan aesthetics, combined with the dynamism and intensity of the performance, amazes us. When we move-with Anne-Marie Albiach’s energy writing, we are not venturing toward definitive meaning or even toward understanding. Rather, encountering the vibrant white space of her poetics “produces and generates sensations never before experienced;”¹⁴ it touches our bodies and changes our perspective, opening us to moving differently, doing differently, and living differently in the world.

Thus through the encounter, which we also refer to as the “interplay of differences,” what results is not an understanding of the other, a final resolution, or an answer, for that creates dogmas and ideologies. Instead, in this gesture of the encounter

¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 21-22.

where we *move-with* and open ourselves to difference – to the other – without expectation and without synthesizing the experience, we keep the discussion going; we keep the debate alive; we learn how to live finally. It is here, through movements of difference, that ethics emerge.

Chapter One

Vers Anne-Marie Albiach

“ÉNIGME.” White space. Our first encounter with the poetry of Anne-Marie Albiach’s *État*¹⁵ shows that when we open to her poetry, we meet surprise, the wonderful, the unknown and the unknowable face to face. Yet while wonderment adds to the poems’ mystique, it often contributes to their incomprehensibility and can even disorient and disturb the reader. These sensations arise from the dynamic, potentially unknowable and unfortunately misunderstood white space that comprises the openings – or *déchirements* – in the poetic text that are central to Albiach’s work.

In his doctoral study of Albiach’s poetry, Marc André Brouillette explores these violent eruptions – *déchirements*¹⁶ – and attributes them to the uniqueness of her work: “L’une des qualités de cette œuvre...réside dans la manière si particulière de faire naître un univers de déchirements intérieurs au sein de tensions entre le texte et la page.”¹⁷ Albiach’s poesy,¹⁸ therefore, is a dynamic and multi-layered geography where tears erupt

¹⁵ Please note that the title is printed with a capitalized and italicized “É” and lowercase, unitalicized letters that follow (*État*). Proper MLA citation standards call for the inverse, but I cannot justify doing this since the typeface is crucial to the text. Therefore, in the name of artistic integrity, the title shall appear in its original form, *État*, throughout this dissertation.

¹⁶ He links this to the spatial discontinuities of language and of being in Albiach’s poetry.

¹⁷ Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.,” (Montreal, 2001) 80.

¹⁸ By the term “poesy,” I mean to highlight the energetic aspect of Albiach’s poetics – its creative force – and not solely its form. In *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach*, Jean-Marie Gleize calls her writing “L’énergie écriture sans aucune limite” (15). “Poesy” in the context of this chapter, therefore, comes from Gleize’s observation and is inspired by the German Romantic conception of “poesy” as a force, rather than only the “shape of a philosophy or system.” See Friedrich Schlegel’s “Dialogue on Poesy” in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. Ed. and trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). It also incorporates the sensorial and “cosmic” qualities that Schlegel highlights in his definition of poesy and that Elizabeth Grosz

from within the intense and fertile encounters between text and page. Neither *État*'s profound terrain, nor its mystery, singularity or dynamism can obscure the traces that the French poetic tradition has deeply carved into it, however. Published in 1971 under the recommendation of Yves Bonnefoy,¹⁹ the work is highly influenced by Stéphane Mallarmé²⁰ and his poetic tour de force *Un Coup de dés*. *État*'s obscure, enigmatic, performative, dynamic and indeterminate tendencies, along with its unconventional typography, are just some of the many factors it shares with Mallarmé's poetry and philosophy.²¹ But even though it is noteworthy and intellectually responsible to cite and even highlight Mallarmé's influence on Anne-Marie Albiach's work, it is not particularly groundbreaking. Their correlation is well known and well documented in most critical scholarship on Albiach's poetry. Brouillette, for instance, states that Albiach's poems respond to Mallarmé's formula of producing spacious writing,²² and poet and critic Jean-Marie Gleize asserts that the most significant characteristic of *État* is the importance accorded to the disposition or the composition of the page, à la Mallarmé.²³

We can confirm, therefore, that Mallarmé and his *œuvre* are among *État*'s seeds of inspiration. In doing so, however, we must not overlook the fact that Albiach's *État* is

incorporates into her philosophy, both of which influence the methodology of this chapter as well as the dissertation as a whole.

¹⁹ Marc André Brouillette, "Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d'Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.," (Montreal, 2001) 83.

²⁰ Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 2.

²¹ Comparing and contrasting Albiach's work with Mallarmé's, while interesting, is not the focal point of this dissertation. For a brilliant analysis on Mallarmé which is related to movement and particularly performance, please see Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

²² Marc André Brouillette, "Le Blanc 'Théâtre' d'Anne-Marie Albiach," *Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the 20th Century*, ed. Jill Anderson (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) 267.

²³ "La première caractéristique de cette écriture, celle qui saute aux yeux, est l'importance accordée à la disposition ou composition de la page..." (57). Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995). Note that Gleize is particularly talking about the first page of *État*.

the birth of something new that is worthy of investigation in its own right.²⁴ This chapter aims to do just that. Through this chapter's exploration of the movements and white spaces that comprise Albiach's poesy and poetry, I hope that *État* will finally be able to move beyond the constricting poetic tradition that privileges the male voice as well as the philosophical concepts of the binary and synthesis, all of which dominate and often paralyze not only the French poetic avant-garde of the twentieth century but also contemporary criticism. We need only look at the title of the work, where the capitalized and italicized "*État*" embodies and exudes movement, to understand the pertinence and necessity of reclaiming the inherent difference that movement brings out of Albiach's poetry, which it does primarily *in* and *through* the white space.²⁵ Here, movement opens up poetry beyond meaning, synthesis, representation, and resolution and becomes a process: the milieu of the interplay of differences that propels the poetic text beyond itself and into sensation – there, in a space where "toutes les évidences lui sont mystère."²⁶ This is *État*'s ethics, which articulates that a work of art is not innovative or ethical through meaning or what it represents, but through its impact on the human body that is

²⁴ Regarding the relation between Albiach and Mallarmé, it is helpful to think of Gilles Deleuze's notion of difference and repetition right away so that we avoid falling into the trap of comparing her work to his, or comparing her to him. When we encounter what is conventionally known as a "similarity" in Albiach's poetry to something in Mallarmé's work, we might think of it as a repetition. In Deleuze's analysis, which blows apart Platonic and Hegelian concepts of difference and repetition, repetition entails real movement and difference. It is not a bad copy or a holding-on of the past. Rather, it is a radical leap towards the future, and the making of something new. As Deleuze states, "repetition is the thought of the future." See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 7.

²⁵ When asked about the significance of the capital "E" of *État*, Albiach replied that it makes the word "imprononçable, l'italique gomme le mot, c'est un mot qui ne veut rien dire." In this respect, it is neither word nor meaning that the title *État* evokes, but rather a movement. See Marjorie Perloff, *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric*. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1990) 68. Later in the same interview, she states that the italic letter "déstabilise [le mot]...En fait le "E" en italique le féminise un peu..." Albiach's statement here brings to light another one of the major differences *État* evokes, that of sexual difference. I wish I had the time and space in this dissertation to address this crucial question more directly, but I plan on revisiting it in the future. It is important enough to merit a work of its own, which it hopefully shall have in the future.

²⁶ Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 14.

touched by art and then acts in the world.²⁷ Let us keep in mind, however, that reading and experiencing *État* differently does not involve effacing the traces of tradition that run through it. Rather, in this dissertation, we will move with the poetry in all of its difference and allow it to express itself in its own enigmatic and sensational singularity.

Whereas white space is often analyzed, movement – to which critics often allude but never fully articulate – has yet to be pinpointed as a crucial component of Albiach's poetry. In his study of her work, Jean-Marie Gleize delimits three major aspects of the composition of the page *chez* Albiach: the absence of symmetry, the dynamic and active white space, and the movement of elements in space (or emptiness).²⁸ It is not surprising that the last two of these elements articulate movement as a fundamental component of Albiach's poetry. Yet while Gleize's breakdown of the composition of the page is just, I would like to extend his claim further. More than just a formal element of poetic composition, the white space is the most dynamic site of rupture of the text and the most flagrant aspect of the page in *État* and of Albiach's early poetics.²⁹ Contrary to the criticism that perceives it as absence and nothingness, this dissertation upholds the white space as a generator of intensity and sensation and a crossroads of perpetual creation.³⁰ It

²⁷ Here I am not trying to claim that innovation and ethics are inherently important or necessary characteristics for works of art. On the contrary, as Elizabeth Grosz states, works of art do not require recognition or "any form of judgment to assess their quality or relative value: they simply need to exist as art objects." In *Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 70. I am, however, making the link to how they can sensationally touch us and make us act "differently" in the world, which is how this dissertation defines ethics.

²⁸ Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 57.

²⁹ By early poetics, I mean those in *État* and *Mezza Voce*. After the publication of *Mezza Voce* in 1984, Albiach's poetics shifted and became less "multilayered [and] spatially- and visually-oriented" (Stout 83). For more on this, see John Stout, "Anne-Marie Albiach's Re-membering of Her Poetry: The Theatre of Cruelty in 'Figure vocative,'" *Thirty Voices in the Feminine*, ed. Michael Bishop (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) 77-86.

³⁰ The sensory and sensational aspect of space can be more concretely understood through dance. Dance theorist Dee Reynolds (who, interestingly enough, wrote her Master's thesis on Mallarmé and whose doctoral thesis is entitled: "Imagination and the Aesthetic Function of Signification in the Poetry and Painting of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Kandinsky and Mondrian") uses Mary Wigman's dance to affirm the

is the “force majeure”³¹ of *État* that questions poetic tradition and challenges literary habits, and thus pushes and extends the boundaries of the page, the frontiers of language, the edges of epistemology and the perimeters of poetry.

As a consequence, *État* also challenges and shifts our experience as readers, hence our initial surprise and disorientation at its unconventional tendencies. Because Albiach’s “energy writing”³² moves differently, it forces us to confront the limits of what can be expressed, what can be known and what can be lived. This is its dynamic ethics that involve encountering, opening towards, and moving-with, and that affect how *we* move, become and live in the world.

Mobile and dynamic space, like Albiach’s white space, is defined by philosopher and artist Erin Manning as “the interval,” which cannot be grasped or contained but which “‘ingresses’ into new actual occasions, magnifying the potential within them.”³³ If we imagine Albiach’s white space as the interval, then we can stretch Manning’s concept further. Manning states that the interval “provokes movement but does not actually move. The body moves.”³⁴ Nonetheless, the white space in Albiach’s poetry both provokes movement and moves because it is both pure movement and part of the

tactile and sensual qualities of space (which she draws from Laban’s movement analysis). Here, she theorizes space in this context as “movement space”: the area where energies reciprocally collide and penetrate. See Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects: Uses of Energy in the Dances of Mary Wigman, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham* (Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007) 70.

³¹ “blanc / de force majeure” in Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 114. See also *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* by Jean-Marie Gleize when he states “du blanc ‘de force majeure’” (33) as an important element of Albiach’s poetry.

³² “L’énergie écriture sans aucune limite.” Jean-Marie Gleize in *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (15).

³³ Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009) 23.

³⁴ Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009) 25.

textual body: it is “A movement that is change in itself.”³⁵ We might also think of Albiach’s interval alongside the Bergsonian notion of duration that comprises “‘continuous phases [that] penetrate one another’, intensively differentiated by ‘the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty’.”³⁶ For Bergson, movement “is qualitative change, and qualitative change is movement.”³⁷ Thinking the white space with the help of Manning’s conception of the interval and Bergson’s notion of duration – as difference and not opposition – is crucial to understanding how it works in Albiach’s poetry.³⁸ By not separating form and force, the white space acts both *in* and *as* the openings of the text: it is *both* form *and* movement, and it can do this because it is comprised of pure differences.³⁹

³⁵ Shaviro, Steven. “On Henri Bergson, movement and time.” *Dancing Ideas*. 09 June 2006. Web. Here, white space as a concept is theorized as a manifestation of pure difference, instead of the absence of the black writing. It will be further explicated through the progression of this chapter.

³⁶ Henri Bergson quoted by Shaviro in “On Henri Bergson, movement and time.” *Dancing Ideas*. 09 June 2006. Web.

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, Ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Cambridge, MA and London: Semiotext(e), 2004) 37.

³⁸ Turning away from opposition (and, as a result, away from Platonic thinking as well as from Hegel) is not only an important philosophical gesture that Albiach’s poetry puts forth; it also shows the growing anti-Hegelian and anti-Platonic movement in France’s artistic and intellectual circles of the late 1960s through the 1970s. See François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 150.

³⁹ By pure differences, elements such as black text, white space, tension, release, movement and stillness are included but are not part of a binary system. As Deleuze states: “We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.” In *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Let us remember that it has only been since Plato that form began to separate from matter (force), and philosophy from fiction. In this dissertation, we are not thinking along Platonic lines, nor are we thinking of avant-garde poetry as a transcendental experience. We are going in the direction of poetry as affective embodiment, a “vital and direct form of impact on and through the body,” where “form is always in the process of becoming and never given or finalized” (Grosz 23 and 84). I believe this makes sense when analyzing Albiach’s poetry since she states that she lives the text as a body (“...je crois que le côté physique de mes texts est extrêmement important. En fait, je vis le texte comme un *corps*...”). [Note that the word “body” is italicized.] Anne-Marie Albiach in Henri Deluy, “Entretien avec Anne-Marie Albiach,” *Action poétique* 74 (1978): 14.

Mechanics of Movement

So as to directly experience the vital forces in and of the white space, let us now plunge into Albiach's poetry. *État* moves in the spirit of a musical score⁴⁰ and, in keeping with its rhythmic quality, this chapter will concentrate on five key movements the text performs: de-memberings, re-memberings,⁴¹ horizontal movement, vertical movement and elasticity. Whereas Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, for example, has a significant diagonal force that passes through the text,⁴² *État* uses not one primary force but *multiple forces* that comprise Albiach's poetics. In this section, we will first explore the mechanics of these multiple forces. The opening movement, which is the first page of *État*, clearly illustrates the textual *déchirements* that Brouillette cites as well as the elements of composition that Gleize outlines. Our concentration, however, will be the white space that propels us to think differently about poetry, and which will hopefully inspire us to do differently in the not-so-far future *à venir*.

⁴⁰ This is a very significant aspect of *État* that, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The reader might keep in mind, however, the rhythmical sense of the word "movement" throughout the dissertation. For more on this, please refer to Jean-Michel Maulpoix's extensive website: *Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Cie*. n.d. Web. Here, he states that the contemporary poets of the 1970s (Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Anne-Marie Albiach and Jean Daive) call lyricism into question: "Toute recherche musicale, d'allitérations ou d'assonances est récusée." Jean-Marie Gleize speaks about this in *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* when he states that her poetry is like musical poetry without musicality: "il s'agit d'une poésie musicale sans musicalité, personnelle-impersonnelle, lyrique non lyrique, ou d'une poésie qui parviendrait à quelque chose comme une neutralité ou objectivité lyrique (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995). At this juncture, I am inspired by Elizabeth Grosz's concept of rhythm and music and believe that in Albiach's extreme avant-garde text (which actively deterritorializes/upsets/reconfigures poetry), rhythms "become detached from their functional role and operate instead as expressive qualities, seeking to resonate not only from within the territory from which they are extracted [i.e. the poetic text] but outside, elsewhere, in the world beyond." (In the world beyond is where ethics comes into play.) Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 53.

⁴¹ Through the course of my study of the white space chez Albiach, I have come to the conclusion that even though the white space facilitates re-memberings, it is ultimately the reader who re-members (reader-response theory). This is an interesting and important topic but unfortunately I cannot go into much detail about it since it lies outside the spectrum of this dissertation.

⁴² "Chez Mallarmé, les vers sont souvent orientés par une diagonale descendante qui traverse les deux pages du livre [...]" Marc André Brouillette, "Le Blanc 'Théâtre' d'Anne-Marie Albiach," *Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the 20th Century*, ed. Jill Anderson (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) 273.

la disponibilité

ne signifie

le même
absence

Travail pratique: car il faut savoir

De-memberings and Re-memberings

The white space on the first page of *État* does more than occupy most of the space on the page. It promotes oscillations of flowing and congealing that destabilize the poetic text. In, on, through and with the white space, Albiach's text is de-membered and re-membered via horizontal, vertical and elastic movements that coalesce, collide and flow in fluctuating trajectories with each other.⁴³

Rupturing and breaking open the text – in other words, *de-membering* – is particularly striking on the first page of *État* in that the white space between the verses “ne signifie” (does not signify) and “le même” (the same). Initially, this opening in the text reinforces the radical linguistic differences between the two terms and reiterates the tension between two polarities: “ne signifie,” the negative pole, and “le meme,” the positive. But the white space does not have to be as substantial as that between “ne signifie” and “le même” in order to split the text, for even the small horizontal white space between “le même” and “absence” emphasizes a linguistic rupture. As Gleize observes: “[...] il est décidément impossible de lire ‘la même absence,’ puisque c’est ‘le même’ qui est écrit. Le même quoi? Aucun substantif masculin auparavant qui puisse faire ici référence, à moins qu’il ne s’agisse du ‘même’ comme concept, pris absolument.”⁴⁴ This space is a hiccup – the moment of uncertainty – that arises because of the incongruity between the two terms: the masculine adjective or pronoun “le même”

⁴³ De-membering and re-membering illustrate what happens in the interval, as discussed above, where Albiach's interval comprises “‘continuous phases [that] penetrate one another’, intensively differentiated by ‘the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty.’” They carry out precisely the movements of Bergson's inter-penetrating phases.

⁴⁴ Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 58. Translation: “It is decidedly impossible to read “the same absence” since it is “the same” that is written. “The same” what? There is no masculine noun that appears before it to which it can refer, unless it is of the “same” concept, taken absolutely.”

and the feminine noun that follows in the next line: “absence.”⁴⁵ The rupture creates spaciousness and wonder in the text because it undoes the modified and the modifier, and the signified from the signifier: it “displaces” meaning and “liberates” the terms from each other, from linguistic and literary conventions and, as a consequence, from expectation.⁴⁶ In this space of displacement and freedom, *each* term no longer *depends on* the other, but *both* terms *interact with* each other.

Interactions are a crucial aspect of Albiach’s de-memberings and are prominent in *État*. We see an example of this in the middle of the first page, between “ne signifie” and “le meme.” Here the white space interrupts the linguistic and visual continuity of the verses on the page and corrals them into two regions: one that consists of “la disponibilité” and “ne signifie” and another that contains the verses “le meme,” “absence,” as well as the mysterious verse “*Travail pratique: car il faut savoir.*”⁴⁷ By infiltrating the verses with its presence, the white space does not sequester the verses or immobilize them. Rather, it invites mystery onto the page and encourages us to read the verses nomadically, in surprising and unexpected ways. Clearly interrupting and deferring is not a process that only focuses on creating “a harmonious development of Form.”⁴⁸ It also bring forth “de discours parallèles”⁴⁹ that are different, autonomous and limitlessly creative because of their mobility.

⁴⁵ This movement is echoed by a line in the beginning of *État* which states: “Quelle est la compacité du déplacement / (le mouvement) / (sa rébellion / opaque)” (12). My translation: “What is the density of displacement / (the movement) / (its rebellion / opaque).”

⁴⁶ “déplace et libère.” Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 105.

⁴⁷ See Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 57-8 for his astute interpretation of this verse.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 268.

⁴⁹ My translation: “parallel discourses.” Anne-Marie Albiach in Henri Deluy, “Entretien avec Anne-Marie Albiach,” *Action poétique* 74 (1978): 17.

That the white space promotes interaction between different discourses and does not compromise their autonomy is one of the most exceptional outcomes, and Albiach's most distinctive technique, from the ruptures – or white space – of *État*. Encounters, interactions and the preservation of differences are not exclusive to de-memberings, however. The fact that differences (or parallel discourses, parts, members, polarities) come together on one page highlights the equally important function of the white space to re-member the text: an act that brings divergent discourses together and puts them into dialogue with each other. Whereas a fusing gesture restricts discourse and squelches autonomy, the inter-penetrating flux of differences that make up Albiach's poesy marshals different polarities through the text, composing assemblages from the differences.

A principal example of Albiach's re-membering gesture⁵⁰ opens the second part of the second section (or movement) of *État* on page 85 that opens with the paradoxical verse “(*opposition : je*).”⁵¹ On this page, Albiach employs minimal words, tight punctuation and unconventional typeface in the verse and extreme white space around the verse, which push the two terms “opposition” and “je” together. The parentheses accentuate the corral-ing tendency of the surrounding white space since they literally enclose the terms and the colon. The italics further add to the tension in the verse by

⁵⁰ I would like to highlight that re-membering is not a gesture that holds on to the past. Rather, it is a lieu of mobility. In addition, memory in the Bergsonian vein, as articulated by Deleuze, can help “recover the particularities that are dissolved in generality” (*Difference & Repetition* 7). In this respect, difference is not negated by re-membering – it is enhanced.

⁵¹ Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 85. Since Albiach admits the rampant inter-textuality in *État* (which we call repetition), I cannot help but think that this verse might be a *clin d'œil* to Rimbaud's “je est un autre,” which expresses the subject's difference much more effectively than Albiach's “(*opposition : je*).” If we were traditionally analyzing the text using meaning as our primary tool of investigation, Albiach's focus on opposition might initially complicate our argument of difference but as we shall see with the help of Cole Swenson's analysis, what semantically appears to be “opposition” eventually manifests as difference, thanks to movement.

harnessing both the punctuation (colon and parenthesis) and the words (*opposition* and *je*) in its movement. If, however, the parenthesis and the italics harness the verse, how can the re-membling gesture of Albiach's poetics create openness and mobility? Wouldn't re-membling lock the verse into stasis? Moreover, how can the verse overcome itself (i.e. how can it demonstrate an ethics) if it is locked in place by the parenthesis, the italics and by the white space that surrounds it on all sides? To address these questions, we must look towards the colon and especially at the singular white spaces around the colon that are key. While the colon divides "opposition" and "je" and acts as a signpost of their crossing trajectories, the white spaces on both sides of the colon prevent their sublimation, thus highlighting each of the term's difference. Imagine, for example, the verse without these two tiny, but critical, white spaces: "*(opposition:je).*" Without its joints – the white spaces – the verse becomes paralyzed. It is locked into one sign and, as a result, the differences of the two terms diminish. With the spaces between the terms, however, the verse becomes an assemblage of signs that, even while under pressure from the surrounding white space, is flexible, open and able to articulate its multiplicity.

Horizontal Movement

Albiach's poetry clearly manifests horizontal force in the verse that we analyzed above, "*(opposition : je).*" Besides the Roman numeral "II" that precedes the verse and denotes the second part of the second section of the text (double-rupturing the text), there are no other verses on the page. The italic type is crucial here because it marks the horizontal force that passes through the verse and across the page as a typographical

residue on the words. It also signals the reader to follow the movement and participate in its horizontal trajectory.

Studying the horizontal movement in the verse “(*opposition : je*)” reveals a remarkable tendency in Albiach’s *État*: as the amount of white space on the page increases, the velocity of the horizontal movement also increases. In one such example, on page 25, we have the following verses at the top of the page, which are the page’s only verses:

comme si dans la lumière
 expérience
elle déplace en quelque sorte la menace

Unlike “(*opposition : je*),” there is no punctuation or particular typeface that helps propel the horizontal movement on the page. The horizontal force thus comes from the vast white space that envelops the verses and then thrusts them across the page. Another example, this time on page 83, has comparable dynamics to “(*opposition : je*)”:

tandis que
« je » *persiste avec le feu,* *né*
 mouvement
 l'apparition est vide de moi

Like “(*opposition : je*),” the italic typeface accentuates the horizontal movement of the verses. Here, three italicized verses frame the only non-italicized, one-word verse “mouvement.” Even though it is located in the midst of the dynamic horizontal force of the italicized verses, it is hard to say that “mouvement” follows their horizontal path,⁵² but the fact that it is not italicized does not render it static. Instead, “mouvement” is

⁵² The fact that “movement” is the only verse on that page that is not moving calls the significance of meaning into question, which is one of the major ways Albiach’s poetics challenges traditional poetry. I will address this in more detail later in the dissertation.

intensified by its different typography and the surrounding white space, both highlighting its singularity. This dynamic is like a *lacher-prise*, where “mouvement” is a conglomeration of forces through the horizontal forces that frame it and the force of immense white space on the page, as well as an eruption.⁵³

Dynamics like these, which are characteristic of Albiach’s poetics, open up poetry beyond binary systems that resolve themselves in synthesis: with one final movement or meaning. Her poetics employ tendencies that, in the words of Cole Swenson, “play with the possibility of dialectical progression” but finally deny “a synthetic resolution.”⁵⁴ Swenson’s statement brings up a common (mis)perception of Albiach’s poetry, which is that it works in a dialectic. This point of view, though flawed, is understandable because her work often functions through tensions between elements that we might perceive as oppositions (opposites being variations of the same), such as movement and stasis, but that are actually pure differences. Swenson ultimately acknowledges this at the end of the aforementioned citation when he says that Albiach’s poetry denies any one resolution. Encounters between differences do not end up in a synthesis or in one resolution because, as difference, they incite more difference and thus more change and creativity. This explains why the examples that we have seen from *État* do not move towards resolution, representation or meaning. Instead, they continue to encounter and erupt with unbounded openness and creative potential.

Verticality

⁵³ It is also interesting to speculate that “mouvement” in this instance is a birth. This is plausible if we follow the linguistic clue “*né*” which preceeds it, and take in consideration the gaps of white space that surround it on the sides and above to be a symbol of birthing space. Further, Albiach speaks of her poetry as a “parturition”: see page 110 of *État* as well as Henri Deluy’s interview with Anne-Marie Albiach: “Entretien avec Anne-Marie Albiach,” *Action poétique* 74 (1978).

⁵⁴ Cole Swenson, “Against the Limits of Language: The Geometries of Anne-Marie Albiach and Susan Howe,” *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan (Jersey City: Talisman House Publishers, 1998) 639.

The vertical movement of Albiach's poetry is spurred by, and therefore stresses, the interplay between the verses and the white space more than the previous movements. These encounters accentuate the dynamic nature subversive tendencies of Albiach's poetics that make it so exciting. With this in mind then, let us turn to an excerpt from page 69 of *État* to experience what Albiach calls the force of "La chute" – the fall:

•

explicitation de cette déchirure

L'unité

de la déchirure

séparés de soi et

qui oppose aux autres

regards et choses l'infranchissable

conséquence juxtaposition

l'incident

•

In this passage, the vertical pull is accentuated by verses' positions on the page that act like a series of signposts and guide the dynamics of the text and the reading in a downward flow towards the bottom of the page. The linear placement of the bullets on the page at the beginning and end of the passage initially reinforces the vertical descent of the reading. Further, as objects with no concrete linguistic meaning, the bullets appear to separate the passage from the rest of the page. Any stability or consistency that they try to provide, however, is eventually upset by continuous oscillations between the verses. Although an initial reading of the passage may start out as vertical, fluctuating

interplay between “déchirure” and “unite,” “unité” and “séparés,” “soi” and “autres,” “regards” and “choses” render the vertical descent irregular. It becomes a pulsating, vibrating multiple vertical trajectory instead of one solid mass. Cole Swenson describes movement such as this as Albiach’s “geometry”:

[Albiach’s] geometry is an unbounded and flexible construction in which she activates a system of innumerable pairs in opposition – body/text, male/female, presence/absence, dark/light, text/white space – and then denies their opposition by keeping them in constant mutation, splitting and recombining them in various ways [...]⁵⁵

To counter the extreme movement of this passage, the bullets attempt to round up the rogue words. The white space of the margins of the page acts as its counterpart, reasserting its horizontal force and pushing in on the passage from the sides in a gesture that tries to bind the disparate verses together. But like a series of suspended signposts, the verses rouse heterogeneous vertical movement that both descends and ascends, and even tries to bifurcate from the flow. Conventional reading methods would dictate that the reader begins the passage with the first verse after the bullet: “explicitation de cette déchirure.” The indentation and capitalization of the one-word second verse, “L’unité,” complicates this technique however, as does the asymmetrically placed verses on the page and the white space that follows and sets it apart. The reading could begin at numerous points in the passage such as “explicitation,” “L’unité,” “conséquence,” or even “l’incident.” Although a strict vertical reading that starts with “explicitation” and ends with “l’incident” can be performed, this passage shows the diversity of Albiach’s vertical dynamics. Here, the vertical force is less of a flow and more of a series of spirals and/or leaps from one verse to another, and back again, in constant oscillations that de-member and re-member the poem. When we examine it closely, therefore, Albiach’s vertical

⁵⁵ Cole Swenson, “Against the Limits of Language: The Geometries of Anne-Marie Albiach and Susan Howe,” *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan (Jersey City: Talisman House Publishers, 1998) 639-640.

force is composed not of one singular flow but rather consists of encounters between different and autonomous movements.

Heterogeneous movements in the vertical flow are not unique to the above passage. Similar tendencies occur on page 73 of *État*. Here the vertical descent is significantly more pronounced than in the previously analyzed passage, but the semantics are much less coherent:

par la descente :
ne peut
sans sensualité

la terreur

: formes apparemment aiguës

As the verses descend and the poem unfolds in this passage, they also appear to linguistically and aesthetically unravel. On the aesthetic plane, the irregularly placed verses, unconventional punctuation (i.e. the colons with ambiguous referents), and irregular white space destabilize the text and disorient the reading. Fixed starting and ending points of this part of the text, which work to situate and also construct meaning, are difficult to pin down. On the linguistic plane there is minimal semantic cohesion between the verses, which may be frustrating for the reader who is expecting the poetic experience to provide concrete linguistic meaning. Yet the significant downward *écoulement* in the passage that is prompted by the short, indented verses with little

common meaning brings to light two crucial factors of the vertical dynamics in Albiach's poetics. First, it highlights the text's linguistic and aesthetic oscillation between de-membering and re-membering that occurs without the use of binary pairs; it also underscores the importance of the process of movement over fixed form in Albiach's poetics.

After our concentration on the verses in the previous analysis of verticality, it might be tempting to postulate that the verse-laden pages and their striking layout, which are characteristic of *État* and especially of its vertical force, are the major catalysts of movement and thus diminish the importance of the white space. In addition, the interplay of both linguistic differences (for example, "soi" and "autre") and aesthetic differences (white space and black words) in Albiach's poetics, which is a major factor of the poems' dynamism and movement, might appear to weaken the agency of the white space. Yet the verses in the above passage show us otherwise. Propelled by vertical dynamics into a free-fall so significant that they break concrete linguistic and aesthetic structure, the verses engage in linguistic and aesthetic oscillations of de-memberings and re-memberings that are incited by the white space. The openness – possibility, mystery and creativity – that the white space instills into the poetic text drives Albiach's poetry beyond the grasp of traditional poetic analysis. As difference, the white space moves in between and around the verses, shakes up the page, and breaks up conventional linguistic and aesthetic structure that can freeze text and verse into stasis. Moreover, it infuses the verses of the vertical trajectory with distance that allows for and even intensifies their fluctuations on the page. Albiach directly articulates this dynamic in *Mezza Voce*: "la

distance exacerbe le mouvement.”⁵⁶ Thus, in the context of vertical force, the white space is more than the verses’ spatial support, which Gleize affirms when he states that “Le blanc n’est pas seulement le ‘fond’ sur lequel [les éléments du texte] se détachent [...]”.⁵⁷ Neither continuous nor discontinuous space, as Brouillette postulates in his dissertation,⁵⁸ the white space is both the movement and the ground that incites movement. This flux of encounters is the poetic text itself changing, as well as the provocation towards movement for texts to come.

The two colons in this passage further reiterate the power of the white space to make the text move. Like the bullets in the passage on page 69, the colons frame the two large sections of white space at the heart of the passage which together act like a whirlpool, surrounding and suspending the verse “la terreur” in the center of the page. Yet even though suspended, *la terreur* is not static, especially not as the “noyaux de sens” that Brouillette evokes in Albiach’s poetics: “La poésie d’Albiach relève d’abord et avant tout son éclatement qui est la source de son dynamisme. Des noyaux de sens surgissent par à-coups et forment un réseau à l’intérieur d’une page, d’une suite ou du recueil entier.”⁵⁹ Rather than signifying “terror” as Brouillette’s *noyau de sens*, the suspended verse *la terreur* is the deferment and even *éclatement* of meaning: it is the *affect* that comes from the oscillating movement between the explosion and the

⁵⁶ Anne-Marie Albiach, *Mezza Voce* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984) 89. See also Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.,” Dissertation. (Montreal, 2001) 108.

⁵⁷ “The white space is not only the ‘background’ on which [elements of the text] detach themselves, or the space on which they move, it is also subtractive (elliptical).” Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 58.

⁵⁸ Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.,” Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 108.

⁵⁹ Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.,” Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 96.

harnessing of forces.⁶⁰ The colons highlight this simmering mid-point in the text – the mid-point being movement at its most subtle and concentrated – where the verse hovers in perfect equilibrium between two different movements, both of which are white space. This case of extreme alterity shows that the white space of Albiach’s poetics is not homogenous and static but is nomadic and changeable. Thus from vertical dynamics, active white space emerges and attests to the possibility of a poetic text that is dynamic precisely through its difference. As constant fluctuations of poesy-becoming-poetry-becoming-poesy, Albiach’s *État* is poetic expression always/already on the move that leaves the trace of “not only as what [it is], but what [it] expressively can become.”⁶¹

Elasticity: Spirals and Leaps

“[...] de la poesie comme d’une toupie.”⁶²

Spaciousness, flexibility and difference – elements that the white space introduces into the poetic text – stimulate a third kind of force in Albiach’s poetry: elasticity.⁶³ We can define elasticity as the “labyrinths of folds virtually active in the interval,” the “becoming-bodies of movement,” “potential directions,” “mattering-form [that] is movement not as identifiable configuration but as intensive figure,” “Figure as force

⁶⁰ The notion of affect – and not effect – is capital here because it is directly related to movement. It is what movement provokes. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas, “Emotion [...] consists in being moved.” For more on this, please see Seán Hand’s superb Levinas reader. Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy” in Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997) 84.

⁶¹ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 143.

⁶² Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995) 15.

⁶³ Although Erin Manning uses the concept of elasticity in interesting and effective ways, my conception of it in Albiach’s poetry does not derive from hers, nor is it wholly based on hers. My conception of elasticity stems from the tantric notion illustrated in Trika Yoga, as articulated in the two volumes *Dynamic Stillness I: The Practice of Trika Yoga* (Portland: Rudra Press, 1990) and *Dynamic Stillness II: The Fulfillment of Trika Yoga* (Portland: Rudra Press, 1991), both by Swami Chetanananda. For more on Manning’s notion of elasticity, see her chapter entitled: “The Elasticity of the Almost” in *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009) 29-47.

taking form, as movement-with that shapes bodies in the making.”⁶⁴ With these definitions in mind, we can see how elastic movement is manifest in the leaps and falls, which make up spirals, that occur in Albiach’s text.⁶⁵

The elastic leaping and falling movements that we find in *État* emerge from the text’s destabilized poetic plane. They are important because they help the reader navigate *État*’s vast white space and maneuver instances of semantic uncertainty and deferred meaning. This is most evident in the text in the linguistic incongruity of “le même” and “absence” on the first page of *État* (our initial poetic analysis), which induces a series of leaps and falls. Here, the immense white space that surrounds the verses disorients both the words and the reader because it ruptures/suspends meaning by removing/displacing the referent from “le même” and “absence.” As a consequence, the reader is provoked to move around – and more precisely, leap around – the ruptures of the text. One such leap might start at the bottom of the page with “le même” and then ascend to “la disponibilité” at the top. Here the incongruity (i.e. the difference) between the masculine “même” and the feminine “disponibilité” propels the reader in a down-ward spiral towards the bottom of the page, just before it provokes an upward rebound to “ne signifie.” Such agility, which is acquired by the leaps and falls, and motored by the white space’s destabilization of meaning, is more than movement for movement’s sake. In *État*, the spiral movement embodies both the reader’s and the text’s rise and fall towards meaning, without necessarily obtaining it. It is a “reaching-toward that moves in the direction of

⁶⁴ Please note that these phrases come from Manning’s chapter on elasticity, but are not necessarily how she defines elasticity. I have reformulated her wording to outline this chapter’s notion of the difficult concept of elasticity. Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009) 33.

⁶⁵ Elasticity can also be present in horizontal and vertical movements. It is obviously present in the preceding analysis of vertical movement where verticality is not linear but pulsing.

experience rather than toward a pursuit of knowledge.”⁶⁶ Thus movement, or process, over definitive meaning takes precedence in Albiach’s poetics.

Dynamically singular and also part of a poetic process, *État*’s elastic movements create relational trajectories that explode the boundaries of the page, opening up the text’s linguistic and geographical frontiers.⁶⁷ The movements between pages 58 and 59 of *État* demonstrate this phenomenon. At the end of page 58, the verse “à fin d’autres” semantically and spatially leaps between the previous two verses “le plus / incessant relief” and the subsequent verse on page 59 “teneurs.” Page fifty-nine’s first verse “teneurs,” while implicated with “à fin d’autres,” also linguistically and spatially oscillates between it and “les graphismes.” A similar leaping/spiraling phenomenon occurs at the end of page 59 with the verse “sa matière.” This verse, also situated in the depths of white space as “à fin d’autres,” bounds back to the preceding verse “l’insoupçonnable” and forth to the next page’s first verse “Énigme,” and “Énigme” soars back to “sa matière” on page 59 and spirals towards “Cette personne,” located after several lines of white space on page 60. Like the de- and re-memberings, spiral movements that occur through the white space and across-page undo and redo the poetic text in on-going fluctuations. This breaks open the geographical limits of the text because the poetry is no longer relegated to the one fixed space of the page. In addition, even the white space is broken open and extended by the spiraling movements. We can

⁶⁶ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 74.

⁶⁷ My usage of the word “explode” is very deliberate because it emphasizes the violence that can result from different encounters. It also happens when, as Deleuze states, “simulacrum overturns all copies by *also* overturning the models,” In *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) xx. What I am referring to is the power of poesy in Albiach (as the “simulacrum”) to overturn French poetic tradition not necessarily through intention but as a result of the repetition. Also, although I am not a proponent of violence, I do acknowledge the creativity that can surge from violence’s *déchirements*— which is what I am indirectly proposing in *État*.

call this phenomenon the white space's overcoming of itself and of its limits, which is a virtual explosion-as-evolution where the white space encompasses itself and more – the leap, the spiral, the following page, and the next movement *à venir*.

The white space is able to (virtually) become more than itself precisely through *État*'s poesy that uses movement and openness to provoke encounters. The leaping and spiraling within the page and from page to page demonstrates how, in Brouillette's words, Albiach's poetry "[...] ne s'agit donc pas d'un rapport unidirectionnel, mais d'un véritable chiasme où l'espace et le texte se rencontrent et se transforment mutuellement."⁶⁸ Thus, the "Dionysian, divine and delirious"⁶⁹ encounters between differences such as the verses that are black like "la pulsion"⁷⁰ and the white space which is "caractère de jointure,"⁷¹ between discourse and the page, between text and space, and between ruptures and bonds become interactive, transformative overcomings of the text's linguistic and aesthetic boundaries. Furthermore, these movements are not leaps *over* textual ruptures but direct and sometimes violent engagements⁷² among the text's differences that emerge *in* and extend *out from* the depths of the its *déchirements*. As a result, poetic expression has room to become different and potentially inspire us to become otherwise as well.⁷³

⁶⁸ Marc André Brouillette, "Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d'Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.," Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 108.

⁶⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 214.

⁷⁰ Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 81.

⁷¹ Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 68.

⁷² Again, I do not with to tout violence, but I do acknowledge its possible emergence when two differences encounter each other. I also think it is important to expand the West's concept of violence as purely negative and abysmal. The dance of the Hindu god Shiva, for example, is violent because it destroys. The destruction, however, unleashes creative potential and makes room for new life to spring forth.

⁷³ This will be discussed more in detail in the following section *Affects of forces*. As previously mentioned, Albiach makes a direct link between spirals and birth: "des spirales / l'élément de / la parturition" (In *État*, page 10), which further supports the notion of her poesy as a dynamic, creative force that gives birth to the new.

Affects of Forces

Studying the movements in and of the white space in Albiach's work allows us to see how the it can function in radically new ways in poetry at large. One example pertains to the misunderstanding of white space as a lack, as blank space and as absence. Regarding Albiach's *Mezza Voce*, where Albiach's poetics are similar to those of its predecessor *État*, John Stout states that "[t]he predominance of blank space on the page confronts us with what cannot be expressed or known."⁷⁴ Certainly the predominance of white space on the page (unlike Stout, I do not call it "blank" space) confronts us with questions of language, expression and epistemology, but it is not through "blank" space, which signifies a lack or a void. There are certainly emptying movements in Albiach's poetics, like de-memberings, but it is crucial to distinguish them from lack, from absence and from the *néant*. They are part of the open-ended oscillatory tendencies that come into play in Albiach's text and that are comprised of *both* emptying movements *as well as* movements that fill up, similar to the systolic and diastolic functions of the heart.⁷⁵ This makes space active and dynamic – not blank – and welcomes differences and their encounters to *pervade* the white space. Not only does such diversity and plenitude widen our perspective of poetry's mechanics and its possibilities, the fully active and intense

⁷⁴ John Stout, "Anne-Marie Albiach's Re-membering of Her Poetry: The Theatre of Cruelty in 'Figure vocative'," *Thirty Voices in the Feminine*, ed. Michael Bishop (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) 83.

⁷⁵ Systolic and diastolic movements are part of the "three-fold movement" that Henri Maldiney uses to describe form that is always becoming, upon which Gilles Deleuze draws to explain his own concept of sensation. This movement is also "nothing other than the movement of intuition, so elaborated by Henri Bergson, in which a philosophical subject must place him or herself in the midst of things in the world without preconceived patterns or expectations and, through this immersion, to discern, gradually and with effort, through learning, the natural articulations between things, the places in things and events where difference most directly emerge." Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 84. For more on Maldiney, Deleuze and Bergson, see "Sensation. The Earth, a People, Art" in Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

tendencies of the white space propel us to call into question the limits of language, expression and epistemology in poetry.

Stout, for example, highlights the significance of Albiach's dynamic white space in regards to language. He observes its particular importance in Albiach's early works when he states that "The fragility of language is evident, for everywhere the whiteness of the page appears to impinge upon the words."⁷⁶ Yet while Stout affirms the active nature of the whiteness's influence on language ("impinge" meaning "to have an effect or impact; to drive at forcibly; to advance over an area"),⁷⁷ he nevertheless objectifies it by opposing it to language and designating it as strictly an aspect of the page. This perception of white space, particularly in avant-garde poetry, is not uncommon and not entirely incorrect.⁷⁸ It, however, marginalizes the white space's importance not only as form but also as force. In addition, stripping it of its singularity and pure difference downplays its subversive gestures.

Alternatively, Brouillette understands white space – and namely the vertical white space – not as a dualistic component of Albiach's poetry, but as part of her poesy's inner force and inherent difference. In this context, one of its primary roles is to open up language by modifying, and sometimes destroying, the syntax of verse and text:

"L'interruption de [la chaîne syntaxique] est sans doute la fonction syntaxique la plus importante du blanc. Elle permet de suspendre le discours et d'y intercaler de nouvelles

⁷⁶ John Stout, "Anne-Marie Albiach's Re-membering of Her Poetry: The Theatre of Cruelty in 'Figure vocative'," *Thirty Voices in the Feminine*, ed. Michael Bishop (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) 83.

⁷⁷ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*. Second Edition. Ed. Erin McKean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 848.

⁷⁸ For a thorough analysis of avant-garde poetry from syntax to politics see Barrett Watten, *Total Syntax* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

marques de temps, de silence ou encore de non-dit.”⁷⁹ I would like to push Brouillette’s argument even further by proposing that the white space transforms syntax neither through *allowing for* the suspension of discourse (“Elle *permet de* suspendre le discours”), nor through an effect, as in Stout’s analysis. This is a risky proposition for even Albiach herself asserts that it is through the *effect* of the *whiteness on the page* that she attempts to destroy given syntax: “C’est par l’effet du *blanc* sur la page (entre autres pratiques) que je cherche à détruire, en quelque sorte, *une syntaxe donnée*.”⁸⁰ But it is through the white space as force – the word “force” defined by Jacques Derrida as “a play of differences” – that Albiach’s poetry can transform and overcome itself.⁸¹ Applying Derrida’s *différance* can help explain how, as an interval, the white space does this:

An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*). And it is this constitution of the present [...] that I propose to call archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporization.⁸²

⁷⁹ My translation of this citation: “The interruption of [the syntactic chain] is without a doubt the most important syntactic function of the white space. It allows for the suspension of discourse, and the insertion (in discourse) of new temporal markers, silence or again the unsaid.” Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.” Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 89.

⁸⁰ In Marc André Brouillette, “Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d’Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr.” Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 88.

⁸¹ “Différance appears almost by name in [the texts of Nietzsche and Freud], and in those places where everything is at stake. I cannot expand upon this here; I will only recall that for Nietzsche “the great principal activity is unconscious,” and that consciousness is the effect of forces whose essence, byways, and modalities are not proper to it. Force itself is never present; it is only a play of differences and quantities. There would be no force in general without the difference between forces...” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 17.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 13. Please note that Jean-Michel Maulpoix also attests to the importance of Derrida’s “trace” (i.e. *différance*) in the work of French poets of the 1970’s, including Albiach: “Ils [Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Anne-Marie Albiach and Jean Daive] privilégient la dynamique de la *trace propre à l’écriture* et ce que Derrida y reconnaît de «différance».” (My translation: “They privilege the dynamic of the trace proper to writing and what Derrida recognizes there as “différance.”) See Maulpoix, Jean-Michel. *Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Cie*. Web.

In the interval of the white space, the play – or collision – of differences set off by Albiach's poesy actively and *affectively*⁸³ moves the text. Infused with the intensity and momentum from the play of differences, the white space hits hard: "Les 'blancs' en effet...frappent d'abord."⁸⁴ When it separates, interrupts, and suspends the text, the white space leaves its trace on syntax, which drives the poetry beyond language's borders. Furthermore, on the poetic plane of composition,⁸⁵ the white space strikes the text and forces it to emerge as more than poetry. This is the becoming ethical of Albiach's poesy where life, affected by art, "most readily transforms itself."⁸⁶

As novel as it might seem, moving – or moveable – syntax is not a notion proper to contemporary avant-garde poetics. In her essay entitled "Poetry and Syntax: What the Gypsy Knew," Barbara Johnson asserts that all poetic verse is movement when she states: "Verse, then, in its rhythms and rhymes, is a practice of pivoting."⁸⁷ She is, in fact, making reference to the pivotal role of syntax in Mallarmé's aesthetic theory:

Quel pivot, j'entends, dans ces contrastes, à l'intelligibilité? Il faut une garantie–

⁸³ Please see Elizabeth's Grosz's discussion of precepts, affects and art in Chapter Three, "Sensation. The Earth, A People, Art" of *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁸⁴ Mallarmé from the preface to *Un Coup de dés* in Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 177.

⁸⁵ Here, Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the plane of composition is helpful and enlightening: "The plane of composition is the field, the plane, of all artworks, all genres, all types of art, the totality of all the various forms of artistic production in no particular order or organization, that which is indirectly addressed and transformed through each work of art. Deleuze and Guattari affirm the plane of composition as the collective condition of art making: it contains all works of art, not specifically historically laid out, but all the events in the history of art, all the transformations, "styles," norms, ideals, techniques, and upheavals, insofar as they influence and express each other. The plane of composition is not a literal plane...but a decentered spatiotemporal "organization," a loose network of works, techniques, and qualities, within which all particular works of art must be located in order for them to constitute art. These works do not require recognition as such; they do not require any form of judgment to assess their quality or relative value: they simply need to exist as art objects." *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 70.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 76.

⁸⁷ Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: essays in the contemporary rhetoric of reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 69.

La Syntaxe—⁸⁸

According to Mallarmé in *Le Mystère dans les lettres*, syntax is most interesting (and, I would suggest, most *affective*) when it acts as poetry's hinge of intelligibility and not as the door to given meaning. He also "emphasizes the mobile, or kinetic quality"⁸⁹ of the process of (thinking about) the poem, which is guided by its typography and namely the white space, in the preface to *Un Coup de dés*.⁹⁰ This common ground between Albiach's poetics and those of Mallarmé embraces poesy as the artful gesture that unleashes language to mystery, which is what Albiach does when she leaves phrases suspended/in suspense: "... j'interromps, parfois, le discours, en apparence, laissant des phrases *en suspens*."⁹¹ Language's mystery, therefore, is a trace of poetry's play of differences, which the white space embodies when it disrupts syntax and surprises the reader. All of the while, poetry is propelled towards the new, beckoning the sensational and unpredictable future where "toutes les évidences lui sont mystère."⁹²

But why is mystery important in language, and particularly in Albiach's *État*?⁹³ Furthermore, how does Albiach's work become ethical if her poetry mystifies, when

⁸⁸ My translation: "What pivot, I understand, from these contrasts, to intelligibility? There must be a guarantee - Syntax." Mallarmé (from *Le Mystère dans les lettres*) in Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: essays in the contemporary rhetoric of reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 67.

⁸⁹ Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 177.

⁹⁰ For more on Mallarmé's conception of this, see Mary Lewis Shaw's chapter on *Un Coup de dés* in *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Here, she writes that Mallarmé postulates that the "white space functions as a scanning mechanism, an exteriorized marking, which announces the rhythm, dynamics, or movement that lies latent...in the text" (177).

⁹¹ My translation: "I sometimes interrupt discourse, in appearance, leaving phrases in suspense/suspended." In Marc André Brouillette, "Spatialité Textuelle dans la Poésie Contemporaine. Le langage et son espace dans les œuvres d'Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Laude et Gilles Cyr." Dissertation (Montreal, 2001) 88. See also Henri Deluy's interview with Anne-Marie Albiach "Entretien avec Anne-Marie Albiach," *Action poétique* 74 (1978).

⁹² Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 14.

⁹³ Although critics have indirectly disputed the issue of mystery in Albiach's *État*, this dissertation strongly upholds it. Jean-Michel Maulpoix, for example, states that the contemporary French poets of the 1970s

demystification has been used as the primary method of critical theory and social practice to ameliorate life?⁹⁴ In Friedrich Schlegel's 1799 *Dialogue on Poesy*, which inspires this chapter's concept of "poesy," the integral relationship between poetry (in the *Dialogue on Poesy* it is referred to as "poesy") is emphasized several times, for instance: "[...] the deepest mysteries of all arts and sciences belong to poesy."⁹⁵ Mystery's place in poetry also emerges as an important topos in the nineteenth-century French poetic tradition, especially in the works of Mallarmé who weaves it into his poems and employs it as part of his aesthetic theory.⁹⁶ In Albiach's poetics, it is precisely the force of the white space – the ruptures – that is the hinge of mystery, and its movement allows for the emergence of a radically inappropriable, innovative and affective poetry.

write with a "cold, flat and muffled" style that favors logic and literality in lieu of metaphor and therefore, I am deducing, mystery. In a similar vein, Jean-Marie Gleize talks about reading Albiach's poetry "*à la lettre*." I disagree with the importance of pure logic that Maulpoix and Gleize place on Albiach's *État*. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, the "opening" gestures of Albiach's poetics create a mysterious poetry. Also, *État* opens with two elements: the word 'Enigma' and vast white space, both which "set the stage" for the text. Furthermore, I am hesitant to so easily categorize Albiach's work in the "masculine" tendencies of logic and literality that were prevalent in many French literary circles of the 1970s, and I suspect that it is a mistake to lump Albiach's *État* with the work of her male counterparts. Although I am unprepared at this moment to formally take a stance on this, it is important to recognize the sexual difference between Albiach (the only well-known "woman" poet of the time) and the French "meta-poets" of the 1970s, who Maulpoix labels as the *poètes contemporains* and Virginia La Charité calls "neo-formalists." Among them are most notably Albiach, Deluy, Hocquard, Ray, Roubaud, Royet-Journaud and Veinstein. See Virginia La Charité, "The Design of Change" in *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907-1990* (Lexington: French Forum, 1992); Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Cie*. n.d. Web.; Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995).

⁹⁴ For more on demystification, theory, politics and social practice, see Cornel West's article "Theory, Pragmatism, and Politics," in *Consequences of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 22-38.

⁹⁵ In *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. Ed. and trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 189. See also pages 181, 183, and 190.

⁹⁶ For more on this, see Mallarmé's *Le Mystère dans les lettres* as well Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 31 and 46; Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: essays in the contemporary rhetoric of reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 52-75; and Peter Dayan, "L'Obscurité, entre Mallarmé et Proust," *Visions/Revisions: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003) 261-274.

One key function of mystery in the white space is that it defers meaning.

Philosopher and critic Avital Ronell takes the stance that society's search for meaning has been "devastating." This position illustrates just how radical Albiach's poetics is in both the literary and social spheres precisely because of its mystery, which defers meaning. In the film *Examined Life*, Ronell explains why the promise of meaning has been detrimental to philosophy as well as to general society:

I'm very suspicious historically and intellectually of the promise of meaning because meaning has often had very fascisoid, non-progressivist edges - if not a core - of that sort of thing... so that very often also the emergency supplies of meaning that are brought to a given incident or structure or theme in one's life are cover ups, are a way of dressing the wound of non-meaning... I think it's very hard to keep things in the tensional structure of the openness, whether its ecstatic or not, of non-meaning. That's very, very difficult which is why there is then the quick grasp for the transcendental signifier - for god, for nation, for patriotism. It's been very devastating this craving for meaning, though its something with which we are in constant negotiation. Everyone wants something like meaning but ... why reduce [life] to meaning and rather than just see the arbitrary eruption of something that can't be grasped or explicated, but it's just there in this kind of absolute contingency of being. To leave things open and radically inappropriable and something... then admitting we haven't really understood is much less satisfying, more frustrating and more necessary I think. ...⁹⁷

Ronell's idea of leaving things open and radically appropriable correlates with Albiach's poetry that cannot be grasped: it evokes "ÉNIGME." Jean-Michel Maulpoix confirms this when he states that in French contemporary poetry of the 1970s, language itself fails in any attempt to seize (most) truth and any kind of ontology.⁹⁸ Given, therefore, that Albiach's poetry hovers "just there in this absolute contingency of being," we are obliged to leave it open and free and thus move with it on *its* terms. But what are its terms? Its terms are movement which yields difference, and difference which yields movement – both dynamics underscoring the importance of *process* in her poetry. The white space in Albiach's poetry moves both text and reader not towards a specific place of meaning, but

⁹⁷ Avital Ronell in *Examined Life*. Dir. Astra Taylor. Zeitgeist Films, 2008.

⁹⁸ "Ils [les poètes contemporains français des années 70] affirment que la plupart des valeurs ou des vérités que l'écriture convoite sont hors de sa portée et que toute tentative pour saisir l'être est, en tant que telle, vouée à l'échec." Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Cie. n.d. Web.

embraces the process of moving-with.⁹⁹ This entails *experiencing* poetry's rhythm, which consequently, provokes us to interrogate not necessarily where we are going (and what the poem means), but how we are moving (and how the poem moves/what it does).

Moreover, focusing on movement (both ours and the poem's) instead of meaning and form shakes up the standing of representation and the figurative in poetry,¹⁰⁰ and thus forces us to think differently about the poetic text. Representation and the figurative, along with verse construction and typography, have dominated twentieth-century poetic inquiry and scholarship, particularly for their role in producing meaning.¹⁰¹ The white space in *État*, on the other hand, moves text and reader beyond the graphics of the poem, "en dehors de leurs graphiques / ces mouvements."¹⁰² It can do this as a work of art, since works of art produce and transmit sensation that intensify bodies which, in turn, act on the world.¹⁰³ In this vein, the white space's dynamic intensity unleashes it from representation. Thus, because it is mobile enough to steer text and reader away from any transcendental signifier, we are able to *move with it* and plunge deeper into the mysteries and the movements of each other. Yet, in an astonishing twist, movement unexpectedly overcomes itself for, in these intensely dynamic and affective encounters, we make the acquaintance of something other than movement – "connaissance autre que mouvement"

⁹⁹ Gleize and Maulpoix make references to this "process" as writing itself. See Maulpoix, Jean-Michel. *Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Cie*. n.d. Web. and Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Editions Bélin, 1995).

¹⁰⁰ This is the crossroads where Albiach's poetics diverge from Mallarmé's influence and inspiration.

¹⁰¹ Virginia La Charité, *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907-1990* (Lexington: French Forum, 1992) 20.

¹⁰² Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 117.

¹⁰³ In defining sensation, please note the following: first, movement is critical in the concept, for sensation "is not representation, sign, symbol, but force, energy, rhythm, resonance." Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 73. Also, works of art do not exist "only to the extent that they are sensed [or] perceived, nor are they "reliant upon an external observer to sense them" for "the sensations produced are not sensations of a subject, but sensation in itself, sensation as eternal..." Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 71.

– we get to know ethics. Neither morals and rules, nor judgments and values, ethics are embodied and affective ways of becoming-with-differences; they are how we sensationally act on and in the world, and they open towards a future *à venir*. Here is an example of this process, as articulated by *État*:

par la descente:

ne peut

sans sensualité

la terreur

:formes apparemment aiguës

[page break]

concentrées en un point, *couteau*, volumes, le vide
à la lumière —
et découpant ainsi des royaumes ceux des
États où l'on demeure lieux des grondements
de flammes où l'on dit s'approcher en graphique de
chaleur et apaisement

•

de l'inachevé dans la vitesse de
l'attitude non point fixe
est le point de lien
et dont la
continuité n'est que la répétition de la
première *énigme*

brutale de toute

[page break]

connaissance autre que mouvement¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971) 73-75.

This passage does not consist of a poetry that is transcendental, logical, and moral; rather, it transmits a moving process that is embodied, affective, and ethical. Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz uses a Deleuzian perspective to explain the sensational capacity of art, music and literature, which Albiach's text embodies:

What painting, music, and literature elicit are not so much representations, perceptions, images that are readily at hand, recognizable, directly interpretable, identifiable, as does the cliché or popular opinion, good sense, or calculation: rather, they produce and generate sensations never before experienced, perceptions of what has never been perceived before or perhaps cannot be perceived otherwise. [...] [The arts] extract something imperceptible from the cosmos and dress it in the sensible materials that the cosmos provides in order to create sensation, not a sensation of something, but pure intensity, a direct impact on the body's nerves and organs.¹⁰⁵

From this point of view, a work of art is not innovative or ethical through what it represents, but through its impact on the human body that is touched by art and then acts in the world. And even though we cannot predict how a body acts in the world, through its encounter with a work of art, it has the potential to perceive otherwise, act otherwise and do differently. The white space in Albiach's poetry, therefore, is groundbreaking in poetry and critical to *État*'s ethics because it is more than representation: it is the milieu of the interplay of differences, which propels the poetic text beyond itself and the human body into sensation – igniting possibilities to do differently.

We might conclude, then, that *État* exudes the ethical ÉNIGME of sensation. Or we might just move with the work, allow ourselves to be touched by the enigma, and then do something sensational in our lives, which just might transform the world.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 21-22.

Chapter Two

Vers Léopold Sédar Senghor

Only in the dance do I know how to tell the parable of the highest things... – Friedrich Nietzsche

Je danse, donc je suis. – Léopold Sédar Senghor

To do something sensational in our lives to transform the world, as Albiach's *État* inspires, was not merely a theoretical *rêverie* or an idealistic dream for Léopold Sédar Senghor. His final, emblematic work from 1977, *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba*, illustrates and demonstrates his "vision neuve de l'univers et création panhumaine"¹⁰⁶ as both poetry on the page and practice to be lived out in the world. In her article "The Arabic Constituents of *Africanité*: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba," Janice Spleth confirms the significance of the *Élégie* in Senghor's new world vision when she states that: "As the last piece architecturally in what the poet calls the definitive version of his work, the elegy was designated by him to stand as the ultimate expression of his poetic, political, and personal ideals [...]."¹⁰⁷

For this vision to dance with creation – for the theory to move into practice – the *Élégie* employs the dynamics of difference that artfully illustrate Senghor's poetics,

¹⁰⁶ In "Dialogue sur la poésie francophone," *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 413-414.

¹⁰⁷ Janice Spleth, "The Arabic Constituents of *Africanité*: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba," *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 60.

philosophy and socio-political objectives, and which bring them to life. These dynamics play out in Senghor's vision, which he introduces in his *Lettre à trois poètes de l'hexagone* as "parole *poiétique*." "Parole *poiétique*," defined as "vision neuve de l'univers et création panhumaine," carries with it two primary, and *different*, components: one that underscores form ("vision"), and one that accentuates force ("création"). This interplay between form and force moves similarly to the dynamics we witnessed in Albiach's poetry, for they illustrate the "moving-with" among differences: a creative and ethical act that, in the context of Senghor's work, we shall call the "éthétique sénégalienne." Contrary to the emphasis on synthesis that is often attributed to Senghorien politics, philosophy and poetics,¹⁰⁸ the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* shows that moving-with difference is key to Senghor's "parole *poiétique*," which is brought to light particularly via the poem's fertility dance. The text, which will also be referred to in this chapter as "territory," thus becomes the artistic milieu of the interplay of differences. This interplay, or these encounters and movements, are the crucial dynamics that render Senghor's vision active and ignite possibilities of doing differently in the world. Thus, through movement and particularly the fertility dance, which is Senghor's "parole *poiétique*" illustrated as poetry and practice, ethics emerge.

This chapter will address how Senghor's *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* artfully shapes textual territory that sets the stage for ethical practice. Our trajectory consists of three principle movements. First, we will analyze Senghor's fleshly and sensational

¹⁰⁸ Two examples of scholarship that privilege synthesis in Senghor's work includes Mildred Mortimer's "Sine and Seine: The Quest for Synthesis in Senghor's Life and Poetry," *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 38-50 and Ash Berkday's 2010 article "Negritude and African Socialism: Rhetorical Devices for Overcoming Social Divides," *Third Text* 24.2 (March 2010): 205-214.

rendering of memory, which give it mobility and open it to renaissance.¹⁰⁹ In the second movement, we will explore the *Élégie*'s "territory" and discover how dynamic and creative expressions of rhythm, that are not merely pleasing for the senses to behold, break new ground for ethics to emerge. Finally, the last movement examines Senghor's conception of cosmopolitanism.¹¹⁰ Through the interplay of differences, a sensational and sensual ethics of "moving-with" emerges from the elegy, which illustrates Senghor's "parole *poiétique*" on the page and in practice. In this respect, Senghor's *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* exceeds itself as poetry, politics and as philosophy: it becomes a moving ethics – "l'éthétique sénégalienne" – artfully crafted on poetic territory that invites us, the reader, into its dynamic space so we may explore other ways of moving, knowing and living in the world.

1. Temporal Somatics: Corporeal Memory, Bodily Renaissance

The visceral and mobile qualities that the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* gives to memory are a distinctive feature of Senghor's poetics that ultimately make space in the text for ethical action *à venir*. In the *Élégie*, Senghor animates memory and carries it to the present by dynamically depicting it through *both* form *and* force, by way of memory's dynamic capacity and the narrator-poet's visceral experiences of the memory: the sound of a kiss. Thus the poem is set in motion by this interplay between image and a

¹⁰⁹ I use the terms "renaissance" and "rebirth" interchangeably throughout the chapter.

¹¹⁰ Instead of using the term "hybridity," I purposefully use the term "cosmopolitanism." The reasons for this change in nomenclature will be explained further in the chapter.

sound when the narrator-poet reflects upon the Queen of Sheba's kiss and is thrust into a sea of childhood nostalgia:

Oui! elle m'a baisé, *banakh*, du baiser de sa bouche
 Et ma mémoire en demeure odorante de l'odeur fraîche
 du citron, du mimosa indien
 Bruiteur de senteurs en avril.
 [...]
 Je dis *banakh* du baiser de sa bouche, la Bien-Aimée,¹¹¹
 [...]

These opening verses underscore memory's dynamic aspect since memory is prompted by "*banakh*," a word-image as well as (and especially) a sensory experience.¹¹² This visceral aspect of the word is accentuated in the glossary of the text, which defines *banakh* as an onomatopoeia "that imitates the sound of a kiss."¹¹³ Despite the fact that it appears only twice in the poem (within the first fifteen verses of the elegy), Senghor nonetheless places memory's visceral qualities and its dynamic capabilities at the forefront of the text.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 333.

¹¹² For more on the kinesthetic and corporeal, refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially his notion of "la chair (the flesh)" in *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). Philipa Rothfield also has an interesting analysis of the kinesthetic and corporeal from a dancer's perspective in "Between the Foot and the Floor, Dancing with Nietzsche and Klossowski," Ed. Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray. *Somatechnics. Queering the Technologisation of Bodies* (Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) 207–224.

¹¹³ The glossary in Senghor's *Œuvre Poétique* states: "*banakh*: c'est un mot onomatopéique, qui imite le bruit du baiser" (436). I also theorize that the italics emphasize the vibratory quality of the word, and not just the fact that it is "un mot étranger."

¹¹⁴ The sensory, and particularly corporeal, qualities of sound bring to mind Antonin Artaud's associations with language, sound and the body: "[Le langage objectif et concret du théâtre] sert à coincer, à enserrer des organes. Il court dans la sensibilité. [...] il fait des mots des vibrations et des qualités de voix. Il fait piétiner éperdument des rythmes. Il pilonne des sons." From "Le Théâtre et son double," *Œuvres complètes*

A second gesture that marks the importance of the elegy's corporeal and mobile elements is a subtle indication on the introductory page:

ÉLÉGIE POUR
LA REINE DE SABA

*(pour deux kôras et un balafong)*¹¹⁵

Written not to rest on the page, Senghor specifies that the elegy is intended to be lived through the body via musical performance, which the designation “*pour deux kôras et un balafong*” supports. This dynamic characteristic of the poem emphasizes the fact that it is meant to tell its story not just through form – as a poem on a two-dimensional page, but also sensationally – through the force of musical vibration. With the significance of the elegy's sensational quality in mind, therefore, we discover that the memory of the kiss, which frames the entire work, has the power to “move” the narrator-poet through the play of differences: by acting as both form and force through the sensational poetic image.

By emphasizing the dynamic aspect of memory, including its link with the senses, Senghor reiterates the importance of the relationship between poetry and the flesh. We see this in the beginning verses of the elegy which ignite the body of the poet through the sense of smell: “ma mémoire en demeure odorante de l’odeur fraîche / du citron, du mimosa indien,” sound: “Bruiteur de senteurs en avril,” and touch: “dans l’eau froide.”¹¹⁶

IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 88. The sensory quality of language, as well as Artaud, will be discussed in more detail in the forthcoming chapters on Ariane Mnouchkine and Werewere Liking.

¹¹⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 331.

¹¹⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 333.

This phenomenon emerges repeatedly over the course of Senghor's poetic œuvre,¹¹⁷ for example, in "Chants pour signare" from *Nocturnes* which, like the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba*, is also written "*pour flûtes et balafong*": "La mémoire de ton visage est tendue sur ma gorge, / tente fervente du Tagant / Voûte qu'encercle la forêt bleue de tes cheveux."¹¹⁸ Here, the poet's memory of a *signare*, a *métis* woman, is stretched on his throat.¹¹⁹ Another example that illustrates the relation between memory, the flesh and sensory experience is the poem "Pourquoi" from *Poèmes divers*. Memories of the poet's youth consist of "imagination" that is ignited with the rhythms of "jazz" and "paroles" set in motion through its coupling with "bamboula" ("bamboula" meaning both music and dance), all of which intermingle with the tumultuous harmony of hips and frenzy of bouncing, bulbous breasts:

Pourquoi battre le rappel
Du jazz imagination
De la bamboula des paroles
Au clair de ma jeunesse?

Renvoyons l'harmonie tumultueuse des hanches,
La frénésie des seins bondissant et bramant
À travers les forêts parfumées,
Renvoyons les longs jours titubants, ivres de vin.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Thank you to Richard Serrano for suggesting this perspective.

¹¹⁸ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 180.

¹¹⁹ That the *signare*, like the Queen of Sheba, embodies "genetic" cosmopolitanism further supports Senghor's multivalent world vision. This will be discussed more in the chapter's last section on cosmopolitanism. Specific work that concentrates on the *signare* includes the Abbé David Boilat's *Esquisses sénégalaises* (Paris: Karthala, 1984). See also Hilary Jones "From *Mariage à la Mode* to Weddings at Town Hall: Marriage, Colonialism, and Mixed-Race Society in Nineteenth-Century Senegal." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 38, No. 1 (2005) 27-48.

¹²⁰ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 222.

Let us examine one final example, “Vertige,” from the collection *Lettres d’hivernage*:

Vertige !...

[...]

D’abord j’ai salué l’Afrique dessus le parallèle de

Bordeaux, et bien auparavant

Quand montait à ma mémoire à mes narines

vibrantes, les peaux brunes odeur couleur de musc.¹²¹

“Vertige” infiltrates the poet’s mind and body when memories, which he describes dynamically: “à ma mémoire à mes narines / vibrantes,” come to him sensually, as bodies and odours of his native land: “peaux brunes odeur couleur de musc.” All of these examples demonstrate how the fleshly and sensuous animate the visual aspect of memory and how both form and force move together. Memory as poetically portrayed in the elegy, therefore, becomes more than just a two-dimensional image on the page. It touches us and comes to life first through “sensation,” as an image, then as creative movement and eventually as practice – its ethical turn.

Henri Bergson, one of the early twentieth-century’s most influential philosophers and one of Senghor’s major influences, explains memory’s dynamic capacity in his work *Matter and Memory* as the following: “Now the immediate past, in so far as it is perceived, is, as we shall see, sensation, since every sensation translates a very long succession of elementary vibrations [...].”¹²² Why is this significant? Senghor’s *Élégie* underscores the sensory aspect of memory, which, in the poetic text, unhinges it from

¹²¹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 246.

¹²² Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988) 138.

being trapped in nostalgia and, through dynamic vibrations and sensations, funnels it into images upon which we can call. When the memory moves from the past into an image in the present, we can then *act* on it in the present, which gives us the possibility of making life different in the future. The importance of memory, therefore, lies not in its “representation” as image, nor even in its sensational qualities, however beautiful or powerful they may be. Memory is significant for its movement from the past to the present, which allows us to act on it. Bergson explains it as the following: “The function of the body is not to store up recollections, but simply to choose, in order to bring back to distinct consciousness, by the real efficacy this conferred on it, the useful memory, that which may complete and illuminate the present situation with a view to ultimate action.”¹²³ Thus, the flexibility that Senghor attributes to memory renders it dynamic and mobile. In this manner, its place in the poetic body – the text – is to infuse it with action and thus the possibility to become practice. It creates an opening in the text to become more than text – to become both “vision” and “création.”

Memories, which are also sites of movement in the poem, act as that joint, or articulation, that channels *both* sensation and vibrations *and* action/movement, *both* the past *and* the present.¹²⁴ They “consist in a joint system of sensations and movements”¹²⁵ that, when inserted into the text, make poetry mobile and allow it to move as a hinge. Here, the temporal spaces of the past (*lieux de mémoire*) encounter the present and, upon our action, can become *lieux de renaissance* in the future. Thus the sensational and dynamic capacities Senghor attributes to memory that we see in the introduction of the

¹²³ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988) 179.

¹²⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988) 138.

¹²⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988) 138.

Élégie are crucial because they facilitate the elegy's "éthétique sénégalienne" by setting the stage – carving out the *lieux*, or territories – for the instances of dance to follow.

Senghor's *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* centers around a fertility ritual and dance that begins in the second half of the poem's third movement and, in the same vein as the elegy's introduction, is sparked by a reference to the poet's memory: "Je me souviens du soir de la soirée de mon festin." The passage continues: "Lentement tu levas ton buste, après moi avec moi à / mon appel. / Pour fermer l'éventail des danses, dansant la danse du / Printemps."¹²⁶ In these verses, the dance, which illustrates Senghor's "parole poétique," paves the way for a subtle yet significant transition in the elegy. On the one hand, the historical context of the fertility dance belongs to the poet's past and establishes the *lieu de mémoire*: "Je me souviens du soir de la soirée de mon festin." Yet because the dance invokes fertility and the spring: dansant la danse du / Printemps," it calls to the future and opens up the text to a *lieu de renaissance*. These verses show memory's movement from the past, "Je me souviens," into the present (the poetic text), and illustrate its interplay with the future, "la danse du Printemps." The regenerative connotations and forward-looking gestures Senghor attributes to the dance draw attention to the new world he envisions, which is not locked in reminiscence of days gone by, but move forward through our actions, which change the world. Elements of the fertility dance that refer to traditional African dance¹²⁷ embody this ideology, for they do not confine the poem to history or petrify it into nostalgia, even though they may function as connections to the poem's ethnic genealogy. In the *Élégie*, dance is released from

¹²⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 337.

¹²⁷ Some dance movements in the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* that evoke traditional Senegalese dance are: "les pieds pilons battant / la terre" and "les bras / nagent dans le torrent comme des lianes" (337). For more on traditional Senegalese dance, see Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

nostalgia and hence liberates the poem from historical fossilization by means of the regenerative powers of the fertility rite or, as the text states, the dance of spring itself: “la danse du Printemps.”

In addition, this passage emphasizes the interplay between the human body and the earth, for their moving exchanges propel a change of seasons: the final verses of the third part of the poem describe the *va et vient* between the bodies of the poet and the Queen and the pulsations of nature. Here, the fertility dance pays homage to winter and then creates a way out¹²⁸ of its barrenness by opening up the poem to spring via traditional associations of fecundity and renaissance as seen in the following verses: “Froidure sécheresse hiver, adieu! La pluie répond à / l’appel du printemps, et le printemps est pluie. / Doucement lentement, une deux gouttes graves / ... / ...les bras / nagent dans le torrent comme des lianes.”¹²⁹ These verses, while beginning to sketch out Senghor’s “vision” and “création” of a new world, emphasize memory’s sensational and sensuous movements that vibrate within the text, and underscore the creative and regenerative nature of the text as a space where sex and art are made.¹³⁰ We can use this dynamic interplay between the past, present and future, and between bodies and nature, to understand the dynamics of an important historical “dance of differences” that Senghor’s “parole *poïétique*” envisions and even incites: Africa’s tension with a colonial past, its movement into the present (so that we may act upon it to make change), and its release

¹²⁸ For more on the concept of the “way out”, see Deleuze and Guattari’s chapter “1837: Of the Refrain” from Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹²⁹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 337.

¹³⁰ Infinite thanks to Liz Grosz and her seminar on the animal in the Fall of 2010 for this inspiration.

into a future to become otherwise.¹³¹ Placing the *Élégie* in its larger historical context will help clarify this idea.

The beginning of the twentieth century was particularly important in the expansion of intellectual consciousness, not only in the West but also on the African continent. At this time, many African intellectuals, including Senghor, were exploring the world and discovering new countries and cultures in Europe, Asia and the Americas. In the words of Dr. S.O. Mezu, this “*renaissance noire*,” which consisted of the “opening-up” of cultural, historical, intellectual and geographical boundaries, brought about a “rupture avec le passé,”¹³² thus sparking intellectual and political innovation on the part of the African intelligentsia. Senghor, through politics and literature, strove towards reclaiming the value and importance of “African”¹³³ culture and people that Western society dismissed. As Nick Nesbitt states: “Senghor’s Négritude nonetheless serves to reverse the system of values that had informed Western perception of blacks since the earliest voyages of discovery to Africa.”¹³⁴ A proponent of the inherent value and importance of Africa, Senghor desired to redefine it in and on its own terms, not according to the West’s perception and definition of it as a *tabula rasa* or as the fossilized image of a primitive society. Rather, Senghor defined Africa, in the words of Mezu, as

¹³¹ Can the effects of colonialism ever really be released? This important question is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but merits examination elsewhere. See Richard Serrano’s provocative *Against the Postcolonial: “Francophone” Writers at the Ends of French Empire*. In this dissertation, I do not wish to consider Senghor in the context of postcoloniality/post-coloniality because I am not convinced that at this time, its trace is ever fully erased or that we are ever truly “post” colonial.

¹³² Sebastian Okechukwu Mezu, *Léopold Sédar Senghor et la défense et illustration de la civilisation noire* (Paris: M. Didier, 1968) 31.

¹³³ I put “African” in quotations to signal that the nomenclature is not my own, but representative of the generalities of its time, the 1960s.

¹³⁴ Nick Nesbitt, *Négritude*, 8 December 2001. Web.

the “inspiratrice des cultures et le musée vivant des civilisations”¹³⁵ and privileged African arts, as Francesca Castaldi states, as “the very best and most valuable contribution of Africans to humanity at large.”¹³⁶ In this respect, Senghor’s endeavor to reverse Western systems of values and redefine Africa is an attempt to rupture with the past.¹³⁷

Inspired by his study of the controversial German ethnologist and archeologist Leo Frobenius, Senghor’s redefinition and revalorization of Africa, Africans and the historical importance both have played in the world (including Europe) breaks with previous negative representations of Africa and Africans. At the same time, Senghor’s method of redefining Africa does not completely reject traditional aspects of African culture. He calls for a utopian redefinition that embodies traditional African elements while still remaining open to change and to the future. In her book *Choreographies of African Identities*, Francesca Castaldi states that in his quest for a “civilization that recognized equality for all its citizens,” Senghor argued for the recognition and valorization of “African identity and the uniqueness of (African) cultural values.”¹³⁸ This ideology represents the political aspect of Senghor’s “vision neuve de l’univers et création panhumaine,” which involves a dynamic interplay between differences: tradition

¹³⁵ Sebastian Okechukwu Mezu, *Léopold Sédar Senghor et la défense et illustration de la civilisation noire* (Paris: M. Didier, 1968) 31.

¹³⁶ Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 50.

¹³⁷ Reversing any system, instead of overcoming it, is a reactive way of establishing an identity be it individual or collective, cultural or national. Furthermore, it reveals the limits of Senghor’s philosophy and politics, at least according to this dissertation’s point of view. Nevertheless, it is important to bring this “hole” in his philosophy/politics to light, even though it deserves a detailed explanation but is outside this dissertation’s range.

¹³⁸ Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 50.

and modernity, the past and the future, the singularity of cultural values under the umbrella of one “Africa.”

Before we continue any further, it is important to analyze the dynamics of the interplay between the past, present and future. We should note that the tension of the past is not brought to the present, and therefore not acted upon, by forgetting or erasure, nor is it freed through Senghor’s tendency towards re-definition that played a critical role in his political and poetic philosophy. In fact, this dialectical way of conceiving of the interplay between nostalgia and renaissance, which depends on opposing forces rather than difference, reveals what many critics (including Frantz Fanon)¹³⁹ consider a contradiction, both in Senghor’s philosophy as well as in the philosophy of Négritude. For example, Senghor’s propensity to rewrite the past employs idealized elements of Africa, both in his poetic texts as well as in his social and political philosophy, in order to propel Africa and Africans beyond the constraints of colonization and into a life-affirming, and arguably utopian, future.¹⁴⁰ In one facet of his conception of the future, Africa and Africans “turn the tables on the West” and are valued and praised for their important contributions to humanity and the world. However, this method can be interpreted as a trap for several reasons. First, the reactionary gesture of “turning the tables” is neither new nor innovative. It relies on the dominant culture’s dialectic that

¹³⁹ Critiques of Senghor, his philosophy and politics and of Négritude do not solely stem from the 21st century and its privilege of hindsight (one such example is Donna V. Jones’s *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy. Négritude, Vitalism and Modernity*). It is worth mentioning that Frantz Fanon, one of Senghor’s contemporaries, articulated much discontent with Négritude’s essentialism and bourgeois tendencies and uncannily predicted its pitfalls after the decolonization of Africa (see Castaldi 55–56 and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*). One only need read the last chapter of *Peau noire masques blancs* entitled “En guise de conclusion” to see the opposition between Senghor’s ideology of nostalgia and renaissance and Fanon’s. In the beginning of the chapter, Fanon cites Marx: “La révolution sociale ne peut tirer sa poésie du passé, mais seulement du futur. Elle ne peut commencer avec elle-même avant de s’être dépouillée de toutes les superstitions concernant le passé” (180).

¹⁴⁰ Senghor’s utopian tendencies are not unnoticed among Senghor scholars and critics alike. For example, both Donna V. Jones and Francesca Castaldi take this into consideration in their respective works on Senghor.

opposes Africa to the West and, as a result, it cannot carve out a future that is truly different; it merely reverses the stakes and subject positions. Furthermore, reversing an opposition catches Senghor – and thus his philosophy, politics and texts – in between two temporally disparate worlds: one from the past that we can call “nostalgia” and one from the future that we can label “hope” or “utopia” proper.¹⁴¹ Instead of linking (as Senghor desired) notions of “the West” and “Africa,” and “black” and “white” for example, the dynamics between these two worlds reinforce the dichotomy between them and create notions of “self” and “other” that consequently perpetuate the binary “us verses them” mentality Senghor aimed to overcome. Francesca Castaldi confirms this idea, stating that while a re-definition of a grand African past can serve to project Africans forward socially and politically, it also distorts the vision of Africa by rendering it a symbol of idyllic perfection in opposition to a corrupt western world: “The assumed greatness of the African past served to guide the hopeful dreams for the future, and this forward projection of nostalgia constructed Africa as a symbol of purity and innocence standing against the evils of capitalist society.”¹⁴²

II. “La terre de la chair”: *Crafting Ethical Territory/Ethics Carving Territories*

What is a “lieu”? What is the difference between a territory and an environment? How do ethics move (in) these places? What is the body’s importance to and in these spaces, especially as pertaining to Senghor’s *Élégie*? These questions are the central to

¹⁴¹ We know from Bergson that time is not cut in a horizontally linear fashion. Rather, it is like a cone with each “temporality” opening onto the other.

¹⁴² Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 55.

this section but, before we address them, let us reiterate that the fertility ritual in the elegy occurs in dynamic interplays between the past and memory, and renaissance and the future. These dynamics do not occur uniquely in the conceptual realm, or even solely as part of a time-continuum. As Sheba and the poet's sensational choreography emphasizes in the fertility dance, bodies harness the rhythm of the universe and carve the cadence of memory and renaissance in space, onto the earth and the poetic page. Dynamic and creative expressions of rhythm, like the fertility dance, then, are not merely pleasing for the senses to behold – they also break new ground for ethics to emerge.

For ethics to emerge, however, a territory needs to be delineated. Whereas an environment is a general location, a territory is land that is divided into a part that one owns and/or controls and that is produced by a marker (a body, for example). The bodies that create the fertility dance, therefore, carve out a territory. A territory is both geographic space, and also more than geography: a territory is an *act*, and we can define an “act” as harnessed movement. Because it is also an act, territory is inherently linked to movement. More than a “place,” a territory “bites”; it boldly “seizes.”¹⁴³ In other words, a territory

is the delimitation of a milieu [a milieu being the congealing of a block of space–time] in accordance with the force of a rhythm, it is the rhythmic alliance of a limited milieu and a restricted range of bodies and body movements. [...] It is an external synthesis, a bricolage, of geographical elements, environmental characteristics, material features, shifted and reorganized fragments from a number of milieus (chaos itself is nothing but the milieu of all milieus), that create both an inside, an outside, a passage from the one to the other, and a space that is annexed, outside, contestatory, a resource: a cohesion inside, a domain outside, doorways from one to the other and energy reserves to enable them to reconfigure or reorchestrate themselves.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 314. Also, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 47.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 47.

In Senghor's elegy, dance delineates a territory that is also the site of the encounter – the collision – between the past and the future, between memory and renaissance, between sexual difference, between cultural difference (which the third part of this chapter, on cosmopolitanism, will address), and between the virtual idea (the concept) and its material actualization (ethics). Vibrating with and from the encounters of differences, the poem resonates as both “vision” and “création,” form and force, theory and practice. Let us take the two temporal differences of memory and renaissance, with which we are already familiar, to see how these dynamics manifests in Senghor's elegy.

We have already established that the beginning of the *Élégie* evokes a *lieu de mémoire* since the historical context of the fertility dance, prompted by *banakh* – the sound of a kiss, belongs to the poet's memory. The poem's second movement reaffirms this space of memory in its first lines: “Ô Mémoire mémoire qui brûles dans la nuit trop / bleue pour chanter le printemps souffle sur mes / narines.”¹⁴⁵ Here, like in the poem's first movement, the poet sensationally draws down memory into the space and the movement of the text. The poem's third movement further accentuates this dynamically embodied *lieu de mémoire* because it calls upon tradition through the Queen of Sheba's body and her procession in the traditional, ceremonial entrance to the “*festin*,” or dancing fertility rite. The imagery Senghor employs in the first half of this movement, including musical rhythm and images of the natural world, is based on commonly used poetic topoi, but in this elegy it also evokes conventional (and stereotypical) notions of African

¹⁴⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 334. Because of the limited amount of space in this chapter, and because it is a segue to the fertility dance (and does not directly speak of the dance) I will not be analyzing this part of the elegy in detail. It is important to note, however, that Senghor establishes the Queen's “oriental” Ethiopian identity in this part of the poem. I do not wish to ignore the problematic dynamics that this orientalism creates but they require more space and time than I have for this chapter, which is another reason I have decided not to explore the elegy's second movement in detail in this dissertation.

culture, for example: “l’aurore en fête embaumant frais les / arbres odorants,” “en poussant de brefs / cris rythmiques,” “leurs peaux de leopard en bandoulière,” “Et neuf forgerons... / ...tous nés du rythme / du tam–tam,” “dans ta robe de boubou rose.”¹⁴⁶

Despite specific references to dance movements that comprise traditional Senegalese dance, such as “les pieds pilons battant / la terre” and “les bras / nagent dans le torrent comme des lianes,”¹⁴⁷ the conventional imagery and language seem nonetheless to reinforce the idea of an idealized and exotic Africa that still remains tied to and sculpted by a Western conception.¹⁴⁸

For this reason, it is certainly justifiable to argue that the traditional, and often stereotypical, African imagery that Senghor uses fashions and reinforces an idealized African territory in the poetic text, even despite the fact that his intention was not to perpetuate stereotypes, but rather authenticate the importance of Africa and African culture by rendering them poetic. Nevertheless, the site of the fertility dance can also be interpreted as a method by which the poem, as well as the poet’s philosophy, unhinges itself from past restrictions (including racially prejudiced and limiting definitions from the West) and, through its own movements that we can call its “ethics,” the poem carves out a new space for itself both on the page and in the world. This gesture, a break from

¹⁴⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 336-337.

¹⁴⁷ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 337. For more information regarding traditional Senegalese dance, please refer to chapters four and six in Castaldi, which describe it in detail.

¹⁴⁸ That Senghor employs stereotypical imagery is apparent in the usage of the word “lianes” as part of dance gestures. As Richard Serrano points out, “lianes” evokes the jungle while Senegal is mostly desert. We cannot ignore, however, that even though African regional dances are specific, they also share movements and gestures between each other. For more on this, see Castaldi’s *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

reactive and paralyzing nostalgia, uses history “as a springboard”¹⁴⁹ and does not look back, but dynamically moves forward. It acts artfully in the present, as dance and poetry for example, and in turn creates and cultivates space for a different kind of future – one that is “unmediated by and un-nostalgic for the past and the present”¹⁵⁰ – to spring forth. The tool that makes this possible is the poem’s gestures or, in other words, its performance.

In the introduction to *Performance and Cultural Politics*, Elin Diamond explains the paradox of performance and outlines it as both ethereal yet concrete:

[...] in the blink of an eye...performance is always a doing and a thing done. One the one hand, performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self). On the other hand, it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field. Common sense insists on a temporal separation between a doing and a thing done, but in usage and in theory, performance, even its dazzling physical immediacy, drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory. [...] it is impossible to write the pleasurable embodiments we call performance without tangling the cultural stories, traditions, and political contestations that comprise our sense of history.¹⁵¹

Diamond’s perspective brings to light how the gestures of the dance sculpt the text and create a territory of encounters – *lieux* of differences which she calls “a drift” – between different temporalities (“present and past”), different ontologies (“presence and absence”), and different states of being (“consciousness and memory”). This “drift,” as Diamond calls it, between the historical, the present, and the future does not bind the text to the notion that “an absent referent or an anterior authority precedes and grounds our

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004) 123.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004) 123.

¹⁵¹ Elin Diamond, “Performance and Cultural Politics,” *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. Ed. Lisbeth and Jane de Gay Goodman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 66.

representations.”¹⁵² Rather, these sensory and sensual movements between differences act as motors that drive Senghor’s “parole *poiétique*,” as illustrated by the elegy, into practice.

From these encounters, and on the elegy’s sensational poetic territory, springs “an epistemology grounded not on the distinction between truthful models and fictional representations but on different ways of knowing and doing that are constitutively heterogeneous, contingent and risky.”¹⁵³ Such a visceral epistemology, which Diamond describes, is set into motion in the elegy when the Queen lifts her body and begins to dance: “Lentement tu levas ton buste, après moi avec moi [...]”¹⁵⁴ and continues through the fourth section of the elegy with the verses: “Pour exploser, la gorge éclore, dans l’éclat serein du / Printemps, le parfum sombre du gongo, la terre / de la chair. / [...] / Ce sont deux danses parallèles, regardant respirant / l’haleine de la brise.”¹⁵⁵ Senghor further affirms the importance of the gestural, or performative, on the syntactic level by accentuating its rhythmic significance in the following verse through the repetition of the word *danse* three times and the alliteration of the consonant “d”: “Pour fermer l’éventail des danses, dansant la danse du / Printemps.”¹⁵⁶ This repetition of the word *danse*, combined with alliteration, transforms the poetic lexical field into a rhythmic platform: words, sound, movement and corporeality *reverberate* with each other, on poetic

¹⁵² Please note that I would not use the terminology “representations”, but am keeping true to Diamond’s quotation. See Elin Diamond, “Performance and Cultural Politics,” *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. Ed. Lisbeth and Jane de Gay Goodman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 66.

¹⁵³ Elin Diamond, “Performance and Cultural Politics,” *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. Ed. Lisbeth and Jane de Gay Goodman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 66–67. Diamond considers this a postmodern notion of performance. In that case, could we consider Senghor’s elegy to be postmodern? Is that necessary? These questions will not be answered in this dissertation, but are provocative nonetheless.

¹⁵⁴ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 337.

¹⁵⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 338.

¹⁵⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 337. The bold type is my own.

ground.¹⁵⁷ Their aftershocks pave new directions in the poetic text for through their “active and vigorous use, [and] reverberations in the present” they show how we might make “history palatable.”¹⁵⁸

Traces of the past’s reverberations into the present become even more evident on the linguistic plane in this section of the *Élégie*. Here, the bodies of the poet and Queen break new ground through their dance, gouging out a “nick in time” that manifests as a (visible) temporal change in the poem in the linguistic shift from the past tenses *passé composé* and *passé simple* (in the first half) to the present tense. This begins with the verse “Pour fermer l’éventail des danses, dansant la danse du / Printemps. / Froidure sécheresse hiver, adieu ! La pluie répond à / l’appel du printemps, et le printemps est pluie.” Such a rupture in the poem’s time frame is not a temporal inconsistency, but rather evidence of impact between (at least) two bodies and two worlds: two races, two cultures, and especially two sexes. Shockwaves that come from this intense meeting – this “corporal collision” of two worlds on poetic territory – propel the encounter, and thus the text, beyond the ethereal yet concrete drift between past and the present. The encounter shakes up the text and, with memory’s movement from the past to the present, we are spurred towards new and different ways of thinking and doing – a movement that demonstrates the “éthétique sénghorienne.”

The transition from the past towards the future, part of the elegy’s move towards ethics, is underscored in the text by the word *Printemps* in the aforementioned passage, which is fundamental both as a theme in the elegy and a metaphor for renaissance. Not

¹⁵⁷ The combination of such diverse elements including words, sound and movement in a poetic text come together to form assemblages, another important phenomenon in Senghor’s philosophy and literary production that we will later examine.

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004) 123.

only is it capitalized, but it also stands alone on the line, calling attention to its importance and marking a new territory of rebirth to come. The word *Printemps* points to this and through the dance's artful carving out of new territory, stagnancy and barrenness metamorphosize into fertility and abundance. On literal ground, *Printemps* acts as a signpost that signals the seasonal transition in the poem from winter to spring. Symbolically, in the context of the fertility dance, the word *Printemps* hints at *l'avenir*, or what is to come between the Queen and the poet: communion and fertility. The eradication of infertility, both literally and symbolically, is underscored even further in the poem in the verse following the word *Printemps*: "Froidure sécheresse hiver, adieu!" The emphatic closing of the passage with *adieu* and an exclamation point blasts an opening into the text out of which Senghor's politics spill. This opening is not a sinkhole, into which one descends while looking nostalgically backwards, but a "way out" that orients one towards the future.

The primary and most concrete example of a "way out" in Senghor's poetics and politics is articulated by the future-aimed Négritude philosophy and movement, which the *Élégie* illustrates on the poetic plane, and which Senghor put into motion during his presidency between 1960–1980 as the catalyst for Senegal's renaissance. Senghor's combination of the literary, cultural, social, political and practical in his poetics and politics has been the site of much criticism.¹⁵⁹ It can also be considered, nonetheless, as one of Senghorian Négritude's greatest strengths, as confirmed by Elizabeth Harney who analyzes Négritude in both the Césaireian and Senghorian veins in her article entitled

¹⁵⁹ See Elizabeth Harney, "Rhythm as the Architecture of Being. Reflections on a Black Soul," *Third Text* 24.2 (2010): 219–222. Here, she outlines the major criticism of Senghor which centers particularly around his conception of Négritude. Some of Senghor's strongest critics: James Clifford, Manthia Diawara and Abiola Irele.

“Rhythm as the Architecture of Being. Reflections on a Black Soul.” The article is one of the rare examples of Senghorian scholarship that emphasizes the complexities of his writings as they relate to the scope of time over which they were produced – Senghor’s lifetime, in fact. Harney also brings to light the importance of the poetic and visual arts that emerge “in concert with the ideas of Negritude.” Specifically regarding Senghorian Négritude, therefore, she states that:

Senghor’s perception of Negritude was multidimensional, looking eloquently and nostalgically to the past while simultaneously envisioning a proactive, revolutionary role for the philosophy, seeing it as a tool for forging a new supranational and national sense of being and belonging.¹⁶⁰

Senghor’s insistence upon self-assurance and modernity as practices and not solely theories, as Harney stresses above, demonstrates Négritude’s transition from the more abstract literary and theoretical spheres to the concrete social, cultural and political sectors. This evolution, unique to Senghorian Négritude, is a critical gesture that allows Senegal as both a nation and a territory to carve “ways out” from colonization.¹⁶¹ A significant element of its transition from the abstract to the concrete is its diverse or “multidimensional” quality.

Nigerian political philosopher Denis Ekpo, like Elizabeth Harney, highlights the diversity that Senghor’s Négritude embraces. He, however, focuses on its drive towards modernization that Senghor believed was key to Senegal’s independent future, as well as its most effective motor of change. Ekpo states:

For others, the business of rethinking the African past or the black race was to rediscover and love it as something good in itself; for Senghor the black race and Africa’s past are

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Harney, “Rhythm as the Architecture of Being. Reflections on a Black Soul,” *Third Text* 24.2 (2010): 219-220.

¹⁶¹ This statement does not intend to simplify the effects of colonization. Rather, it points to strategies of overcoming some aspects of colonialism, despite its deep-rooted traces on both colonized and colonizer.

beautiful and good and we need to so reaffirm; but the modernity which beckons us on is a call of fate and it is even more urgent to answer that call. Negritude's chief meta-political role is to prepare us psychologically to answer it.¹⁶²

The turn towards modernity that Ekpo stresses is, in fact, a turn towards the future that confirms Senghor's philosophy and politics as active and forward-looking. Orienting itself to that which is *à venir*, Senghorian Négritude distinctly evolves beyond the theoretical into what Ekpo calls the "meta-political." Whereas he relegates Négritude's chief meta-political role to the psychological, its fleshly, physical significance cannot be overlooked – and Senghor's poetry will not allow it! Not unlike the meeting of the poet and the Queen of Sheba in the *Élégie*, Senegal's future-driven trajectory is carved out by geo-political encounters, otherwise articulated as "corporeal collisions" or meetings between different "territories" – both of which we might commonly call "politics."

In order to better understand how Senghor articulates his politics, let us briefly transition from poetry and step back sixteen years prior to the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba*, to one of his political writings: his 1961 political address at Chatham House. Here, Senghor opens with direct comments on territory, before outlining his politics of the future that center around diversity and what he terms "complementarity":

I am always glad to be in London, where, just after the last war, I took part in a series of Pan-African discussions whose importance for the future of Afro-European relations needs no stressing now. These discussions brought together African intellectuals of English and French culture. That was a foretaste of the Africa we want to build, of diverse but complementary elements.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Denis Ekpo, "Speak Negritude But Think and Act French: The Foundations of Senghor's Political Philosophy," *Third Text* 24.2 (2010): 228.

¹⁶³ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Some Thoughts on Africa: A Continent in Development," *International Affairs* 38.2 (1962): 189.

Both this political address and the poetic *Élégie* highlight the themes of diversity, the encounter, and the future. In the address at Chatham House, Senghor immediately refers to the encounter between diverse territories: “Pan–African discussions,” “Afro-European relations” and “African intellectuals of English and French culture,” examples he cites whose meetings and movements factor into and inspire his conception of a forward-moving, modern Africa. Yet while these new encounters aim towards diversity, as he articulates in his speech, Senghor constrains them to “complementarity,” which poses an important problem according to the theories put forth in this dissertation. Here, we are proponents of difference and our arguments center around the diverse movements of difference: a radical otherness that moves *with*. However, according to Senghor’s political vision as articulated in the Chatham address: “the Africa we want to build, of diverse but complementary elements,” akin to his “parole *poiétique*,” complementarity takes precedence. We must ask ourselves, then, if both difference and complementarity are possible. Or let us ask an even more acute question: have we been theorizing Senghor’s politics and poetry, and particularly the *Élégie*, too idealistically? Some of Senghor’s critics might think so. One such critic does not interpret Senghor’s Négritude, politics or poetics as forward-looking. Manthia Diawara takes Senghor to task for what he calls Senghor’s “primitivization” of Africa: his acceptance of tradition, insistence on the collective and his defense of ritual in everyday life. For Diawara, continuing to embrace these elements after independence impedes African progress and prevents the cultivation of modern and independent subjectivity, all of which (according to him) are crucial for the “salvation of Africa”:

I believe that the salvation of Africa lies in modernization, the creation of secular public spheres, and the freedom of individuals. [...] I believe that, in West Africa, if tradition helped us to resist the various brainwashings of colonialism, independence jump-started

our true modernization. [...] Thus, independence counteracted colonialism in Africa...by endowing oppressed people with the consciousness of a truly modern subjecthood, including the right to freedom, self-determination, and equality under the law.¹⁶⁴

Although he takes a stern stance in regards to Senghor's politics, as the citation above shows, Diawara's most forceful and direct critique of Senghor pertains to the artistic sphere. He claims that the Négritude movement bedims the primitivization of African artists because of its insistence on the Bergsonian concept of *élan vital*, or vital force, which works of art contain.¹⁶⁵ He also resists the ritualistic and collective nature of rhythm and movement and condemns Senghor for attributing these attributes to African art. This, Diawara believes, strips both art and artist of their autonomous identity.¹⁶⁶

Like Diawara, Donna V. Jones (who is perhaps Senghor's sharpest critic of the 21st century) vehemently calls Négritude into question as a motor of change. She considers Césaire, Senghor and the Négritude poets as "poets of a black ancestral myth" whose goals included the attempt "to recover the core of their fabulated common ancestry and to unite themselves around certain shared metaphysical and stylistic assumptions."¹⁶⁷ Jones argues that Négritude's ties to the past, to traditions, to "mythic assumptions," as well as its "vitalist hyperromanticism" are key factors, among others, that undermine its revolutionary capabilities. She states:

¹⁶⁴ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 55–56.

¹⁶⁵ For more on Senghor's position, see Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme*. (Paris: Seuil, 1964); for an well-formulated abbreviated version, see Souleymane Diagne, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 24 May 2010 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/index.html>>.

¹⁶⁶ In his work *In Search of Africa*, Diawara states that the fact that modern artists, filmmakers and musicians from Africa and its diaspora must completely accept the stereotype of themselves as "primitive" in order to be considered artists "is often obscured by the Négritude movement's characterization of African art as the bearer of vital force. Léopold Senghor...is more interested in the symbolic interpretation of the images represented by African masks and statues. He is trapped in an ethnological reading of African art which considered only its functional role in society. For Senghor, rhythm and movement in African art can be understood only in terms of ritual – that is, the collective participation of musicians, dancers, elders, and ancestors in masquerade. In such a context, it is inconceivable for the masks and statues to have an autonomous identity as works of art." *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 195.

¹⁶⁷ Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy. Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 129.

Then, as now, the *Négritude* poets offered Africans the Bergsonian promise of rebecoming who they really are, at least in the terms of a return to traditional values if not traditional structures. At the same time, though, the mythic foundations posited and the unity achieved were not timeless but specific products of colonialism...¹⁶⁸

Négritude's ties to the past are clear, and Diawara and Jones are justified in analyzing this prominent aspect of the Négritude philosophy. Nevertheless, it is difficult to resolve both Diawara and Jones's claims of Négritude as stagnant and backwards because it does not completely break with the past. As we have been advocating thus far, rather than severing all ties with the past, including tradition, Senghor's politics and poetics *move with* it. The move with the past is ironically what makes Senghor a proponent of difference, as Jones herself suggests when she states: "Senghor strove to turn hard differences into soft ones, the clash of cultures into their future communion. But Senghor accepted race differences as they were [...] For Senghor, the task became to reinterpret the extant, not distance it from some future, utopian point."¹⁶⁹ Jones further vindicates Senghor as an agent of difference when she cites Abiole Irele's confirmation of Senghor's commitment not only to difference, but also to the future: "Senghor's advocacy of *Négritude* does not imply therefore a simple return to outmoded customs and institutions – the point needs to be stressed I think – but rather to an original spirit which gave meaning to the life of the individual in traditional African society."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy. Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 131.

¹⁶⁹ Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy. Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 135.

¹⁷⁰ "Senghor's aim...is to explain what constitutes the difference as the black African is concerned, and to demonstrate the originality of his culture and by implication of Negro subcultures in the New World: the originality and the *validity* of their fundamental spirit...Senghor's advocacy of *Négritude* does not imply therefore a simply return to outmoded customs and institutions – the point needs to be stressed I think – but rather to an original spirit which gave meaning to the life of the individual in traditional African society." Irele in Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy. Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 135.

In step with Irele, Denis Ekpo's analysis supports Senghor's political and poetic movements as proponents of difference, even in spite of his acquiescence to the French government and French culture:

Senghor's famous poetic 'return to the source' is thus not a pretext for a sterile traditionalism but a renewal of self-assurance amid the derogatory racist theories of colonial Europe. The poet commemorates the past glories of his race only psychologically to reassure the hitherto disvalued African self of the validity of his non-European form of life, and this to force Europe's recognition of the existence and validity of Africa: Africa is not the Other of civilisation, she is a different civilisation.¹⁷¹

Ekpo's emphasis on Senghor's "return to the source" as "renewal" and not stagnation, concepts that are also present in and illustrated by the *Élégie*,¹⁷² underscores Senghor's commitment to regeneration, change, and hence to the future. The last phrase of the above citation, "...and this to force Europe's recognition of the existence and validity of Africa," is sticky because it grants too much power to the West's recognition of Africa. Nevertheless, it directs our attention to a critical aspect of Senghor's poetic and political movements that we might call his ethical objective, which ideally embrace difference and encourage encounters so as to promote deep transformation not only outside of Africa ("Europe's recognition" of it) but especially inside of Africa (renaissance).

The collision of territories – their encounter – marks the importance of building and creation not through nostalgia but through renaissance, which is reiterated by the temporality that occurs with these movements: the encounter only occurs *in the present* yet its affects and effects reverberate into the future. In both the elegy and his political discourse at Chatham, Senghor harnesses the power of the present by encouraging encounters between differences in order to make deep changes in Senegal. Contrary to

¹⁷¹ Denis Ekpo, "Speak Negritude But Think and Act French: The Foundations of Senghor's Political Philosophy," *Third Text* 24.2 (2010): 228.

¹⁷² Evidence of a "return to the source" might be interpreted two-fold in the elegy: first, in the narrator's reverie of his childhood; second, in the communion with the Queen of Sheba whose geographic location was popularly celebrated as the beginning of "African civilization and culture," especially during the 1960s and 70s.

criticism, he did not turn away from the debilitating effects colonialism had on Africa (and specifically Senegal) by trying to *move with* the West, and especially France. This ethical move – the “éthétique sénégalienne” – reveals how Senghor’s poetics and politics attempt to surpass colonialism on visceral levels: through territories on the geopolitical level, through bodies on the corporeal level.¹⁷³ Both Senghor’s address to Chatham House and the *Élégie*’s dance reflect these two levels despite their sixteen-year difference. What emerges from both the poetic elegy and the more concrete political discourse, therefore, is an embodied ethics: an ethics that not only encounters others, but opens to them and moves with them viscerally and artfully.

III: Ethical Dynamics, Corporeal Cosmopolitanism

...in Senegal we believe that culture should be both the basis and the aim of politics. A nation, in order to be truly a nation, must have a personality of its own. That is why we launched the theory of 'negritude', because we wanted to go back to our sources and re-discover the values of civilization of Black Africa. But if 'negritude' signifies what is deeply rooted in us, according to the evolution of that idea, which is dynamic, we must aim at cultural achievement, and in that cultural achievement we must welcome contributions from outside.¹⁷⁴

Senghor’s insistence upon the importance of the cultural realm is concretized in his political policies. As the first president of an independent Senegal, he actively promoted the interaction of both art and politics, stating: “Literature and art, in fact, are not separated from politics in Senegal.”¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, he supported the National Ballet of

¹⁷³ Although it may seem obvious, it is important to realize that Négritude, based on “blackness” of the skin (as well as, to some, the soul), is corporeal. Nick Nesbitt emphasizes this in his work on Négritude when he mentions the importance Claude McKay played in Senghor’s conception of Négritude. McKay was, to Senghor’s mind, “the true inventor of [the values of] Négritude”: “[...] Far from seeing in one’s blackness an inferiority, one accepts it, one lays claim to it with pride, one cultivates it lovingly.” In *Négritude*, 8 December 2001. Web.

¹⁷⁴ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Some Thoughts on Africa: A Continent in Development,” *International Affairs* 38.2 (1962): 191.

¹⁷⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Some Thoughts on Africa: A Continent in Development,” *International Affairs* 38.2 (1962): 191–192.

Senegal publically and economically, and 25% of Senegal's national budget was allocated to promote Senegalese culture and arts.¹⁷⁶ Of all of the arts, however, Senghor used the dance gesture as a social and political tool to facilitate relations between other countries and cultures. In his political and poetic oeuvre, dance becomes the most radical site of encounter where pure difference meets and cosmopolitan crossings converge. These movements are both political and poetic, which the *Élégie* illustrates through the fertility dance between the Queen of Sheba and the poet; they underscore the importance of opening to the other as well as expose the cosmopolitan position of Senghor's philosophy.

Images of what many critics, including Mildred Mortimer and Ash Berkday, have labeled and theorized "hybridism" abound in Senghor's oeuvre and especially in the *Élégie*.¹⁷⁷ In Senghor's elegy, movement animates these images and the gestural reveals that the images are not hybrid, but cosmopolitan. Whereas hybridity depends on synthesis, i.e. multiple elements that come together and abandon their differences to make a "one," both difference and movement engender cosmopolitanism: "it is not simply *one*, for it admits many versions, born of distinct experiences of displacement and of 'travel'."¹⁷⁸ These ethical dynamics between nostalgia and renaissance that we analyzed above, for example, are movements of difference that explode into embodied ethics via movement, the dance.

If we turn to the first instance of dance in the *Élégie*, which occurs in the middle of Part I, we witness very corporeal dynamics between the human and the vegetal: "Tu

¹⁷⁶ Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

¹⁷⁷ Examples of "hybridism" are related to nation/s, gender and language.

¹⁷⁸ Marina Camboni, "Impure Lines. Multilingualism, Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Women's Poetry," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 1 (2007): 34–44.

m'as visité à chaque degré parmi les six, ma Noire, / à chaque printemps solennel / Ma Belle, quand la sève chantait, dansait dans mes / jambes mes reins ma poitrine ma tête.”¹⁷⁹ In this verse, dance is evoked corporeally and hyllic images proliferate the lexical field: “jambes,” “reins,” “poitrine,” “tête.” Here, it is not the human body that is dancing but the “sap” or “vigor” (*sève*) that dances inside of the poet’s body. Senghor’s familiar vegetal topos is present in “la sève chantait, dansait” (if we interpret “sève” to mean “sap”), an image that highlights the importance Senghor attributes to nature’s dynamism from which the human body receives vitality, inspiration and fertility.¹⁸⁰ It also attests to the importance of moving *with* since both the sap and the poet’s body maintain their difference while moving with each other. This is an “assemblage” that proposes an ethics which takes place on the physical plane, thus exceeding any conceptual moment of pantheistic reverie. Visceral vocabulary that embodies nature and seeps corporality forces the elegy beyond symbolism: the poem becomes physically actualized through the dance, which makes the poet’s body “multiple”: it is both human and vegetal, both political and poetic, both literal and lyrical. Theorized in choreographic terms as a “rhythmic exchange in the space-body,”¹⁸¹ the poet’s body and thus the poetic text are thrust towards a renaissance of form – one that constructs man and nature onto one page, but which encourages them to move together as forces, freely in their differences.

Cosmopolitan and corporeal movements also occur on the linguistic plane of the elegy and are spurred by the dynamics of difference that we have analyzed above. The

¹⁷⁹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 333.

¹⁸⁰ This imagery is strongly influenced by Henri Bergson and his conception of the *élan vital*.

¹⁸¹ Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects* (Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007) 67.

placement of the word *dansait* in the passage is significant: separated by a comma, it is juxtaposed with *chantait*: "...quand la sève chantait, dansait dans mes / jambes [...]." This linguistic juxtaposition of *dansait* and *chantait* suggests that the auditory and the visual are indispensable elements in creative, fertile artistic production. It confirms the poem as a sensori-motor assemblage, "a joint system of sensations and movements" hinged in present between nostalgia and renaissance, through the encounters of differences.¹⁸²

Subsequently, it is within the poetic body that is both form and force where these artistic elements collide. Mildred Mortimer comments on this phenomenon, drawing from her research on Abiola Irele, when she states that Senghor's "poetic method" is a synthesis of the "framework of French poetry" and "elements of the oral poetry tradition." According to Mortimer and in the vein of Irele, "rhythm and sound become important elements to convey the African poet's grounding in oral tradition and his link to the spoken word."¹⁸³ The writer and poet Alain Bosquet also recognized the sensory and vibrational qualities of Senghor's poetics and articulated its importance, stating that this "uniqueness" found in Senghorian poetics stems from the Francophone African influence. In his *Lettre à un poète, lettre à un continent*,¹⁸⁴ he writes to Senghor upon

¹⁸² We examined this citation from Bergson in the first part of the chapter, and its relevance emerges again. In full it states: "Now the immediate past, in so far as it is perceived, is, as we shall see, sensation, since every sensation translates a very long succession of elementary vibrations, and the immediate future, in so far as it is being determined, is action or movement. My present, then, is both sensation and movement; since my present forms an undivided whole, then the movement must be linked with the sensation, must prolong its action. Whence I conclude that my present consists in a joint system of sensations and movements. My present is, in its essence, sensori-motor." Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988) 138.

¹⁸³ Mildred Mortimer, "Sine and Seine: The Quest for Synthesis in Senghor's Life and Poetry," *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 42–43.

¹⁸⁴ N.B.: Senghor included several letters he received from some of his contemporaries in his oeuvre in order to facilitate his readers' comprehension of his poetry (especially the *Élégies*) and of Francophone poetry in general. He states: "Je livre donc ces quatre textes à mes lecteurs. Ils les éclaireront, non seulement sur les *Élégies* majeures, mais, ce qui est mieux, sur la poésie francophone..." (363).

reading his poetry: “Je découvrais une vibration inconnue pour moi, un vocabulaire qui roulait ses rocs et ses écorces.”¹⁸⁵

Rather than conflate the distinctive elements of Senghor’s poetics that Bosquet attributes to its “Africanness” and that Mortimer ascribes to synthesis, we can theorize both as emerging from the interplay of difference that movement in the text brings to light. The incorporation of sensory, natural or vegetal imagery is not uncommon in poetry, yet Senghor animates his poetic lexicon, and thus the body of the poem, with living, visceral, and sensational vocabulary that is illustrated through the memory as well as the fertility dance. Here, we see once again the “moving-with” of form and force – “deux danses parallèles” – that dance profoundly illustrates, as articulated by dance theorist Dee Reynolds who states that dance is “illuminated corporeality, animated form.”¹⁸⁶

The “animated form” extends beyond the actual bodies in the text; it is also relevant to what Alain Bosquet and Robert Jouanny describe as cosmopolitan linguistics. Bosquet describes the distinctiveness and importance of the Senghorian poetic lexicon in his letter to Senghor when he writes: “Il m’est apparu que l’espèce humaine, chez vous, donnait au langage un rythme de chair et de sang, de vertèbre et de peau lisse, de sorte que se refait la greffe de la parole sur l’anatomie.”¹⁸⁷ This fleshly observation confirms the complementary companionship of three elements found in Senghor’s poetry – the corporeal, rhythmic, and linguistic – whose movements *with* each other make poetry

¹⁸⁵ Alain Bosquet, “Lettre à un poète, lettre à un continent,” Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Oeuvre poétique. Poésie*. (Paris: Seuil, 1990) 366.

¹⁸⁶ Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects* (Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007) 65.

¹⁸⁷ My translation: “It occurred to me that the human species, according to you, gives language a rhythm of flesh and blood, of spine and smooth skin to the point that language’s graft on anatomy is remade.” Alain Bosquet, “Dialogue sur la poésie francophone,” Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Oeuvre poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) 367.

come alive. Juxtaposition, one of Senghor's major poetic devices that thrives on the dynamics of "moving-with," makes this possible. Dr. S.O. Mezu affirms the importance of juxtaposition in Senghor's poetics, which also reveals Senghor's step away from the classical French poetic tradition, in his observation that: "Dans la syntaxe de Senghor, c'est la juxtaposition qui domine contrairement à la syntaxe de subordination du français classique."¹⁸⁸ Let us refer back to several verses of the elegy's fourth movement: "Pour exploser, la gorge éclore, dans l'éclat serein du / Printemps, le parfum sombre du gongo, la terre / de la chair. / [...] / Ce sont deux danses parallèles, regardant respirant / l'haleine de la brise." Here, Senghor juxtaposes, or puts into play, several differences: "éclat" and "serein"; "terre" and "chair"; "regardant" and "respirant," yet the most significant play of difference occurs between the poet and the Queen in their fertility dance, which Senghor describes as difference: "deux danses parallèles." This illustrates a most intimate encounter where even linguistic differences do not end in synthesis but continue to "move-with" each other. These juxtapositions, or assemblages, create a flux, or flow, that is evidence of a cosmopolitan space.¹⁸⁹ That these linguistic differences engender difference and cosmopolitanism, and thus illustrate "parole *poïétique*," exemplifies the "éthétique sénéghorienne" that emerges from the *Élégie*, from the poem's sensational imagery to its viscerally cosmopolitan linguistic dance.

¹⁸⁸ In *Léopold Sédar Senghor et La Défense et Illustration de la Civilisation Noire* (Paris: M. Didier, 1968) 167.

¹⁸⁹ Camboni, who focuses on identity politics, states that a cosmopolitan space is that "where self and other, the local and the world, meet and frontiers recede." Although such identity politics are not put forth in this dissertation (they are discouraged), Camboni's description of cosmopolitan space is helpful. See Marina Camboni, "Impure Lines. Multilingualism, Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Women's Poetry," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 1 (2007): 34–44.

We have explored this in relation to the first instance of dance in the *Élégie*; now we shall move towards the last textual analysis, and most controversial concept, of the poem: *l'amour métis*.

The theme of *l'amour métis*, according to most critics, is the keystone of Senghor's *Élégie* and represents his personal and political philosophies. Its role is so fundamental that the entire *Élégie* has been analyzed as "an affirmation of 'l'amour métissé'".¹⁹⁰ Janice Spleth posits that the *amour métis* of the *Élégie* is a metaphor for the love between Senghor and his French wife, Colette Hubert, as well as a "celebration of the biological and cultural cross-breeding or métissage that had come to embellish the original essentialism of Senghor's philosophy of Negritude."¹⁹¹ According to Spleth, the corporeal unification that the elegy's fertility dance illustrates signifies the unification of two nations, the African and the Semitic. The Queen of Sheba in Senghor's *Élégie*, she posits, is an exemplification of the glorified African soul to whom the poet refers in the text as "ma Noire" and "Ma Belle." In addition, Spleth states that Sheba, as constructed and portrayed in the *Élégie*, is not purely African but multi-racial: she is composed of African, Hebraic and Arabic elements.¹⁹² She does affirm, however, that "the spirit of Africa is of paramount importance in this expression of what Senghor calls the 'Negro–Semitic dialectic.' ... there is no ambiguity in [Senghor's] mind about the race to which

¹⁹⁰ Nespoulous-Neville in Janice Spleth, "The Arabic Constituents of Africanité: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba," *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 62.

¹⁹¹ Janice Spleth, "The Arabic Constituents of Africanité: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba," *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 62.

¹⁹² I will not go into detail about this here, for it is the basis of Spleth's argument, which she explains in her article.

the Queen of Sheba belongs. She is Ethiopian in the original, classical sense of the word [...].”¹⁹³

According to these theories and following the trajectory of synthesis where “two become one,” the Queen of Sheba of Senghor’s *Élégie* must be African. Her African soul, unified with the poet’s African but Western influenced soul, is a tribute to the most sublime synthesis possible in Senghorian ideology.¹⁹⁴ By virtue of the poet’s unification with the Queen, which made possible through dance, the poet is brought back to his “roots” and “la boucle est bouclée.” Yet, as our analysis has demonstrated thus far, the movements of the dance break apart the concept of synthesis and promote a moving-with that is dependent upon difference. This is reiterated in the elegy’s penultimate section by the words “deux danses parallèles,” which affirms the moving together of differences under one fertility dance. The final verses of the elegy further confirm these parallel and different movements through the juxtaposition of the personal pronouns “tu,” where the poet refers to the Queen, and “je,” where the poet refers to himself. Here, “nous” never emerges, but a new world is born: “Quand ta bouche odeur de goyave mûre, tes bras boas / m’emprisonnent contre ton cœur et ton râle rythmé / Lors je crée le poème : le monde nouveau dans la joie pascalle.”¹⁹⁵ If we follow suit with the above theories that center around synthesis and concur that the Queen is symbolic of Africa, then we must accept

¹⁹³ Janice Spleth, “The Arabic Constituents of Africanité: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba,” *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002): 68.

¹⁹⁴ See Spleth, page 61, where she states: “[Sheba] is as well the African soul with which the poet, by virtue of his contact with the West, must be reunited.” In “The Arabic Constituents of Africanité: Senghor and the Queen of Sheba,” *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (2002).

¹⁹⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 340. “Nous” never emerges because the Queen expires. My translation: “When your mouth odor of ripe guava, your arms boas / imprison me against your heart and your rhythmic moan / During which I create the poem : the new world in pascal joy”. This is a very complex ending which merits more room than is available for discussion. Let us keep in mind that the poem is an elegy, and the moan, which can be interpreted as the moan of one’s last breath, is in accordance with the genre of the poem.

that her death (“ton rôle rythmé”) is also the end of the Africa of nostalgia as well as the one known today. Yet despite Senghor’s “quest for synthesis,”¹⁹⁶ the dynamics of difference prove to be more powerful, and the interplay between *lieux de mémoire* and *lieux de renaissance*, between “self” and “other,” between nations, and between languages ultimately give way to the new. From the encounters of the *Élégie*’s differences spring creation, a new world: “Lors je crée le poème : le monde nouveau [...]” The elegy’s final verses remind us that Senghor was not only a politician and a philosopher, but that he was, above all, a poet – a profession he linked to activity and to life more than any other. In his *Lettre à trois poètes de l’Hexagone*, he writes: “...la poésie est, dans notre vie, non pas le métier mais l’activité majeure: la vie de notre vie, sans quoi celle-ci ne serait pas vie.”¹⁹⁷ Poetry, for Senghor, is an interplay of differences: it is both vision and creation, both form and force, both memory and renaissance, both self and other, both death’s “rôle rythmé” and “le monde nouveau.” Such dances demonstrate that ultimately, neither the Queen nor the poet needs to *resolve* his or her differences through poetic synthesis. Rather, the interplay between differences forces each one to plunge into the other and, as a result, each becomes more open, more moved, more different, more creative, and thus more ethical than he, or she, was before.

Perhaps unbeknownst to him, Senghor’s poetics show cosmopolitan and corporeal ethical movements that result not in unity, but that emerge from and encourage difference and diversity. It is for this reason that the *Élégie* does not stagnate in nostalgia or stumble in synthesis. The encounters between the French language, Western poetic form, and African tradition infused with lyricism and dance from the East and West become a

¹⁹⁶ Mildred Mortimer puts forth the idea of Senghor’s “quest for synthesis.”

¹⁹⁷ In “Dialogue sur la poésie francophone,” *Œuvre Poétique. Poésie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990) 382.

veritable living philosophy: an “éthétique sénégalienne” that consists of sensory and sensual cosmopolitan forms and forces moving-with each other. In this respect, language and ideas do not lie dormant between the pages of a book. Through encounters with each other, they leap from the page and live in the present, paving the way for the future. Nietzsche wrote that “(o)nly in the dance do I know how to tell the parable of the highest things.” Perhaps, therefore, the parable Senghor illustrates through dance in the *Élégie pour la Reine de Saba* is one that harmoniously depicts the possibility of “living-with” through diversity, which can inspire us today on the political, poetic and personal levels. Albeit utopian, investigating this possibility alone proves that the *Élégie* incites renaissance, inspiring us to think, to create...and hopefully, to dance.

Chapter Three

Vers Le Soleil

In 2009, Ariane Mnouchkine was awarded the International Ibsen Award. The official announcement from the committee regarding their reasons for choosing

Mnouchkine states:

Everyone who has seen one of Ariane Mnouchkine's productions at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris leaves with the feeling of having been part of a tale of enchantment. A tale that is larger than life but at the same time reveals life. A fantastic journey that throws fresh light on history and contemporary society, that enriches thought and feeling and in dramatic language inspires an apparently paradoxical faith in the future.¹⁹⁸

How do Mnouchkine's theatrical productions relay such enchantment? How do they oscillate between that which is "larger than life" and everyday "material" life, while at the same time inspiring faith in the future? Through movement; in its most corporeal incarnation, which are the physical aspects of the theatrical productions, as well as conceptually, where it is a foundation of the theatre troupe's philosophy. It is well known that Mnouchkine places particular importance on the Soleil's actors' physical training and corporeal gesture, which are influenced by cosmopolitan theatrical practices from the East (including those from Japan, India, Tibet and China) and the West (including Shakespeare, Artaud and Brecht). Movement also translates into a fundamental aspect of the Théâtre du Soleil's radical practice of "living-with" that Mnouchkine refers to as *faire ensemble*: "Qui dit coopérer dit 'travailler ensemble, faire

¹⁹⁸ From *The International Ibsen Award*. Nationaltheatret. n.d. Web.

œuvre commune’.”¹⁹⁹ Both concept and practice, *faire ensemble* occurs both on-, back- and off-stage, and involves actors, production participants and audience alike. This philosophy/act confirms Mnouchkine’s insistence that theater is a collaborative, political and even ethical art that is put into motion by everyone who encounters, and thus participates in, it. *Faire ensemble*, as both act and concept, therefore, constitutes the core of this chapter around which we will analyze movement as it is expressed in two of the Soleil’s productions: *1789* and *Richard II*. Here we will discover how the sensual aspect of theatre – movement and gesture, which go hand in hand with *faire ensemble* – weaves spectacular stories that animate living and livable ethics: an ethics of difference that embodies and engenders cosmopolitanism, openness, collectivity, process, and practice. Ultimately, Mnouchkine produces choreographies of cosmopolitanism and community that step toward and embrace the world at large, inviting us to participate in radically different ways of living now, and for the future.

Faire ensemble: Il était une fois...

In Senghor’s *Élégie*, we witnessed the manifestation of a cosmopolitan “moving-with” through the interplay of bodies in a fertility dance. Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil amplifies this notion and, in a similar corporeal vein, transforms it into a cosmopolitan “living-with.” Created in 1964 by a group of friends from the Sorbonne as “la Société coopérative ouvrière de production,” the Théâtre du Soleil is a unique and dynamic “tribe” that is simultaneously a “family,” a theater troupe, “une école de

¹⁹⁹ Marie-Louise and Denis Bablet, “Vers un théâtre autre,” *Le Théâtre du Soleil ou la quête du Bonheur*. (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1979) 7-9.

formation,” a “quête,” and an adventure.²⁰⁰ In his account of Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil,²⁰¹ Jacques Nichet, specialist of contemporary French theater and former colleague of Mnouchkine, emphasizes the importance of the concept of “ensemble” not only in the troupe’s theatrical philosophy, but also in its experiences as a collective that lives together in daily life. He states: “il suffit pour faire du théâtre d’être juste ensemble.”²⁰² According to Nichet, the beauty in this philosophy is its simplicity, for the Soleil was founded upon the idea of “être ensemble pour fonder un ensemble,” and not on a particular ideology.²⁰³ Mnouchkine particularly esteems the anti-ideological foundations of the troupe, which is reflected in her quotation: “nous n’étions ni Brechtien, ni rien.”²⁰⁴ Since its inception by “a group of ten idealistic young students in Paris in 1964”²⁰⁵ and especially in its formative years (1966-1970), the troupe was just “together,” open to other possibilities, other spaces and other practices²⁰⁶ and therefore

²⁰⁰ Mnouchkine refers to the Soleil as “un tribu,” a tribe, and the quoted terminology are her words from Béatrice Picon-Vallin, “Une oeuvre d’art commune,” *Théâtre/Public* N°124-125 (1995) 74-83. Web.

²⁰¹ Jacques Nichet, “Le théâtre n'existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L'Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio.

²⁰² Jacques Nichet, “Le théâtre n'existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L'Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio.

²⁰³ It is ironic, then, that one of the reasons Mnouchkine states for not speaking much about her production *1789* is that it was simplistic. This is found at the conclusion of Nichet’s show on Mnouchkine: Jacques Nichet, “Le théâtre n'existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L'Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio.

²⁰⁴ Jacques Nichet, “Le théâtre n'existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L'Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio. Please note that this quotation does not imply that Mnouchkine rejects Brecht, but rather that she rejects ideology. This is evident when she states that she sees Brecht and Brechtian theatrical practices as a “vision” instead of an “ideology.” In Agnieszka Karch, “Theatre for the People: The Impact of Brechtian Theory on the Production and Performance of 1789 by Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil,” *Opticon* 1826 Spring 2011: 1-7.

²⁰⁵ David Williams, “A Grain of Sand in the Works: Continuity and Change at the Théâtre du Soleil,” Ed. David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre. The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) xi.

²⁰⁶ This statement might appear to oversimplify the beginnings of the Soleil, but it is a paraphrase of Jacques Nichet’s words. If we place the statement in its proper cultural, socio-political and historical context, it may seem less simplistic and more idealistic, which I believe it is. In “Le théâtre n'existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L'Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio.

open to other ways not only producing a theatre outside of convention, but also of creating different ways of living: “d’autres propositions pour vivre autrement.”²⁰⁷

That the Soleil does theatre just to be together is nonetheless an understatement, however romantic, modest, or simple the idea appears. An important and distinctive outcome of the openness that springs from *faire ensemble* is theatre that not only results in performances, but that is an entire process leading up to, and including, the performance. Such a dynamic method, which is also a practice, entails first and foremost collaboration and collective participation, beginning with the “director” herself.

The twentieth century marked a significant evolution of the concept of the “director,” attributed to a great extent to the influence of the historical avant-garde. This evolution was set into motion at the end of the nineteenth century and included three principle directors whose methods and theatres transformed the French stage: André Antoine and his Théâtre Libre, which opened on March 30, 1887; Jacques Copeau and the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier that opened on October 23, 1913; and the French actor and director Aurélien Lugné-Poë whose Théâtre de l’Œuvre opened with Maeterlink’s *Pélleas et Mélisande* in May of 1792, and produced Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* in December, 1896.²⁰⁸ Theatre continued to be revolutionized throughout the twentieth century by directors including Antonin Artaud, and subsequently Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht.²⁰⁹ The avant-garde’s influential role on/in theatre combined with her

²⁰⁷ Jacques Nichet, “Le théâtre n’existe pas: Les clowns, 1789, 1793 (Ariane Mnouchkine).” Narr. Christine Goémé. *L’Eloge du savoir*. France Culture. 16 December 2010. Radio.

²⁰⁸ For more on these directors, see Bettina L. Knapp. *The Reign of the Theatrical Director. French Theatre: 1887-1924*. (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1988).

²⁰⁹ See Brian Singleton, “Ariane Mnouchkine: Activism, formalism, cosmopolitanism,” Maria M. and Dan Rebellato Ed. Delgado, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). The implication of the avant-garde on the concept of the director and in the evolution of theatre in general are important issues that go beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more information, please see

theatrical involvement during the 1950s, the socio-historical context of France in the 1960's (including *Mai '68*), and a life-changing exploration of Asia²¹⁰ at the age of twenty-three opened Mnouchkine's eyes to doing theatre differently. She gradually transformed the conception and position of director from *metteur en scène*, which "implied a functionality for the role in a predominantly author-centered theatre," to the German word *Probenleiter*, meaning "rehearsal director" yet evoking the sense of someone who leads rehearsals.²¹¹ This gesture is the first of a long choreography that marks Mnouchkine's commitment to theatre as a "doing together": a collective practice and process rather than an autocratic product.

The themes of openness, collectivity, practice, and process are echoed in the inner-workings of the troupe at the *Cartoucherie*, beginning with rehearsals. Rehearsals at the Soleil serve as practice sessions: there are no textual analyses or dramatic lectures carried out and no work done around the table.²¹² It is a raw, visceral time and space ripe with discovery, collaboration and creation, described as the following:

From the beginning, Mnouchkine and the actors are in a mode of discovery and creation, rather than in interpretation or repetition. The set is not built, other than the empty 14 x 14 square meter platform on which the actors rehearse; and scenes are not worked in any special order. Mnouchkine tells the story of what they will attempt to create. This initial narrative is the crucial moment for establishing the tone, the outlook and the goal of the production. Actors might be encouraged to do their own research ...or they might even travel beforehand...But their time on the rehearsal stage will be spent in improvising, after donning costumes and masks or make-up that will help establish the characters. [...]

Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Richard Drain, *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

²¹⁰ At the age of twenty-three, Mnouchkine took a one-year trip around Asia and the Middle-east (Japan, India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Taiwan, Afghanistan, Turkey and Iran), interacting with and photographing people in performers. The experience is noted to have changed her life and profoundly influenced her theatrical practices. This, along with the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s that culminated in the events of May 68, are primordial factors in the shaping of the Théâtre du Soleil. See Judith Miller, particularly Chapter 1 of *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) and Josette Féral, *Rencontres avec Ariane Mnouchkine. Dresser un monument à l'éphémère* (Montréal: XYZ éditeur, 1995).

²¹¹ Brian Singleton, "Ariane Mnouchkine: Activism, formalism, cosmopolitanism," Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato, Ed., *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 32.

²¹² Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 49-50.

There will usually be two or three months of rehearsals before a consensus is reached that the feel is right. Then the designers go ahead and execute the performance costumes, the set pieces, and the final music. Casting is also done at this point. Those actors who are not cast will spend their time in the workshops, kitchen, or administration, or on the technical aspects of the show, including physically carrying out the set changes.²¹³

Constructing rehearsals as collaborative, experimental *ateliers* is innovative on Mnouchkine's part, yet follows suit with the avant-garde influences of twentieth century theatre as well as the revolutionary tendencies of the 1960s. Where it becomes truly exceptional is how the Soleil's collective and cosmopolitan threads interlace stunning aesthetics with politics, philosophy and ethics.

In order to weave together the diverse threads of poetry, politics, philosophy, history, and ethics, for example, the Soleil draws on two important techniques. The first stems from Jacques Lecoq, one of the most important theorists and teachers of (physical) theatre of the twentieth century, whose technique creates a foundation for both the actors and the production as a whole. His method uses the body as the principle theatrical tool and it is only after full corporeal training that the actors train with words. Mnouchkine says of Lecoq: "Grâce à lui, on a compris que le corps était l'outil primordial. Après avoir éduqué son corps, le comédien pouvait se nourrir des mots."²¹⁴ David Bradby, Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at Royal Holloway in London, calls Lecoq's physical technique "the laying down of sediments" – rudimentary movement and speech acts that the actor must be able to relate afresh in order "to enter into the necessary state of creative openness."²¹⁵ The actor must fully embody movements and speech ranging from

²¹³ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 50.

²¹⁴ My translation: "Thanks to him [Lecoq], we understood that the body was the primordial tool. After having trained his body, the actor could feed himself with words." Ariane Mnouchkine in Fabienne Pascaud, *Ariane Mnouchkine: L'art du présent. Entretiens avec Fabienne Pascaud*. (Paris: Plon, 2005) 25.

²¹⁵ "Lecoq believed that all human beings share a 'universal poetic sense' [*fonds poétique*]. He believed that the ability to respond creatively, or poetically, depended on the laying down of a series of sediments through the universally shared experiences of being born, nurtured, developing movement and speech, and discovering a world of movement, objects, sounds, colors, and other human beings outside ourselves. For

being born to taking one's first step that also serve to create openness and a sense of discovery in him. There is a domino effect in this technique for, while such techniques open up and train the actor's body, they also open up the production to ethics: possibilities of transformation and doing/living otherwise both in theatre and in everyday life. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben outlines this link between movement and ethics, explaining that movement "allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them."²¹⁶ Movement, therefore, "cracks open" performance to allow for an ethics to spill forth which, at the Soleil, is a sensual and dynamic ethics of *faire ensemble* that, using the body, entails opening toward, engagement and moving-with difference. In an interview with Jean Perret, the *Probenleiter* herself insists upon the power of (re)discovery via the body and corporeal movement and confirms it as the Soleil's path: "In rediscovering [ancient theatrical gesture] you transform. You set off; you learn. You rediscover; you transform. That is, at least, the path we take..."²¹⁷ Lecoq's assertion that rediscovery leads to transformation makes clear that the integration of ancient gestures and movements into performance does not equate imitation or mimicry, nor does it require "living in the past," for as Lecoq states in his essay "The Gestures of Life": "The body reflects its society, its milieu and its period."²¹⁸

an actor to enter into the necessary state of creative openness, he had to be able to relate afresh to these basic discoveries." David Bradby, "Editor's Introduction," Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) xii.

²¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 58. Also see Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch. Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 8.

²¹⁷ In David Bradby, "Editor's Introduction," Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 133.

²¹⁸ Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 27.

The particularity of the body to its society, milieu and its period is a concept Mnouchkine employs at the Soleil beginning at rehearsals. She constructs rehearsals as experimental processes that, rather than imitate a particular cultural dance or specific sacred ritual in full, *engage with* traditional gestures drawn from global corporeal practices, such as Kathakali dance from India or Japanese kabuki theatre. The incorporation of Asian-inspired gestures and movements into theatrical productions is not new in Western theatre. Copeau's Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier produced a Japanese Nō play, *Kantan*, during its 1923-24 season²¹⁹ and Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Œuvre staged Sanskrit dramas.²²⁰ Theorist Adrian Kiernander, who works closely with the Soleil, further confirms this when he writes that we might "recall the 'Turkish' scenes in Moliere, Voltaire's use of Chinese elements"²²¹ and more recently, Asian theatre's "[...] explicit influence on many European directors including Copeau, Brecht, Artaud and more recently Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba."²²² Mnouchkine stands apart from her contemporaries, such as Brook and Barba, however, precisely because the Soleil engages with Asian corporeal practices in performance, but does not try to imitate the entire *récit* or ritual as the production itself.²²³ At the Soleil, the players are encouraged to spend

²¹⁹ John Rudlin. *Jacques Copeau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 48-50.

²²⁰ Bettina L. Knapp, "The Reign of the Theatrical Director: Antoine and Lugné-Poë," *The French Review*. Vol. 61, No. 6 (May, 1988: 866-877.

²²¹ Marvin Carlson, "Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages to India?," *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Ed. Patrice Pavis (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 80.

²²² In "Introduction to 'The Theater is Oriental,'" *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 93.

²²³ "Contrairement à d'autres artistes comme Brook par exemple, ce ne sont pas des récits que Mnouchkine emprunte à l'Orient, des mythologies, une spiritualité, une philosophie mais très concrètement un rapport au corps, à la voix, à la scène, à l'espace, au costume. Son goût pour la dramaturgie, lui, reste délibérément occidental, un Occident dont elle apprécie la grandeur et où elle puise avec plaisir : Shakespeare, Eschyle, Euripide, Molière, Mann. C'est au croisement de ces deux continents du théâtre que Mnouchkine choisit de se situer." Josette Féral, "L'Orient révisité," *Le Théâtre du Soleil* (n.d. Web.) 2. This article is taken from Féral's work *Trajectoire du Soleil* (Paris: Editions Théâtrales, 1998). I would like to add to Féral's argument that Mnouchkine situates herself in the intersection of *at least* two continents (instead of only two).

time and *move with* different theatrical techniques, and notably corporeal practices, in order to produce expressions that are particular to them and to the collective. Leonard Pronko, chairman of the Theatre Department at Pomona College and director of kabuki productions for over twenty years, confirms Mnouchkine's commitment to creating innovative productions. In his powerful article entitled "After Hanako...", he states:

It is never Mnouchkine's intent simply to impose a form of a style. Her actors invariably spend many months mastering techniques and making them their own in a very personal way before they are embodied in performance. Most of her actors have been with her for many years and possess a solid training in *commedia dell'arte*, acrobatics, and other physical forms of theatre. For Richard II, Mnouchkine apparently undertook no serious study of *kabuki* or *nō*, but simply worked with what she had seen, transposing it for the needs of the play and the abilities of her actors until she achieved something that, physically and vocally, recalled the intensity, energy, and concentration of various oriental forms. At no point was there any clear imitation. What struck the viewer was the authority with which the actors performed. Nothing seemed arbitrary, all was suited to the needs of the moment. This was possible because the actors had worked so long to gradually create their own style, only obliquely related to any specific techniques of *kabuki* or *nō*.²²⁴

In her extensive work on Mnouchkine, the Soleil and Orientalism, Josette Féral also insists upon the fact that Mnouchkine does not copy or imitate "Oriental practices" but instead uses them as a theatrical "working tool":

Mnouchkine ne copie pas les pratiques orientales et ne cherche pas à les reproduire dans ses spectacles. Elles constituent d'abord, pour elle, un outil de travail, non une finalité en soi. Mnouchkine admire l'Asie certes, s'en inspire, s'en nourrit mais elle ne cherche nullement à importer telles quelles les formes artistiques orientales dans ses spectacles.²²⁵

What, then, is the purpose of being "fueled" by different movements, such as those inspired by Asian theatres such as Kathakali or kabuki for example, or rather, what does it do to theatre at the Soleil? Adrian Kiernander states that the incorporation of Asian theatrical practices in a Western dramatic context "requires and enables a violent rupture with naturalism."²²⁶ The space of this rupture that Kiernander highlights is

²²⁴ Leonard C. Pronko, "After Hanako...", *Asian Theatre Journal* Vol 5, No. 1. Spring (1988): 87.

²²⁵ Josette Féral, "L'Orient révisité," *Le Théâtre du Soleil* (n.d. Web.) 2.

²²⁶ Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 93.

crucial for several reasons. Here, actors can move with absolute mobility thus expanding performance possibilities – they are able “to confront concerns which would be cramped or excluded by a superficially realist theatrical style.”²²⁷ The Soleil’s performances of difference, which are informed by different global practices of movement, breaks through the realist style and opens up theater beyond representation to promote *faire ensemble* between performers as well as between performer and spectator. In this respect, they evolve from performances into practices that lived through and transmitted via the body. This is the theatre of “nerfs et cœur” that wakes us up, the theatre “qui nous réveille: nerfs et cœur,” which Artaud envisions.²²⁸ Both philosophy and physical practice, *faire ensemble* allows the Soleil players to transmit a “visceral connection”²²⁹ between themselves on the stage that also extends into the audience, creating encounters between performer, performance and spectator that actively engage the audience in the theatrical action.²³⁰ Such a technique highlights Mnouchkine’s propensity toward the sensual power of theatre, as opposed to its textual or purely psychological power. This is evident in a statement she gives during a *stage de théâtre* where she explains that:

Il n’y a pas de *Dramaturg* chez nous [...] Je pense qu’il faut savoir qu’une dramaturgie ne s’écrit pas forcément avec un papier et un crayon. [...] Nous n’avons pas besoin d’écrire la dramaturgie, ce sont les corps qui la font. Le théâtre, ce sont des corps, le théâtre, c’est l’art du corps. Quand on dit que le théâtre, c’est le texte, je réponds: non, le texte, c’est la littérature du théâtre, et s’il n’y pas un corps d’actrice ou d’acteur qui entre, il n’y a pas de théâtre.²³¹

²²⁷ Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 94.

²²⁸ In “Le Théâtre et son double,” *Œuvres complètes IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 82.

²²⁹ Lee Jamieson uses this terminology to describe Artaud’s screams in the work *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, which is relevant to the context concerning performer and spectator engagement at the Soleil. In Lee Jamieson, *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 2007) 53.

²³⁰ We will discuss this in more detail in the section below entitled “Audience Engagement.”

²³¹ In *Ariane Mnouchkine*. Ed. Béatrice Picon-Vallin. (Arles: Actes Sud, 2009) 52-53.

Mnouchkine's emphasis on the corporeal in "writing" plays is both Asian-inspired and deeply reverberates Artaudian tones.²³² Artaud writes in "En finir avec les chefs d'œuvre": "Je propose donc un théâtre où des images physiques violentes broient et hypnotisent la sensibilité du spectateur pris dans le théâtre comme dans un tourbillon de forces supérieures."²³³ This image clarifies how the performances (of difference) at the Soleil are collectively created in the present moment of the performance, which occurs through a vortex of forces that engages and envelopes performers and spectators in the most sensory ways. Utilizing movement this way, in order to engage the performers and spectators both on- and off-stage, thus turn theatre into a collective experience – *faire ensemble* to the extreme – and is the primary way in which the Soleil pries open theatrical convention, from whence ethics emerge.²³⁴ This shows, as Margaret Shrewing writes, the commitment of mid- to late-twentieth century European theatre troupes' (such as those of Mnouchkine, Vilar, Strehler, Littlewood, Planchon, and Brecht) "to cracking open ossified performance, repertoire and design by widening the audience and recovering the civic dimensions of drama."²³⁵ In order to see specifically how the Soleil breaks open performance in this way, let us turn to the beginning movements of their production of *Richard II*, which was part of the Shakespeare series, in order to more concretely examine the troupe in practice.

²³² Judith Miller highlights Mnouchkine's move away from the text when she writes: "Artaud's exhilarating and confounding writings underlie and bolster theoretically her move away from textual centeredness to performances that take their meaning notably through gesture, sound, and spatial configurations. Mnouchkine has flirted with bracketing texts and giving them secondary status during her entire career. She has also refined her physical work to promote a kind of actor-athlete-dancer reminiscent of Artaud's 'athlete of the heart.'" In *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 17.

²³³ From "Le Théâtre et son double," *Œuvres complètes IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 80.

²³⁴ This, I argue, is the main difference between Mnouchkine and Brecht. Whereas Brecht uses distance and "alienation" as a technique to shake up, and wake up, the audience, Mnouchkine uses distance and extreme engagement, *faire ensemble*, to make change. The specifics of Mnouchkine's *faire ensemble* are discussed in more detail as the chapter progresses.

²³⁵ In *King Richard II* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 166.

The Soleil's performance of *Richard II* opened on December 10, 1981 at La Cartoucherie. Following its great success, including winning the prestigious *Grand Prix du Théâtre* in 1982, the Soleil was invited to stage it, along with *La Nuit des rois* (*Twelfth Night*), at the 1982 *Festival d'Avignon*. This production, of which the opening scene is the object of our analysis here, was held outdoors at the *Cour d'Honneur du Palais des Papes* in Avignon, France – a setting that is spacious, grandiose and airy and thus appropriate for the actor's sizable costumes, extensive gestures and expansive movements on stage. The scene opens brusquely: music akin to Japanese taiko drums sounds²³⁶ while nine actors – King Richard and eight members of his court – collectively leap and bound from the stage's left wing around and then onto center stage, reminiscent of a volery of birds swooping around in the sky. The stage is made up of "sloping platforms...which allow the actors the greatest freedom of movement."²³⁷ The Soleil players dart and dash their way onto stage in a spiral fashion, yet we do not know "who" each character is. Although each character's costume differs in color and detail, and the movements and gestures he uses (including running, jumping and leaping) render him visibly unique, his specific social identity is de-emphasized in the staging due to the "grandness" of costumes, gestures and the stage itself. It is not until the drum beat changes and the characters, through jumps and leaps, file into a line across the stage (on the beat of the drums) that the *personnage principal* emerges from the group: King Richard. The movement of the collective into a single-file line draws attention to the King's particular "difference": at this moment, we notice that he is the only character dressed in white. Yet at the same time, his commanding gestures that, upon an arm raise

²³⁶ See the group Kodo: Shawn Bender, "Of Roots and Race: Discourses of Body and Place in Japanese Taiko Drumming," *Social Science Japan* 8, No. 2 (2005): 197-212.

²³⁷ Josette Féral, "Arian Mnouchkine in Japan," *The Drama Review: TDR* 26.No. 4 (1982): 94.

and with the beat of the drums, instruct each royal subject to bow down before him, deliberately clarify his status to the public.

“Once the most dangerous [and] the most politically vibrant play in the [Shakespearean] canon,” *Richard II* is also considered “the most difficult to accommodate on the twentieth-century stage.”²³⁸ The opening scene of the Soleil’s *Richard II* is vastly different from a traditional staging of the story.²³⁹ Although both begin with the entrance of the King and “other Nobles and Attendants,”²⁴⁰ Mnouchkine uses athletic choreography and cosmopolitan staging to animate the King’s entrance in surprising and dynamic ways. This technique diverges from conventional theatre, where the seat of power of the performance, especially in Shakespeare, lies mostly in what is done in great rhetorical moments, “within the frame of the verse.”²⁴¹ At the Soleil, however, the power of its “unashamedly theatrical” performance is not located in one seat, but rather is dynamic and moving.²⁴² Mnouchkine defines this aspect of character development as a state, or “*état*”: “the primary passion which takes over an actor.” It is crucial that the performer externalize each “state” through both vocal display and “an

²³⁸ Margaret Shewring, *King Richard II* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 2.

²³⁹ One of the traditional ways of blocking the Shakespearean play is opening Act I, Scene i with King Richard *seated* in his throne and having his court approach him. This is vastly different from the Soleil’s dynamic and athletic opening where he *runs* onto the stage with the court.

²⁴⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard II*, Ed. W.G. Clark and W.A. Wright (Oxford and London: The Clarendon Press, 1876).

²⁴¹ See, for example, Granville Barker, a virtually unknown theatre director in the early 1900s whose focus on drawing on textual clues for character development influenced Shakespearean productions of modern theatre: “Everything the actor does must be done within the frame of the verse. Whatever impression of action or thought he can get within this frame, without disturbance of cadence or flow, he may. But there must be nothing, no trick, no check, beyond an honest pause or so at the end of a sentence or speech. And I believe you’ll seldom find that the cadence and emphasis, the mere right scansion of the verse, does not give you the meaning without much or any further effort on the actor’s part. [...] But here it is really the breaking of the verse which destroys it, for as I said Shakespeare has written one tune ...” In Margaret Shewring, *King Richard II* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 78.

²⁴² As stated above, Margaret Shewring, among other critics such as Judith Miller, Josette Féral, and Françoise Quillet, confirms this characteristic of the Théâtre du Soleil. I have chosen to cite Shewring for her specificity regarding the Soleil’s *Richard II*. See page 166 of her book *King Richard II* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

exaggerated use of movement,” particularly important in the development of the Shakespeare series since Mnouchkine outlines “the volatility of state” as a major characteristic of Shakespeare’s writing.²⁴³

We must not confuse the concept of *état* with psychology, however, since “the story” takes precedence at the Théâtre du Soleil. Here, storytelling relays encounters – instances of *faire ensemble* – and demonstrates acts of “living-with.” Through Mnouchkine’s insistence on the physical, visceral power of theatre (in lieu of the solely psychological aspect), storytelling becomes a dynamic and communal phenomenon, ignited by the encounter with the other, whether the “otherness” be between performers or between performer and spectator.²⁴⁴ Psychology’s interiorizing tendencies are incompatible with the Théâtre du Soleil’s philosophy and practices because of the Soleil’s insistence on exteriority and multiplicity, underscored by their commitment to *faire ensemble* within the troupe and with the audience. Josette Féral confirms the insignificance of psychology at the Soleil, even going so far to state that it “banalise le récit...et réduit le jeu de l’acteur.”²⁴⁵ On stage, therefore, it is not the actor’s individualized, personal psychology, but the performers’ bodies, gestures and movements that, along with collective encounters we have described, create stories.²⁴⁶ This

²⁴³ See Shewring, *King Richard II* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 168. I am very thankful for Margaret Shewring’s detailed research that brings the concept of “état” to light. The echoes of Anne-Marie Albiach’s work here cannot be ignored and although they are not directly related to Mnouchkine and/or the Soleil, the concept of “état” underscores the importance of the visceral and corporeal of late twentieth-century poetry and theatre that aim to *faire autrement* by *faire ensemble*.

²⁴⁴ Judith Miller remarks on the importance of the encounter in work on Mnouchkine: “...to this day, Mnouchkine does not see her productions as ‘packages,’ but rather as encounters between two creative groups in a process of exchange.” In *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 10-11.

²⁴⁵ Josette Féral, *Rencontres avec Ariane Mnouchkine. Dresser un monument à l'éphémère* (Montréal: XYZ éditeur, 1995) 19.

²⁴⁶ Let us be careful not to make a false dichotomy between the body and mind, for in this dissertation, the mind is considered part of the body. Therefore, psychology does not work for the Soleil not because the Soleil is more body focused, but because the Soleil is action focused. It is also important to acknowledge Artaud’s influence in the step away from psychology and concentration on the sensual. He writes in the

phenomenon is integral to the Soleil's ethical trajectory that, though fueled by difference, embraces collectivity and community, illustrated by "faire *ensemble*."²⁴⁷ Moreover, it follows suit with the Soleil's emphasis on sensuality and action ("faire ensemble," "faire oeuvre commune") that, in turn, gives their performances the dramatic and cosmopolitan aesthetic for which they are known.

Their cosmopolitan and dynamically spectacular aesthetic are two key elements that Mnouchkine uses in the Soleil's *Festival d'Avignon* production of *Richard II* to relate the story of the fallen king. At first, the production's musical choice is unexpected and shocking to hear. Resembling Japanese takio drumming,²⁴⁸ the musical score composed by Jean-Jacques Lemêtre that included over 300 percussion and drone instruments, may seem historically, geographically and culturally anachronistic juxtaposed with the Shakespearian text. Since Elizabethan courtly music and folk music were historically used in Shakespearian productions,²⁴⁹ the utilization of music in performance was neither uncommon nor strange in the context of Shakespearian theatre. Yet the integration of a score like Lemêtre's, with its deep rhythmic and sometimes jarring sounds, accentuates the "difference" Mnouchkine incorporates into her productions, which also renders her Shakespearean production not only particular to the Soleil, but also "other" both in the scope of Shakespearean productions as well as on the

first manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty: "Mais considérer le théâtre comme une fonction psychologique ou morale de seconde main...c'est diminuer la portée poétique profonde...du théâtre." In *Œuvres complètes IV*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 89.

²⁴⁷ The step away from the psychological is again reminiscent of Artaud who writes "Les méfaits du théâtre psychologique venu de Racine nous ont deshabitués de cette action immédiate et violente que le théâtre doit posséder." In "Le Théâtre et son double," *Œuvres complètes IV*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 82.

²⁴⁸ It is important to note that in its indigenous setting, this kind of drumming is used in Nō, Kabuki and Bunraku theatre as well as in ceremonial and religious settings. We will explore the ceremonial and ritualistic aspect of theatre in the next chapter on Werewere Liking.

²⁴⁹ Michael Best, "Shakespeare and Music," 2001-2010, *Internet Shakespeare Editions; University of Victoria, Victoria, BC*, 25 September 2011.

conventional French stage. Furthermore, Lemêtre's score served a major purpose in Mnouchkine's staging of *Richard II*: it provoked and supported the players' movements. Miller writes: "[Lemêtre's music] kept the beat, punctuated the movements, and created musical themes for the characters. Rather than a symphonic underscoring as in prior productions, the music ... helped transform the actors into dancing forms."²⁵⁰

Along with the energetic and jarring music, Mnouchkine's costuming of the characters continues to push our conceptions of what theater can become by incorporating aspects of, though not imitating, Eastern-inspired dress. Judith Miller describes the costumes of *Richard II* as the following: "[t]he lavish costumes, in rich variations of [hues of red, black, white, and gold], caught and reflected the light easily: They were made of highly textured ecclesiastical cloth and combined many layers – some of which floated and shimmered with the constant movement of the actors."²⁵¹ The Soleil's costumes for *Richard II* are not specifically Japanese in the Nō or Kabuki style, nor are they specifically Indian in the Kathakali fashion, but contain elements of these types of theatrical costuming including the full skirt (Kathakali and Kabuki traditions – especially the Shishi costume of Kabuki), the kimono-style of Japanese Nō costumes (particularly the *noh uwagi*, outer garments worn over the kimono; and the *noh atsuwita*, the male kimono), and the kabuki-inspired masks (donned by the older characters).²⁵²

We must not neglect to note the influence of Elizabethan dress on the Soleil's costumes, which is most notable in the actors' voluminous robes as well as in the Elizabethan ruff

²⁵⁰ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 83.

²⁵¹ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 80.

²⁵² For information on Nō costumes, see the following works: *Collection of Noh costumes*. Kyoto: Unsodo Pub. Co., 1961; *Sculpture in Silk: Costumes from Japan's Noh Theater*. Ed. Ashley Milne-Taylor. New York: Art Capital Group, 2003; and Ruth M. Shaver *Kabuki Costume*. Ill. Sōma Akira and Ota Gako. Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle, Co., 1966.

and doublet – in step with Elizabethan times where theatre troupes combined different clothing styles and patterns into their productions.²⁵³ Yet again, like with the musical score, the utilization of different aspects of costuming – its cosmopolitan aesthetic – adds to the performance’s “otherness” on an aesthetic level. The cosmopolitan dimension of the music and costumes serves a greater purpose, however, than to dazzle the eye or ear. The otherness that the Soleil’s productions emit, which is sensually transmitted sonorously through music and visually through costume, engages the spectator in the performance’s awe. This movement from stage to spectator, a movement of *faire ensemble*, shakes up the audience’s expectations of theatre and forces them to call it into question, which is fueled by the production’s dynamic quality: through “the constant movement of the actors” who “hardly ever [stand] still.”²⁵⁴ In fact, the dynamic quality of the Soleil’s productions is their most important function.

That the music and costumes privilege movement – and that movement underscores the music and costumes – further reiterates the importance of the acrobatic/corporeal aspect of the Théâtre du Soleil that is often prevalent in Eastern theatres yet devalued in theatres of the Western worlds. Judith Miller writes of the

²⁵³ Miller also describes the significance of the Soleil’s costumes in *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 80.

We should note that in Shakespearian productions, the actors wore the dress of their contemporary time and not that of the time of the play represented on stage (exceptions for the Greek and Roman plays).

“Whatever play, and whichever era the play was set, in the actors generally wore the dress of their own time. The theatre was new - the plays were new. The plays had to be produced in a hurry in order to ensure a rapid turnover of new material for the insatiable Elizabethan audience and to beat the competition from rival theatres. Not enough time had elapsed to build up a ready-made store of costumes which reflected the correct period of the play. Perhaps the costumes in a play, such as Julius Caesar, would have been easier to develop as togas are relatively easy to produce. In this instance a combination of Roman clothes and Elizabethan clothing might well have been seen together. The picture at the top of the page depicts a Scene from King Henry IV (Part 2) by William Shakespeare. The play is set in the early 1400's. King Henry IV lived 1399-1413 but this is the type of costume that would have been worn by the Shakespearean actors - the Elizabethan dress of the day.” Alkin, L.K. “Elizabethan Costume,” *Elizabethan Era*. 20 March 2008. Web.

²⁵⁴ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 83.

importance of the physical in Asian theatre and at the Soleil: “Mnouchkine took from Asian theater a model that allowed her to perfect a gestic system and clarify physical lines. She refined and defined – with her actors and designers – set and costumes and a network of signs in order to offer an onstage lesson.”²⁵⁵ Miller continues this passage by writing that the corporeally precise way in which Mnouchkine staged *Richard II* “so transcended the ordinary that it attained the luminous power of the sacred.”²⁵⁶ I propose, however, that the corporeal methods Mnouchkine uses, which are highlighted by the music and costumes, constitute the Soleil’s cosmopolitan yet singular technique of performance that is not only transcendently sacred but also fleshly ethical. The performance’s power, which Miller perceives as transcendental, comes also from the performance’s sensual movements as well as from Mnouchkine’s ability to *bring together* diverse forms of corporeal expression such as dance, song and dramatic performance. This approach, which Françoise Quillet refers to as “unity,”²⁵⁷ also occurs in theatres of Asia: “l’art de l’acteur oriental consiste à développer simultanément ce que la tradition occidentale sépare: la danse, le chant et le jeu dramatique.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 80.

²⁵⁶ We address the concepts of ritual and the sacred as they pertain to theatre in the chapter on Werewere Liking, but should be aware of the importance of ritual in the West as well, as articulated by Antonin Artaud regarding theatre, as well as by Mircea Eliade in the more general context of the functions of rites and ritual.

²⁵⁷ Let us be careful when employing the term “unity” so that it does not refer to a coming-together that results in dissolving into sameness, but rather a *faire ensemble* that respects and encourages singularity and difference. Also, Artaud writes about theatre and unity, stating in a letter that he wrote to Jean Paulhan: “It is on the stage that the union of thought, gesture and action is reconstructed. And the double of the Theatre is reality untouched by the men of today.” In Claude Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2001) 87. We will discuss Artaud in more detail further in the chapter.

²⁵⁸ My translation: “the art of the Oriental actor consists in simultaneously developing what the Western tradition separates: dance, song and the drama. The Oriental theaters referenced allow us to find a unity similar to the *choréïa*, that ‘integral union of poetry, music and dance’ that made up the theater of ancient Greece.” It is important to note that while Quillet highlights the influence of Greek theater on Mnouchkine and the Soleil, as we have also remarked in the preceding pages, she mentions the influence of “Oriental theater” on the Greek theatrical tradition, which is a more rare - and perhaps more significant - observation. See Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 57.

Just as Asian-inspired techniques and practices enhance the Soleil's philosophy and aesthetic, it is also the primary source of the Soleil's most numerous and harsh critiques. The majority of the critiques are based on prominent post-colonial theories that condemn the academic, literary, and political discourses of powerful Western nations for homogenizing "the East" as using it as the ultimate "other": a blank canvas on which to project its unrealistic, romanticized, fetishised and racist fantasies.²⁵⁹ This is at risk of happening, states Peter Holland in his essay entitled "Mind the Gap: Using Shakespeare," particularly in cases where there is a gap of knowledge between one area of theatre practice where there is extensive knowledge (like Shakespeare in the West, for example), and "equally extensive ignorance of another [area]" (such as Kathakali or Kabuki in the West).²⁶⁰ Alexander Huang outlines three primary ways that European theatre directors, including Mnouchkine, exploit this gap and takes Mnouchkine to task for two of them. First, Huang signals "European directors incorporating Asian performative or decorative elements (but still using a European language)" which exploits the gap of knowledge "to create a sense of freshness, to make Shakespeare foreign through the foreign art form that now embodies the text."²⁶¹ He also criticizes European/Asian co-productions where performers "usually of different ethnicities – borrow and mix different performance traditions and reinvent their own."²⁶² Although the Soleil does not function as a European/Asian co-production, it is made up of performers from diverse backgrounds and uses diverse techniques in its performances, as demonstrated in *Richard II*. Despite

²⁵⁹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1994) and Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

²⁶⁰ Peter Holland in Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 58.

²⁶¹ Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 59.

²⁶² Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 59.

the fact that the director or theatre troupe, like Mnouchkine and Soleil, do not purposefully intend to “orientalize” the East, they still “rely heavily on the role of Asia as the ultimate Other” according to Huang, to whom the result is “a positive stereotype which is negative in outcome.”²⁶³

In his critical essay entitled “Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages to India?,” Marvin Carlson proposes that the theatrical quality of the work of both Peter Brook’s and Ariane Mnouchkine’s performers needs to be taken to task for two primary reasons: “the naïve mimeticism of actors imitating the behaviours of diverse ethnic groups” (referring to Mnouchkine’s and Cixous’s *L’Indiade*) and “the generalizing abstraction and ecumenical humanism” (of Brooks’s *Mahabharata* performers).²⁶⁴ He writes:

In sum, both the *Mahabharata* and *L’Indiade* may be seen less as attempts to deal specifically with India or even what the concept of India means to us in terms of difference or otherness than as attempts to utilize images drawn from the Indian experience to construct a theatrical celebration of human brotherhood, either metaphysical or political. Both are presented as necessarily positive and grounded on the same bases which ground traditional Western liberal humanism. A potential Otherness of the India itself is not important – China, Southeast Asia, Nigeria or American Indian myth and history could have served a similar purpose, since the ultimate goal is not to confront the alien element in these cultures but to utilize them as external markers to our own culture upon which to ground a final synthesis.²⁶⁵

Carlson’s major contention with both directors and their respective productions is their failure to address and confront the differences of other cultures by using them in performance as exotic, universal, unifying tendencies for the performers and for the audience. Along with perpetuating stereotypes and racist/colonialist thinking, this creates

²⁶³ Alexander C.Y. Huang, “Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised,” *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 59.

²⁶⁴ Marvin Carlson, “Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages to India?,” *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 80.

²⁶⁵ Marvin Carlson, “Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages to India?,” *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 90.

“a dangerous and self-deceptive vision, denying the voice of the Other in an attempt to understand it.”²⁶⁶

Both Huang and Carlson’s critiques are not unfounded. In *Richard II* for example, Mnouchkine does incorporate movements, costumes, music and performers from around the globe, but does this necessarily engender a colonialist and/or orientalist point of view? And is it, as Huang writes, Intercultural Shakespeare’s “own fixation upon the exotic and its insistence on *both* the local and the foreign as nothing more than material for exploitation?”²⁶⁷ Following Edward Said’s point of view,²⁶⁸ for example, the West’s dominant socio-economic-political makes for an uneven distribution of power, thus the answer to the question would be “yes.” This is assuming that power only flows to the dominant culture/society (i.e. the West), however, which Michel Foucault has theorized to be false. According to the Foucauldian perspective, power “exists only when it is put into action”²⁶⁹ and once activated, is a flow to which every person, culture and society has access. “Power,” Foucault explains, “is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free.”²⁷⁰ This point of view forces us to call into question, therefore, the dominant position of power that both Huang and Carlson automatically attribute to the West and remove from the East. Huang touches upon this when he brings to light just how “un-Asian” performances, such as the Soleil’s, appear to Asian

²⁶⁶ Marvin Carlson, “Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages to India?,” *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Ed. Patrice Pavis (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 91.

²⁶⁷ Alexander C.Y. Huang, “Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised,” *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 67.

²⁶⁸ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1994).

²⁶⁹ In “The Subject and Power,” *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd edition. Ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 219.

²⁷⁰ “The Subject and Power,” *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd edition. Ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 221. Also see Dino Felluga, “Modules on Foucault: On Power.” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. 31 January 2011. Purdue University. Web.

audiences. He cites a Chinese adaptation of Hamlet, *The Banquet*, and Akira Kurosawa's films as examples of artistic performances that are utterly "Asian" according to Western audiences, but "decidedly un-Asian according to Asian audiences."²⁷¹ Yet despite this small acknowledgment, Huang ultimately stands by his argument that corresponds to Carlson's, which calls for a re-examination of otherness in the context of Asian-inspired theatrical performances of the West.

The above criticism notwithstanding, Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil do not specifically link otherness specifically to Asia. Their work consists of *faire ensemble*, which they do not by engaging the East/West binary, but rather by approaching otherness as pure difference. Brian Singleton, in his astute work on Mnouchkine, politics and cosmopolitanism, agrees and states that "Playing otherness culturally and theatrically, thus, has been the working method [of the Soleil] for the ultimate portrayal of difference (in real and social terms) that is affirmed and celebrated."²⁷² Mnouchkine's refusal of imitation is a key factor that maintains her commitment to difference. At the Soleil, the players do not claim mastery over authentic theatrical and dance forms. Doing so would falsely assert authority over the movement and/or costume and strip it of its cultural specificity. Instead, Mnouchkine insists on respect over servility, and states that "[the Soleil's] connection with [the Kabuki theatre in Japan] is therefore a relationship of absolute respect but not of servility to the techniques."²⁷³ Here, we see how she encourages learning from the particular art or aesthetic by engaging with it together. Any

²⁷¹ Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 55.

²⁷² Brian Singleton, "Ariane Mnouchkine: Activism, formalism, cosmopolitanism," Maria M. and Dan Rebellato Ed. Delgado, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 46.

²⁷³ Mnouchkine in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. Ed. Patrice Pavis (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1996) 95.

act of “doing together” is an engagement with an other where, at the Soleil, “other” is defined by difference and not linked to a geographical, cultural or religious area.

Otherness at the Soleil, therefore, is not solely Asian, which the production of *Richard II* demonstrates. Here, Mnouchkine translates and ultimately transforms the Shakespearean text, which makes it “strange” and “other” irrespective of the fact that the “other” in this case is Western in origin.

Let us now turn to three principle components of the Soleil’s technique of *faire ensemble*: the new, making strange and audience engagement, which will help us understand *faire ensemble* with greater clarity.

The New, Making Strange, Audience Engagement

As illustrated by gesture, music and costuming that incorporate, or move with, both Eastern and Western traditions, movement as a method of *faire ensemble* is a distinctive component of the Soleil’s practices because of its double gesture: it simultaneously “moves with” while making theatrical conventions of both the East and West other and strange. Cosmopolitan by default due to its insistence on difference as a creative motor, this double gesture moves beyond the facile and predictable East/West dichotomy that is prevalent in many performances as well as in performance theory. It shows how movement (as a part of the Soleil’s techniques and practices) is capable of embodying diverse influences (i.e. Kabuki, Nō, British Elizabethan) all while propelling a production beyond mimesis and opening it up to becoming something new and singular.²⁷⁴ *Richard II* is the Soleil’s first major example of this, proving furthermore

²⁷⁴ I refer to this phenomenon in the Senghor chapter as part of the poem’s temporal vacillations between the past and the present that do not stagnate in nostalgia but rather give birth to the new.

that the combination of traditional theatrical techniques, outside theatrical practices, and the integration of historical references ultimately engenders the new when done together – *faire ensemble* – as a moving, dynamic practice. In her extensive analysis of Asian influences at the Soleil, Françoise Quillet maintains the birth of and importance of the new in *Richard II* when she writes:

[O]n retrouve, les éléments qui concourent depuis Richard II, à créer une nouvelle forme: espace scénique, rôle de la musique, jeu frontal des acteurs, maquillages/masques, tapis, mais intégrés au point que nul n'a parlé de l'influence de l'Orient dans ce spectacle, bien que le Topeng fut pratiqué régulièrement en répétition, par exemple.²⁷⁵

The critical juncture of Quillet's citation lies in her observation of the "new form" that stems from elements she labels as "Oriental," which the production of *Richard II* initially sparked. Earlier in her analysis, she is careful to point out that these forms, though inspired by "the Orient," are not copies of Asian theatrical techniques. In the same vein as our analysis above which insists on difference and not mimicry at the Soleil, Quillet states that "Au Théâtre du Soleil l'acteur doit inventer ses propres formes en s'inspirant de formes antérieures et non en les copiant. La tradition n'est pas à reprendre mais à réinventer [...]."²⁷⁶ From this, we can posit that *Richard II* is the Soleil's first production that proved that the creation of a new theatrical "form"²⁷⁷ is not undermined by its insistence on difference, nor is it inhibited by the integration of traditional/conventional theatrical elements from both the East and West. On the contrary, the Soleil's

²⁷⁵ Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 100-101.

²⁷⁶ My translation: "At the Théâtre du Soleil the actor must invent his own forms through the inspiration of previous forms and not by copying them. The tradition is not to revive but to reinvent..." Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 79.

²⁷⁷ I prefer the term "practice" to "form" primarily because it insists on action, dynamics and movement. I would also like to add that Quillet's statement highlights not only the innovative component of the Soleil's "form," but also its ethical dimension, which I will address more in detail throughout this chapter.

performances become even more powerful and innovative by the generative force of difference itself.²⁷⁸

This force, as illustrated by Mnouchkine's incorporation of cosmopolitan movements that include vibrational sounds and corporeal gestures in *Richard II* (and also more generally in the Soleil's Shakespeare productions), calls theatre into question through innovation and also by making it strange. Alexander Huang acknowledges the dynamic of "making strange" in his research on the incorporation of Asian theatrical techniques in Shakespearean productions. He states: "For example, in the process of making strange a familiar canon, Mnouchkine redefined what was once homely to her European audiences and made unfamiliar forms of representation accessible."²⁷⁹ Yet how can the Soleil make a familiar canon strange all while rejecting exoticism?²⁸⁰ This is

²⁷⁸ For more on difference, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). I would also like to point to the fact that here, Grosz emphasizes the importance of "The New," specifically regarding feminist theory. In the section entitled *Disturbing Differences*, she writes: "*At its best*, feminist theory is about the invention of the new: new practices, new positions, new projects, new techniques, new values. It is clear that it must understand and address the old, what is and has been, and the force of the past and present in attempting to pre-apprehend and control the new, and to that extent feminist theory is committed to "critique," the process of demonstrating the contingency and transformability of what is given. It is also clear that there needs to be not only the production of alternatives to patriarchal (racist, colonialist, ethnocentric) knowledges but, more urgently and less recognized, a freedom to address concepts, to make concepts, to transform existing concepts by exploring their limits of toleration, so that we may invent new ways of addressing and opening up the real, new types of subjectivity, and new relations between subjects and objects" (83). Although it is addressed to feminism, Grosz's citation is relevant to us for its insistence on the new and how, by going beyond critique (and, for our purposes, mimesis), the new opens up relations between subjects and objects, which is exactly what Mnouchkine does. At the Soleil, the relations are between us and theatre, and also between performer and spectator. This is its ethical turn.

²⁷⁹ Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* Vol 8 (2008) 57.

²⁸⁰ Judith Miller addresses this question in an intelligent and sensitive manner, writing that "there is a certain positive naivety in Mnouchkine's humanistic vision, in her desire to decrease the space between the Western self as referent and the other she puts onstage. Naivety is germane to her utopian effort to unite the human community. And while naïve efforts have led to egregious acts of colonialism in the past...we also know that, deployed with sensitivity and intelligence, efforts at uniting are the only kinds of efforts that attempt to build an internationalism not based on economic control. We would also add that theatre companies from Asia and Africa are also participating in intercultural theater - not as a means of avenging their colonization by the West, but as a way of expanding their own representational repertory. In *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 59. See the entire section entitled "The Orientalist Critique" (pages 57-59) for the quotation in full.

possible because the Soleil is an artistic practice, and making strange is a function of art, which forces us to think about things in a new way, and act differently. Art, as defined by Elizabeth Grosz, requires “framing, decontextualization, a transport elsewhere, a movement that Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization.”²⁸¹ In essence, Grosz’s definition of art resonates with what the Soleil does with movement: they take qualities from diverse sources (such as inspiration from Kathakali dance, or the ruff from Elizabethan dress), frame them in another artistic context (like a performance of a play such as *Richard II*) and transport them to another *lieu* (the Cartoucherie or the Palais des Papes at the Festival d’Avignon). All of these movements together – which are another manifestation of *faire ensemble* – decontextualize the qualities, make them strange, and as a result, provoke us to think otherwise. Yet while we focus on the movements, here Grosz targets not the qualities’ movements, but their deterritorialization, as the motor of change: “It is not their transport of qualities that enables these qualities to acquire an autonomy from their use. It is the positioning of these qualities elsewhere that enables them to generate sensations, enliven and transform bodies, and add new dimensions to objects.”²⁸² Grosz’s insight, though it specifically refers to Aboriginal art, is pertinent to Mnouchkine’s performance art for several reasons: both privilege the corporeal, particularly regarding art-making; both highlight the new, which springs up from what Grosz articulates as deterritorialization and what we call “making strange;” and both draw parallels to the transformative powers of art, which we refer to as ethics.²⁸³ All of

²⁸¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 188.

²⁸² Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 188. Let us remember that deterritorialization is a movement in and of itself, and for that reason, it is relevant to our study.

²⁸³ To further assert the importance of deterritorialization and its role in sparking the new, Grosz states that the “deterritorialization of qualities enables the eruption of a new kind of art.” From “Living Art and the

these aspects manifest in the Soleil as part of *faire ensemble*. Moreover, they show the subversive movements of the Soleil's practices, including *faire ensemble*, which turn theatre on its head and shift theatrical movements and practices *while moving with them*. We analyzed such a phenomenon above through the music and costumes of *Richard II*, but the most overt example of it is the performance experience itself and, most notably, audience participation.

In his aforementioned citation, Alexander Huang states that Mnouchkine makes a familiar canon strange and redefines the known by making “unfamiliar forms of representation accessible” to European audiences; yet, how does the Soleil make “unfamiliar forms of representation” accessible to the audience? Mnouchkine and the Soleil troupe reach out to the audience beyond the stage to engage them and transform theatre into a total collective experience because it is also a total sensory experience – an event that goes beyond the “performance” itself. First, let us clarify the notion of collectivity that is foundational for the Soleil. Two principle forms of collectivity: collectivity within the theatre troupe as well as collectivity entailing audience engagement, are the Soleil's critical objectives of the theatrical process and their productions. They stem from Mnouchkine's intent on transforming theatre into a life practice that includes both the theatrical and quotidian dimensions, despite her shattered idealism and disillusionment due to the events of May 1968. The following analysis by Brian Singleton is lengthy but valuable since it clearly articulates Mnouchkine's vision and the Soleil's trajectory regarding collectivity and audience engagement. Below, he explains the foundations of Mnouchkine's subversive gestures that reach out to the

Art of Life: Women's Painting from the Western Desert,” *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

audience, which she anticipated would change theatre and could provoke change in the world, regardless of her disenchantment with theatre and society after May 1968.

The focus thus for the collective was a desire to construct an alternative performance narratology that stood in opposition to the grand and hegemonic narratives of national history and to focus instead on the hidden histories that collectively make up much broader social struggles. Instead of 'being' characters from history, Mnouchkine's actors would self-consciously present them. Instead of keeping their audiences in the dark they would keep them active and offer them agency. Instead of waiting for the audiences to come to them they would go out and bus them into the theatre. And, most importantly of all, they would abandon theatre buildings forever and perform in ... a disused ammunition factory (Cartoucherie) in the middle of the Vincennes forest... Acknowledging that theatre in itself could not change anything socially or politically, Mnouchkine was offering the possibility through the experience of a demystification of the art form of theatre, that spectators might emerge into social and political realities with a renewed desire for change and a new idealism that had been shattered by the events of May 1968.²⁸⁴

Singleton's observations bring to light several unconventional and important aspects of Mnouchkine and the Soleil: little-known stories based around social struggles as the basis for productions; an uncommon *lieu*, the Cartoucherie, as the performance space; rejection of the actor-cum-star mentality.²⁸⁵ All of these things highlight one of the most important facets of the Soleil, which is the way theatre is made strange and transformed into a process, a collective act – a *faire ensemble* on and beyond the stage.

As Singleton states in the passage above, Mnouchkine purposefully engages the audience before the performance begins, and even before they step inside of the theatrical *lieu*. The Soleil's production of *1789*, which opened in Milan in November of 1970, a

²⁸⁴ Brian Singleton, "Ariane Mnouchkine: Activism, formalism, cosmopolitanism," Maria M. and Dan Rebellato Ed. Delgado, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 33-34.

²⁸⁵ Mnouchkine's approach regarding character creation ("la création des personnages") at the Théâtre du Soleil is less actor-centered and more character focused than most directors, including those in the avant-garde. For example, Mnouchkine does not want to see an actor "emotionally vibrate on stage" and instead insists upon the actor giving up himself/herself to the character, who carries a specific story: "Pour créer... la théâtralité du personnage porteur de signes (et non l'acteur vibrant émotionnellement sur la scène), Mnouchkine choisit une démarche où le personnage est avant tout porteur d'un récit."²⁸⁵ Josette Féral, *Rencontres avec Ariane Mnouchkine. Dresser un monument à l'éphémère* (Montréal: XYZ éditeur, 1995) 19. Far from the Western method of the actor-cum-star, Mnouchkine's approach is based on collectivity. Here the story takes precedence, and the actor gives movement to the character in order to illustrate the story. The character, however, does not become indistinguishable or deferential to the story, or even to history for that matter.

“very broad, physically based comedy meant to shake up and critique the status quo”²⁸⁶ demonstrates this. The production, part of Mnouchkine’s historical and militant series from the 1970s, tells the story of the French Revolution and is one of the Soleil’s most radical example of audience engagement. It was “designed to involve the audience in the physical action of the performance, ...establishing a different and compelling rapport between public and playing space” in order to “strengthen the audience’s adhesion to [Mnouchkine’s] plays’ messages of struggle, protest, and enlightenment” and, more importantly, to ignite sparks of social and political action in both the players as well as the audience.²⁸⁷ The Soleil engages the spectators in explicit ways during the performance of *1789*. First, the players break the fourth wall through naming the spectators. From the beginning of the performance, the actors personalize the spectators and address them as “vous” and, as the performance progresses, as “nous.” In one scene, for example, the character Le Chapelier directly declares to the audience:

Et maintenant, Mesdames et messieurs, vous allez assister à un authentique débat parlementaire sur la question des droits de l’homme et du citoyen. Nos députés vont se produire parmi vous, nous vous demandons la plus grande attention. Voici la question à l’ordre du jour...²⁸⁸

Calling the spectators by name linguistically affirms their participation and implication in the theatrical performance. Further, the above citation “nos députés vont se produire parmi vous” reveals another technique that Mnouchkine uses to engage the audience in the performance of *1789*. The staging that consists of separate platforms that cut into the audience, along with the players’ entrances and exists that often emerge from within the audience, engage the spectators in the action since their bodies are part of the physical space of the performance (it is important to note that the audience stands for the entire

²⁸⁶ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 74.

²⁸⁷ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 31.

²⁸⁸ *1789*, Le Théâtre du Soleil. Ed. Sophie Lemasson et Jean-Claude Penchenat (Paris: Stock, 1971) 59.

performance of 1789). In one extreme instance of audience participation that we will analyze in more detail below, audience members are invited to partake in games reminiscent of a *fête foiraine*: they are given bean-bags and are invited to throw them on stage. In this respect, spectators are not only linguistically involved in the performance, but their role as “citoyens,” which they are also called during the show, is solidified through their physical participation in the theatrical space.

Echoes of Brecht’s political theater emerge here, which Agnieszka Karch explains in her article “Theatre for the People: The Impact of Brechtian Theory on the Production and Performance of 1789 by Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil.”²⁸⁹ Even though Mnouchkine has stated that her troupe was “ni Brechtien, ni rien,” one of the most significant ways Mnouchkine’s theatre is inspired by Brecht, writes Karch, is through its ethics: theatre’s ability to engage the audience so they can make change in the world. Karch states: “One of the central elements of her philosophy is to make the spectators aware of their potential to participate in the process of change. Instead of passively witnessing the unfolding of political and social events, citizens should feel encouraged to act and to note their personal impact on history.”²⁹⁰ The Soleil achieves this ethics through engagement, through collective creation – *faire ensemble* – both on and off the stage. Although Mnouchkine and Brechtian theatre share many points in common including the emphasis on collective creation and audience engagement to make change, there is an important difference we might notice. Whereas Brechtian theatre implements philosophies and techniques that alienate the audience from the theatrical production so

²⁸⁹ Agnieszka Karch, “Theatre for the People: The Impact of Brechtian Theory on the Production and Performance of 1789 by Ariane Mnouchkine’s Theatre du Soleil,” *Opticon1826* (Spring 2011): 1-7.

²⁹⁰ Agnieszka Karch, “Theatre for the People: The Impact of Brechtian Theory on the Production and Performance of 1789 by Ariane Mnouchkine’s Theatre du Soleil,” *Opticon1826* (Spring 2011): 1.

they may more critically observe the world, Mnouchkine bases her Théâtre du Soleil on the concepts of “faire ensemble” and “l’amitié” that engage, or *bring in*, the public to intimately move with the theatre production. Laurence Labrousse articulates this as the Soleil’s way of engaging the audience in order to “créer un rapport dynamique avec le réel [...] de faire accéder le spectateur à une autre position d’âme vis-à-vis du réel.”²⁹¹ Such a phenomenon of engagement, “moving-with,” where the spectators are engaged in the performance and both audience and actors move with each other is especially evident in the Soleil’s productions during the 1970s, including *1789*. Here, theatrical experiences that we might associate with Peter Brooks’s “rough theater” and the techniques of Richard Schechner and Luca Ronconi, all of whom “designed theatrical experiences that depended on the audience’s active, physical participation,” call on “the spectators willingness to engage with, even absorb, the materiality of the theatrical work, accepting its more obvious theatricality but also experiencing its greater physical reality and more explicit sensuality.”²⁹²

The Soleil creates a greater physical reality and more explicit sensuality for the audience by turning the theatrical experience into a process through a complete deterritorialization of time and space, while enveloping them – engaging them – in the theatrical process. First, the audience is transported by bus from the Parisian urban metropolis to the Cartoucherie, a former ammunitions factory in the forest on the outskirts of Paris. Once the audience arrives, they are immediately engaged by and into the theatrical *lieu*. Victoria Ness Kirby describes the space of the Cartoucherie and her experience of the Soleil’s *1789* as follows:

²⁹¹ Laurence Labrousse, *Ariane Mnouchkine: Un parcours théâtral. Le terrassier, l'enfant et le voyageur* (Paris et Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1999) 73.

²⁹² Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 75.

Inside the large rectangular building the theatre company has divided the huge space into two parts, cleaned it up, and minimally painted it. One section has become a “lobby,” where tickets are picked up, some costume racks are stored and a photo display of former productions is mounted on panels. The other sections, in which the play is performed, are much larger than the first. There is a high ceiling, with a wide skylight down its center that is covered over during performances. The walls and floor are stone and brick, and all the cast-iron reinforcements are visible; the rectangular space is divided down the center of its length by about twelve iron pillars. The company constructed a wooden grandstand for spectators that takes up part of the room nearest the lobby area. Behind and above it is a raised platform for the light boards and technical crew. The grandstand faces five plain wooden platforms, each about five feet high, grouped around a large, empty, rectangular space. Each of the platforms can be reached from at least three sides [...] The hall gives an impression of enormous spaciousness and simplicity. Nothing is hidden from the audience. We can see actors and actresses applying make-up in front of a long table and bench under the “control tower.” More costume racks, tables and benches, trunks and lockers are located at the two far ends of the hall. Before the performance, the space is brightly lit, and actors and actresses – there are about 40 – can be seen in various stages of being dressed and made up. The audience is free to roam about, talk to members of the company, or to find a place to see the performance. The majority of the spectators seat themselves in the bleachers until this section is filled. Those remaining and those who perhaps know that the space inside the stages is available to the audience begin drifting, searching for a stair or a cross bar to perch on. By the time the performance begins the grandstand is full and about two hundred persons are standing in the central area. In a sense, there are two different audiences. One, sitting in the stands, can see all the platforms at once and has an over-all, simultaneous view of the performance. It is static and removed in distance from the action. The other audience, those persons who are within the area defined by the platforms and passageways, becomes the participating audience.²⁹³

Kirby’s account of the Soleil’s *1789* production outlines the unconventional techniques Mnouchkine uses in making theatre a total and collective experience. Part of the strange-making/making-new comes from Mnouchkine’s intent on breaking up theatre in order to make it, as Huang says, “more accessible.” This is most flagrant in the fragmentation of the theatrical space: the wings, the stage and the house are opened up, which liberates the audience’s physical movement throughout the space and integrates them into the performance since they are encouraged not only to witness but also participate in the actors’ transformation into characters. *1789*’s unconventional stage construction – five individual platforms – breaks the notion of a single, linear story and

²⁹³ Victoria Nes Kirby, “1789,” *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol. 15.No. 4 (1971): 73-4.

also cuts through the fourth wall between actor and audience.²⁹⁴ This is a dynamic way of making theatre *au présent*, which subverts the notion that the theatrical story is fixed history and instead presents it organically from multiple perspectives.²⁹⁵ The process engages the audience in the performance itself, and thus in history; ultimately, it is meant to heighten the audience's awareness of their role in history and the world and provoke them to be more mindful of their presence and actions in the world. Judith Miller writes: "Mnouchkine's desire to interact intimately with her spectators, so as to keep them aware of their own potential for action, also led her to make the audience part of the creative process."²⁹⁶ During the performance, the audience does not passively sit in the dark and quietly observe the show, as we examined above. Let us turn to another scene from *1789* for an example of how Mnouchkine and the Soleil encourage audience participation, increase their awareness and agency, and weave it into the production itself. The scene follows a lively enactment of the events leading up to the storming of the Bastille by the (working) people of Paris. Here, energy and tension are intensified by a live military drum-march, the brandishing of guns, and shouts from across the platforms of "Let the people go!" Suddenly, there is complete silence in the hall. The lights dim:

Slowly one becomes aware of someone murmuring close by. Turning, one can see an actor sitting and beckoning spectators to gather around him closer. He is whispering about taking the Bastille. He stops, trying to recollect the events exactly, searching for the

²⁹⁴ The usage of platforms instead of one stage is a crucial technique that Mnouchkine uses to encourage *faire ensemble*. In the Soleil's production of *Richard II*, Mnouchkine also uses singular platforms to break up the linear space of the theatrical lieu and liberate the movements of both the actors and audience. See Josette Féral, "Arian Mnouchkine in Japan," *The Drama Review: TDR* 26.No. 4 (1982): 93-95.

²⁹⁵ Here, outlining Mnouchkine's conception of history is important. Judith Miller states: "For Mnouchkine, 'history' means more than past events. It connotes, rather, a narrative of events that are thought to have altered the direction of contemporary societies and nations. History, in this light, is never distant from the present. Past and present reflect dialectically upon each other. Thus in Mnouchkine's work, she always connects what has happened – and how this has been interpreted – with what is happening. Furthermore, she often focuses on what she deems to be history in the making – or contemporary events of such import that they are sure to have an impact on how society and the individuals who compose it and move change." Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 29.

²⁹⁶ Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 31.

proper words. He remembers and continues, surer of himself. [...] You realize that there are other actors telling other groups of spectators, including those in the bleachers, their stories of the storming of the Bastille. [...] Slowly the actors rise to their feet, talking louder and louder until they are shouting out their tales. Drum beats come faster and faster [...] "They have taken the Bastille!" The rolling kettle drums become deafening. The lights are very bright. Suddenly, a man bounds onto center stage and announces the news: The Bastille will be demolished. The people have won.²⁹⁷

This vigorous scene is followed by a corporeal and carnivalesque celebration of the storming of the Bastille, which Kirby calls "the people's victory." Here, "colorfully dressed puppeteers, wrestlers, and acrobats" fill the hall and the audience is "invited to step up to another stage and throw small bags stuffed with soft material at shields [on which the heads of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI are painted] held by three members of the company."²⁹⁸ A wheel, resembling a wheel of fortune or a roulette wheel, is displayed on another platform; on it are painted words such as "Happiness," "Reason" and "Fraternity" and the audience is encouraged to bet on the winning word. A chain of people, comprised of both actors and audience members, sweep through the theatre space, and wind through the stages and into the audience. On another stage, actors wearing costumes similar to those of the *Comédie Française* appear, but run from stage to stage and finally plunge into the audience "which parts to give them passage."²⁹⁹

The corporeally dynamic and collectively performative aspects of the Soleil's productions create a unique, visceral experience that is part of *faire ensemble*. Françoise Quillet attributes this to the "Oriental" inspiration at the Soleil that includes the concept of the chorus, which she calls *choréïa*. In regards to the Soleil's production of *Richard II*, she states: "Les théâtres de l'Orient-référence permettent de retrouver une unité analogue à la choréïa, cette 'union consubstantielle de la poésie, de la musique, et de la

²⁹⁷ Victoria Nes Kirby, "1789," *The Drama Review: TDR* 15.No. 4 (1971): 80.

²⁹⁸ Victoria Nes Kirby, "1789," *The Drama Review: TDR* 15.No. 4 (1971): 80-1.

²⁹⁹ Victoria Nes Kirby, "1789," *The Drama Review: TDR* 15.No. 4 (1971): 81

danse' qui formait le théâtre grec antique [...]."³⁰⁰ The creation of a chorus or a chorus-like assembly does not solely emerge in the Soleil's Asian-inspired performances, however. In 1789, for example, the chorus manifests in several forms ranging from the groups of actors on the platforms to the chain of people made up of both actors and audience members. This shows that the *faire ensemble* that is unique to Mnouchkine and the Soleil is not solely the result of "Oriental" inspirations, but is linked to the opening up of movement in the theatrical *lieu*, which *can* come from Asian practices *as well as* dynamic practices from Ancient Greece, India, and France, for instance.

Corporeal practices and *faire ensemble* also highlight Mnouchkine's insistence that the Soleil's philosophies, which are integral to the troupe (i.e. collectivity, difference, openness, experimentation), do not remain "theories" but instead become "practices": practices that are demonstrated during performances, yet ultimately meant to be lived in the world. This is why audience engagement is vital to Mnouchkine's practice of *faire ensemble*, but it does not mean that theatre's ultimate goal is to become a social reform movement. Rather, at the Soleil, theatre takes politics and philosophy and makes them flesh. As a result, theatre is propelled beyond representation.³⁰¹ This means that political and philosophical concepts like man, mind, language and logic break from representation as objects of knowledge³⁰² and instead become open, fluid states to be interrogated and experimented with, *together*. For example, the complex socio-political structures that are explored in *Richard II* through the king's fall from, and Bolingbrook's rise to, the throne,

³⁰⁰ My translation: "The theatres of the Orient allow us to rediscover unity analogous to that of the Greek concept of chorus: this union akin to that between poetry, music and dance of Ancient Greece." Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 57.

³⁰¹ That the Soleil propels theatre beyond representation is crucial to the argument put forth in this dissertation, in spite of the fact that critics such as Judith Miller hold tight to representation.

³⁰² Claire Colebrook, "Questioning Representation," *SubStance* 29.92 (2000): 51.

and the “power of the (working) people” that is interrogated in *1789* are called into question on stage, actively and artfully.³⁰³ Mnouchkine then uses the medium of theatre to put the questions into motion collectively – a gesture that allows us to call theatre into question as well. She confirms this when she states: “On ne théorise pas beaucoup au Soleil. Notre désir de comprendre ensemble, d’analyser ensemble le rôle du théâtre dans la société s’accompagne depuis toujours d’une pratique.”³⁰⁴ We might, however, perceive a false dichotomy between theory and practice in this statement. Theory, although not the only path to social change, “remains a necessary condition for the creation of new frameworks, new questions, new concepts by which social change can move beyond the horizon of the present.”³⁰⁵ It is itself a form of practice, like Elizabeth Grosz explains: “... ‘theory’ cannot be understood in opposition to its dichotomous other ‘practice,’ but must be seen as its own, rather dull, form of practice, the practice of research, writing, teaching, and learning [...]”³⁰⁶

Theory in/as practice, which we understand here as a lived ethics or visceral epistemology, is a fundamental step in the ethical turn that the Soleil performs. Claire Colebrook’s explanation of ethics can help us understand its often-neglected vibrant and active characteristics, which she outlines in the context of its neo-Aristotelian traces:

According to writers as diverse as Jean-Pierre Vernant (1991), Pierre Hadot (1995), Michel Foucault (1988), Jurgen Habermas (1971), Alastair MacIntyre (1980) and other neo-Aristotelians, the Greeks lived their world as a polis: not as raw matter to be quantified, known and measured, and not as data to be represented. Meaning was worldly rather than individual, expressed in the

³⁰³ These summaries are admittedly general and simple, but a complete exploration of Mnouchkine and the Soleil’s political activism and its implications far surpasses the confines of this dissertation. I leave it up to the reader, therefore, to take to the wealth of bibliographic sources and delve more deeply into this topic should he or she wish.

³⁰⁴ Fabienne Pascaud, *Ariane Mnouchkine: L’art du présent. Entretiens avec Fabienne Pascaud* (Paris: Plon, 2005) 35.

³⁰⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 83.

³⁰⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 83.

idea of a “prose of the world” – a world that harbored its own sense. Ethics was less a question of rules and foundations than it was an area of dialogue, practices, response and shared narratives. In this pre-modern and pre-representational world, there was a continuity between meaning, ethics, law, the cosmos and one’s body. Ethics was lived as one’s own, practiced as a way of life; and philosophy was not a procedure of valid arguments but a practice of self-formation.³⁰⁷

Colebrook’s enlightening analysis demonstrates how, when we delve into ethics’ pre-modern and pre-representational contexts, it is practiced as daring and corporeal experiments. Ethics is not a set of pre-determined rigid and unchanging rules; rather, it is a life practice and an artful experiment, just as Mnouchkine illustrates with the Théâtre du Soleil. For this reason, an alliance – or *amitié* – between theory and practice is essential, which is what the Soleil shows us through their moving philosophy of *faire ensemble*.

Through *faire ensemble*, the ethical gesture of “reaching-towards” emerges throughout the Soleil’s practice, and perhaps is most clear in their philosophy/technique of cosmopolitanism as well as their technique of audience engagement. Reaching towards others, which we can also articulate as engaging differences, is important because it opens up possibilities of becoming otherwise: “When we reach toward to touch, we reach toward that which is in-formation or trans-formation. This reaching toward is an engendering that qualitatively alters the relation between being and becoming, altering us to the potential variables that combine to give us a clue as to ‘what a body can do’.”³⁰⁸ What do the Soleil’s *corps* and the corpus do, therefore, through reaching towards (the other)? As a part of *faire ensemble*, this gesture illustrates dynamically new ways of moving and interacting that extend the boundaries of the stage, the edges of the text, the frontiers of language and the borders of knowledge. It proposes

³⁰⁷ Claire Colebrook, “Questioning Representation,” *SubStance* 29.92 (2000): 50.

³⁰⁸ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch. Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 86.

dynamic new ways of knowing and acting in the world and transforms theatre into a moving process as well as an artful practices that calls art, politics and life into question.

With *faire ensemble*, “theater” moves beyond “the area in which something happens,” “a sphere of enactment,” “a dramatic representation,” or a collection of stories and becomes embodied, dynamic ethical practices to be exercised both on stage and in daily life.³⁰⁹

Through “a dynamic set of practices by definition...always ‘to come’,” theater at the Soleil “speaks of a desire for...ethical change, and the possibility of renewal through a processual fashioning of *self-in-relation*,” or as we call it, through *faire ensemble*.³¹⁰

Ultimately, Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil shows us how to transform meetings of differences into interrogations and experiments on how to live with each other on stage and in the world openly, artfully and, at times, joyfully. With this tool in hand, therefore, we just might be inspired to craft our own life, like Mnouchkine does with theatre, into an artful and ethical “fantastic voyage” or “tale of enchantment” as well.

³⁰⁹ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*. Second Edition. Ed. Erin McKean. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 1748.

³¹⁰ David Williams, editor of *The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, comes to a similar conclusion regarding the ethical turn that I argue is present in Mnouchkine’s theatre. See “A Grain of Sand in the Works: Continuity and Change at the Theatre du Soleil,” *Collaborative Theatre. The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) x-xv.

Chapter Four

Vers Werewere Liking

Werewere Liking's ritual, or ceremonial, theatre³¹¹ illustrates the themes we have come to know well throughout the course of this dissertation: difference, deterritorialization, moving-with, and cosmopolitanism. At first glance, Liking's theatrical works may give the impression as the biggest proponent of movement and gesture of all the works in this dissertation. This is because "We know...that in general, Francophone African theatre is very physical, invested in signifying through dancing and drumming, the latter crucial for bonding the audience to the work and the performers."³¹² Yet when the familiar themes of difference and cosmopolitanism are ignited in Liking's ceremonial plays, they illuminate crucial – yet ignored – aspects of African ritual theatre as well as an important side of movement that we have not yet encountered.

Analyzing Liking's ritual theatre under the scope of movement and through the encounters of difference, moving-with, deterritorialization, and cosmopolitanism brings to light the subversive gestures she crafts in her work that call not only theatre, social and political phenomena into question, but also movement itself in the most forceful and profound ways. Liking's use of traditional elements such as dance, ritual gesture and music does not edify ritual theatre, but opens it up to function as "un modèle que l'on

³¹¹ Following the scholarship on ritual theatre, which includes that by Hourantier, Conteh-Morgan and Miller, I will use the terms "ritual" and "ceremonial" theatre interchangeably throughout the chapter.

³¹² Judith Miller, "Is There a Specifically Francophone African Stage Textuality?," *Yale French Studies* Vol. 112 (2007): 133.

interroge sans cesse, comme une base essentielle que l'on consulte pour reprendre contact avec certaines idées primordiales."³¹³ In this respect, it functions as a means by which society calls itself into question in order to better itself.³¹⁴ Marie-José Hourantier, Liking's close friend, colleague and collaborator during the 1970s and 80s, confirms this when she states that "Cette nouvelle société crée son propre théâtre parce qu'elle éprouve le besoin d'exprimer ses angoisses, ses contradictions et de réfléchir sur leur résolution, avec des techniques qui ont fait leur preuve."³¹⁵ Here, Hourantier's analysis of ritual theatre is in line with ours when she confirms that ritual of tradition is not a movement that is made up of, or leads to, stasis. On the contrary, it is dynamic and ultimately paves the way for regeneration – new ways of living in the future – that we can see concretely manifested in Le Village Ki-Yi, a community of artistic education for young people, that Liking created in the mid-1980s.³¹⁶

Such dynamism does not translate into a purely practical function in daily life, however. The sensational encounters that occur in Liking's ceremonial theatre, and particularly her first play from 1979, *La Puissance de Um*, rouse and emphasize the importance of artistic creation in ritual theatre. The artistic turn releases African ritual

³¹³ Marie-José Hourantier in Werewere Liking and Marie-José Hourantier, *Spectacles rituels* (Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1987) 11. This theory presented here follows the argument I made in the chapter on Senghor.

³¹⁴ Please note that the cathartic effects of ritual theatre are in fact an integral part of its traditional function. Hourantier states that "Le théâtre en Afrique doit, comme partout ailleurs, se construire sans cesse comme réponse à des interrogations, à des angoisses, préserver son statut au sein de la collectivité et remplir son rôle social. 'Pour que l'acte théâtral puisse de définir comme acte social au sens fort du terme, on considère traditionnellement qu'il doit être porteur du pouvoir d'exprimer la vérité et la cohésion du groupe, qu'il doit célébrer ou formuler la vision collective qu'une société a d'elle-même, de son histoire et de ses rapports à l'Univers.' Dans ce sens le théâtre revêt une nécessité pour atteindre une véritable régénération individuelle et collective." Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 8. It is Liking's use of subversive gesture, which I will reveal and explain further in the chapter, which is the radical and innovative act in her ritual theatre.

³¹⁵ Marie-José Hourantier in Werewere Liking and Marie-José Hourantier, *Spectacles rituels* (Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1987) 11.

³¹⁶ Le Village KiYi is one of Liking's most fascinating – and concretely ethical – acts. We will address it at the end of the dissertation.

theatre from being solely political and/or social critique, and reignites and re-members the creativity and artfulness that is an intrinsic part of it. Further, it shows that the human body is touched by art sensorially – through a direct impact on the body of the audience and performers. It is precisely the artful turn and the sensational touch, therefore, that open up the paths towards new ways of living *à venir*, which spring forth from Liking’s ritual theatre because of its crucial movement between life and art. This pulsation is Liking’s ritual theatre greatest – and most ethical – gesture.

Throughout the course of this chapter, we will witness how the ethics that upsurge from Liking’s ritual play *La Puissance de Um* show that a work of art (in this case, theatre) is not innovative or ethical through what it represents, but through its impact on the human body that is touched by art and then acts on and in the world. From this dynamic pulsation of life and art, a new kind of artful life explodes, and from that, new worlds are born.

Setting the Stage: Her-story

Werewere Liking, born Nicole Ngo Njock in 1950 in Bassaland in Cameroon, was steeped in indigenous Bassa culture from birth. Both of her parents were traditional artists and musicians and, because she was married very young (16 years of age), the women in her husband’s family played a vital role in her educational and artistic development. She reached the farthest initiation into *Koo* and *Nding*: secret Bassa women’s cults through which the “complete socialization of women [is] achieved.”³¹⁷

³¹⁷ These cults are “traditional cults in which newlyweds (*mimbom*) as well as betrothed girls (*biyegna*) were initiated into womanhood by a group of select older women who held positions of responsibility in the community. Some of these societies continue to exist today.” In “Introduction,” Werewere Liking, *African*

Her education in conventional, Western-style primary school, on the other hand, was brief.³¹⁸

Liking's artistic, mystical and cosmopolitan background is one factor that sets her theatrical corpus apart from other modern African plays written in the decades immediately following the Independences of the 1960s. The playwrights, many of whom followed in the neo-Négritude movement, including Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant and Cheikh N'Dao, aimed to break with the assimilation tendencies and "European esthetic" of Francophone theatres of the early twentieth century.³¹⁹ Suspicious of Western influences, yet choosing to write in French, the language of the colonizer, these writers incorporated African themes including rituals and traditional dance, as well as emblematic characters of black resistance,³²⁰ into their works in order to "express an African identity and rewrite the history of Africa from an African perspective."³²¹

Although critics such as Sylvie Chalaye and Katheryn Wright view this technique as

Ritual Theatre: The Power of Um and A New Earth, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome et. al. (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, 1996) 7.

³¹⁸ It is difficult to determine whether Liking's educational trajectory was common for women of her generation. Meredith Terretta states that "In the case of Cameroon, by the late 1950s, the village was inextricably linked with the city." Since the divide between the urban and rural in decreased, access to Western-style education for all people, regardless of geography, may have increased. See " 'God of Independence, God of Peace': Village Politics and Nationalism in the Maquis of Cameroon, 1957-1971," *The Journal of African History* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2005) 78. Further, in her fascinating historiographical study of Cameroonian women's participation in nationalism, Terretta documents three Western-educated Cameroonian women: Marie-Irene Ngapeth, Marthe Ouandie, and Julienne Niat. These young women held leadership positions in the Union des femmes camerounaises (UFC), and all three women "shared a desire to increase the political rights of [Cameroonian] women ... during the new postwar age." In "A Miscarriage of Revolution: Cameroonian Women and Nationalism," *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* No. 12 (2007): 68. Thus, women of Liking's generation clearly had access to Western-style education, but it is difficult for us to determine how many. Based on this information, we might wonder if Liking's lack of Western-style education was truly exceptional, or if it is a facet of her life that she, and her biographers, emphasize.

³¹⁹ Two examples of this kind of theatre are Gilbert de Chambertrand of Guadeloupe and Jean Gosselin's troupe of French repertory theatre adapted to a Caribbean context. See Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, "Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations," *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 146.

³²⁰ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, "Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations," *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

³²¹ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, "Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations," *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

nostalgic of and glorifying a utopian pre-colonial Africa, and even a literary “crutch,” it was nonetheless an important, and even necessary, first step for African writers emerging from centuries of colonialism.³²² In this respect, it allowed them to begin to “reconstruct national and cultural identity and rewrite the history of Africa from an African perspective,”³²³ which manifests in the text through the integration of tradition (African dance, chants, rituals), nostalgia and glorification of pre-colonial Africa. Furthermore, the philosophical framework of Négritude that these writers inherited – a philosophy and practice that through Senghor’s influence, which we called *l’éthétique sénégalienne* in Chapter Two, is both intellectual and sensual – allowed them to produce new models of theatrical expression.³²⁴ Thus, even though the playwrights who wrote following the Independences of the 60s relied on an Afro-centric perspective, it permitted them to express themselves in a new way, with at least one foot stepping towards the future even while the other foot, according to some interpretations, may appear to be firmly grounded in the past.³²⁵

Following the optimism and independence of the 1960s, the 1970s brought about “disenchantment,” “artistic withdrawal into the self,” and a “concern with individual

³²² In my previous chapter on Senghor I dispute that these techniques are solely nostalgic. I will not reiterate my stance here, but ask the reader to kindly keep it in mind.

³²³ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, “Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations,” *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

³²⁴ In her chapter on “Queering ‘West African Literatures,’” Stephanie Newell makes a similar argument regarding women writing the novel. She explains how Senghor’s idea of “effective humanism” allowed women writers to break out of patriarchal structures and produce innovative works of fiction. In *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 195.

³²⁵ John Conteh-Morgan explains the difference between the usage of the French language and indigenous cultural performance in nationalist theatre and that in what he calls “culturalist” theatre, to which he ascribes Liking. In nationalist theatre, their “mainstream French stage conventions and use of the French language exhibited authoritarian, messianic, statist tendencies and a paternalistic view of the emergent nation that were embedded in dynastic, regal, epic, and heroic conceptions of the African and Caribbean past.” On the other hand, the cultural theatres that followed became sites of “new and ‘authentic’ theatrical cultures whose structure, function, and theatrically constituted the foundations of an alternative French-language tradition of playwriting.” In John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) xiv-xv.

rather than collective identity,” according to Chalaye.³²⁶ Both African and Antillais playwrights, including Bernard Dadié from the Ivory Coast and Jean-Evaina Mna from Cameroon, and Robert Dieupart and Arthur Lerus and Alex Nabis writing from the Antilles, created “profoundly satirical” works, provoked by their dissatisfaction with “failed collective and national projects” and “African dictatorships that emerged from the ashes of colonialism.”³²⁷ Despite their best intentions, however, Chalaye believes that these intense and daring political theatres still “continued to subscribe to classical models inherited from colonial times.”³²⁸

John Conteh-Morgan, on the other hand, puts forth an alternative view to the theatres of the 1970s. According to his perspective, these theatres, which he calls the “post-nationalist theatre movement of aesthetic critique and renewal” and “the new theatre of aesthetic and cultural critique,” are dynamic, creative, performance-based (as opposed to textual-based) works that are heavily corporeal and intracultural.³²⁹ Liking’s theatrical productions show that she is a pioneer of this new theatre where the corporeal aspect, and movement in particular, is a vital component of its innovativeness. The intracultural aspects, or differences, she brings together on stage make a “complete art” that creatively challenge both art and life.

Liking is part of the 1970s generation of African playwrights, as her first play *La Puissance de Um* was performed and written in 1979. At the same time, her ceremonial plays’ dynamic and creative aesthetic components carve out a unique niche on the

³²⁶ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, “Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations,” *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

³²⁷ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, “Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations,” *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

³²⁸ Sylvie Chalaye, Donia Mounsef, Christy Wampole, “Contemporary Francophone Drama: Between Detours and Deviations,” *Yale French Studies* No. 112 (2007): 147.

³²⁹ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 8-9.

French-language African stage. Liking's ritual theatrical corpus, including *La Puissance de Um*, actively calls into question major issues including African tradition, gender roles, and theatre as genre by performing these phenomena when they encounter each other together as *processes*. This is manifest in Liking's theatrical works since they focus specifically on women and the processes whereby they are socialized, illustrated by the *biku* ritual we will investigate in *La Puissance de Um*.³³⁰ Yet contrary to Chalye's perspective, Liking's work is not "profoundly satirical" or "disenchanted," and it is not an "artistic withdrawal into the self." This illustrates Liking's first step away from the classically- and colonially-inspired political theatre that Chalye describes. Moreover, its creative character is confirmation of the new and distinct path that Liking forged both in French-language African theatre and in the late twentieth century avant-garde. John Conteh-Morgan, one of the most important theorists of the French-language African stage, attests to this and calls her theatre "one of the most creative appropriations of indigenous performance traditions for the francophone African stage."³³¹ Yet Conteh-Morgan is not the sole critic to draw attention to the ingenuity and creativity in Liking's work. In her influential article "Werewere Liking: From Chaos to Cosmos," Katheryn Wright places Liking in a unique realm, stating that she "belongs to a new generation of African writers who are concerned as much with the content of their works as with developing a new African esthetic that might further the social efficacy of their art."³³²

³³⁰ Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 137. Newell makes this observation regarding the West African novel by women, yet it is significant to Liking's theatrical texts, as well as her novels.

³³¹ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 60.

³³² Katheryn Wright, "Werewere Liking: From chaos to cosmos.," *World Literature Today* 69.1 (1995) 56.

How do Liking's early divagations pave the way for a different and creative theatre *à venir*? Like the primary texts we have analyzed thus far in the dissertation, one of the most important movements that it, along with the new theatre, executes is to break open the classical works of the French theatrical canon (as well as the African plays that followed suit) through its emphasis on the corporeal, or through performative practice. One way the new theatre does this is through "[t]he recovery of practices such as audience participation, the decentralization of text, and authorial authority effectively reduced the centrality of European influences – a paradox, as we shall see, given that European theatrical innovation has been inspired by such practices."³³³ Performative practice, Conteh-Morgan writes, is the new theatre's most important feat: "Arguably, the single most important feature was the new theatre's rejection of the textualist and literary bias of the dominant theatre tradition in favor of a performance orientation."³³⁴

One way in which Liking orients her ritual theatre, including *La Puissance de Um*, toward performance is through "that which is theatrical in ritual"³³⁵ which usually, though not always, favors the sensory and the gestural over the textual in its performance. The "theatrical in ritual" manifests in Liking's performances through the people involved: her productions use paid actors and not priests, and the spectators are not worshipers; an actual ritual would be comprised of a (genre of) priest and worshipers.³³⁶

³³³ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) xv.

³³⁴ It is important to note here that Conteh-Morgan considers Liking as part of the "new theatre" movement. John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 8.

³³⁵ Liking says this in several of her interviews, including the one with Judith Miller, "Werewere Liking: Eclectic Connections. Interview with Werewere Liking.," *Women Writing Africa. West Africa and the Sahel*, Ed. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Aminata Diaw, Vol. 2 (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005) 363-373.

³³⁶ Cheryl Toman, "Werewere Liking as Translator and Translated," *FLS: Translation in French and Francophone Literature and Film*. Ed. James Day (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009) 103.

Because Liking's ceremonial theatre uses actors and not priests, the bodies on stage are not solely confined to a representative function, as they are in a religious context during a ritual. This allows the actor to deeply connect with the sensory capacities of her body, which is a major function of ritual theatre that "réapprend à cultiver le corps, siège de la vie, à l'habiter", le connaître et le sentir."³³⁷ Connecting with one's body on stage is not a self-serving function, however. Through the actor's sensational connection to her body, and not the text, she opens up and connects both on- and beyond the stage in an encounter towards the other: the spectators. Moreover, since the actors of Liking's ceremonial theatre are often part of the community, their bond with the spectators is already well established.³³⁸ The actors use this bond, along with their own connection to their body, in order to "capter son environnement et le corps de l'autre."³³⁹ Such an encounter, which Conteh-Morgan defines as "artistic self-consciousness," animates the actors' gestural performance for the audience, creating a dynamic flux of differences between them that is woven into the performance. Acting using sensorial connections to the body that engage in a flux between actors and spectators – similar to the *faire ensemble* we witnessed in Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil – differs from acting according to classical

³³⁷ Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 181.

³³⁸ It is important to highlight that in African ritual theatre, the actor is not foreign to or removed from the community. On the contrary, he is an "individual who is invested in the dignity of initiates [and who] consciously assumes his role as an actor in the theatre of daily life and who must pass on his knowledge to, and for the good of, the community." Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 219. (The translation is mine.) Furthermore, ritual theatre breaks down the boundaries between actor and spectator since the spectators, as participants in the ritual, are potential actors themselves. For more on the actor in African ritual theatre, refer to Chapter Six: "L'acteur-rituel," and for more on the public, see Chapter Seven: "Le public," both part of Hourantier's aforementioned work.

³³⁹ Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 181.

theatre.³⁴⁰ Whereas the latter consists of imitation and emotional detachment both from the self and from the spectators, actors of African ritual theatre are required to deeply connect with themselves and with the community, as established above.

There are both artful and ethical undulations in this kind of sensorially shared performance dynamic that emerge from the emphasis on sensorial connections and encounters between actor and spectator. The actors' sensational, rather than purely representative, function in ritual theatre's performance, along with the audience's active engagement, underscores the body's active role in creating the performance. In this respect, Liking's ceremonial theatre reveals the body of both actor and spectator as "barometre, balance, pour [...] la rencontre de soi et de l'autre [...] l'endroit de l'espace où tous les plans de l'existence se rencontrent [...]." ³⁴¹ This phenomenon, in the most optimistic of outcomes, creates a theatrical experience where each member of the performance – actor and spectator alike – can construct his own questions, and perhaps draw his own conclusions, from the theatrical experience. Liking's ritual theatre, including *La Puissance de Um*, does provoke "serious thought" and create "something of the healing ecstasy" ³⁴² that comes from traditional ritual. Yet the theatrical aspect of her work, of which the sensory, corporeal aspect is key, propels the internal, personal reflection ("thought" and "ecstasy") that ritual provokes into exterior encounters with the other. Thus the collective dynamic between actor and spectator not only functions as "a

³⁴⁰ The term "classical theatre" shall refer to the French and/or French-inspired dialogue drama that privileges the "literary."

³⁴¹ Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 181.

³⁴² Conteh-Morgan in Cheryl Toman, "Werewere Liking as Translator and Translated," *FLS: Translation in French and Francophone Literature and Film*. Ed. James Day (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009) 103.

³⁴² Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 181.

form of ritual initiation into self-understanding” but, through the encounter with the other – with difference, “self-understanding” itself is opened up and called into question. The self is put into perspective in relation to the other and the community, which is part of the cathartic process of ceremonial theatre that involves “moving-with” – interminglings of self and other, individual and community, art and ritual, and theory and practice – “on whose successful outcome the regeneration of both self and community depends.”³⁴³

The Power of Um

La Puissance de Um, as mentioned above, is Werewere Liking’s first play and was first performed and then scripted in 1979.³⁴⁴ It is based on a ritual for the dead, parts of which are still performed in Bassaland today.³⁴⁵ In the play, Ngond Libii Ntep Iliga³⁴⁶ (who shall be referred to as Ngond Libii henceforth) Bassa culture and tradition call her to step into widowhood since her husband, the politically renowned Ntep Iliga, passed away. First, in order to understand the significance of this play, as well as movement’s role therein, it is crucial to recognize the cultural implications of widowhood according to

³⁴³ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 11.

³⁴⁴ That the play was performed first and then scripted upholds the primacy of the body and movement (over text) in Liking’s early works, which we attributed above to the performance-based African new theatre, per Conteh-Morgan. We might also think of both Mnouchkine’s improvisational techniques and Artaud’s sensational theories of theatre here, and especially his emphasis on the sensory over the text, as articulated in the previous chapter on Mnouchkine.

³⁴⁵ This is according to Asanga, Dingome, Futchu and Lyonga in the introduction to Liking’s *The Power of Um*. See Werewere Liking, *The Power of Um and A New Earth*, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1996) 8. Please note that I will question the homogeneity of the Bassa influences, and especially its importance, in Liking’s rituals further in the dissertation.

³⁴⁶ On the list of characters, Liking specifically defines the name of Ngond Libii: “literally the slave woman of Ntep Iliga” and Dingome explains it as “ ‘*Ngond*’ in Bassa means ‘the daughter of’ and ‘*Libii*’ is the most derogatory term used to designate a slave. ‘*Ngond Libii*’ therefore means ‘the daughter of a slave’ and by extension a ‘slave girl’. Ngond Libii’s name is an adequate method to indicate the woman’s subservient position in the society. Werewere Liking, *The Power of Um and A New Earth*, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome et al, (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1996) 19-20, 27.

the Bassa. On this subject, Jeanne Dingome explains the rites a widow must undertake, which are composed of a series of traditional corporeal practices that the character “Old Woman” describes to Ngond Libii in the play:

Today, as in the past, surviving widows are subjected to a series of rites that aim at helping them adjust to their new condition. Immediately after the death of her husband, the widow becomes taboo. Her communication with the outside world virtually ceases, except through the medium of older widows who are her initiators into widowhood. To reinforce her seclusion, she undergoes certain symbolic rites: she is stripped naked and her body is covered with ash; a clod of kneaded clay is plugged into each ear; and hence on, she lies on the bare floor. Her nakedness is a sign of the vacuum left by the death of her sole provider, while her plugged ears prevent her from hearing calls, and particularly the call of her deceased husband, for it is believed that he will be yearning after her. In addition, she must, like everybody else, wear the mourning rope on her wrist on the day of the burial and will only remove it on the fifth day when the *lissò mòò* rite takes place.³⁴⁷

In the description above, it is clear that becoming a widow in Bassa culture is a physical process. A woman assumes the status of “widow” not upon the death of her husband, but only when she physically assumes the role by partaking in the ritual. The performative, and thus highly physical aspect, of widowhood is affirmed in the play when the male elder of the community commands the female elder to “dress the widow.”³⁴⁸ That Liking illustrates widowhood as a physical process corresponds to ceremonial new theatre’s corporeal emphasis, and if we look closely, we discover that it is a profoundly subversive double-gesture. Even though the play is based on a ritual for the dead, the crux of *La Puissance de Um* actually revolves around Ngond Libii’s rejection of the

³⁴⁷ In Werewere Liking, *The Power of Um and A New Earth*, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome et al (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1996) 9. I have used Dingome’s description of the rite since it is more detailed. In the play itself, the Old Woman explains the rite as the following: “Pendant les neuf jours qui vont suivre la mort de ton mari, tu ne répondras à aucun appel. Si quelqu’un insiste, tu lui répondras: ‘que me veux-tu?’ Et c’est pour entendre le moins d’appels possible que tu auras de l’argile aux oreilles. Pendant cette même période, tu te couvriras de cendres uniquement, car tu es en deuil de ton seigneur et maître qui ne t’offrira plus d’habits pendant longtemps. La cordelette de deuil te reteindra auprès de tes enfants. Ils ont encore plus besoin de toi que Ntep. Il peut bien attendre un peu, celui là!” (20).

³⁴⁸ Werewere Liking, *The Power of Um and A New Earth*, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome et al (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1996) 35.

Bassa widowhood rite, called *biku*.³⁴⁹ In other words, the play's most critical and controversial gesture is twofold: Ngond Libii's *refusal to move* according to tradition, and her provocation of new movements that engender innovative, ethical practices.

The performance stage is built as a semi-circle, which establishes the space as ritual space. Circular or semi-circular performance spaces are a key feature of new theatre, which broke the walls of classical theatrical space, so to speak, through settings that not only validate ritual theatre, but also create a collective theatrical experience by encouraging fluidity between the performers and spectators.³⁵⁰ At stage left, there are several objects including a mortar and pestle, benches, wood logs and stones that serve as seats, and a calabash of palm-wine.³⁵¹ Red, black and white cloths cover the seats and each color carries its own individual symbolism according to Bassa culture.³⁵² At stage right, there is a bamboo bed on which the corpse of her Ngond Libii's husband, Ntep Iliga, lies. The objects and their position on stage work together to create a network of

³⁴⁹ The Bassa terms are found in Jeanne N. Dingome's introduction to Liking's *The Power of Um*. See Werewere Liking, *The Power of Um and A New Earth*, Ed. and Trans. Jeanne N. Dingome et al (San Francisco, London and Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1996) 9.

³⁵⁰ We might be reminded of a similar dynamic of theatrical space and performer/spectator fluidity in the Théâtre du Soleil. Regarding Liking, Conteh-Morgan confirms the spatial fluidity in new theatre; see John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 15. Also, see Marie-José Hourantier's extensive work on ritual theatre in *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984).

³⁵¹ We should be careful not to over-elevate the status of the object in ritual theatre. According to Marie-José Hourantier, a ritual object is "living" insofar as it highlights the gestures of the actor. She states: "L'objet lui-même importe peu, seule la forme, sa matérialité s'impose dans l'imagination de l'acteur qui lui prête toutes les fonctions, lui fait tenir n'importe quel rôle." In *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 168.

³⁵² Although it is not in the interest, and beyond the scope, of this dissertation to analyze the symbolism of the play, it is noteworthy to mention the significance of the colors in *La Puissance de Um*, per Hourantier: "*La Puissance de Um* ont réduit la palette aux trois couleurs représentatives de la symbolique africaine: le noir, le rouge et le blanc. [...] Pour l'Africain, nous a expliqué un vieux sage bassa, deux couleurs contiennent toutes les autres couleurs, le noir qui absorbe et le blanc qui les manifeste. [...] Dans la vision ésotérique...le noir est immatériel, car à l'instar de l'esprit, il ne peut être souillé, et il évoque un changement d'état. Le blanc devient matériel, il supporte toutes les taches et symbolise alors la mort, la destruction. [...] Le rouge est le symbole de la vie active, de la vie prodigue qui aboutira au noir, à la négation des couleurs. Cette idée de passage, d'épreuve, qu'évoque le noir aboutit au blanc qui est à nouveau la réunion de toutes les couleurs-lumière, traduisant la guérison, la découverte de la vérité, une renaissance." Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 173-4.

signals that communicate on the sensory levels of both the performers and spectators.³⁵³ Such a phenomenon is possible because objects, colors and space all contain vibrational qualities according to Bassa belief. For example, each color emits vibrations that physically and sensorially act on the spectator. Also, specific actions are conducted in specific areas of the stage (i.e. healing and light is in the east, obscurity is in the west) according to the vibrational qualities of each direction.³⁵⁴ Although fascinating, neither the meaning nor the symbolism of these theatrical elements is crucial to our analysis. Furthermore, Liking chooses to geographically deterritorialize her productions and move them from Cameroon, where Bassa ritual significance is part of the native culture and widely understood, to the Ivory Coast, where it is “foreign,” thus destabilizing ritualistic meaning and symbolism.³⁵⁵ This allows Liking to concentrate on and highlight the fleshly and sensorial aspects of ritual and put them into motion in her work, which captures our attention – or “touches” us. It is understandable, therefore, and even expected, that each person will understand the signals differently since the audience is

³⁵³ Marie-José Hourantier confirms this in her extensive research on West African ritual and ritual theatre, and has specific insight into Liking’s works. She was Liking’s close friend and colleague during the 1970s and early 80s. Regarding ritual, she writes: “Les couleurs, les sons, les danses, les postures fonctionnent comme autant de langages codés qui renvoient certes aux valeurs culturelles du groupe mais qui permettront au futur metteur en scène de les exploiter avec la même subtilité en tenant compte à son tour de son public.” Regarding ritual theatre, she states: “Un rituel était organisé jadis pour être efficace et le vise à atteindre ce même but en agencant ses moindres séquences de manière à être parfaitement suivi et perçu par le spectateur. La forme joue un rôle essentiel, le code adopté doit être extrêmement rigoureux pour que les idées-forces s’imposent. C’est l’art de dire, le geste qui porte, le symbole qui signifie, les rythmes et les vibrations qui émettent, ce sont tous ces éléments réunis qui décident du succès ou de l’échec d’un spectacle rituel.” In *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984) 20, 59.

³⁵⁴ For more on symbolism and meaning of this nature, see Werewere Liking and Marie-José Hourantier, *Spectacles rituels* (Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1987), Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984), and John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). The Romanian writer Mircea Eliade also writes extensively on symbolism, myth and ritual. See, for example: *Images et symboles: essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

³⁵⁵ Cheryl Toman, “Werewere Liking as Translator and Translated,” *FLS: Translation in French and Francophone Literature and Film*. Ed. James Day (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009).

composed of both those whose culture is evoked in the performance as well as outsiders to the culture. Ultimately, the signals are intended to touch everyone involved in the performance, albeit differently, regardless of his or her origin.

The play opens when Ngond Libii enters the stage singing a funeral song. She stops at center stage and looks at the objects that are placed at stage left. Finally, she approaches the calabash, places it on her cheek and caresses it while stating: “C’est ici que je vis ma vie. Statique mais lovée, prête à déborder du vase comme toi, vin de palme bouillant de rage, dans une outre trop petite, enfermé.”³⁵⁶ She puts back the calabash but continues to caress it and says: “C’est ici que je vis ma vie, écumante d’énergie qui fuse de moi telle la lave du cratère, telle la résine des pores de l’écorce, vaine et inexistante dans des masses pourtant encombrantes.”³⁵⁷ Here, Ngond Libii’s words are not particularly inflammatory but they do emit signals of her distress that set the scene for the tension *à venir*. At the advent of her husband’s death, she publically articulates her discontent with her life and will continue later in the play to expose his public and personal failures through dialogue that is colored with anger, sadness, frustration and lamentation. In the monologue, she does not lament losing him, but instead clearly articulates her rage that comes from the loss of her freedom and mobility during her married life, as underscored by her gesture holding the calabash. This is brave and provocative on her part, considering that the audience might expect her to express grief over her husband’s passing!

At this very early moment on stage, we might wonder why words via monologue are the principle means of communication considering that new theatre, and Liking’s

³⁵⁶ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 10.

³⁵⁷ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 10.

ceremonial theatre in particular, privileges movement and gesture. In order to address this important issue, we need to clarify Liking's conception of "words," and in particular "words" in relation to "text." This task is straightforward: Liking does not divorce words from the body. Whereas "text" is understood by the new theatre as pre-inscribed, predetermined fixed speech and gestures that correspond to the Cartesian mind/body dualism embraced by classical theatre, "words" are part of artistic, corporeal expression that manifest as vibrational expressions of and from the body. Hourantier explains this as the following: "Dans le théâtre-rituel, le corps est aussi important que la parole: il dicte les sons, sert de caisse de résonance mais il ne prend jamais sa revanche sur le verbe qui est autant que lui un instrument de libération et de communication."³⁵⁸ This philosophy "is made flesh" in Liking's novel *Elle sera de jaspé de corail* where one of the characters, Grozi, calls for more fleshly and sensory-rich theatrical practices: "[In theatre,] Other vibrations should come into play and move us to the core. The sound of vowels should strike our pituitary gland and put us in touch with other worlds...Smells should make our mouths water...And silences should allow us to meditate and widen our horizons."³⁵⁹

Such a passage highlights the corporeal affect of the words in Liking's ritual plays, which "tend to be poetic, incantatory, and invocative. They seek...to act on the

³⁵⁸ My translation: "In ritual theatre, the body is as important as the word: it [the body] articulates sounds, acts as sound box, but it never takes revenge on the verb, which is as much an instrument of communication as the body." Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 179.

³⁵⁹ Werewere Liking, *It Should Be of Jasper and Coral, and Love-across-a-Hundred-Lives*, Trans. Marjolijn Jager (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000) 73 and John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 3. This brings to mind Artaud's theories on theatre that highlights the sensory, corporeal quality of theatre, which we saw manifest in the previous chapter on Mnouchkine and Le Théâtre du Soleil. Artaud states: "Abandonnant les utilisations de la parole, il fait des mots des incantations. Il pousse la voix. Il utilise des vibrations et des qualités de voix. Il fait piétiner éperdument des rythmes. Il pilonne des sons. Il vise à exalter, à engourdir, à charmer..." In "Le Théâtre de la cruauté," *Œuvres complètes IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 88.

senses, the ‘organism,’ as Artaud would put it.”³⁶⁰ It also shows how Liking uses the concept moving-with as part of her theatrical techniques in a *double-entendre*: the body and word perform together not only in and from the actor, but also in and with the spectator. Dynamics like these remind us not to think of the body in dualistic terms where the body is on one side and *la parole* and the mental is on the other,³⁶¹ but as different and fleshly practices that move together affectively and effectively. Thus Ngond Libii’s monologue is neither subversive nor artful for its semantic quality, for its meaning, or even for the fact that it illustrates her courage to publically proclaim her dissatisfaction. Rather, it is the dance that word and gesture perform together via the body that brings to light instances of subversion, like Ngond Libii’s refusal to partake in the widowhood rite, that come to life on stage. Now, let us return to the next series of events in *La Puissance de Um* to witness first-hand the unfolding of Liking’s artistic, avant-garde aesthetics in order to continue our analysis in more detail.

Following her first monologue, Ngond Libii leaves center stage. Liking specifies: “*sa voix monte, mais son regard reste baissé*” as she advances towards the front-stage. Ngond Libii utters: “Désespérément, je tends mes yeux vibrants, je me tends...Je tends ma voix syncopée, je me tends...je tends mes mains crispées vers cet œil mort, la lanterne qui ne m’éclaire plus, en ces temps de crise [...]”³⁶² The stage directions indicate that she raises her eyes and addresses the audience for the first time, and from this position, Ngond Libii announces: “Eh oui! Moi, fille esclave, femme de Ntep, j’ai tué

³⁶⁰ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 73.

³⁶¹ Marie-José Hourantier confirms this and states that it is, in fact, *not* part of Bassa tradition to dualistically divide the body and the mind. In *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984) 180.

³⁶² Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 10-11.

mon mari.”³⁶³ Though shocking, her declaration is crucial because it continues to build the intensity that her previous monologue established, and upon which the following scene rests. After this avowal, Ngond Libii subsequently moves to the right angle of the stage towards her husband’s corpse. Turning her back to the public, as indicated by the stage directions, “*elle avance lentement jusqu’au bord du lit ; elle tend alors les mains sur la dépouille de Ntep comme pour une bénédiction...*”³⁶⁴ and says:

C’est ici que je noie ma vie sous le torrent des sucres inexploités, sous le poids des talents étouffés. Ah! Que la résine n’est-elle énergie agissante et que mon sang n’est-il pétrole? (elle baisse les mains comme pour une défaite). Et ainsi de mes pères, et ainsi de mes frères. Cependant que le temps se traîne interminablement vers ton règne, ô toi, Homme (elle s’adresse à la dépouille sur un ton subitement espiègle). Vois-tu le signe et la lueur d’espoir dans le ciel? Ah! Ah! Eh bien, peut-être, pour nos fils et nos filles, mais en attendant, toi, attends!

Elle [...] va à la porte où elle appelle le plus naturellement possible son fils aîné. Celui-ci arrive, indolent. Sa mère le regarde comme une bête curieuse puis, au bout d’un moment...

Va battre le tambour d’appel : annonce la mort de ton père... Il est mort enfin!³⁶⁵

Succeeding this proclamation, Ngond Libii’s eldest son, Ntep Ntep, enters the stage beating a call drum. As we discussed above regarding the ritual objects and their colors, Liking incorporates the musical instrument in the performance not as “*décor musical*” but for the way in which it contributes to elaborate the discourse, which includes the gestural, on stage. The instrument produces rhythmic vibrations that are put into motion by the actor’s body, and all these *together* contribute to the aesthetic and ceremonial aspects of the performance.³⁶⁶ Her second son, two daughters, and “the public” composed of tribal elders (a man and a woman), a griot and members of “the crowd” also come on stage and

³⁶³ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 11.

³⁶⁴ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 11.

³⁶⁵ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 11.

³⁶⁶ Marie-José Hourantier confirms this, and specifically mentions Ntep Ntep in this scene, in *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984) 175.

sit in a semi-circle fashion. One woman of the crowd begins to sing the same funeral chant as the one Ngond Libii sung when she first came on stage; the rest of the women on stage join her. Suddenly, “*with a gesture*,” Ngond Libii interrupts the singing. She states:

Tout a une fin, même la bêtise. Tout a un début même le courage. La fille esclave a commis la bêtise d’aimer un homme que l’on appelait: le lion. La fille esclave a tué le lion, elle vous invite à l’enterrer et elle vous dit: enterrez Ntep! Vous aurez à manger, vous aurez à boire. Vous aurez la fête que vous voudrez mais enterrez-le d’abord. Elle vous dit aussi: prenez garde à vos intérêts: celui que pleurera sur Ntep, ou celui qui portera son deuil, ne bénéficiera d’aucun privilège sur l’héritage de Ntep [...] Pour tout dire, il ne pourra plus jamais mettre les pieds ici et sera considéré comme un ennemi. Enterrez Ntep! Faites-le vite, avant qu’il ne pourrisse. Il était déjà si avancé de son vivant. Enterrez-le! Faites-le vite, avant qu’il ne se désagrège. Il était une ordure, il ne mérite pas de deuil. Enterrez-le! Faites-le vite, vous aurez la fête.³⁶⁷

Ngond Libii moves towards the mortar and pestle, picks up the mortar and “starts pounding furiously.” After hostile comments from several men of the crowd, which breaks the “spell” of her pounding, she continues:

Je pourrais vous conter Ntep s’il n’était une histoire à vomir à jeun. Je n’ai tué personne d’autre, j’ai tué mon mari, pas celui d’une autre femme, j’ai tué mon mari! Et si Ntep avait neuf vies pareilles à celle qu’il a vécue, je le tuerais neuf fois. Enterrez-le, il empesté déjà l’air. Enterrez-le et buvez du vin. Une sale histoire; comment vous conter Ntep?³⁶⁸

This extensive excerpt shows how Liking intermingles different aspects of sensation in her ceremonial theatre, for example, sound (the singing of the funeral chant and the sound of the pounding from the mortar and pestle); gesture (Ngond Libii’s gesture to stop the singing, the pounding gesture of the mortar and pestle); and dialogue (composed of both chant and spoken word). Moreover, these different sensational encounters unearth new theatre’s cosmopolitan tendencies that are most prominent in Liking’s work, which we can attribute to the interminglement of categories within indigenous performance. Upon reading the following observation by John Conteh-

³⁶⁷ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 12.

³⁶⁸ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 14.

Morgan, we realize that African new theatre and cosmopolitanism are not strangers to each other.³⁶⁹

Two broad categories of indigenous performance can be distinguished: the recreational and the devotional. With each of these are a variety of overlapping genres, such as masquerade theatre, spoken drama, dance and puppet theatre, dramatised narratives, recitations and civic or sacred rituals. I use the word 'overlapping' to point to the porous nature of generic boundaries in African performance forms. Thus while, say, speech might be the predominant medium in a given performance, accounting for that performance's overall generic classification in European languages as 'spoken drama', such speech rarely, if ever, stands alone. Other communicative media, such as music and dance, invariably complement it, lending to the form in question the multi-generic, *Gesamtkunstwerk* texture that has become a critical commonplace about African indigenous performances."³⁷⁰

Just as it confirms the dynamic and cosmopolitan tendencies of African new theatre, Conteh-Morgan's citation reaffirms the importance – and the “Africanness” – of the diversity and creativity that compose the new theatre's techniques. Liking pushes these boundaries even further, however, and insists that the actors of her productions learn diverse techniques in order to refine their art. These activities include karate, yoga, breathing exercises, intellectual reading and a mastery of Bassa cultural and ritual techniques.³⁷¹ Furthermore, she “borrows ritual elements from other African countries (West Africa in general, particularly the Ivory Coast and Mali) and also from other cultures like the West Indian voodoo, Christian mythology, European esoterism, [and] oriental mysticism [among others].”³⁷² Such diversity is a key ingredient of Liking's unique and artful theatrical techniques. Paired with the unpredictable and unusual ways she brings word and gesture together, which we have analyzed here in the first segment

³⁶⁹ This is an important observation, especially considering the narrow - and burdensome - emphasis on African essentialism that is applied to African literatures.

³⁷⁰ John Conteh-Morgan, “Francophone Africa south of the Sahara,” *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 88.

³⁷¹ For more, see Chapter Five, “Les techniques du théâtre-rituel” in Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984).

³⁷² Jeanne N. Dingome, et. al. in Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, “Un-Masking the Mediator: Werewere Liking's Flashes of Light,” *“The Original Explosion that Created Worlds.” Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 80-81.

of *La Puissance de Um*, Liking's theatre manifests both sensational and cosmopolitan tendencies.

What makes Liking's theatre truly exceptional, however, is the untimeliness of her theatre's cosmopolitanism. "Culturalist theatre of roots" of the 1970s and 1980s, which is theatre that uses traditional elements such as ceremony and ritual like Liking's, has not been viewed as cosmopolitan. It will not be until the "transgressive theatre of the 1990s" that critics, including Peter Hawkins, believe theatre rejects discourses of authenticity and put binaries such as performance/text, the French Other/the African self, and orality/literacy into question.³⁷³ Further, it is not until the twenty-first century that "a third and chronologically distinct generation emerged [which] has variously been described as the theatre of 'cultural hybridity' ..., 'of crossings' ..., and 'of the in-between' [...]." ³⁷⁴ What Conteh-Morgan argues here, and which serves as the basis of his solid research on African Caribbean Theatre, is not contestable. On the other hand, it is clear from our study here of Liking, also accentuated by our work on Ariane Mnouchkine in the previous chapter, that the "in-between" was already put into motion and occurring on stage before the twenty-first century. Peter Hawkins addresses this in detail in his article entitled "Werewere Liking and Artistic Synthesis" where he uses Homi Bhabha's notion of a "third space" to theorize Liking's "multiculturalism," what we refer to here as cosmopolitanism.³⁷⁵ Liking's theatre forcefully calls into question the binaries that both

³⁷³ See the Introduction to John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) for more on this.

³⁷⁴ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) xvii.

³⁷⁵ I have not used Hawkins's article more frequently in this chapter due to our differences regarding synthesis and postcolonialism in Liking's work. As I argued in the chapter on Senghor, cosmopolitanism does not lead to the synthesis of differences, but rather to their proliferation. Furthermore, I don't believe that we are post-colonial as of yet, which I have also made clear in the chapter on Senghor. I uphold these same positions here. Nevertheless, Hawkins's work is provocative and informative, and I respectfully

Conteh-Morgan and Hawkins outline by un-doing them and choreographing something “other” on the stage, which is made up of the “crossings,” “hybridity,” and the “in-between” that both critics observe, though thirty years earlier.

Is the play’s creative and cosmopolitan bent, which is motored by its untimeliness, the only movement powerful enough to shake up not only theatre, but Bassa tradition as well? Likewise, is it the major contributing factor to Ngond Libii’s immobility, which is paradoxically the most subversive gesture of the play? So far, we have encountered several of Ngond Libii’s monologues that we have established are part of the new theatre’s corporeal techniques. Yet even though her monologues are provocative, often scandalous, and sometimes cutting, it is ultimately her refusal to take part in the physical widowhood ritual, the *biku*, that is simultaneously the play’s crux of tension and its undoing, what Hourantier labels “*démythisation*.”³⁷⁶ Or in other words, to use terminology that has been coursing through the veins of this dissertation, it artfully illustrates a *de-membering* and *re-membering* of tradition through gesture and movement, by using gesture and movement.³⁷⁷ In this sense, Liking’s work is truly avant-garde. The interplay between artfulness and the body creates fertile ground, not only for innovative theatrical aesthetics to come to life, but also for ethics to upsurge – ethics that are not “a handmaiden to politics”³⁷⁸ but lived manifestations of creativity.

recommend it as an important part of Liking’s critical corpus. See Peter Hawkins, “Werewere Liking and Artistic Synthesis,” *“The Original Explosion that Created Worlds.” Essays on Werewere Liking’s art and writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 53-62.

³⁷⁶ Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984) 83.

³⁷⁷ This is what Jacques Derrida calls “deconstruction,” which we will not discuss here, but which is noteworthy nonetheless. In addition, it is yet another example of the new theatre’s, and especially Liking’s, untimeliness proving that it is *toujours/déjà* avant-garde!

³⁷⁸ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 3. His use of the term “handmaiden to politics” in the context of Liking’s *Elle sera de japse et de corail* was too eloquent and appropriate to pass up.

Like the new theatre's intention of breaking up the classical theatrical text through movement, *La Puissance de Um* shakes up tradition through a subtle, yet highly creative and subversive, ritual. The scene³⁷⁹ follows the male elder's frustration that Ngond Libii refuse to perform the *biku* herself. It unfolds after a short monologue by Ngond Libii that begins with tender remembrances of her husband's hands, but eventually develops into bitter remarks on corruption:

(tendrement d'abord puis fielleusement)

Ses mains...Ah, ses mains!...Comment les oublier? Elles lui appartenaient! Qu'elles lui ressemblaient! Il était de ceux qui salissent tout, quoi qu'ils fassent, ou qu'ils aillent, par leurs mains moites de déserteurs, [...] leur peau surnoise de cancrelats; [...] Ah, Ntep, c'est une sale histoire. Enterrez-le, faites-le vite, je vous en prie.³⁸⁰

Next, the Old Woman enters carrying ashes, clay and banana leaves: elements used in the *biku* rite. Since the female elder initiates women into widowhood,³⁸¹ her entrance on stage, while carrying the primary ritual objects, signals the rite. The Old Woman approaches the Old Man and sits to his left side. The stage directions indicate: “[elle] lui parle comme s’il était réellement la femme de Ntep” and “ses paroles sont reprises par le premier homme à l’adresse de Ngond Libii.” She then speaks to the Old Man who “joue le jeu et parle au nom de Ngond Libii”:

Tu ne sais plus la tradition, ô femme de Ntep, ou la violes-tu exprès pour nous narguer? Sommes-nous à un rituel de mort, à un rituel de deuil ou encore à un rituel de commémoration? Qui t’a demandé de faire siéger ton tribunal aujourd’hui? N’aurons-nous plus de neuvaine de deuil ou alors as-tu décidé de nous priver de tout?³⁸²

³⁷⁹ All of the scenes in *La Puissance de Um* unfold with the entrances and exits of different characters, which is integral to the play's spiral rhythm that is fundamental to Bassa cosmology, philosophy and art. Also, the fact that Liking does not construct the play in the Western classical way with breaks in the text (for example, *Act I, Scene iii*) and pauses on stage (breaks in dialogue, scene changes, dimming of lights, etc.), both of which indicate separate scenes, is indicative of ritual theatre, underscores her commitment to the destabilization of genre (both ritual and theatre), and illustrates the new theatre's intention of calling into question classical theatre, especially that in the Western vein.

³⁸⁰ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 19.

³⁸¹ See Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984).

³⁸² Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 20.

The Old Man, in the name of Ngond Libii, replies by assuring her and the community that there will be no mourning or memorial, but there will be plenty of food and drink, and thus a funeral ceremony. He then orders the rite to begin: “Toi, fais ton travail: habille la veuve...” (The English translation stresses the “you”: “As for YOU, carry on your duty, dress the widow!”).³⁸³ The rite indeed begins, but not in a traditional or expected way. The Old Woman performs the ritual: “*La vieille femme recouvre le vieillard de cendres. Elle lui met de l’argile sur les oreilles, sur les joues et sur le menton. [...]*”³⁸⁴ and as she ties a small banana rope around the old man’s wrists, she explains the ritual process that the new widow will endure, as well as its signification.

Are we shocked that the *biku* ritual is performed on a man who is the community elder? Should we be more shocked that no character objects to it or expresses hesitancy and/or disdain? If we remember, Ngond Libii’s harsh criticism of her husband stirs up protest from the community, and notably the males. Her unyielding stance to give her body up to the ritual gestures as dictated and restricted by tradition elicits no protest from the community, but it does spark the most avant-garde – and a gender bending – act of the entire performance. The scene that Liking creates here is unusual and subversive since the *biku* ritual is not performed on men, but on women. Because this ritual turns tradition inside-out through the reversal of gender roles in the ritual, it is equally curious that the members of the community do not object to such extreme subversion, or even mention it. What, therefore, does this scene do? Based on what we know from Liking’s theatre, ritual theatre, and new theatre, we can identify the following innovative and intrepid objectives the scene performs via its corporeal component: first, its unusual

³⁸³ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 20.

³⁸⁴ Werewere Liking, *La Puissance de Um* (Abidjan: Ceda, 1979) 20.

ritualistic movement breaks up the text; this movement destabilizes theatre, including ritual theatre, as a genre. This, in turn, leads to the emergence of Liking's particular aesthetics – an aesthetics that then unleashes an ethics both on the stage and into the world.

As we have already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Liking's revolutionary ritual breaks up the text through movement, and precisely through gestures that compose the unusual *biku* ritual. Evidence shows that the playwrights of the new theatre were acutely aware of the power of movement, and executed it with intention and force in their works. For example, Souleymane Koly explains the reception of the performance-based plays: “the shows that are best received are those that contain the least text,” and Sony Labou Tansi purposefully articulates the importance of breaking up the classical text that creates a fissure from which a truly new theatre emerges:

The intention, really, is to break up the “classical” text, if I may put it that way. A wonderful text is not necessarily a good pretext for a show...During rehearsals, the work with the actors can lead to changes in the text, which is then little more than a “scenario.” It is a question of mixing *mise en scène* with text. Theatre is not about writing texts.³⁸⁵

Both Koly's and Labou Tansi's statements point to the new theatre's intention of employing dynamism, spontaneity and creativity in their performances, which are qualities that they perceive missing (or at least under-represented or underutilized) in classical texts.³⁸⁶

Creative uses of the gestural in performance also breaks classical conventions of theatre-as-genre that revolve around binary notions of body/word, actor/spectator,

³⁸⁵ In John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 8.

³⁸⁶ According to this point of view, classical theatrical texts may lack dynamism, spontaneity and creativity due to the constraints that writing places on them. Although a discussion about this is certainly pertinent at this juncture, it exceeds the limits we have here.

stage/audience are opened up and challenged.³⁸⁷ Anne Adams attributes this to what Liking calls a “lunatic language” that she, along with other African writers including Sony Labou Tansi, Henri Lopès, employs in her works. According to Adams, “‘classic’ forms of artistic expression that are bound by formal constraints might have suited the artistic impulse of an earlier generation,”³⁸⁸ but no longer serve the contemporary African writer, or contemporary African society at large. She attributes this to traumatic contradictions that manifest as the binary (i.e. sacred/profane, mystical/mundane) in both language and thinking, which have infiltrated society and continue to proliferate. Lunatic language, on the other hand, breaks down binaries through “mixing” and “re/uniting the audience and the artist/writer” as in the “oldest of African traditions, where there were no binary oppositions of sacred/profane, mystical/mundane, tragic/comedic.”³⁸⁹ The subversive ritual scene above illustrates this phenomenon and what happens when binaries are opened up in this way: gender roles are overturned and characters speak in each other’s names. This phenomenon does not privilege tradition and ritual, however. On the contrary, Ngond Libii’s refusal to become the widow sets off a series of ritual gestures that render the ritual itself “other.” Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi agrees with Jeanne N. Dingome and her fellow translators of *La Puissance de Um*, as do I, when she states that:

³⁸⁷ For more on binaries, see Peter Hawkins discussion in his article “Werewere Liking and Artistic Synthesis,” *“The Original Explosion that Created Worlds.” Essays on Werewere Liking’s art and writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 53-62. Also see Anne Adams’s discussion of Liking’s concept of “lunatic language,” which we can consider Liking’s articulation of a visceral epistemology via language. In Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 153-168.

³⁸⁸ Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 154.

³⁸⁹ Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 153. We should also note that Marie-José Hourantier’s anthropological work confirms this in *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984).

While Liking remains close to the customs of her people, she often alters them to suit the revolutionary ideas of some of her characters. Ngond Libii's rebellion is a case in point, for one can hardly imagine in real life a situation where an African widow refuses to submit herself to the rites prescribed by tradition and instead accuses the whole clan publically.³⁹⁰

Thus, through the subversion of gender in the *biku* ritual, not only are the binaries of the classical text called into question in Liking's ritual theatre, but ritual and tradition are turned inside-out. This is part of what keeps *La Puissance de Um* in step with the new theatre's tendency to venture beyond text, and which pushes Liking's creative and dynamic theatrical practices far beyond them.

As far forward as Liking's practices might propel us, let us step back for a moment to address an important question Sony Labou Tansi's aforementioned citation brings to light. There, he states that in the new theatre, "theatre" is not about writing texts. If it is not about writing texts, then what is it about? This question is too general to apply to each playwright – and each play for that matter – that is part of the new theatre movement considering that we respect the singularity and diversity of each one. John Conteh-Morgan can help us again through his outline of two broad categories of Francophone African indigenous performance traditions: recreational and devotional. He is careful to highlight "the porous nature of generic boundaries in African performance forms"³⁹¹ that is manifest in the overlapping genres, communicative media (music, dance), as well as the fact that both genres are forms of "conscious, *framed* activity as distinct from the unreflexive performed behaviour of everyday social life" that entails

³⁹⁰ Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, "Un-Masking the Mediator: Werewere Liking's Flashes of Light," *The Original Explosion that Created Worlds. Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 80.

³⁹¹ John Conteh-Morgan, "Francophone Africa south of the Sahara," *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 88.

enactment with, or in front of, an audience.³⁹² In a similar vein, Hélène Tissières articulates this as the fluid space that theatre creates: “Theater creates a fluid space, constantly in the making, where ‘re-negotiating’ can occur.”³⁹³ Thus from this porous space, which is the result of the encounter of different performance traditions, emerge new African artistic expression and new aesthetic paradigms that are manifest in *La Puissance de Um*.

One example of such aesthetic innovation in *La Puissance de Um* entails the concepts of “mixing,” *mélange*, and “moving-with.” These concepts are what make Liking’s theatre a “complete” art. In an interview from 1995 with Judith Miller, Liking states that she was “born into a culture where the verbal arts – poetry, philosophy, declamation – are part of a general initiation to life, called by the Bassa people the *mbock*.”³⁹⁴ The greatest of the Bassa storytellers, according to Liking, were “complete artists”: they sang, played musical instruments and danced. Liking obviously draws from this notion of “complete” art, which *La Puissance de Um* illustrates for the scenes we have analyzed all show encounters of ritual, dance, song, storytelling, and political commentary moving with each other in one performance space.

³⁹² John Conteh-Morgan, “Francophone Africa south of the Sahara,” *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 89.

³⁹³ Hélène Tissières. “African Women and Representation: From Performance to Politics,” *Research in African Literatures* 41.3 (2010): 152. It is important to note the work Tissières reviews here: Thérèse Migraine-George’s *African Women and Representation: From Performance to Politics*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008). I have not used in this chapter because of its emphasis on theatre as solely representation, from which I turn away in this dissertation. As Elizabeth Grosz states, art “is not representative (representations always fails what it represents). It is expression, extending out.” In *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 189. Nonetheless, Migraine-George’s *African Women and Representation: From Performance to Politics* is an important work that adds to the scholarship on Liking.

³⁹⁴ In Judith Miller, “Werewere Liking: Eclectic Connections. Interview with Werewere Liking,” *Women Writing Africa. West Africa and the Sahel*, Ed. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Aminata Diaw, Vol. 2 (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005) 364.

Theatre as a complete art is part of the paradigms Liking defines as “*nouvelles esthétiques*.”³⁹⁵ *Nouvelles esthétiques*, which is both concept and practice, entails: “advocating the legitimate subverting of rigid genre boundaries,” which we have confirmed above through our discussion of cosmopolitanism. They also involve an African aesthetics characterized by “a greater liberty that strikes down all genres, and deployment of symbolic elements not just for their meaning and content (the signified), but also and especially for the texture and sensuality of the signs themselves, for their unaccustomed encounter and for their very vibration, as it were.”³⁹⁶ If we return to our scene analyses, we can verify that these aesthetics were in motion from the beginning of the play. Liking continues: “Descriptive language and the imaginative must be liberated from all logical formation and from the restraints of verisimilitude. They should serve to create a series of images intended to provoke an emotional explosion which can liberate the reader, turning him/her into a creator also.”³⁹⁷

Ethics in/as Practice

Such creativity is not only an aesthetic or sensory asset, although aesthetics and sensation play integral roles in both the new theatre’s and Liking’s trajectory. Through creative movement, *La Puissance de Um* opens up theatre to become more than “text”: theatre becomes a collective practice that contains both an artistic and a social self-

³⁹⁵ Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 153-168.

³⁹⁶ Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 153-168.

³⁹⁷ Werewere Liking in Anne Adams, “To W/rite in a New Language: Werewere Liking’s Adaptation of Ritual to the Novel,” *Callaloo* 16. No. 1 (1993): 153.

consciousness.³⁹⁸ We can view this as evidence of the play's ethics, which it illustrates on several levels.

Ritual theatre in the traditional sense aims to do one of two things: the recreational aspect of ritual theatre aims to "entertain and sometimes to instruct" whereas the devotional aspect is "action-oriented."³⁹⁹ The boundaries between the two genres often blur into each other, which *La Puissance de Um* clearly illustrates.⁴⁰⁰ This avant-garde aesthetic, paired with the flexible ritual structure of the play, allows Liking to "deal with some topical issues of wider interest such as women and subversion of oppressive power, the leadership problem, corruption, the need for reconciliation, etc."⁴⁰¹ Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi outlines the particular issues that *La Puissance de Um* introduces:

The Power of Um...serves as an instrument to re-think the position of postcolonial woman-as-subject, to question contemporary gender relations of power and class, and also serves as a metaphor for an African continent in a world order structured by global capitalism and Western imperialism that will remain subjugated and dispossessed unless its people - men and women - ... take responsibility for changing and shaping is heterogeneous histories.⁴⁰²

These are the issues Ngond Libii opens up when she refuses to take part in the *biku* – issues that still need to be fully addressed in African and Western societies alike.⁴⁰³ It is

³⁹⁸ We might be reminded of a kindred phenomenon in Mnouchkine's theatre here, which is also a part of its ethics.

³⁹⁹ John Conteh-Morgan, "Francophone Africa south of the Sahara," *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 89.

⁴⁰⁰ Both Irène Asisba d'Almeida and Michael Syrotinski theorize that blurring boundaries is an intertextual technique Liking often uses in her narrative strategies (here, both refer to Liking's novel *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail*) as "a prelude to a radical new identity, and a female subjective voice" (Syrotinski 151). See Michael Syrotinski, *Singular performances: reinscribing the subject in Francophone African writing* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002) and Irène Asisba d'Almeida, "The Intertext: Werewere Liking's Tool for Transformation and Renewal," *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, Mary Jean Greene ed. et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁴⁰¹ Jeanne N. Dingome in Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, "Un-Masking the Mediator: Werewere Liking's Flashes of Light," "The Original Explosion that Created Worlds." *Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 81.

⁴⁰² Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, "Un-Masking the Mediator: Werewere Liking's Flashes of Light," "The Original Explosion that Created Worlds." *Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010) 81.

⁴⁰³ Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi proposes a strong feminist and post-colonial critique surrounding Ngond Libii's rejection of the *biku* ritual that is important but unfortunately surpasses the scope of this dissertation. See

through the vehicle of theatre and its emphasis on corporeality, though, that bring these issues to light, for “Le théâtre s’impose de lever les interdits sur tous les problèmes sociaux et existentiels, expose analyse tout ce que la société tait et refuse.”⁴⁰⁴

Though exposed and raw from our exploration, we must not fear that these issues fester like open wounds. Some of ceremonial theatre’s most benevolent movements are its healing gestures, which Liking takes to heart and puts into practice. One example in Liking’s ritual theatre is its therapeutic function that drives both actor and spectator to complete catharsis by bringing to light “a space of inner truth and spiritual import that exists at a level of knowing that is deeper than that of the rational mind.”⁴⁰⁵ The play’s ritual and avant-garde performance techniques – including the use of ritual space, the incorporation of music and dance, the employment of lunatic language, all of which we have outlined in detail – spark that this process. Although we may not agree with this kind of healing from our personal perspective, it is crucial to understand Liking’s theatre, and especially her ritual theatre works. For Liking, ritual initiation brings the consciousness of individuals and groups to a place of “psycho-spiritual healing”⁴⁰⁶ which, we must remember, is not detached from the corporeal but rather an integral part of it, and which is a process that engenders change in both the individual as well as the collective. It is imperative that we do not confuse this process with notions of psychology, ambiguous mental “hocus-pocus” or new-age mystery. Liking’s techniques,

“Un-Masking the Mediator: Werewere Liking’s Flashes of Light,” *“The Original Explosion that Created Worlds.” Essays on Werewere Liking’s Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopoi, 2010) 63-88.

⁴⁰⁴ Marie-José Hourantier, *Du rituel au théâtre-rituel. Contribution à une esthétique théâtrale négro-africaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984) 27.

⁴⁰⁵ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 63.

⁴⁰⁶ John Conteh-Morgan, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 68.

as we have seen throughout this chapter, are sensory/corporeal and rooted in the body, and it is precisely for this reason that they are artful.

Because Liking desired to see more concrete manifestations of this healing, she slowly moved away from ritual theatre and in 1983 left university life, disassociated herself from Marie-José Hourantier and put her dynamic and cosmopolitan philosophies into practice. With the help of several other artists, she launched the Village *Ki-Yi M'bock* ("Ultimate Knowledge of the Universe") in 1983, a social project that mentors African children in the arts. This project is part of her transition from the research-oriented theatre of ritual theatre to a more "politically committed, action-oriented, didactic character that she calls a "*théâtre opérationnel*"⁴⁰⁷ which is based on a philosophy Liking calls "*l'esthétique de la nécessité*." She describes this philosophy as the following:

Je dirais que mon esthétique est *celle de la nécessité*. Je fais mon art selon les besoins, comme le cordonnier qui réalise un travail pour une utilisation immédiate. J'ai besoin de voir mes rêves se concrétiser. Au début, j'ai travaillé dans un théâtre expérimental, rituel, musical... Aujourd'hui, on ne sait plus où me ranger, côté esthétique. Mais c'est selon les besoins des jeunes avec qui je travaille. Mon théâtre est donc vital, il fonctionne selon les exigences du jour.⁴⁰⁸

A discussion of the Village Ki-Yi is a dissertation in and of itself, and Michelle Mielly does a commendable job outlining it in her article "An Aesthetics of Necessity." For our purposes, the Village Ki-Yi is significant because it illustrates Liking's creative, visceral

⁴⁰⁷ Michelle Mielly, "An Aesthetics of Necessity in the Age of Globalization: The Ki-Yi Village as a New Social Movement," *"The Original Explosion That Created Worlds." Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopoi, 2010) 32-33.

⁴⁰⁸ Mielly's translation: "I would say that my aesthetic is one of necessity I create my art according to needs, like the cobbler who carries out his work for immediate use. I need to see my dreams materialize. In the beginning, I worked in experimental theatre techniques, with ritual, music... Today, no one knows where to classify me, in terms of an aesthetic. But it's according to the needs of the young people with whom I work. My theatre is therefore a vital one, it functions according to the needs of the day." Werewere Liking in Michelle Mielly, "An Aesthetics of Necessity in the Age of Globalization: The Ki-Yi Village as a New Social Movement," *"The Original Explosion That Created Worlds." Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopoi, 2010) 33. Note that the bold typeface is my own emphasis.

and vital epistemology put into practice. It shows that “attempting to work from the inside out, assessing needs through local or indigenous knowledge and action, and foregoing the employment of outside intermediaries”⁴⁰⁹ is a truly avant-garde and ethical practice for it employs knowledge with action, theory with practice, and creativity with corporeality in the world. Moreover, it underscores the important role that creativity plays in African theatre, as well as the important role art plays in African society. In this respect, art is not representation divorced from the body and from our world. Rather, it is a process – an “agent of change in life” – a way of bringing bodies “in touch with the forces of the past and future, with the forces of the universe”:

Art affects bodies, bringing them in touch with the forces of the past and future, with the forces of the universe [...] with the force of one’s ancestors, which enable us to exist as we currently do and yet to differ from them. Art is an agent of change in life, a force that harnesses potentially all the other forces of the earth, not to make sense of them, not to be useful, but to generate affects and to be affected, to affect subjects, but also objects and matter itself. [...] It enables new prospects and possibilities for a people, not just the artist, but the constituency of the artwork itself, those it transforms, those who hear or see it as well as those who do not. [...] Art is created always made, never found, even if it is made from what is found. This is its transformative effect - as it is made, so it makes. As art is a detour of nature, so nature is transformed through art into culture, into history, into context, into memory, into narratives which give us, the living, a new kind of nature, one in which we can recognize or find ourselves, one in which we can live, survive, flourish.⁴¹⁰

Through the Power of Um, Werewere Liking shows us that art – and more specifically, living artfully – is the most vital and ultimately the most radical form of ethics of our world today, and perhaps the greatest gift for future worlds *à venir*.

⁴⁰⁹ Michelle Mielly, “An Aesthetics of Necessity in the Age of Globalization: The Ki-Yi Village as a New Social Movement,” *“The Original Explosion That Created Worlds.” Essays on Werewere Liking’s Art and Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopoi, 2010) 39.

⁴¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 189.

CONCLUSION

*To leave traces in the history of the French language – that’s what interests me. I live off this passion, that is, if not for France at least for something that the French language has incorporated for centuries. I think that if I love this language like I love my life, and sometimes more than certain native French do, it is because I love it as a foreigner who has been welcomed, and who has appropriated this language for himself as the only possible language for him. Passion and hyperbolization.*⁴¹¹ -Jacques Derrida

By bringing together diverse authors and their works in this dissertation, I have intended to show that literature, and specifically poetry and theatre, at end of the twentieth century is not vacuous or incomplete. Rather, it is full, vibrant and dynamic, and draws its energy not by standing alone, but through its encounters with others – with difference. Moreover, it is through encounters – or performances – of difference, as we have witnessed throughout the four chapters here, where ethics emerge. Although they all contain elements of “difference,” “cosmopolitanism,” and “moving-with,” the ethics that emerge from each chapter’s encounters are singular, for example: the de-membering and re-membering motions of Albiach’s white space; the *éthétique senghorienne* of Senghor’s elegy; Mnouchkine’s *faire ensemble*; and Liking’s healing ritual theatre. Yet, other significant but inarticulable ethics emerge from these performances of difference, which come from the way they touch and inspire us, and manifest in the acts and practices that we perform in the world – how we live in the world. In our final analytic gesture of the dissertation, let us now evaluate the key elements that comprise the performances of difference we have moved with here.

⁴¹¹ In *Learning to Live Finally*, Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michel Naas. (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2007) 37.

Each of the works that we have encountered in this dissertation move sensorially and, as works of art, they also touch us on a sensory/corporeal level. The dynamic interplay in and of *État*'s white space, for example, necessitates that we put meaning and representation aside in order to experience poetry's enigma and its rhythm. Memory's dynamic temporal trajectory in Senghor's *Élégie* brings to light not only its sensational aspect, but also demonstrates how, through its sensational qualities, we can channel the past in order to do differently in the future. This is put into motion via the fertility dance, which illustrates Senghor's new world vision as a harmonious dance of differences. Mnouchkine's creative and cooperative Théâtre du Soleil uses the sensory in its most unabashedly theatrical way beginning from rehearsals by engaging the performers' bodies in intensive and cosmopolitan corporeal practices, and extending to the performance where the audience is both sensorially stimulated by the spectacular performance, and also physically engaged in the performance itself.

The performances of difference in each of the four chapters also demonstrate theory and practice moving-with each other, a movement that intensifies and becomes more concrete with each chapter. The domain of theatre gives us the most obvious manifestations via Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil and Werewere Liking's Village Ki-Yi. At the Théâtre du Soleil, for example, we not only witness but can also participate in *faire ensemble*: a concept and a practice. The healing powers of theatre, which are comprised of both theory and practice, are manifest in Liking's ritual theatre. When she abandons it, along with university life, for what she calls *théâtre opérationnel* – the practice of her philosophy of *l'esthétique de la nécessité* – Liking pushes theatre and art beyond the boundaries of the page, stage and frame. Her Village Ki-Yi is the

most radical example of *l'amitié* between theory and practice, as well as a beautiful example of its ethical implications in the world. Although less flagrant than the Village Ki-Yi, Léopold Senghor's *parole poïétique* contains the two elements of theory and practice that he articulates as "vision" and "création," which he illustrates through movements of the fertility dance. Both vision and creation – form and force – are paramount here for the realization of a new world *à venir*. Form and force are vital to Anne-Marie Albiach's *énergie écriture*, as we examined in the first chapter. Because these two elements move together on the page as part of the poetic process, they overturn poetry in its representational form. This unleashes the sensational capacity of art, which touches our bodies directly and intensely.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that all of the authors involved in this dissertation express themselves in the French-language, yet they do not speak the same language: each author utters a different tonality, albeit minor. As foreigners in their own tongue, and not natives, Albiach, Senghor, Mnouchkine and Liking execute perhaps the greatest gesture of difference when they articulate their language as an outsider – “as a foreigner who has been welcomed” – to craft their works of art. In this respect, language becomes the ultimate territory of the encounter and gesture of “moving-with” the other. What is striking about these encounters is the benevolence and friendship the gesture offers through difference and cosmopolitanism – through *faire ensemble*. Through this movement, the works “passionately” and with “love” emit an ethics that *nous apprennent à vivre enfin*.

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